The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) lived most of his life in Copenhagen. Almost on a daily basis, he took walks in the city and enjoyed what he describes as the free pleasures of urban life. This means that he was involved in a praxis of observation of what went on in the streets of the city, and engaged in conversation with people that he met on his way. Kierkegaard's writings often contain direct references to the urban life of Copenhagen, though his relationship with the city and its inhabitants was marked by ambiguity. On the one hand, he ascribed his intellectual development to the streets of the city, while on the other hand he regarded himself as being trapped in the narrowness of the small bourgeois community in Copenhagen. In the early nineteenth century Copenhagen was a city of moderate size and Kierkegaard was a well-known figure in the streets, portrayed in both visual and textual representations. While Kierkegaard himself is a kind of urban type or figure that belongs to early nineteenth century Copenhagen, in his writings we find descriptions of other types or figures that he observed on his way around the city. At one point, Kierkegaard even mentions that he wants to write a so-called 'diary of an attendant in Copenhagen'.

How sad it is that so many people miss out on what costs nothing. There is no entrance fee, no expenses to meet the invitation, no subscription, no troubles and difficulties. (...) How sad it is that so many people miss out on the kind of teaching that is not given by a tutor, but by somebody passing by, by a conversation with a stranger, by the accidental touch.¹

For most of his life Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) lived and worked in Copenhagen. On daily walks in the city he enjoyed the free pleasures of urban life as described in the above quotation, while the act of walking itself helped him structure his thoughts. Kierkegaard's writings are full of references to Copenhagen's city life and architecture. At the same time, his relationship with the city and its inhabitants was marked by ambivalence. On the one hand, he ascribed his intellectual development to the streets of the city, while on the other hand he saw himself trapped in the narrowness of the Danish bourgeoisie:

I must say, my life has been wasted. If I had lived elsewhere than Copenhagen, this would mean that I had wasted away the best years of my youth in folly, confused studies and possibly a dissolute living. Alas, no, it is the other way around. I have become somebody, and that is why my life is wasted here in Copenhagen, where you can only live happily and pleasantly as long as you are nobody.²

Kierkegaard was a well-known figure in the streets, and in an almost Baudelaire-like manner he described his daily promenades as ways of “taking baths in humans”.³ As a kind of proto-flâneur, Kierkegaard was an observer of city life, and at one point he wanted to write a so-called “diary of an attendant in Copenhagen”.⁴ This article takes us on a walk with Kierkegaard through his
Copenhagen, developing what he never composed in full, but what we find in fragments throughout his oeuvre: the diary of an attendant.

This tour of Copenhagen will open to a proposal of a new way of describing and analysing the city through the theme of institutional order. Institutional order comprises a set of commonly shared, but continuously negotiated understandings that structure the reciprocity between society and the behaviour of the individuals in it. An analysis of institutional order is a way of articulating urban order as an exchange between the culturally ephemeral social realm and the more stable architecture by investigating what is typical in particular settings. In this article, Kierkegaard’s house and his whereabouts in the city will form the starting point for exploring early nineteenth century Copenhagen topographically as institutional order. It is an attempt to circumscribe what is typical with respect to architectural organisation, behaviour and customs, as well as the prevalent cultural understandings of notions such as what is most private and what is most public, ranging from the sexual and the familial to the ceremonial. This is done by means of regarding a very particular interaction between a citizen, Kierkegaard, and a city, Copenhagen.

Although this is not the place for a full study of Kierkegaard’s Copenhagen, this tour of the city unfolds as a consistent and intricate picture of the life of Copenhagen in this period. Also, the breath and depth of Kierkegaard’s reflections on the city cannot be covered in its entirety. As a philosopher, however, Kierkegaard’s writings contain a particularly illuminating reflection on and attunement to city even in his daily, hands-on involvement with the urban life of Copenhagen. It is, therefore, the combination of Kierkegaard and Copenhagen – in contrast to other citizens from this period – that allows for the discussion to be propelled towards a more general level. This indicates that neither Kierkegaard nor Copenhagen are purely local phenomena, but have a deep European culture as their common context. This furthermore implies that the city is not merely investigated in architectural or cultural-historical terms. Rather, it is an attempt at providing an interpretative tool that can describe and combine these perspectives, illuminating how both cultural practices and architectural settings contribute to forming the city as institutional order.

Institutional Settings and the City

The general use of the word institution covers bureaucratic and instrumental structures such as hospitals, schools or the tax authorities, which can be called explicit institutions. These terms often have a negative connotation, however, especially with regard to the verb form – being institutionalised. In opposition to these explicit institutions, the word also has more metaphorical connotations where cultural customs or rituals can attain institutional character. These can be called implicit intuitions. In this article the use of the word ‘institution’ works within the full semantic spectrum of the word, and by regarding institutional structures as underlying and indispensable conditions for urban and societal life it points to a particular interpretation of the word that relates to the anonymous dimension of permanence or constancy in the city.

The semantic spectrum is important to keep in mind, as it points to the comprehensiveness of the institutional field, but also to its limitations. Individual life takes place within an institutional framework, which relates to both the explicit and implicit dimensions of institutional order. In general, institutions comprise a stability. They continuously exhibit an identity and thus provide a means of orientation, and account for a constancy of culture, both on an overall scale and more locally or intimately. To the extent that institutional order prevails for everyone, it has a universal dimension, but is culturally rooted and carries the nuances of regional or local culture. The institutional order of Copenhagen will therefore exhibit similarities with, but also significant differences from, Venice, Berlin or other European cities. And, concomitantly, a city can be seen as an institution in itself comprising many institutions in it.

At the same time as institutions account for stability and continuity, they are not static in character but also open and require cultural differentiation, conflict and change. Institutional order comprises a set of commonly shared, but continuously negotiated understandings. Insofar as a society is embodied in its individuals, the institutional structures are negotiable; they arise from a framework of communication and constant re-interpretation. Institutional analysis articulates these structures through investigations of what is typical in a particular setting; and the present paper treats Kierkegaard’s Copenhagen in this way.
Cities can be managed and understood exactly because they are cultural in character, not merely complex, physical or even virtual or communicative structures. They are organised according to deeply rooted cultural principles that manifest themselves as a set of typicalities with regard to architectural settings as well as cultural and socially induced behaviour. This implies a dependency on a cultural and historical situation that makes it is necessary to place the investigation in a particular place, at a particular time, and work within a historically oriented framework moving from the particular to the more general.

Kierkegaard in the City
In 1794 the castle of Copenhagen was destroyed by fire and only a year later, in 1795, almost a third of the city was reduced to ashes in a fire that attracted attention throughout Europe. The large, ruined areas were quickly rebuilt and rows of new, Neo-classical houses were erected. Another destructive event, the British bombardment in 1807, complicated by Denmark’s involvement in the Napoleonic Wars and the resulting economic crisis, created a new need for the city to embark on a major reconstruction project lasting well into the 1830’s. The political turbulences and failures stand out against a remarkably flourishing cultural life in the period – the so-called the Golden Age, from approximately 1800-1850, when Copenhagen was the centre for the poets and artists of a generation. Here, Bournonville created his ballets, Thorvaldsen his sculptures, Hansen his architecture, Eckersberg and Lundbye their paintings, Grundtvig and Ingemann their hymns, Weyse and Gade their music, Oehlenschläger and H.C. Andersen their poetry, Ørsted his physics and Kierkegaard his philosophy.

The most noticeable topographic feature of Copenhagen in the Golden Age is the way the city was confined to a restricted territory because of its fortification. A city with more than 120,000 inhabitants, it was, until 1867, surrounded by ramparts from the early seventeenth century and had four entrance gates that were only open in daytime. Within these confines, however, the contemporary large-scale reconstruction effort produced coherent institutional topographies that still dominate the centre of Copenhagen. Because of its consistency this development has proved particularly interesting architecturally and topographically as an example of a European city in the early nineteenth century.
For most of his life, Søren Kierkegaard lived at one of the nodal points in the medieval part of Copenhagen: the Town Hall Square. This is one of the areas damaged most heavily in the fire and in the bombardment, and it is still dominated by grey, neo-classical houses from the period of reconstruction. Like a footprint, however, the many narrow, crooked streets and institutions, which date back to the birth of the city, show that the area has a much longer history. Kierkegaard grew up on this spot and lived here as a child, as a student and later as a bachelor, having inherited his father’s house. This address can therefore be regarded as his starting point for exploring the city and its people, and in the following account, this particular address and Kierkegaard’s notorious daily walks in the city will form the starting point for an exploration of Golden Age Copenhagen.

An ambulant musician played the minuet from Don Giovanni on some kind of reed-pipe. (I couldn’t see what it was as he was in the next courtyard), and the druggist was pounding medicine with his pestle, and the maid was scouring in the yard, and the groom curried his horse and beat off the curry-comb against the curb and from another part of town came the distant cry of a shrimp vender, and they noticed nothing and maybe the piper didn’t either and I felt such well-being.

On June 10th, 1836, Kierkegaard writes these sentences in his diary while sitting in his father’s house. In 1808, Kierkegaard’s father bought the house directly from the architect, the court-architect Andreas Kirkerup, who had built the house after acquiring the fire site in 1798. It was a brick building with eight bays (14.55 meters long) and four storeys high with a high basement and an attic – typical of the houses built in the early period of reconstruction after the fire. The Kierkegaard family with six children (still waiting for their youngest, Søren, when moving into the house) occupied what was in reality two flats with seven major rooms and two kitchens encompassing the entire prestigious first floor, while the rest of the house was rented out. This was a very large flat for a family in the dense and crowded city. By contrast, less wealthy people – from the civil servants to the maids who lived in the house – were distributed in the property according to their financial capacities. This followed a spatial arrangement typical for this part of Copenhagen, where the social structure of the city to a large extent was reflected in the vertical arrangement of the houses rather than in the quarters of the city, as would much more be the case after the demolition of the ramparts. The most attractive flats were on the bel étage, the first floor, while poor people occupied the attics, the basement and the mews. What could be called the middle class was distributed between these levels. The house was demolished in 1908, but we know that it stood right next to the Town Hall building, and that it was a typical, Neo-classical residential house from the period with stucco and a central, classically inspired entrance door flanked by the less imposing doors to the basement. It seems that these doors both led into a pub.

An initial meeting with the city from the point of view of the child on the first floor, Søren Kierkegaard, can be seen in the following quotation, which constitutes a portrait of what Kierkegaard calls the man from the basement: “Everyone has an ideal, and most often it becomes a caricature. My ideal is the fat and plump basement-man. I remember this figure from my earliest childhood, where he stood in his basement-doorway and smoked his pipe in the afternoon sun.” Where people live in a house is a clue to their occupation and social status and as there were many more basement entrances in the city, there were probably many other basement-men as well. This is why Kierkegaard can use him as a figure, a type, an ideal: he is well-known and typical. This figure no longer exists, but belongs to the Copenhagen of this period where many basements are occupied by the poorer part of the population. As a caricature, he symbolises life in the basements, but as a figure he communicates something important about life, about social proximity and distance, in Golden Age Copenhagen.

The Town Hall Square functioned as one of the Copenhagen’s major market places. Every morning, the square was filled with farmers from the surrounding villages selling vegetables and chickens. This was a setting where different people in the town would mix – from the farmers and street vendors in the market, to the maids who went shopping for their masters and mistresses, to bourgeois strollers like Kierkegaard, and to beggars in the corners of the streets. This hustle and bustle is complemented by a quite significant number of animals who contributed to the general glamour in the streets. It should not be difficult to imagine that dogs and horses were habitually encountered in the city. Smaller animals from cats to rats to fleas and lice were equally commonplace, however, and in the nineteenth century Copenhagen still had a rather large population
of larger farm animals. In 1838, for example, 2,777 horses, 1,435 cows, 739 pigs and 45 sheep lived within the ramparts of the city. All of them contributed to what cannot be seen in the representations from the period: the manifold smells of the city, which in a crowded place with no subterranean sewerage system are a constant experience.

The city's lively street life is experienced at close hand by Kierkegaard, who is a well known figure in the streets. Every day at exactly two o'clock Kierkegaard slams his door behind him to start his daily walk. And as he notices wittily in an attempt to portray the mixing of people in the city:

In this respect, life on the streets in a capital is at times rather humiliating for the upper-class and charming for the simpler class. The honourable Master of Ceremonies, he has to jump away from the pavement to give space for a maid with her basket from the market, and the coachman on the omnibus honks at the elegant equipages, since he cannot give way to them, they have to give way to him.

Kierkegaard could be found every afternoon in Østergade, the city's fancy shopping street, either strolling immersed in conversation or, later in the afternoon, visiting one of its famous coffee-houses. Østergade was the street for the dandies of Copenhagen, and constituted an open-air meeting place for the bourgeoisie. Fredrika Bremer, a highly celebrated Swedish female writer, described this street as follows:

Østergade, terrible to recall for a quiet spirit, who is not used to the movement in the streets of Copenhagen, and who coincidentally happens to buy clothes here. Whatever you may desire: hats, cloaks, lace, ribbons, shawls, dresses, parasols, umbrellas, gloves, stockings, shoes – no matter what you ask for, you will be guided to this street. And when you come to Østergade at all times, you find that the whole town is already there, shopping, strolling, conversing, yawning. And if you happen to find yourself in that terrible position of needing to hurry through Østergade to reach the other end of town, then, oh poor inexperienced wanderer, put your heart in the hands of God and try to find your way as best you can!

Here, Frederike Bremer draws out a metropolitan feel in a city of moderate size and economy. It might overwhelm the stranger, but for somebody to whom Østergade is home territory, the crowd is neither frightening nor estranging, and Kierkegaard takes pleasure in this environment on a daily basis.

Østergade was also the place for the fancy Swiss and Italian coffee-houses that were frequented by the rich and fashionable – places that Kierkegaard visited almost every day. There was, however, also a quite literal backside to Østergade since the street lead into the disreputable Peder Madsens Gang, one of the small streets or cul-de-sacs where the poorest people in Copenhagen were packed together. The poor lived in the so-called ‘castles-of-rag’, which were average-sized houses in the city with an occupancy more than three times the average. The cheapest possible way to get a place to sleep in one of these houses was to pay for permission to fasten oneself to a rope against the wall so that one could sleep while standing up and

FIGURE 2. This photograph simulates the view from the window of the first floor flat in the place where Kierkegaard's house used to stand. Today, it is not the basement-man who can be observed from this point of view, but a different kind of lonely male figure... (Photograph by author.)
thus take up as little space as possible. These types of houses often had curious names, characterising them in a quite dry, ironic style: The Thundercloud, The Swamp, The Gate of Slaves and The Club of Lice.\textsuperscript{10}

As these accounts illustrate, distances between rich and poor were microscopic in Golden Age Copenhagen. This was the case whether we regard the boy from the wealthy family on the first floor who observes the basement-man below his window or whether we regard the clash between the fashionable world of expensive shops and European coffee-houses and the very different though no less intense world in Peder Madsens Gang. Among other things, prostitution flourished in this street, which had as many as six brothels. Even on Østergade itself there are numerous complaints about prostitutes blocking the pavement and soliciting allegedly innocent men in the rudest manner. As Kierkegaard remarks, despite the general rules about giving way to other people on the pavement, no one is “as certain to keep a place on the pavement as a prostitute.”\textsuperscript{11}

Prostitution was very widespread in Golden Age Copenhagen and there were around 250 registered prostitutes in the city. In other words, one out of 500 inhabitants or one out of 250 women is a prostitute, says the police report of 1849. In reality the number was probably a lot higher, however, since many women from the lower classes were partially involved in prostitution. It is important to emphasise, though, that not much is known about the life of the passions in the Golden Age, simply because this is an issue not discussed by the bourgeoisie in a period of prudish Victorianism. Still, there are clues to this hidden life of the city. Many of the prostitutes, for example, are known under quite striking names: Butcher Hanne, The Little Riding Master, Red-Leg, The Feather Duster and The Singer.\textsuperscript{13} As with the basement man, these names make these women stand out as figures, vividly and sarcastically symbolised by names embodying their ‘virtues’ or character traits.

It is not only the idea of talking to other people in the streets or in the cafés that drags Kierkegaard out

FIGURE 3. Still today it is possible to get an idea of what life must have been like in one of the little cul-de-sacs close to Østergade. (Photograph by author.)
on his walks every afternoon. As mentioned in the introduction, Kierkegaard's interest in urban life also implies observing the life that goes on in the city as when he wants to write a ‘diary of an attendant’. What does he mean by this? Would he refer to the kind of attendance that the magazine Politievennen – literally the ‘friend of the police’ – was endorsing? Politievennen was an organ for all kinds of complaints from the Copenhageners, where the middle class addressed and discussed issues relating to daily life in Copenhagen. Its motto was ‘to preserve peace, order and discipline’. Under the heading of Disorders, for example, one could find information about bad paving and loose cobble stones, complaints about loud noises in the streets, about the way the coachmen are treating their horses, especially if they park illegally or drive in a hazardous manner through the streets. In general, this was the place to advance all sorts of criticism regarding beggary, dirt, prostitution and disorderliness of all kinds. One wonders if it is this sort of petit-bourgeois enthusiasm for orderliness and cleanliness that Kierkegaard’s attendant is looking out for. Probably not.

Another group of attendants that were present in the streets of the city were the watchmen. They were supposed to keep order at night time, catch beggars, look out for fires, murders and thefts and, in general, keep an eye on anything that could cause disturbance and disorder in the streets. Furthermore, they were supposed to keep track of time by shouting the time out loud every fifteen minutes and reciting a particular verse at every hour. It does not seem to be this kind of attendant that Kierkegaard is aiming for either, and he does not miss the opportunity to sneer at the watchmen:

(…) at night time [I] hear the cries of the night watchman who shouts every fifteen minutes. Once in a While when I wake up at night – and as one might be very interested in knowing what time it is, it is very easy to find help in this respect, as I only need to wait a couple of minutes – since the watchman shouts every fifteen minutes. And so he does. He yells in a high tone of voice, as clearly as if he was standing right at my side, so loud that he would almost wake me up if I was asleep (which I would not desire) – he shouts: Hey watchman! And then he lowers his voice after this well placed violent effort and says quietly what time it is. And so it goes, from quarter to quarter, from hour to hour.

If I was awake through an entire night and listened every fifteen minutes, the only thing I would hear would be: Hey watchman! It would not be completely out of place, however, were Kierkegaard to regard himself as a kind of watchman in the most literal sense of the word, as he was concerned with little incidents or conversations and often noted them down in his journal. And his desire to write a diary of an attendant is supposed to deal with topics such as ‘the story of a gutter plank bridge’ or the story of the ‘rat that became a misanthrope’. As he remarks:

Under this title [The Diary of an Attendant] I wish to describe the single quarters of the city in which there is, so to speak, a certain poetic atmosphere, such as Kultorvet (Kultorvet is the single square where there is the most atmosphere), scenes from the streets, a gutter plank bridge etc.(…) Everybody should be thrown into this praxis all the time: the love-stories, the maids etc. It is not at all strange that one finds a very healthy humour in the maids, especially when they criticise the adornment of the respectable ladies. – It is a study for me these days to make every child I meet on the street smile.

Kierkegaard’s attendant has, so to speak, much more to do with attending to the city and the life of the city, rather than pointing out its disorderly aspects. It is a praxis free of prejudice, an attempt to come to terms with the city through a mode of observing the details and the little stories that take place everywhere. This means engaging not only with intellectual conversations with the bourgeoisie on Østergade, but also with the poorer part of the population: the full spectrum of figures that we have met on our way around in the city.

This interest in the figures of the city – an obsession that goes back to the basement-man from Kierkegaard’s childhood – reveals a distinct layer of the life of Copenhagen, as each figure conveys knowledge of the city. Their placing in the larger social and spatial dynamics of the city is conjured up in every one of them. All the figures from his writings are individuals that Kierkegaard has met or seen in Copenhagen, but through the way they are treated, as examples observed and heard, their individuality sinks back into the crowd and what is left is the figure or type: the brewer, the merchant, the copying clerk, the pauper,
the clergyman, the barrister, the prostitute, the bully, the maid, the coachman and many more. In this way, Kierkegaard’s Copenhagen is a typical city, whose types are always embodied by particular people, as if these types were offices to behold in the larger economy of urban life.

The Typical Messiness of Urban Order

For Kierkegaard, it is the intensity, the noise and the mess that is most important in defining city life. This could not be further away from the orderliness called upon by Politievennen. True, the comments in Politievennen provide a picture of something that a certain kind of people have in mind, of what is apparent in the everyday life of the city. Peculiarly, however, this messiness is not normally noticeable in representations of the city. But using the criticism of the messiness in the city from places like Politievennen and supplementing it with the stories of the many attendants who willingly or unwillingly attend to what is apparent in city life, it is possible to begin to develop an understanding of the differences, the messiness, the convolutedness of the order in the city.

The reason for focusing on a single person like Kierkegaard, however, is an attempt to find a particular starting point from which to investigate how the collective order is understood in this period. Kierkegaard is particularly interesting for this purpose because of his extraordinary sense of reflection about the urban culture of which he is part.

Words that have appeared frequently in this account are the figure, the type and the typical. Kierkegaard’s examination of Copenhagen figures and types should be used as a vehicle to uncover what is typical in this city with regard to its institutional order. Rather than emphasising the city as a complex structure of differences, the marking out of these typicalities uncovers a layer of similarities throughout the town on a very deep level of its organisation. This is one way of accounting for what is held in common in the city as a collective structure of references. This illuminates the idea of institutional order.

Particular cities are organised institutionally through a set of culturally determined understandings. The analysis of types and typical settings gives access to a particular supra-individual or anonymous level that is important for understanding institutional order. The process of anonymisation that follows from this approach to the city should not be regarded as alienating, however, rather, it enables an ordering of the multitudes of references and the cultural complexity of the city.

The type, the typical, cannot be understood through statistics or tables of particular actions, modes of behaviour or economic competences alone. All of this is part of what constitutes the type, but should not be placed in the centre of the investigation. Rather the inquiry should take place exactly at that level where individual characteristics sink back into the crowds, into the density and the convolutedness of the city while leaving behind typical features conjured up in the singular person, place or setting. This form of analysis necessitates an approach and a form of textual representation that is neither theoretical nor literary, but which avails itself of an essayistic form of writing that tentatively represents these structures. This has been attempted in the present account.

NOTES

1 Søren Kierkegaard: Stadier paa Livets Vej III, Copenhagen, 1845, p.295. (Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Danish sources are by HS.)
3 See for example Søren Kierkegaard: Gjentagelsen (The Repetition), Hovedland, 2001, p. 52.
4 J. Heiberg et.al. (ed): Kierkegaards Papirer vol.3, Copenhagen, 1911, p. 99.
6 Quotation from Peter Tudvad: Kierkegaards København, Politikens Forlag, 2004, p. 25. To a large extent, this description of Kierkegaard’s Copenhagen relies on Tudvad’s study from 2004, but places the discussion with a discussion about city more generally.
7 Ibid. p. 32.
8 Ibid. p. 50.
9 Ibid. p. 128.
10 Ibid. p. 368.
11 Ibid. p. 131.
12 Ibid. p. 111.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid. p. 74.
15 Ibid. p. 58-59.
16 Ibid. p. 81.