

Abstract

The research presented in this thesis is intended to reveal the layers of social and cultural meaning invested in a building conventionally regarded as a work of abstract aesthetic modernism, and one which has been evaluated, within the framework of a national heritage preservation policy, as an architectural landmark of the post-war era of urban reconstruction. By combining the research methods of architectural history (archival) and of anthropology (ethnographic) I have located and interpreted the architecture of the Brunswick within a larger social story that demonstrates how the lived experience of a particular environment exists in parallel with the more objective official discourse that invests a work of architecture or art with cultural significance.

The thesis traces the architectural inception and complex evolution of the building, its critical reception, and the proposals for redevelopment that culminated in a major refurbishment and transformation of the shopping precinct in 2006. It goes on to present an ethnographic account of the Brunswick as a social, as much as an architectural space, and an anthropological interpretation of the relationship between identity and place in terms of the specific qualities of the built environment. It shows that the material environment becomes real and vivid to people as an embodiment of the social dimensions of their lives, and that the boundaries between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ – the private space of the home, and the layered sequence of public spaces extending through the building to the city beyond - are not objectively fixed, but subjectively perceived and negotiated in different ways. Although the Brunswick exerts considerable power as a unique architectural image, its boundaries do not define an integrated social space, nor a unified experience of the place as a living environment. Nevertheless, repeated interaction and sensory experience make it a tangible architectural framework for everyday and domestic life which evidently shapes the view from the inside looking out.

The research aims to make a significant contribution to knowledge at a meeting-point between anthropology and architecture, which might help to inform future understanding of the interaction between people and the built habitat in modern urban societies.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to:

The Arts and Humanities Research Council and Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College for grant-funding my research over three years; Dr Greg Votolato and Dr Eric Hirsch for their invaluable supervision; the residents of the Brunswick, Patrick Hodgkinson and everybody else who gave up their time to talk to me during the course of the research; the *Architectural Review* and Patrick Hodgkinson for permission to reproduce images, also Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre, the RIBA Drawings Collection at the V&A, architects David Rock, Hawkins/Brown, Squire and Partners and Levitt Bernstein Associates; Susannah Stone for her photographic collaboration in the research; Camden History Society and Peter Woodford for publishing Chps 2 and 3 (and additional material) as *Life and Times of the Brunswick, Bloomsbury* (Camden History Society 2006); Roma Backhouse for providing the opportunity to exhibit the ethnographic photography at the Brunswick during the Bloomsbury Festival launch event, October 2006 (Inside Looking Out), and Pierre d'Avoine and BC,MH for their design consultancy; Pierre d'Avoine for continuing editorial advice; Greg Ross for production assistance; and Ivan, Reynard, and all my family and friends for their interest and support.

Author's Declaration

Chapters 2 and 3 of the thesis have already been published in an earlier version, along with some additional material, as *Life and Times of the Brunswick, Bloomsbury* (London: Camden History Society 2006), a copy of which is attached. A number of the illustrations relating to these chapters have not been reprinted within the thesis, but will be found in the book, indicated in the thesis text as [LT ...]. Many of the ethnographic images were shown at the Brunswick Gallery, Coram Arcade, October 2006, in the exhibition 'Inside Looking Out', curated by Clare Melhuish and Susannah Stone, with financial assistance from Allied London.