

# SHALL WE DANCE? ENCOUNTERS FOR ENERGY RENOVATION OF SINGLE FAMILY HOUSES

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In the strive for climate change mitigation and transition the building stock is a major issue to acknowledge as its energy consumption and production of carbon dioxide is significant, around 30% of the total in Sweden. Government policies, subsidies and more have therefore been applied to deal with this issue. However the bulk of efforts have focused on dwellings, office buildings, public buildings and other major installations, whereas the single family house areas have received less attention and presently even enjoy a public regulation regime which leaves up to ten years of room for manoeuvre before private house owners are obliged to react. This leaves the arena for more voluntary types of renovation. Studies shows that house owners doing such renovations are prone to contact and use their local SME craftsman. The encounters between house owners and craftsmen come to impede the degree and quality of the energy renovation referring to costs, unstable and/or ineffective technologies, lack of understanding of subsidies and financial options and even general insecurity. This paper reports a local study of three craftsmen contractors and their interaction with house owners as potential customers which is part of a project with a group of participating SMEs. Through interviewing, participant observations and shadowing, the sales processes and negotiations were followed on site inside the customers house. Theoretically the study draws on Goffman's concepts of presentation of self in everyday life, performance, staging and "front". The results show a complex interactive pattern, like a dance, where limited local knowledge play a role as does subtle assumptions about cost and economic capacity. Thus rather than placing the responsibility for conservative renovation actions on either the craftsmen or the house owners, it is claimed here that the two parties are acting in a routinized play they cannot easily escape.

Keywords: energy renovations, detached houses, Goffman, SME.

## INTRODUCTION

Buildings represent 30% of the total energy consumption within Sweden (Boverket 2010). Energy renovations are therefore important to carry through seeing it is one of the most significant contributions to decrease energy usage within buildings (Risholt *et al.* 2013). There are some energy renovations carried out today, but a much greater amount is required to be able to reach EU's directives (EU 2010). House owners prefer to contact small and medium sized enterprises (SME) when renovating or planning to renovate their houses (Doona and Jarlbro, 2009).

This paper aims at studying the interaction between craftsman and customer, asking what kind of processes might lead to the scoping of the renovation task.

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This study is part of a project developing building SMEs business models in response to the need for energy renovations. Customer and customer relationships are important parts of a SME business model and understanding of customers need is vital (Osterwalder and Pigneur 2010). To develop a comprehensive understanding of sales processes, negotiations and customers' perspectives, enterprise and customer interactions were followed.

The paper introduces Anton, Bosse and Stefan which are the craftsmen followed as well as Sebastian, Christer and Bosse which are the customers as well as AntonSebastian, Bosse - Christer and Stefan - Oscar which are the pairs of interaction. We come to focus on multiple scripts of identity and therefore use the pseudonyms names to avoid too readily assigning functional roles to them.

The papers' central contribution is the emphasis and understanding of interactive encounters, the dance between the craftsman and the customer, underlining the joint enterprise they enter into as alternative to putting the "*blame*" one sided when the result is a convenient and restricted renovation without much energy consumption reduction. Goffman is here used to enable a more interaction and symbolic oriented analysis of the craftsman-house owner relations that otherwise often are described in a one-sided manner, blaming either side. Moreover Goffman also enables departing from thinking that cost and economy are dominating the relation.

The paper is structured as follows. It opens with a theoretical framework using the dramaturgical approach and pointing to the role of script. Then follow the method section. The empirical part describes two staged encounters and the material is then analysed together with the third case.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework conceptualises the renovation occasion as a staged performance. 'Staging' is here understood as a construction of a physical arena and occasion for an act (Goffman, 1959; Clausen and Ushinaka, 2007). This emerges through interaction and would involve "*one to one*" occasions as well as "*one to many*" (Goffman 1959). Staging of renovation arenas is conceptualised as a performative becoming of a collaborative sociomaterial agency (Clausen and Ushinaka, 2007). Importantly, as noted by Pinch (2010), staging involves the construction of performers (on stage) and audience, spectators to the events on stage. The performative dramaturgical repertoire encompasses using language, narratives, gestures, bodily movements (Van Praet 2009) as well as clothing. It involves processes of initial definitional work, encounters (Goffman 1959, 1961) and might lead to mutual social obligation if not disrupted (Darr and Pinch 2013). It also involves agent tactics of performing front stage as well as back stage, and finally, but importantly, sociomateriality is part and parcel of these staging processes.

A sales encounter, where a service or a product is attempted sold is a case in point of a staged interaction (Darr and Pinch 2013). They view sales encounters as important because studying them uncovers the social fabric of market exchange, and reveal that service and product value and sales price are socially constructed. Darr and Pinch (2013) study several types of sales encounters, one being material commodities traded through face to face encounters on the sales floor in shops. Another being market pitchers at flee-markets. They view the sales floor and the street spot as stages for sales processes and use a dramaturgical analysis of framed sales encounters (Goffman 1959, 1961). Sales encounters can be seen as involving structured forms of action

which repeats themselves in similar situations, re Goffman concept of “*script*”. In the process of sales encounters Darr and Pinch (2013) finds three “*scripts*”; “*material scripts*”, “*identity scripts*” and “*morality scripts*”. The sales encounters leads to social obligation – a stated situation where social actors feel more or less compelled to carry out a social action, in the case the purchasing.

Both the salesperson and the potential customer perform identity scripts during the sales encounter. The identity scripts can, according to Darr and Pinch (2013) go far beyond the immediately available script of seller and customer. More over identity script is “*asking*” for a particular response from the audience, in this case most often the other person as the studied interactions are involving, but also others.

Morality scripts are invoked during the sales encounter as part of obtaining trust and later social obligation (of buying) according to Darr and Pinch (2013). Acting a moral script can be related to the quality of the product, the habitus of the seller and/or to how processes of the encounter (here renovation) is carried out. It can refer to that the seller and his company are not “*wide boys*” and the products not “*shoddy*” or the process just or unjust, good or bad (Darr and Pinch 2013).

Materiality scripts describes how materiality can enable these practices directly by, for example, acting as separators between front and back stage, by acting as properties, stage requisites, but it may also constrain the performance of agency (Pinch 2010).

In the theatre there are distinctions in actors’ roles and actions depending on if they are performing in front of an audience (front-stage), or if they are behind the scene, where the audience cannot see them, acting with other actors known to them (backstage). Goffman (1959) shows how these front-stage and back-stage concepts can be applied to social life and human interactions. Front-stage then represents when interactions occurs in public and back-stage is interactions in private or with actors that are trustworthy (McCormick 2007).

Today’s workplaces are often “*fluent*”, without a fixed location, which is the case for the SME owners and craftsmen. This implies that back stage and front stage might be difficult to define. However, Lowe *et al.* (2012) argues that front stage and back stage can be divided depending on how the actors interpret and make assumptions about “*we*” (symbolizing back stage) and “*them*” (symbolizing front stage) in their interactions.

## METHOD

This paper draws on three interactions between enterprise representatives and potential customers wanting to renovate their homes. The customers had contacted the enterprises for consultation. To be able to make an approximation about how and what needs to be conducted as well as provide a price, the enterprise sends out a representative for a visual inspection and what might follow. The interactions followed occurred at the customers’ homes.

The methods used to acquire information were participant observation and shadowing (Czarniawska 2007). The clients’ observation and shadowing were enabled through the craftsman that invited the observer to specific customer-visits after been asked to do so of the observer at a prior time. Short interviews were also conducted with two of the three enterprise representatives in the car to and from the customer’s home, as well as with the customers in the end of two of the visits. The empirical material was analysed in an iterative process in the first phase of the study (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2006).

As the status of the study is explorative we have included the cases we got so far and there is thus not a direct selection occurring. The names used are pseudonyms and they are used to underline that when following the interaction more closely is less simple to assign functional roles to the players. We therefore use Anton, Bosse and Stefan for the enterprise representative/craftsman/ seller/ guest and similar personal names for the customer/hosts. All translations of the rhetoric are made by the authors.

The role as a researcher in relation to staging between two other persons deserves special attention. The researcher is following the enterprise representative to, from and during the encounter with the customer. Yet the researcher's presence might lead to another performance and staging of the enterprise representative. The craftsman might feel the need to stage himself in front of the researcher (for example as competent, experienced, skilled and trustworthy). Also the interaction with the customer might lead to another staging and performance. Moreover the researcher also performs scripts: as a guest (coming in the house, shaking hands, nodding, smiling, interacting with body language, talking about the dog/child), as an enterprise representative (talking about Chalmers), as an outsider (not being part of the discussion of work that the customer and the craftsman had talked about before – seeing they were referring to it in a way that they had discussed it before), as a researcher (talking about the study, asking the customers questions) and then as a guest again (thanking for coffee, wishing a nice weekend and enjoying the weather, saying goodbye).

It is a limitation that we have not yet followed full cases of renovations and we did not here discuss the encounters between SME and customers before and after the one analysed below. As only a limited set of interactions has been studied we might find other scripts or less regularity among scripts, than what is implicitly communicated here. Moreover the staging might be a lot more complex as families are more than one person (i.e. craftsmen told us that they talk to the husband, yet it appears that sometimes it is the wife that decides) and other arenas exist for staging the companies.

## **CASES**

### **Anton and Sebastian**

Arriving at the customer's house, Anton, the enterprise representative/salesperson/craftsman quickly tells me the customer, Sebastian, had called Anton out to look at his house because he did not want to experience another winter as last winter. Stepping through the gate to the house, Sebastian opens the door, shouting if we are afraid of dogs. Seeing we are not, we step just inside the door and gets greeted by a happy Amstaff. Sebastian and his girlfriend are trying to calm her down without luck. For a couple of minutes the dog has everybody's attention.

When the dog finally calms down a little, Anton, still with his shoes and jacket on starts asking questions, about the dog, about Sebastian's job, how does he like it, what does his girlfriend do for a living, how was Christmas and so on. Sebastian is the one taking place and his girlfriend is hiding in the background of Sebastian. After some time Sebastian explicitly says that he bought the house and he is the one who has done some of the renovation made in it. After that statement Anton is focusing on Sebastian only and the questions are becoming more specific for why Anton is there: how long have they lived there, what are the problems they are experiencing, how was it last winter, has he done something to prevent it from becoming the same issue this year (except from calling him). Sebastian is keen on telling us of all problems and what he has done so far to make the house better (warmer) than it was when he bought it.

Anton asks if he may have a look at the attic and Sebastian agrees. The attic is reached from the inside of the house, we are told we do not need to take our shoes off, and then we go up. Anton goes up first, the researcher goes up after and Sebastian is standing in the entrance of the attic, halfway up the ladder.

Anton examines the attic, he is putting a knife in the beams, lifting on existing insulation to find the plastic, flashes the light in the corners and studies existing insulation. He then explains how Sebastian needs to change the ventilation so extra insulation can be added. Sebastian looks nods and says he understands. When Anton is satisfied we all go down to the kitchen where Sebastian's girlfriend is waiting.

Over a cup of coffee, Anton goes through the process of what will happen now and how it will work to add extra insulation by showing a short video clip. Sebastian and his girlfriend are very interested of the video and all other questions and comments need to wait till the clip is finished. Finally price is calculated by Anton and accepted by Sebastian. Thanking for the coffee we are heading off. On our way to the car Anton tells me that Sebastian seemed to be a great guy and he will be surprised if he will not get calls from neighbours to Sebastian by the end of this month, wanting to do the same thing as Sebastian.

### **Bosse and Christer**

Arriving at the house, still in the car, Bosse tells the researcher that the house owner is one of those who have called a few craftsmen in the same area, to get several opinions and prices to compare and choose from.

A man opens the door after we have rung the doorbell. We present ourselves and steps in. Two children comes running, but disappears just as quickly again. Bosse makes a comment about the children and Christer, the house owner says that OS (Olympic winter games) is on the TV. A short conversation about Sweden's accomplishments in OS follows, Christer then shows us down to the basement to look at his present heating system. Bosse takes a look at the system and explains how it works today and asks how Christer and his wife experience its functionality. Christer says they bought the house just a month ago and recently moved here, and therefore have no experience to talk about. They just knew they wanted to invest in a new heating system so they could save some money in heating costs and invest the saved money in a new kitchen.

Bosse asks Christer to have a look around in the house to see the need and potential they have. In one of the rooms Christer asks if there could be a good idea to switch all radiators for fan convectors, Bosse advises against that for several reasons, but when getting to the hobby room, located next to the garage, Bosse explains that this room could be a room where Christer could install fan convectors to get some heat.

The walk through the house ends in the kitchen. Bosse is asking questions to find out what type of heating system would benefit this family the most in relation to price, needs for warm water and wished inside room temperature. He then explains what will happen next. Christer sits quietly and listens, answers Bosses questions. Suddenly Christer asks Bosse if he knows a couple of Bosses companies competitors. He tells Bosse that two of his companies' competitors have been there, supposedly to make offers. He has not gotten anything from them yet though, he said they did not seem to be interested. Bosse replied that he found that strange and that he would give them a ring and talk to them. Christer seemed happy with this.

Once we sat in the car again Bosse tells the researcher that one of the companies that Christer told us about is not reputable so he is not surprised to hear this about him,

however that the other company had not given an offer were on the other hand very surprising, seeing this house represents a job everybody would want: nothing complicated to remove, nothing complicated to install and easy to make some money out of it. He was very surprised they were not already in contract with Christer.

## DISCUSSION

In the first case the enterprise representative is trying to get “*a feeling*” for how to address the situation and the customer and claiming that he is aware about building on trust and confidence in his relationships with house-owner/customer (towards their companies as well as their products). There was a distance between the enterprise representative and the customer in the beginning at all the customer visits.

Several identity scripts are in play. Anton, the enterprise representative performs a guest, a salesman, a craftsman (carpenter) and an enterprise representative script. In the first case a guest script and a host script is first mobilized talking about the dog and more.

The materiality of the attic becomes supporting the enterprise performing a craftsman script inspecting the roof sides, insulation and corners and “*explaining*” to the host/customer what needs to be done.

Another materiality, a video clip is mobilized to further the craftsmen professionalism. The social construction leads to that the host/customer and the craftsman construe social obligation and end up calculating a price and agreeing on it.

Also in the second case, the encounter opens playing out the guest and host scripts. The walk through the house creates several occasions for playing out the craftsman’s script, mobilizing expertise on the heating system and fan convectors. Throughout the walk however the sales script is also an element, but is fully played out first in the ending of the encounter. Bosse is actually performing an owner script, not only an enterprise representative one, which however does not appear so strongly for the customer.

A trust and morality issue turns up when Christer (the potential customer) asks Bosse about the competitor’s behavior. We know from the backstage interaction that potential customers are taking offers from others is perceived by Bosse as a bit of a special situation. The morality script played out can be seen as balancing between trust building towards reaching social obligation, and distrust because of taking offers from others and even an unserious competitor is problematic. Again the materiality of the house offers occasions of mobilizing the craftsman expertise distinguishing between rooms with different needs for example. To Bosse the house comes to represent an attractive job, even easy because of its accessibility.

### Across the three cases

There are different constellations of Anton’s, Bosse’s and Stefan’s script performance. One is more craftsman-oriented whereas two are more sales-oriented. The clothing reflects that the craftsman being in blue overalls whereas the salesmen (also craftsmen practitioners) are more neatly dressed. One, Bosse is audience to a customer’s performance of criticizing the competitors, evoking morality scripts, whereas Anton and Stefan through the bodily, oral and symbolic behavior relatively smoothless reaches social obligation.

The physical exercise of Stefan leaning forward is used by this craftsman-oriented enterprise representative to convince the potential client, Oscar, to use aluminum framed windows, social obligation appear to be established.

The representatives were initially mobilizing guest scripts asking “*unthreatening things*” and commenting about weather, sport, making pancakes, and the children running around and making parables to their own lives.

The SMEs want to sell and increase their selling to the customers. When a house owner contacts the SMEs for renovation of their house, the SME carpenters are doing an inspection of the house, measuring both issues asked for and of own initiative. They are at the same time interacting with the customers, clarifying what needs to be done. The carpenters, as representatives for the SMEs, are aware that the interactions with the customers are appropriate occasions for increase of selling, despite this they are not trying to expand the selling beyond what derives directly from the encounter. Instead of helping the customer understand possible investment opportunities they perform what they interpret the customers perceives needed.

Through our interviews and other interactions with the companies we are told that the carpenters are first and foremost trying to get “*a feel*” for what the customer wants and needs, and their financial ability. When they experience they understand the customer, they often try to narrow down the customers wishing instead of shifting focus and selling. This can be interpreted as a dominance of the craftsman script as identity orientation. The customer is in this view possibly seen as an obligatory point of passage for doing the real stuff, assembling wood, electricity systems etc. whatever materiality is involved in the craftsman identity script.

The material script is performed through the interaction with the house. One craftsman/enterprise representative (Stefan) taps on an inside of the attic and the “*response*” is saw dust sliding down inside the cavity.

The feeling for the customer is underlying the enterprise representatives’ decisions in how to address the situation and the customer. The carpenters claim they are aware about the importance of trust and confidence building in customer relationships. In the observed interactions there was in the beginning a distance between the carpenter and the customer. Relating this to Goffman (1961) the carpenter is staging himself as unthreatening by asking questions and making comments about weather, and so on. By presenting himself in an unthreatening way to gain trust and to create a relation the carpenter might not dare to push too much for selling, afraid to lose the whole deal.

There are fraudsters in construction businesses, imposing to be knowledgeable carpenters but in reality being scammers. The house owner might therefore be careful and uncertain of the financial ability of the enterprise and the representatives’ competences. By not knowing what or who to trust the house owner becomes hesitant to buy the service and leave the house in the hands of the carpenter he or she does not know.

The carpenter and the house owner are in a sense performing a slow distant dance, facing each other in circles. A dance where no one dares to step a bit further and reach for the other, taking the lead position, instead they are carefully staging themselves using metaphors and stories to slowly move closer the others world. Maybe trying to establish what roles to allocate for oneself as well as the other and to reach a common understanding of the roles as well as getting a sense of the others actions, expectations and if there is a hidden agenda. We note that our interaction encounters involves the

seller/craftsmen in a rich set of scripts, whereas Darr and Pinch (2013) find their richest examples of identity script by the customer.

Front and backstage; in two cases the car transporting the observer and the enterprise representative becomes the backstage before and after the sales encounter. In one sales encounter the garden fence gate provide the material separation allowing the enterprise representative to air that the potential customer is likely not to have enough financial means to realize all his ideas.

At the backstage “we” is performed as the researcher and the enterprise representative and “them” are the customers (see also Lowe *et al.* 2012). It derives that the enterprise representative thinks the researcher can be trusted (parallel to McCormick 2007’s finding).

We note that despite the expected fluidity of staging front and back, various materiality’s performed the separation of front and back in time and space in a relative straightforward manner, counter to McCormick (2007)’s finding.

What and who constitutes the “audience” might shift (a third person, like Sebastian’s girlfriend might be the audience, but when Anton is interacting with the house Sebastian becomes part of the audience).

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper set out studying the interaction between craftsman and customer, asking what kind of processes might lead to the scoping of the renovation task. We found multiple scripts in play during the interactive encounters. Assumptions about the partner in the activity involve lack of knowledge, financial resources, morality and professional competences. Moreover materiality played along supporting the craftsman identity script mostly.

We saw how these interactive encounters were performed like a slow distant dance. A dance where mutual distance is incorporated and no one dares to step a bit further and reach for the other taking the lead position, instead they are carefully staging themselves using metaphors and stories to slowly move closer the others world. We interpret this characteristic of the interactive encounter as main explanation for the relatively conservative scoping and outcome of renovation of single family houses. Rather than placing the responsibility for conservative renovation actions on either the craftsmen or the house owners, it is claimed here that the two parties are acting in a routinized play they cannot easily escape, which creates barriers for applying new green technologies and/or renovations in an energy saving manner. We expect to pursue this assumption in the future research work.

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