

This chapter focuses on residents' attitudes to the interior space of the home itself, and, through a process of intimate domestic ethnography, explores the extent to which its boundaries are experienced as both secure and permeable. While the home constitutes the first and most personal point of engagement with the wider physical environment, it also represents through its material culture a microcosm of an individual or household's relationships with the world beyond its walls, which may only be truly experienced through a contrasting state of mobility. The following material shows how residents' conceptualisation of an idea of home within the Brunswick is elaborated through the construction of narratives of self-identity focussed on work, family, friends, status and ethnicity, which may be seen as independent of any particular conception of 'community' at the Brunswick itself, but at the same time fundamentally shape and are shaped by a sense of emplacement at the Brunswick as a physical and social setting, and as experienced in contrast to 'other' places.

5.1. The idea of home and 'elsewhere'

June says: *'Making a home, or creating a home, sounds as if you have a conscious concept before you started'*. She is adamant that the concept of 'making a home', as such, in her flat at the Brunswick is one which *'to me does not apply... I don't consciously create a home, the home happens around me.'* She regards her flat less as a space to be worked on and shaped in the image of the inhabitant, than as a given container for personal belongings, where the latter are intrinsically more important than the space itself. *'I think that where you live and where your familiar objects are, your lares and penates, is where home is'*, June says. However, it cannot truly be experienced as home except in relation to other places which are 'not home' – because one's 'familiar objects' are absent from them. Hence the idea of home as a permanent focus of belonging and self-identity is realised less through longevity of residence than an experience of mobility. June makes many journeys away from home, visiting friends in other parts of the country and abroad, because, *'to come back home is my main thing in life really - that's why I go away.'*

June cannot relate to her neighbour downstairs, who has realised her idea of home through a process of expensive structural alterations to her flat, which she has

comprehensively reshaped. It is now a cohesive and integrated space which specifically accommodates her personal living requirements, conceived as a detailed programme rather than simply a collection of things. It is the flat itself which represents 'home' as much, if not more so, than the 'familiar things' inside it. June has not adjusted the basic shape and form of her flat in any way, largely because, as she points out, she herself is not an expert in wielding a Black and Decker drill, and she would not consider getting in any outside help or expertise. Home-making in her case is a question of arranging her personal things around her, within the given constraints of the flat. As the space itself is limited, she limits her belongings quite strictly, and excludes everything that is not there '*for some reason*', in the sense of representing some aspect of her life.

Home is conceived by June as fundamentally an interior experience of things, which is relatively disconnected from an awareness of the external environs of the flat. Although she enjoys the view from the windows towards the hotel on Southampton Row and the trees on Bernard Street, she does not use her balcony very much except as a place for her plants, and resolutely avoids any explicit identification of her 'home' with an idea of the Brunswick itself – rather, it is a home which transcends immediate locality, connected by June's material things to aspects of her life which relate to cultural and social activities in 'central London' and further afield. It is a highly personalised zone, the contents of which all represent different, carefully edited, aspects of June's own life over the course of time.

Home is a fixed point, an enduring constellation of embodied memories and associations, which is always there to come back to. June suggests that she goes away not so much to see her friends but in order to reproduce the experience of coming back home each time. Home can only be truly experienced in relationship to other far-away places, and when June travels abroad she will bring back artefacts from those 'other' places, embodiments of 'non-home', and recontextualise them within her own space to become integral elements of her domestic environment as a representation of herself in the wider world. As things, her '*lares and penates*', they in turn become signifiers of the idea of home itself.

Mobility away from and outside the home is important in defining an idea of home, as a fixed point of return, for most residents. Mobility delineates the relationship between interior and exterior, continuity and transience. Journeys may be local, or more far-flung, but they serve the same purpose of reinforcing a sense,

albeit in varying degrees, of geographical and social emplacement. Even though Bob has been retired for nearly 20 years now, he still makes a point of leaving the house each morning, and returning around 6 o'clock at night, having spent the day in libraries, his clubs, doing a course, or working voluntarily as a city guide at local sites of historic interest such as Lincoln's Inn Fields or St Paul's Cathedral. He will also take early morning and evening walks in the local squares with his dog. By contrast, his sister doesn't go anywhere, except when she has hospital appointments – partly because of her physical ailments, which make mobility difficult for her, but also because she has always been based at home, looking after their elderly mother when she was alive, and working on piecework as an embroideress in the lounge. For Bob, Jean is an integral part of the home-world which he experiences as a place to leave and come back to each day.

Ruth and Lynn, like June, have travelled far afield, bringing back mementoes from their trips to incorporate within their homes. One of Ruth's favourite artefacts is a coffee sack from Costa Rica, given to her by her best friend to fill up her otherwise empty suitcase on her return home. She also has various dusty items on a high shelf, so dusty that she can hardly tell what they are. But the important thing is that they are there, regardless of whether they are visible or readable as a display as such. They serve a personal narrational purpose, rather than a desire to make a public statement. For Ruth, the idea of home is one of a launching point from which to go out into the world and engage in the various activities and campaigns which she is dedicated to, and which are represented by various artefacts inside her flat, rather than a focus in itself for intellectual and social investment.

Lynn has a hubble-bubble pipe from Palestine prominently displayed next to her sofa, but she says she has been taken aback by the fact that she hasn't used it once since she got home from her last trip there. She had imagined she would spend sociable evenings at home with friends, smoking on the hubble-bubble and chatting. But although it is not used, the pipe serves an important symbolic purpose, as an embodiment of her passionate involvement with a world away from her home at the Brunswick, which she has embraced within her interior space.

Lynn is in the process of completely rethinking the idea of home. Now that her son has left, and her disillusion with the changes at the Brunswick has grown, she is contemplating the idea of living in a completely different way: *'I do want to live differently...I've really rethought, what do I need to do with my life right now.'* She

has considered options such as a communal life at a place like the Findhorn Community in Scotland, though she thinks this would not be right for her. But her problem is that she is very attached to the idea of her home, as a place '*That I come to for my peace and my getting away from things.*' She is frustrated by her emotional attachment to it: '*I've fallen in love with my flat - that's so sad!*' But she also values it highly as an interior, personal world to which she can escape from the busy, and potentially invasive, social world outside. She underlines the difference between her experience of her flat as a true 'home', and the experience of somebody like David Levitt, the architect for the refurbishment, who has bought a flat at the Brunswick to use as a pied-a-terre, while maintaining another home in Oxford. As Lynn says, '*that's very different*', implying that he simply would not be able to understand the depth of her attachment to her flat at the Brunswick as a home, and the profound impact on her relationship with her home of the refurbishment work.

Conal is another resident who has strong links with 'elsewhere' – in his case Greece, which is represented in numerous pictures and artefacts in his flat. The front door is painted blue, because '*it's meant to be slightly Greek*'. Again, his sense of home at the Brunswick seems to be largely defined by his journeys away from it and its significance as a point of return from elsewhere. For Gloria, by contrast, the flat she has occupied at the Brunswick since it opened is inextricably tied up with an idea of her 'roots' in the area, and is notably devoid of any references to travels abroad. 'Mobility' as a concept doesn't seem to surface in conversation. Although she mentions that as a young woman she lived in America for a while, she has scarcely travelled since, and firmly states: '*the more I'm here, the more I'll stay.*'

Gloria's sense of home is intensely localised – to the extent that Putney, in south-west London, where her daughter lives is seen as alien territory, and she always speaks of 'Holborn' rather than the more abstract 'central London', or West End, referred to by other residents. She describes her future life at the Brunswick as '*the oldest lady in the village....*', evoking a tightly-knit community in a traditional landscape. Yet she too, it transpires, has her 'elsewhere' – a mobile home in Kent which she disappears to when she gets the opportunity, sometimes with a friend. However, she experiences perhaps the greatest pleasure in coming back. '*I love getting on, is it a 38 bus? If I come back from Kent... or even if you get a taxi back*', because she loves the journey through London, taking in all the history, '*a lot of history*', which leads to her home at the Brunswick, as an integral part of that history.

Annie and Anthony also have a caravan which they keep down on the south coast and use for holidays. They have several models of it – ‘*nice reminders*’ – displayed in their living-room, along with a painting of the location where they keep it: ‘*I love that painting because it makes me think of going down to the caravan.*’ They say the children love being in the country on a farm: ‘*that’s what’s so nice when we go away, that we escape... that’s what holidays are for.*’ But they would never want to leave their Brunswick home: ‘*We’re determined to stay*’. Their caravan existence complements their life at the Brunswick, the caravan itself forms an extension of the home space, but the time they spend in it also emphasises their sense of belonging and emplacement when they return to the flat.

If there was an idea that the Brunswick flats would be occupied by ‘urbanites’, using their flats as little more than base-camps for a more expansive life out in the city – or, as Kevin puts it, ‘*people who just worked in London and went home at the weekends*’ - then there is evidence that residents do invest in their flats as proper ‘homes’, as focal points of belonging and identity, in a more profound sense. Kevin claims: ‘*I never say I’m going back home when I come to London [from summer holidays in Ireland]... where I live this is my house, my flat, but no it’s not my home*’; but in the same breath he declares with absolute certainty that he feels ‘*very much*’ at home in his flat: ‘*I look forward to coming back. Oh absolutely, yeah.*’ While Ireland may be ‘home’ in a grand original sense, the flat at the Brunswick is home in a real-life, day-to-day basis, and all the more so for the fact that it is the point of return after each of those Irish summer holidays.

But although holidays themselves provide opportunities to leave and return to the Brunswick, part of the Brunswick’s particular appeal is the fact that it has ‘*a holiday feel*’ itself, as Gloria puts it. Her words reflect a common perception that, whatever the problems of living there, the architecture has a quality which lifts it out of the everyday and the ordinary. While some people, like Lynn, compare it to a ‘*big ship*’, or a cruise ship, carrying its passengers on a leisurely journey somewhere else, others describe it as having a ‘*continental*’, or a ‘*Mediterranean*’ feel – the quality of a holiday location. For Kevin, it is ‘*like a Greek island*’ – or will be, when the external paintwork and re-planting is finished. When Gloria moved in, she ‘*had the feeling that once the good weather came it was almost like being on a holiday*’; so much so that she was tempted to tile the floors throughout – Mediterranean style - until her mother suggested it might not be safe for her young daughter, and she

resigned herself to conventional British carpeting, with parquet flooring in the hall, laid by a man from Camden Town. For her, the flat, and the Brunswick as a whole, has a '*fabulous*', '*unique*', and festive dimension which is uplifting in much the same way as the experience of going on holiday, while also providing permanence and security, '*roots*', in a community she belongs to and is known to.

5.2. Representations of identity within the home

5.2.1 'home' and 'work'

Notwithstanding Gloria's evocation of the Mediterranean in her description of her environs, she has furnished her flat with what she describes as '*very old-fashioned furniture*' entirely sourced in the local area, notably a shop called Simmonds, just north of the Euston Rd, which sold secondhand furniture. Her two armchairs came originally from a 'gentleman's club' in St James's, and she had them re-covered. Other furniture comes from her old flat on Great Ormond Street, while the bedroom furniture is '*only MFI stuff or something like that... but it suits me down to the ground.*' The flat is wallpapered, with floral prints and 'antique' ornaments on display, alongside a large collection of photographic portraits of her daughter, the comedienne. She has screened her radiator behind a decorative wooden casing, because it was such a '*big, ugly thing*'.

Gloria's flat represents a Victorian-Edwardian ideal of traditional, hierarchical domesticity, completely separated from the world of work. It is upholstered, decorated and homely, precisely the characteristics that Modernism rejected in its recasting of the home as a hygienic, functionalist working environment. Gloria says that '*if I were to go into an ultra-modern all chrome and glass flat, then I would go for what toned in, what the flat called for*', implying that she does not consider the design of this flat particularly 'modern', even though the Brunswick was '*unique*' and a '*showpiece*' in architectural terms – ahead of its time. But her real preoccupation seems to be with dressing things up (including herself) to give a sense of '*warmth*', which she cannot find in the more functional, minimal '*modern stuff*' for which her mother had the greater preference. The reason she has used wallpaper in the bedroom is because '*emulsion can be a bit cold*', and it seems unlikely she could ever feel comfortable in an '*ultra-modern*' flat. The idea of warmth, implicit to her sense of '*being on a [Mediterranean] holiday*', is also implicit to her idea of homeliness and domesticity, and expressed in her choice of furnishings for the flat.

Conversely, Gloria is shocked by some of the flats she's seen at the Brunswick which are '*like glorified offices, they look like offices, I think, there's no semblance of a home. It seems odd.*' By contrast with hers, they are 'cold', and her description of them as office-like is a clear criticism. They blur the distinction between work and domesticity, in a way which is antithetical to her own concept of home. Her comments are echoed in Amanda's criticism of Rob's flat on exactly the same grounds – it looks clinical, 'like an office', with its grey metallic Venetian blinds (cold) where a proper 'home' would have curtains (warm), regardless of the architectural aesthetic of the building as a whole. For Rob, on the other hand, whose work is fundamental to his sense of identity and control over life, it is a '*comfortable*' environment with a pleasant neutrality, the walls left as a '*blank canvas*' do not give away too much about the identity of the occupants to others, and hold out potential for the inhabitants themselves - the possibility of future evolution. Gloria, by contrast, would see that as a failure of '*self-expression*' – and, as she says, '*if you can't express yourself in a room this size [the living-room] then there must be something wrong with you.*' It is, no less, a form of dysfunctionality, though a different kind from that of her neighbour who not only smells, but also has no furniture to speak of in his flat, and sits upright in a chair to sleep at night. It represents a condition of blurred boundaries between domesticity and work which result in a misrepresentation of 'home'.

If the concepts of 'home' and 'office' represent two opposing poles of representation in the interior realm of the Brunswick, then Lana's concept of home represented as '*workshop*' falls somewhere in between. In contrast to Gloria, she has completely rejected the old-fashioned furniture she had in her old flat, regardless of family associations – '*rather heavy old dark furniture, hand-me-downs and things. From the family.*' She says, '*I didn't want the country look here*', but also she had developed a complete horror of the idea of traditional old buildings, which she had come to equate with heavy repair bills and continuous financial outlay: '*ivy creeping up and eating bits of mortar*', internal cornices and mouldings, the sight of which causes her to '*wince*', to '*feel sick*'. She specifically wanted to live in a place which was more fluid, less defined, where the edges between spaces could be blurred, and pictures on her walls will bleach in the sun, '*change all the time*'. She didn't want to be confronted by spaces which were '*asking you to make [them] proper*' any more, and she didn't want to feel any pressure to put her space and herself on public display,

contrasting her own situation with *'those houses in Holland which are there to show everybody how clean and tidy and respectable they are.'*

Lana's architect friends tried to redesign her flat for her as a bright, clean modernist space, but she woke up one morning and realised she didn't want that either: what she wanted was a *'utilitarian space'*: *'I like the idea of my flat being like a workshop.'* She has consciously abandoned the idea of *'homeyness'*, except in one small area, the entrance hall, represented by a piano, and gone back to her original *'perfect space'*, the one *'huge room'*, with *'a bed, bookcase, painting corner. Eating bit. Sink'* that she lived in when she first came to London. She also draws a comparison with the way that people live in France, at least as represented in the movies: *'you know how they all live in flats, in very tight spaces. I thought I really like that idea, with the bookcase and this wall around you, and then you eat.... Surrounded by your books'*.

Lana's neighbour, who she describes as being like one of her aunties from Pinner, thinks Lana lives like a student. *'She's not being critical, but in her eyes it doesn't acknowledge conventional traditional notions of space.'* Susan, a few doors down from Lana, describes her own flat, when she moved in, as being like *'your granny's flat... all very smart, not our taste. Quite wallpapered, Joan cleaned every other day.'* The choice of fabrics and papers also made it feel *'like staying in a bed and breakfast.'* Susan's neighbour, a *'proper old lady, about 80'* lives in a flat which is *'always immaculate, a great big 3-piece suite... carpet... so plush.'* By contrast, Susan, like Lana, has made her flat less *'proper'*, more of a *'hotchpotch of things'*, not even *'the sort of look you would have designed'*.

Lana has emphasised the fluid, unfixed sense of overlapping activities that she wants to achieve in her flat by putting most of her furniture on wheels, so that it can be moved around as she likes. She uses one of her bedrooms as a studio, and her living-room provides a gallery space for her paintings and her son's and her partner's photographic works. In a very real sense, her flat is a place and a focus of work, a real *'workshop'*, as well as a home. It does transgress conventional ideas of appropriate separation between home and office, home as a retreat from work; and also, it does not meet the conventional expectations that a home should be the locus of intimate, caring social relations. Lana and her partner James, who lives downstairs, have made a clear decision that they do not wish to live and share a home together: *'we like it that way.'* For both of them, in their respective identities as artist and

photographer, their homes are most important as safe, private places in which to explore and develop their creative identities through their work, and not as a focus for intimate relationships of the sort which they have both rejected at previous stages of their lives. But at the same time, they are spatially linked and connected within the larger framework of the Brunswick as 'home' and a common space of belonging.

For most long-term residents of the Brunswick, the convention of separating home and work is still respected, but there are an increasing number of others whose representation of home within their flats is thoroughly mixed up with narratives of work, often of an artistic/ creative variety. On the one hand, there is somebody like Jean, who has always worked from home as an embroideress, which fitted in with her other 'work' as carer for her elderly housebound mother, but was always maintained as a distinct activity separate from the traditional, domestic identity of the 'home' itself. But for many newcomers, the presence of work, as an important form of self-identity combined with a means of earning a living, is fundamental to the representation of home, and there is in some sense a self-conscious effort to blur the conceptual segmentation between private and public lives, even though the physical boundaries between home and exterior may be quite firmly delineated and maintained.

Conal and James both work in offices from their homes, as does Susan's boyfriend, though he will have to move out soon to make way for their baby's sleeping arrangements. Conal's '*end bedroom*' has been transformed into a study/office crammed with books, files, drawing equipment and a computer, and a number of his architectural models are on display in the living-room, mainly because he has nowhere else to put them. His late partner Mary used to paint from the flat, and many of her paintings are displayed on the walls, while her painting-box, made by Conal to store her equipment in, still has pride of place next to the sofa in the living-room. James has carved out a bit of the main bedroom to create a darkroom where he can develop his photographs, and in his second bedroom he has a desk and computer. Part of the storage/display unit he made for his living-room is designed for hanging prints to dry. There is evidence of his work throughout the flat, photographs on the walls, cameras stored in cases on shelving above the doorways in the halls. Susan's boyfriend has been using the second bedroom as an office, working at a desk where a desktop computer is installed. This is complemented by a second laptop computer which moves around the flat as required. Annie and Anthony similarly have a laptop

computer at home which can be used in whatever location is most convenient, but since Annie started a full-time job on a magazine she has moved her old school desk, made by her father, into the bedroom from the living-room, which is where she used to do her freelance work. It has been replaced by an electronic piano, part of a plan for their daughters to have piano lessons, the project of bringing up their children as another form of ‘work’.

Annie and Anthony have made efforts to move evidence of the actual activity of their work-as-livelihood away from the living-room, and to replace that a narrative which is more about the project of family life – while at the same time maintaining various signs and symbols of their work interests and status within the space in the form of designed objects such as the Ingo Maurer lampshade or the Aalto trolley. These objects quickly tell the informed observer that the occupants of the flat have an educated taste and some kind of expertise in design: *‘our taste is a cleaner, more modernist sort of outlook on things... we’re interested in [design culture] and that’s our jobs.’* By contrast, Ruth’s living-room is overrun by papers associated with her various areas of campaign work, and is very clearly less of a social space than an active work-space, even though she is retired. But at the same time, there is little sense that she is intentionally placing her work on display. Rather, it is a question of inadequate accommodation. June also feels her life is overwhelmed by papers, but makes concerted efforts to confine them to her bedroom, and not let them spill over into her living-room. Her work activities are conceived as a private affair, not something which she wants to turn into a any kind of public statement of identity. As she says, in a slightly different context, *‘I don’t believe in inflicting one’s ownership on people. I’d never say, oh look at this, oh look at this. Ever. I just wouldn’t’.*

5.2.2 family and other narratives

Gloria primarily exhibits framed photographic portraits of her daughter in her flat, along with antique ornaments, some of which are inherited from her mother, and some old prints of 17th-century floral ‘hand-ties’, also from the family, presenting a traditional, formal image of home as a set of distinct spaces, ‘properly’ dressed. Although she does sometimes bring home floral bouquets from her shop to display on a side table, her motivation seems to be less about bringing ‘work’ into the flat, than in putting the finishing touches to the ‘dressing’ of her home: *‘if I knew you were going to come and take some photos, I’d say just send me round some things. But I do*

like flowers in the house.' She is upset by what she perceives as the inappropriate under-dressed state of the exterior of the building: she is looking forward to it being *'all painted and lovely'*, but depressed by the fact that it will only extend to the *'cosmetic aspect of it all. Because it is rather like putting on your finery and forgetting to change your underwear.'* However, she can compensate for that inside her own home, where she can put on an appropriate level of display.

Gloria lives alone now, but brought up her daughter here and also cared for her mother, followed by her disabled sister, who both lived in the flat after Catherine (the daughter) until their respective deaths. So despite the absence of a husband or further children, the flat has been the stage for a fairly complex family life of an *'extended'* nature. Now, the bedroom which was occupied by Catherine and then Kathleen, has been specially redecorated by Gloria to accommodate her granddaughter when she visits, with stickers of Disney characters on the doors and walls, and new curtains to keep the light out so she won't wake too early in the morning. The living-room is completely dominated by the pictures of Catherine – a much-love daughter, but also a success story in the public domain.

By contrast, both Rob and Francoise, and Annie and Anthony, make a point of telling me that family pictures do not have a place in their homes. Annie says they have no interest in that sort of thing – *'not at all!'*; however their wider family networks are represented by various pieces of furniture and pieces of artwork that have been given or made by family members. For instance, the big dining-table comes from Anthony's parents, the school-desk was made by Annie's father, and the Aalto trolley was a wedding present from her parents. In the hall hangs a painting by her sister. Like them, Rob also emphasises a certain antipathy to family pictures, explaining that they never had any at home when he was growing up: *'my parents never had pictures of family on the mantelpiece. Some people have, the whole place is filled with pictures of cousins and children and babies and grandparents. The dear departed. So I don't have those, Francoise doesn't have them. Not working to that sort of mentality. Relationships with people.'*

As far as Rob is concerned, his home is not about putting his relationships with other people, other than his girlfriend, on display. Perhaps for him, relationships are essentially to be acted out, not (consciously) represented by inanimate objects. At the same time, because he has no children, the flat provides a vehicle for him to explore an idea of his own identity extracted from the web of social and familial

relationships which entangle people to varying degrees. Since Francoise has left the flat, and prior to the arrival of his new girlfriend, he has taken the opportunity to engage in some fresh introspection, and he likes the idea, rejected by Francoise, of hanging some of his more abstract photographs of the Brunswick on the walls. He has also taken '*a few things out of boxes, which I quite like but she didn't like because she thought they were too crafty*', and putting them out on display in the empty spaces resulting from Francoise's departure. And although his new girlfriend has introduced new items into the flat which he admits are not really to his taste, and certainly would not have been to Francoise's taste, he is rather enjoying the '*unpredictability*' of it and the '*spontaneity of things*' happening to break entrenched habits and routines of his own, the potential it offers for reshaping his own sense of self and its manifestation within the home.

In a sense, Susan and her boyfriend are going through a similar process, following the arrival of their new baby. Having lived in the flat for some years as a single person with flatmates, then as part of a couple, Susan is enjoying her latest change of circumstances, transforming into a mother and a family unit within the flat, where new items connected with the forthcoming baby are gradually insinuating themselves into the interior landscape. A Moses basket filled with toys waits by the bed, the parking spot for the pram has been identified in the hall. The office/study has been earmarked as the baby's room, and, on my visit after the birth of the baby, the bathroom is festooned with nappies hanging out to dry. With the installation of Venetian blinds to the living-room windows, there seems to be a symbolic marking of the boundaries between an internalised family life within the flat and the world of social relations beyond it. This might also mark the point when Susan starts to divest the flat of the last remnants of its former occupants, adopted as quasi-surrogate grandparents, in order to establish her own family narrative within the space.

Bob and Jean have lived together throughout their lives as siblings, and for many years they lived with their mother as well. It was on her account that they moved to the Brunswick, where they also had friends, because she could no longer manage the stairs at their old flat not far away in Clerkenwell. Jean and their mother shared the larger bedroom, and Bob had the other, 'children's' room. Today the rooms are clearly distinguished from each other by colour coding – pink for Jean's room, blue for Bob's. While Jean's room is decorated with pictures and ornaments related to ballet, her great love, and furnished with classic white 'feminine' furniture –

an oval bedside table and dressing-table – Bob’s room is tightly filled with his bookcase and desk, portably TV, and pictures of London. They are quite clearly the bedrooms of a single man and a single woman, whereas the lounge could belong to any married couple of a certain age and social status, and the entrance hall is decorated with ornaments belonging to Bob – model cars and buses, pictures of London, reflecting his great enthusiasm for and expertise in the area of London history. Bob reveals that they have a constant struggle to make people understand that they are not husband and wife, but siblings, and it seems clear that this ambiguity about their relationship is a source both of frustration and also of some anxiety to them. Bob relates how the people he meets when he goes out to walk the dog will persistently ask after ‘the wife’, and how he’s given up correcting them because if he stresses that is not the case it is immediately understood she must be an illicit lover. But he is particularly exercised by the reluctance of the council tax administrators to recognise their relationship correctly: ‘*You deal with this in the sense of two separate people... two separate individuals. [But it was] a long time before they accepted the fact that we were quite separate.*’ The colour coding of the bedrooms is a readily understood sign that they do not share that side of their lives, and they have achieved a high degree of separation in their daily lives as well, although it is clear that they care for each other and Bob, particularly, feels a sense of responsibility for Joan, who is older, less physically able, and, in his view, less able to deal with the ‘*commercial*’ world. They do not eat together, and when they do eat, they eat different foods; they go to bed and get up at different times, and Bob is absent from the flat between 10 o’clock and 6 o’clock every day. They do not even argue: as Bob says, ‘*We get along very well really.... But if we did really disagree I’d always go for a walk... I don’t see any point in arguing.*’

Part of Bob’s motivation for this level of segregation is also to establish a degree of independence between himself and his sister in anticipation of the time when ‘*one of us is going to go, and one’s going to be left.*’ Thus the prospect of death at some point not too far in the future structures their daily life in a matter-of-fact and practical way. As Bob points out, many of their friends have died in the last four or five years, and they have no family left to speak of, save ‘*one cousin who we never see, apart from that we have no-one else.*’ Curiously, none of these people are represented in photographs, only Bob and Jean themselves and their dog, which they clearly dote on, although there are plenty of souvenirs and memorabilia on display,

along with various plants, and ‘some family things’, which possibly include the pretty gold-painted glass decanter and glasses. There are also quite a lot of clocks: ‘*We rather like clocks*’, says Bob, even though the sound of the clocks ticking must be a constant reminder of time passing to its ultimate conclusion.

Alone in her flat upstairs, Giulia also lives in a state of anticipation of death, especially since she recently suffered a heart attack, but her life has become considerably more introverted than Bob and Jean’s. Although she still cleans her flat, she has given up cooking, even though on my first visit she was still happily providing for herself with a turkey drumstick from Safeways, some vegetables and a bottle of wine which would last a week. Now she will just eat a sandwich, and she has give up reading, except for the Bible. Her Spartan bedroom, which used to have decorative floral wallpaper, but has now been repainted in magnolia emulsion, is a space which she describes as ‘*good for meditating, communicating with God*’, or at least it would be if the noise of the building works outside and underneath the building would only stop. When it is noisy, she can only ‘*communicate with the devil*’, she says, and she warns that it will send her into illness and depression, like her neighbour who recently died of depression.

Many of Giulia’s neighbours and friends have now died, along with her younger brother, and she herself has suffered a heart attack in the last few years. Her flat is adorned with numbers of photographs of friends, former patients, and her family, and her furniture also seems to have been mostly given to her by people she has looked after in the past and relatives of those friends who have passed away. For instance, a glass display cabinet with a mirrored back and decorative coffee-cups was given by ‘*the children of those two elderly ladies when they died.*’ Giulia herself ‘*had nothing*’ when she moved there, except a few pieces of embroidered linen from her mother, and seems to have furnished her flat with whatever she was given in return for her nursing care, in a gesture of reciprocal passive acceptance. One item she points out as being of particular personal significance to her is a print of a painting by Constable, an artist she discovered on her regular visits to the National Gallery, and fell in love with, presumably for his representations of an England which entranced her. The others are her bizzy-lizzy plants out on the balcony which she talks to every day, perhaps in lieu of the human relationships that no longer exist.

5.2.3 social status and ethnic identity

Giulia's flat, uncarpeted and sparsely furnished, devoid of the conventional British three-piece suite and soft furnishings, has a distinctive Italian look about it, but she claims she is unaware of it, and her determination to stay in England, notwithstanding a trial return trip after her retirement, suggests her affection and loyalty to the country of her birth and her sense of ethnic identity is limited – although, after 50-odd years in England she maintains an intense Italian accent. She emphasises that she is open-minded about other people's ethnic background, that, unlike other people in her village in Italy, she was never bothered, for example, by the unfamiliar smell of the food cooked by the black and Indian people who lived there. The issue which interests her more is that of social status and wealth, and she clearly identifies herself with a hard-working working-class, which she believes is being pushed out of the Brunswick by people with money. She says it was '*wicked*' of Mrs Thatcher to sell off council housing, knowing that it would be sold on for profit to a different kind of person. She dreads the idea of what the Brunswick will now turn into, and it makes her angry and resentful: she '*doesn't cry for rich people*' because they '*don't care about me.*'

Giulia has a self-awareness of her social status as a hospital cleaner, and a pride in the fact that she has worked for a living, doing a job that other people won't do. This is combined with a sense of political justice, which she describes as '*a little bit more Communist*'. She really admires the social system in England for its welfare provision, against which Italy – where the elderly and sick have a choice of spending their money either on food or on medicines, and there is no such thing as social housing - compares most unfavourably. In addition to that, 'high culture' in England is accessible and affordable compared to Italy, allowing people like herself to share in it and educate themselves.

Giulia has not been well-off in her life, but she has not spent the money she has had on investment in her home. She seems to have had no interest in furnishing the flat in such a way as to support any particular idea of social standing. She has simply accepted various items that she has been given, and is happy to live with relatively few material comforts around her. She sits in a plastic, cushioned, high-backed garden chair, and the centrepiece of her living-room is a round table, covered with a cloth, and four dining-chairs, located in the centre of the space. The main decorative elements are her framed photographs of family and friends arranged on and

above her sideboard, the palm crosses from church, and pieces of embroidered linen from Italy. She has thin floral curtains across her windows, screening out the view of the changing Brunswick, and a battered concertina blind over the raked glazing which must have been one of the originals installed at the beginning by the council for its tenants.

By contrast, other council tenants at the Brunswick are criticised by ‘newcomers’ such as Rob and Francoise for the accumulation of material goods which distinguishes their home-making enterprise from the their own, and which is interpreted as a clear indicator of social class status. *‘People have got things like collections of tankards, or china dolls. Lots of people have got bloody great big televisions. Really enormous TVs. That’s the awful thing... the poorer social classes are, the bigger the television set is going to be.’* Because the flats were not designed to provide the sort of *‘nooks and crannies that you fill up with bits and bobs’*, the result of the ‘collecting’ instinct shown by such occupants is a proliferation of *‘shelves, all higgledy-piggledy’*. There is a clear sense of disapproval of this apparent inability to live in a condition of simplicity and order at home, the sort of comfortable ‘neutrality’ which Rob and Francoise espoused, which in turn is seen as clinical and ‘office-like’ by other tenants. But for Rob and Francoise, the ‘Spanish-style’ fit-out which their flat had been subjected to by the previous owners was a nightmare: *‘Dark curtains, lots of wood, polystyrene tiles... well, I’ve seen worse but that was quite enough.’*

However, Francoise reveals that in their previous flat she had happily indulged a love of ‘kitsch’. She says the style was very different from the approach they have adopted at the Brunswick. But her use of the word ‘kitsch’ elevates what might otherwise be perceived as her own private attachment to consumer culture onto a more self-aware and educated aesthetic level, distanced from the vulgarity of consumption styles which she has witnessed in people’s homes at the Brunswick.

Annie and Anthony describe their own attitude to ‘things’ in the home as explicitly anti-consumerist. They do not spend large sums of money on furnishings and fittings, notwithstanding their interest in and professional promotion of contemporary design, and describe themselves as *‘pretty ruthless’* in getting rid of items they no longer need; while, somewhat perversely, Annie invests her efforts in collecting discarded packaging, cardboard boxes which might come in useful at some point – *‘everything needs a box you know’* – despite the problem they have with lack

of space. Their outlook is reflected in their passion for their caravan, which complements their existence in the Brunswick as a get-away, but also delights them as the embodiment of an approach to organisation of a tight space, using economic means: *'all the details are really beautifully done and clever storage...'*

Such an ideal of economy is one that is not readily understood by other Brunswick residents. When Annie and Anthony moved in their first priority was to remove all the superficial cosmetic surgery that the previous family had carried out there, and *'salvage'* the original simplicity of the design. Annie and Anthony now have a black carpet, with a black cat to match, and grey walls, with a tiny TV that can be wheeled away to the side of the room. They echo Rob and Francoise's disparaging class-conscious comments about large televisions, as does Susan, and even Kevin the caretaker, whose TV is big by their standards, but, as he explains, negligible by comparison to others in the Brunswick: *'you know I could take you into flats and this looks like a really small TV! I know somebody who spent £1000 on ... £1000! You can pick it up and steal it if you want, you couldn't pick up and steal that one.'*

While Annie and Anthony can afford to be anti-consumerist in the construction of their homes because, in Rob and Francoise's words, *'they don't have to prove anything'*, residents such as Lorraine are astonished by the way that newcomers will rip out the 'improvements' made to flats by their new 'owner-occupiers' in order to demonstrate their change of status from that of council tenant. As far as she is concerned, the modern aesthetic of the original design is nothing more than a signifier of council, ie lower economic and educational, status. Even though she herself has done very little to her flat, due to lack of funds, other than install a glass partition between the kitchen and living-room, she is mystified as to why *'more intelligent'* newcomers would want to make their expensively-bought homes look like council flats again.

For residents such as Lorraine and Gloria, a more traditional representation of home, replete with upholstered furniture, curtains, pelmets, and carpets, is 'proper'. Ornaments, pictures and consumer goods are part of that proper representation; neutrality, the 'blank canvas', the idea of home as 'workshop', or as a 'work in progress', are concepts which just don't make sense to them, and which are clearly associated with the values held by newcomers in regard to the idea of the home. Both Annie and Anthony describe their home-making enterprise very much in terms of an ongoing, collaborative project, to be carefully thought out and realised bit by bit: *'it's*

a work in progress, always changing ad infinitum.’ They lived in the flat for a year before they did anything at all, then ‘*Anthony did a design*’. The main obstacle to the realisation of their project is the insidious accumulation of ‘*stuff*’, material goods, especially associated with the children: ‘*everything closing in on us*’.

Susan, likewise, reveals that her flat was ‘*a joint effort, completely*’, with her architect flatmate, and that, although they did not explicitly approach it as an architectural project, ‘*we did draw before we built. Proper architect way!*’ She resisted having a carpet for some years, because it did not fit in with the implicit architectural agenda, until out of consideration for her downstairs neighbours, who could hear everything dropped on the concrete floor, she finally set out to source and specify precisely the right product and found a black and white patterned carpet which was specially made in India. Her flat presents a warm but carefully controlled and orderly aspect, with a place provided for everything, although the arrival of her baby, and the prospect of family life, potentially threatens that regime.

However, not all ‘newcomers’ have subjected ‘clutter’ to the same level of control. Conal’s flat is hardly a shrine to consumer culture, in fact quite the opposite, considering that many of the fittings and furniture have been specially made to his own design. But it is full of items which he has collected over the years, and clearly enjoys, such as his collection of chairs, and many pieces of artwork, souvenirs and mementoes which fill the available shelf space. Conal himself refers to his displays as ‘*the mess*’, and says that visitors, including his girlfriend, ‘*sort of raise their eyebrows... but what the hell.*’ He clearly values the ‘mess’ as a tapestry of embodied memories and associations, and a means of organising them, and he takes pleasure in pointing out different items and where they come from. He says he has ‘*just gradually accreted all the bits and pieces*’, and although, ideally, he would like to get them into a more orderly state, he is not prepared to give up his weekends to reorganise the flat according to the plans he has. Ultimately he believes that ‘*people ought to be able to live in their houses the way they want to live in them*’, and he clearly feels comfortable surrounded by the things he has amassed over the years, which give his personal history a certain structure.

Lana describes Conal’s flat as ‘*very interior*’, perhaps because of this very emphasis on ‘things’, which contrasts with the emptiness of her flat and its more abstract, outward focus towards the sky and sunlight which bleaches her paintings. Hers is almost an inversion of the idea of ‘home’, or as she puts it, ‘homeyness’, a

quality which only has a place in her naturally introverted entrance hall. In a similar vein, she describes her partner James's flat as being full of '*millions of things*', a whole life-history embodied in objects, pictures and maps and even the bicycle, enshrined in his front hall, representing the traumatic accident which changed his life for ever.

June speaks of her 'familiar objects' as her 'lares and penates', her household gods, and the essence of her home. She has made a conscious decision not to collect things, abandoning her collection of china dolls, because she '*thought you can't collect things in a small flat!*' But at the same time, things are clearly very important to her. She has consciously '*tried to pare down*' her ornaments, so that what she has now are '*only things I really like... cherished...*', and has now reached a point where '*I don't think I'd get rid of any of my artefacts, because they're all here for some reason*'. Many of these items seem to be connected with family, including a cabinet of curiosities in her bedroom inherited from her mother, and the dining-suite which was one she helped her mother to buy originally.

In Kevin's flat, things also play an important role in establishing a clear sense of family continuity expressed more broadly in an ethnic dimension. There is a sense in which they are used quite explicitly to create an idea of the home as a world apart from the world outside – another, private realm of existence which is tightly linked to the Ireland of his birth and which he considers as his true 'home'. He is adamant that he doesn't want to '*grow old in London*', and anticipates a final return before that happens. In the meantime, many, perhaps most, of the objects on display in the flat speak of that connection with Ireland, although he says there is nothing he is so attached to that '*that I'd put in a box to take with me*' when he returns; after all, they are only temporary substitutes for the real thing. In particular, there are several paintings of Irish rural scenery, so that when he's doing the washing-up he can '*take myself off to Donegal! While something's burning!*'. Or, when lying in bed, he can gaze at a picture of Eniskillen: '*both of us were brought up in rural Ireland, so....I don't really want a picture of the tower blocks on the wall.*' There is also a Yeats poster on the living-room wall, almost like a manifesto for Irish culture, china from a '*well-known pottery in Ireland... actually wedding presents given to my Mum and Dad... family heirlooms*', and a framed sepia wedding photograph of his parents hanging right by the front door. This, as he explains, was taken in Dublin, which was as far as his Dad ever travelled: '*my Dad never left Ireland.*'

Kevin's Irish identity is really important to him and his family, and his home effectively provides a vehicle for expressing that. Although he comments that '*some of the flats [at the Brunswick] are amazing designs... really wonderful and imaginative*', he stresses that they are '*completely different to my flat*', and that he is simply not interested in that approach to home-making. For him, much like June, the flat is more about the things inside it, for which it provides the container, than the space itself, considered as a potential 'project' or design challenge. It serves its purpose quite well as it is, bar a few areas of minor dissatisfaction which, as a council tenant, he wouldn't consider addressing himself.

5.3 Conclusion

The material culture of the home provides an abundant and richly significant mass of evidence from which to distil and interpret narratives of self and belonging which in themselves constitute strong threads of connection between the relatively internalised world of home, and the external world beyond it. I have roughly divided this evidence into three categories, which are broad in themselves, and full of overlapping areas which may never perhaps be comprehensively analysed as discrete areas of inquiry. However, they describe three key areas of social identity which are represented within the contemporary home in contrasting ways.

One of the features of the Brunswick flats which residents comment on as an advantage is their 'neutrality' and the fact that they do not seem to exert a dominating aesthetic or ideological influence over occupants' perceptions of how they might transform the space into a home which expresses their own, widely varying, personal experience of life and sense of who they are. Even though the Brunswick as a larger architectural framework of inhabitation is sometimes experienced as dominating, even oppressive, it does not seem to impinge on the sense of freedom which people have to 'express themselves' in their own private space, while for others it provides a liberating, even holiday-like environment which has a specific power to engage the imagination in a positive way.

Different people draw the boundaries between their private space, the larger context of the Brunswick, both as a physical and as a social setting, and the world beyond the Brunswick territory – made up of work, family, friends and other social and ethnic identities – in different ways, allowing more or less permeability between the two. However, the Brunswick itself provides a specific and meaningful context in

which the experience of home is anchored and evolves as the focus of a more general sense of ‘emplacement’ in the world, as I shall discuss in the following chapter.