Introduction   **Summary of Research Aims and Argument**

The aim of this undertaking was to make a significant contribution to research into the interaction between modern architecture and people, a dimension of contemporary society which has been a focus of considerable debate for many years, but is noticeably under-researched and under-theorised. I had become acutely aware of the apparently irreconcilable aims of architectural criticism, on the one hand, and traditions of social research, on the other, focussed on social organisation and values, that do not specifically inquire into the experiences that people have of inhabiting buildings and the wider physical environment.

Six months into my research I was awarded research funding under the then AHRB's 'ring-fenced' awards scheme in the history of architecture and the built environment. This was specifically designed to support multidisciplinary research contributing to an understanding of the social and cultural heritage and provide a long-term perspective on change. This encouraged me to give some focus to the contrast in ideas of what might legitimately constitute 'heritage' in terms of the built environment, notably the contrast between 'official' discourses of national architectural and social ideology and the preservation policies which they engender, and the 'unofficial' narratives of life around a particular 'icon' of modern architecture which reveal how other sectors of the same society perceive, interact with and evaluate a certain built landscape over a period of time. I began to see this in terms of a dialectic between a process of idealisation and 'fetishisation' on the one hand, and everyday lived experience and embodied understanding on the other.

Architectural critics are interested in analysing and critiquing an architectural concept and its built realisation, locating a work of architecture within a particular history of architectural thought and practice. Their analysis focuses on composition, form, function and materials, but rarely considers the broader cultural context of a design in any detail, or patterns of use. Most architectural critiques are written at the beginning of a building's lifespan, and not revisited unless there is special reason to do so. They begin and end at the point of realisation, with scant consideration for questions of how the building will be occupied, what effect it will have on the lives of people who occupy it, and how it may evolve over time, once the keys have been handed over. But buildings have chequered and complex histories, as they become

absorbed into the larger social story in which the relationships between things and people play a dynamic role.

On the other hand, those who have a declared interest in 'society' and its structures of organisation often seem to play down the role of the physical and the material in human lives, or to demonstrate a certain dismissiveness of the need for a proper understanding of the physical dimensions of society. Buildings constitute an inescapable fact of social life, reflecting and simultaneously shaping a society's values and aspirations for the future, but modern architecture is readily dismissed by 'lay-people', even those who have attained high levels of understanding and expertise in other areas, as the direct product of an architect's creative impulse and exclusive training, completely disconnected from the conditions of the society in which it was produced, and quite often alien to that society's real needs and desires. This is partly the result of the strong reaction against the perceived 'social engineering' implemented through post-war modernist architecture, as an imposed, utopian vision of how the masses should live, which disregarded local identities in favour of a transcendent, abstract universalism. It is also partly the fault of the architectural critics who promote an interpretation of architecture in these terms, at the behest of a society which is seemingly obsessed with the cult of the individual, and the idea of creative production as a result of individual genius, glorious and notorious by turn. But above all, the emergence of a dominant critique of Modernism as a condition of fragmentation and breakdown in social cohesion and collective belief systems – in other words a negation of the very concept of culture and society – has made it difficult to develop a discourse about modern architecture, in particular, as a meaningful form of material culture in contemporary society and one worthy of anthropological study.

The aim of this study was bipartite, combining the methods of architectural history research and anthropology. It was to undertake an architectural-historical account and critique (Chps 2 & 3) of a particular, controversial building, that would challenge conventional accounts of its formal and representational significance, revealing the complex nature of its inception and realisation, and showing how the role played by the architect represents only one strand of an intricately woven social story that continued long after the architect's contract was terminated and the building opened. It was also to conduct an ethnographic and anthropological investigation (Chps 4–6) into the lived experience of the people who have inhabited the building

during the 35 years of its history, their own perceptions of a place they know intimately as the setting for their everyday lives, and how those relate to the public discourse about the architecture. It was to consider how living in such an environment affects the reality of their social lives, and the way they see themselves and the society they live in.

I took the Brunswick as my case study because in many ways it has embodied all the debates around post-war architecture (notably problems of physical maintenance, including structural failures, and social problems related both to council housing allocation policies and to a perceived inability of inhabitants to feel 'at home' in such housing environments); in addition to which I already had some useful local knowledge of the building. It has been vilified as a concrete monstrosity, described as a slum, but also Listed (Grade II) as an iconic work within the national architectural heritage; and, after many years of debate and disagreement, it has been extensively refurbished externally as an aspirational shopping centre and popular destination for leisure shoppers which nobody could have imagined during the first 30 years of its history, while the council housing above has been steadily colonised by relatively affluent middle-class urbanites [Figs 5, 6].

In order to achieve the stated aims of this study, it seemed necessary to conduct a two-pronged, cross-disciplinary approach to the research: firstly archival (bibliographic and documentary), out of which emerged the architectural history of the building as a visual and formal image or icon; and secondly ethnographic, generating an anthropological analysis of the Brunswick as a lived social space, and an intellectual conceptualisation of the relationship between the two dimensions of its existence. This has involved framing the material from what might be called a phenomenological perspective, bringing to the fore issues of materiality, sensory perception, and embodiment, or 'being-in-the-world', at individual and local level (Melhuish 2005, 2006b)), which forms a sharp contrast with conventional readings of the Brunswick as the product of an obsessively rationalising, functionalist, and universalising philosophy of social organisation and city planning epitomised by the Corbusian Modernist legacy to architecture.

The discussion resulting from this two-pronged approach may effectively be summed up as a coming-together of two differentiated, though interconnected, points of view: on the one hand, the view from 'outside looking in' (the architectural history perspective), and, on the other, from 'inside looking out' (the ethnographic/

anthropological perspective). While the former may be reasonably familiar to anyone who has taken an interest in the Brunswick over the years, although in an over-simplified form which I have sought to redress, the latter, in terms of both field research and conceptualisation, has been largely overlooked - even though the internal social dynamics of council estates in general is a subject which has increasingly entered the public domain (Hanley 2007, Ravetz 2001, Parker 1983).

Since the 1970s, political concerns about the destructive effects of 'social exclusion' have grown, and council estates and their cultures have come under scrutiny as the underlying reasons for social dysfunction have been sought. Tony Parker's evocation of the 'Providence' housing estate (Parker 1983), a compilation of residents' firsthand accounts, provided a vivid and disturbing insight into the structure, or lack of structure, and the quality of residents' lives, without authorial comment. But 10 years previously, Newman (Newman 1972) had already pointed a finger at the role played by design issues in the definition of modernist council estates as fundamentally 'anti-social' environments, coining the term 'defensible space' to describe the spatial quality which was notably absent in these settings for social life. This hypothesis was given further publicity in the mid 1980s by Coleman (Coleman 1985), who published a dramatic condemnation of post-war 'planned' housing design which, hand in hand with the 'community architecture' movement, gave an enormous impetus to the gradual dismantling and reorganisation of many council estates across the country.

However, the aim of my thesis was not to look specifically at issues of design and social dysfunction in this tradition of enquiry, but rather to examine more broadly, from an explicitly anthropological perspective, the question of how residents at the Brunswick (which, in any case, may not be perceived as a 'typical' council estate for various reasons, see Chp 4.3), and elsewhere, think about and respond to non-traditional forms of habitat in terms of their own sense of identity and direction in life, and in parallel with the aesthetic, architectural-historical debate which may surround such social settings. I wanted to develop a database of evidence, and the beginnings of a theoretical understanding of this material, which might help to generate further studies of the ways in which people's lives interact with the built environment – in other words, how a specific physical environment, which may have been independently evaluated as having significant aesthetic and formal qualities, contributes to the definition and expression of social lives in the various domains in

which they are played out. I also wanted to consider specifically how this discourse of personal and 'community' identity, running in parallel with an aesthetic objectification of a particular environment, might relate to a discussion of issues of national identity, or 'heritage', for which the Brunswick has become a well-publicised focus. It seemed to me that the process by which this body of cultural material, including significant works of art and architecture, is identified and defined for future generations highlights the role of buildings in representing social and cultural values beyond the architectural aesthetic appraisal.

The key point which seemed to come out of the anthropological research presented here, is that the material environment becomes real and vivid to people as an embodiment and representation of the social dimensions of their lives in a particular social context or contexts: a reality which ultimately becomes more meaningful than the abstracted visual image, however powerful and aesthetically sophisticated that may be.   The boundaries between 'inside' and 'outside' environments in any given situation are not clear or fixed, so that the experience of habitat is made up of an appreciation of and response to the public profile and external appearance of a particular building or place, merged with and modified by a more intimate knowledge of and response to its interior qualities. This will be focussed on the private space of the home itself, but spreads outwards from that point through a layered sequence of differentiated spaces and social settings to the public domain. Key aspects of an individual's or household's social identity will be represented and expressed within the home space, over which the subject has most autonomy, but the lines of connection between the home and the social world outside it are drawn through the framework of the immediate physical environment which constitutes a component of the urban fabric and the public consciousness, and over which the subject has relatively little control, but an intimate knowledge developed through daily interactions.

Thus, while the Brunswick as architectural image, viewed from outside, may appear as a clearly defined, objectifiable material and aesthetic entity, the Brunswick as social space, experienced from the inside, is a much more fluid concept which ebbs and flows in extent and meaning according to the individual perspective and social identity of each subject: in other words it is perceived more subjectively and personally and in ways that outside observers may have little or no understanding of. Indeed, the very idea of the Brunswick as a potentially objectifiable 'social space' co-

existent with the architectural object may be misleading, because the social dimensions of the place cannot be conflated with the building itself, except in one technical sense – its social and physical identity as a council estate. From the outside, and influenced by the knowledge of its council estate status, an observer might assume that the physical boundaries of the building would delineate an identifiable social community, defined by comparable living conditions, common values and aspirations, which is confluent, and identifies itself with the physical territory, fulfilling the expectations promoted by studies of vernacular architecture in small-scale societies. But in fact, in this complex urban setting at the heart of a post-industrial global city, there can be no clearly-defined and cohesive community identifiable with the boundaries of the building itself (Cohen 1993 [1985]), even where it might be suggested by specific conditions and patterns of housing provision and tenure.

I do not want to suggest that the built form, the architectural image, of the Brunswick is insignificant to those who inhabit it. On the contrary, I will show that it is widely experienced as a powerful and dominating environment in which to live, which has considerable significance as the physical setting within which inhabitants establish their homes and represent their own identities, and even as an architectural artefact with fetish-like qualities. However, the experience is negotiated in different ways, depending on individual background and social identity, and infused with different meanings, which do not necessarily correspond with the critics' interpretations of the Brunswick as a work of architecture, providing the basis for the official discourse on which the policies for its management and redevelopment have been based. Also, the constitution of the habitat as council estate represents another significant dimension of its identity which, although not material in itself, has far-reaching material consequences and affects every aspect of residents' experience of living in this particular environment, even those who are not, or no longer, council tenants themselves.

In other words, the way in which one individual may perceive the Brunswick may contrast significantly with the way in which it is perceived by another, to the extent that it may become difficult to make any a priori assumptions at all about the way in which a particular environment is collectively seen and 'read'. And additionally, the experience of the physical qualities of a particular environment may

be powerfully mediated by the reality of living within a specific system of housing provision and tenure that has particular social and material implications.

From 'inside looking out', as I show in Chapters 4 and 5, the boundaries between inside and outside are layered, fuzzy and moveable, notwithstanding the apparent solidity of the Brunswick's concrete walls and surfaces. In fact, permeability between interior and exterior was an effect that the architect specifically strove to express in the original design of the building, with its open staircases, 'view-holes' out through the ends of the blocks and across the terraces, and glimpses of the sky through the top of the A-frame – although these features have subsequently been criticised as design faults in terms of the maintenance and security of the building. The design of the glazed wintergardens to the flats was explicitly intended to blur the boundary between interior and exterior, merging the house and the outside in a sense that one critic found disturbing (Sennett 1976, p 13) [Figs 7, 8]. The thesis demonstrates the difficulties of understanding people's experience of habitat in the dualistic terms of either 'home', as a discrete interior entity, representing an exclusive, autonomous and internalised domain of personal or household control (Miller 2001, Cieraad 1999; see Chp 6), or, conversely, 'public domain', as an external, disconnected sphere of existence, pre-determined by architectural form or spatial morphology (Hanson and Hillier 1984). Rather, because persons and territories are socially and culturally constructed (Douglas 1973), physical boundaries between different zones of existence vary in permeability and social significance according to the whole life experience of a particular person, and are negotiated in different ways, both physically and cognitively, even though there may be identifiable patterns related to structural factors such as class and status. This will affect the processes of identity construction and representation within and beyond a given habitat, and the capacity to relate to a particular environment in the sense of 'belonging' or 'being at home' there, and a much more expansive sense than that suggested by the debate around 'defensible space', or the lack of it, in planned social housing.

I have framed my discussion of this process, set out more fully in Chapter 6, in terms of a concept of 'boundary work' and 'integration/segmentation' (Nippert-Eng 1996) between the material spheres of existence which represent and connect the interior home space with that of the wider physical environment, concretising the individual's self and social identity in various ways. Nippert-Eng has used this

concept in her discussion of the relationship between home and work in the modern world, arguing that the contrasting processes by which people differentiate and negotiate the relationship between these two realms are fundamental to the constitution and experience of modern social life. These processes take on ritual characteristics involving repeated and habitual forms of behaviour, or particular artefacts which are used in certain ways to cross the boundaries between contrasting realms of existence. In the same way, I argue that individuals develop personal cognitive systems for negotiating and making sense of the habitat in relation to their own narratives of self-identity, which involve both patterns of behaviour and the recognition and use of material artefacts and qualities of the physical environment to track their trajectories from 'inside' to 'outside', in both a physical sense, and in the sense of mapping out social emplacement and identity from its most personal and internalised dimensions, to its broadest and most public manifestations.

I have organised and presented the ethnographic data in Chps 4&5 to illustrate this concept of physical and social layering from inside to outside, and vice versa, at the Brunswick. I show how these physical layers, or realms of social existence are perceived and described by residents and how they are manifested, recognised and negotiated through certain patterns of behaviour and the use of material artefacts in particular ways, which come together to represent contrasting expressions of identity within the context of the Brunswick as a common framework for everyday life. I show how this common framework performs a differentiating function, in terms of the contrasting responses it elicits from residents, but at the same time how it is also perceived, in some dimensions and at certain times, as a unifying factor, both in terms of its specific characteristics as a council estate, and in terms of its power as an artistic and architectural artefact which exercises a particular appeal to the imagination, transcending social boundaries.

I have suggested in Chp 6 that one way of conceptualising and understanding the Brunswick in this role is through Turner's concept of the function of symbols in bridging and connecting between the different states, or realms of social, ritual and spatial classification (Turner 1969) by which we make sense of our social existence. Turner draws a picture of society as a clearly organised, hierarchical structure of states of existence, largely defined by property, and differentiated from each other by interstitial, or 'liminal' zones of 'statelessness' through which the social subject has to pass to move from one to the other. The process of passage between one state and

another is in itself an illuminating and liberating social experience, which he defines as that of 'communitas', and is enacted in ritual and spatial forms (varying widely between different societies) in which symbols are explicitly used as a bridging device between states.

As an objectified or abstracted architectural image or artefact, the Brunswick has a significant, although not deterministic role as a symbol with a certain power to bring otherwise disparate groups together, across boundaries, in particular situations, as a local 'community' freed from its normal differentiating attributes, rather in the sense of 'communitas' evoked by Turner. To cast the Brunswick in this role may seem a little far-fetched, but it also recognises the original design intention, which was to achieve a work of architecture with an explicitly existential dimension, transcending the detail of everyday existence and social reality. The ethnographic data shows a clear awareness of this somewhat 'other-worldly' dimension of life at the Brunswick, combined with a strong sense of the way in which the discourse around the aesthetic significance of the building, as recognised and evaluated by outsiders, has lifted it out of a purely local narrative of existence into another sphere, transcending local lives and values, in which it, and, by association, the residents, simultaneously co-exists.

The thesis reveals 'the Brunswick', in its various formal representations as concrete monstrosity (passers-by, pre-refurbishment), megastructure (critics), town-room (architect), or cruise-ship (residents), to be a complex and dynamic social organism, made up of many different variable and overlapping groups (Cohen 1993 [1985]), defined not simply by longevity of residence, class or recognised role at the Brunswick itself, but also by personal interests and connections, or 'lifeworlds', outside the Brunswick. But while residents are aware of groupings and affiliations that differentiate them from each other, forming a system of classification within the estate, the Brunswick itself also constitutes a powerful symbol of identification and belonging that not only provides a point of interconnection between groups, but also a point of connection between residents' private lives 'at home', and their public and professional lives in the outside world. So although the Brunswick as an architectural icon, or image, does not determine the experience of 'home' or 'making a home' itself, as the research shows, it does impinge on the way in which people negotiate the boundaries between home and the outside world and how they perceive, although not how they *define* themselves in that context - 'inhabiting the image'.

Drawing further on Turner, to expand the notion of the Brunswick's symbolic character, I have also suggested that a significant dimension of the interaction between inhabitants and the environment in this setting, may be the role the Brunswick has historically played, through its architectural design, the (mis)management of its internal spaces, and the allocation of the housing, as the social and physical embodiment of a notion of the 'liminal' or in-between space, in the particular context of its time and place. In other words, the Brunswick itself, due to a unique combination of its architectural qualities and social characteristics, became a place that was seen to be in some sense 'marginal', that was not immediately identifiable in terms of its social classification, which literally housed people who had involuntarily fallen into the 'interstices' of the social system, and were able to find a certain anonymity within its physical structure; but also attracted residents who consciously aspired to step onto the margins of society in order to fulfil a more visionary role in society. During this period in its history, the Brunswick became increasingly rundown, even slum-like in some residents' eyes, but for others, it acquired the aura of a 'poetic ruin' that allowed a certain freedom from the values of mainstream, capitalist society. When the building was finally Listed, then refurbished and commercialised as a shopping centre - a process that acted as a catalyst to the tentative gentrification which had already, ironically, been started by the artists and writers who saw the Brunswick as a refuge - there was a real sense of loss that the space had been drawn back into the normative social structure. For some residents that represented a fundamental change in the social and framework of their lives and identities, even though, for others, it was a change for the better [Figs 9, 10].

Research at the Brunswick highlights the importance of the 'narrativised self' as a concept in understanding the relationship between people and their habitat (Rapport and Dawson 1998, Hall 1996): in other words, the ways in which people construct and represent stories of self-identity, and the extent to which material phenomena play a role in that process. At the Brunswick, this process of self-narrativisation, as a means of perceiving one's own subjectivity within a certain context, is also caught up with the narrativisation of the building as an object of architectural discourse. The latter has effectively become a collective and national discourse which transcends locality and validates the Brunswick as a representation of particular national values (eg class system, health and welfare standards, industrial/economic strengths, urban planning policies) and a particular national

identity ('English', 'post-imperial', 'multiculturalist'; Thomas 1997) which has meaning at a global level, but largely disintegrates at local level into a mass of personal detail and meaning experienced through repetitive sensory and social experience. While most people will have an awareness of this supra-local discourse, and engage with it to a lesser or greater extent depending on its relevance to their own personal story, its relative significance will vary widely, and individuals will integrate or segment their own roles into the two narratives of self and Brunswick in varying ways (Nippert Eng 1996). As the ethnographic data shows, residents effectively act out their sense of belonging, or being at home at the Brunswick, through different strategies (Bell, Fortier 1999) relating to their personal lives and experiences, some more effectively than others. Simply having lived at the Brunswick since the beginning may not be enough to give a person a sense of connection to or ownership over their home-territory (Strathern 1981), or be the only way of achieving that; for others, embracing the 'official discourse' of the Brunswick as a tangible aspect of their own personal lives may be a valuable way of constructing an equally authentic sense of belonging.

Although, as the data shows, the experience of living in the Brunswick does not itself define residents' sense of identity or community, it is clearly a significant factor in indicating some 'directions' of existence (Douglas 1991. It is, to re-apply Douglas's definition of a home, '*a kind of space* [which] *has some structure in time, aesthetic and moral dimensions*' (p 289). And in that sense, its material qualities do have significance. On the one hand it has a formal and material grandeur, drama and power, which was deliberately intended by the architect to delineate an existential dimension transcending the banalities of daily life, and which has subsequently evolved, as I discuss in Chp 6.4, a near-fetishistic quality in terms of the public response to. However, at the same time, the materials and construction methods used to achieve architectural and aesthetic effect have carried inbuilt problems of maintenance that have created another significant dimension to its material presence - one of decay and reduction in terms of the quality of the physical environment. While this may evoke a notion of liberating 'poetic ruin' for some residents, it has, for others, dominated everyday life in a more negative and imprisoning way. From a phenomenological point of view, and drawing on Rowlands (Rowlands 2005), the experience of living in the Brunswick may be interpreted as in some way 'reduced', through deterioration of the original materials, a lack of detail and finish compared to

traditional building aesthetics, and also a failure of proper maintenance. Rowlands stresses the need to recognise the role played by a 'hierarchy of materiality' in the ordering of social life and maintenance of the status quo, and makes the point that a lack of access to material realisation has powerful social and political implications. If, as Strathern describes it, things objectify relations (Strathern 1999), then the material qualities of things should be presumed to be of some significance. Thus the lack of finish and decayed state of the Brunswick may have a correspondingly negative impact on residents' sense, or otherwise, of social and political empowerment, which is borne out by comments about a 'dependency culture' on the council, and a pervasive sense of helplessness in regard to the process of decision-making about the building's maintenance and future. From this perspective it can also be seen that there are aspects of the discussion about materiality at the Brunswick which relate to the literature on council estates, design and maintenance issues, and social problems in general. As Hanley makes clear, issues relating to the quality of the physical environment, both spatial and material, are central to the problematic character of the council estate model as a social phenomenon, concretising and perpetuating the built-in lack of opportunity and sense of exclusion from mainstream society among inhabitants (Hanley 2007).

The Brunswick, however, stands out from this literature because it is also subject to an alternative discourse of materiality, running in parallel with this. As suggested above, the Brunswick as a work of architecture has acquired an iconic status which may be interpreted as a kind of fetishisation of the built object, investing it with a peculiar kind of material power capable of forging a unique bond between the thing itself and its audience - in particular those who inhabit it (Spyer, Pels 1998). The building's transcendent symbolic function, as discussed following Turner, resides in these qualities. Following Spyer, it may also be argued, however, that 'festishisation' of the Brunswick would inexorably lead to the commercialisation which is now felt, by many, to have divested it of its special qualities and powers. Spyer argues that the fetish has always, eventually, been commodified in western capitalist society, leading to the permanent loss of its material, sensual character. The refurbishment of the Brunswick, so celebrated by those who predicted its permanent demise and possible destruction, has, ironically, led to a divestment of its fetish powers which has taken something away from the perception of the building as a material thing, and also had a negative impact on the sense of belonging of the people

who live there, despite its apparently positive effects in terms of upgrading the environment.

Although the Brunswick does not constitute a discrete and deterministic environment for people's lives, it seems clear that, as a physical and built landscape, its materiality, form and symbolic powers do have a particular impact on the experience of living in it, and that the experience of 'being at home', in the sense of constructing a sense of self-identity, is not confined to the home space itself, but spreads out to the city beyond, through the layers of the wider architectural framework in which the flats are contained. As discussed in Chapter 6, some anthropological studies (from Lévi-Strauss 1979, to Wilmott and Young 1957, and Wallman 1984) have downplayed the significance of physical habitat on the construction of social experience and identity within a particular location, and the pre-eminence of social relationships independent of the built habitat. I hope that this thesis will challenge that perspective on social life, even in the context of a 'concrete megastructure' which may be seen by its critics as epitomising a state of alienation inherent to the modern built environment. Authors from Williams (1973) to Tilley (1994), have stressed the need to understand the physical landscape as an imprint of human activity, and the relationship between patterns of life and the physical or material context as a process of interaction and interrelationship. Drawing on such a cultural and phenomenological perspective on materiality and landscape, while rejecting a deterministic interpretation of spatial morphology, it is possible, then, to refocus attention on the nature of the connections between people and the things or landscapes that surround them, understood not simply as objectified, visual images, but as a direct sensory and imaginary experience that informs practice and embodies social relationships.