Understanding the users’ role in the value and meaning of buildings: A practice-based enquiry investigating the post-completion life of three publicly funded architectural developments from the 1960s and 1970s

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Abstract

The thesis is the culmination of work conducted in the context of an interdisciplinary research project that is practice-based and contributes to the fields of Fine Art and Architecture. The research focuses on life after completion for three publicly funded developments from the 1960s and 70s. Post-completion is defined from the moment when the users inhabit the spaces in and around buildings, which then start to play a role in their on-going life.

The practice methodologies within the research operate in two mutually informing ways. In a similar way to a residency the research uses an immersive approach, in order to bring a familiarity with residents and users of places and access to a range of intimate perspectives. The other part of the practice comprises an examination of the developments via material and active forms: installations, constructions, wall drawings, artist’s books and participatory practice.

In the thesis I argue that a practice-based approach is essential because this method enables the production of alternative forms of knowledge than those produced by verbal or numeric forms (Dean and Smith, 2009:3). The knowledge is communicated via means that are somatic, kinaesthetic, spatial, visual and physical. As the argument of the research relates to the habitation, dwelling in and daily experience of buildings and places, these more bodily means of communicating and understanding knowledge are appropriate for this subject.

Two aspects of the life that buildings have after the architect walks away are brought together by using de Certeau’s (1984) framework of placing value on the everyday and Lefebvre’s (1991) notion of spatial production. The thesis explores the ways in which users physically change their own environments through DIY, adaption and modification, and how spaces and places are transformed via the activities that happen in and around them.

In the context of the widespread threat of obsolescence or actual demolition of many buildings from this period, the research relates to a contemporary dialogue re-evaluating architecture from the 1960s and 70s, including notably: the writer Owen Hatherley, the collective Failed Architecture, and the artist Jessie Brennan. The contribution of this present research is the argument that there has been an
undervaluing of the users’ role in the production of space in relation to buildings from this period.

The three developments explored within the thesis were all built under the welfare state with the ethos of public provision, addressing respectively: the provision of power, sports facilities and housing.

The first case study focuses on Crystal Palace Sports Centre. The experience of inhabiting a building is considered, particularly as mediated through sports activities and the immersive act of swimming. The focus then moves to Didcot A Power Station for the last few months of its active life in 2013. The findings relate to its role in collective memory, identifier as a major landmark and the culture of invention and ‘Do-It-Yourself’ (DIY) amongst staff at the plant. The last case study considers The Bampton Estate in south-east London. The implications of adaption and DIY in relation to assumptions about taste are examined in the context of domestic and private space.

Through these case studies, I draw attention to the value of users’ contributions to their own environment and investigate how these can play a part in conceptualising the on-going life of a building. The research questions the way 1960s and 70s buildings are perceived in the present, while contributing to the debate about framing our understanding of them and the impact that may have on their future.

1 See p.18 for an explanation of the term, ‘case study,’ in the context of this research.
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Firstly, a huge thanks to my chief supervisor Dr Terry Perk. He combines a belief in practice as a research tool and the potential of material propositions to challenge and develop the written thesis, alongside a rigorous grasp of theory and a practical approach to managing the project. As an artist for whom the written part of the thesis was somewhat daunting, this has been a very helpful starting point. He has been a brilliant guide in this process.

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A number of people have contributed to this thesis and helped develop my understanding of the subject area. Thanks to Owen Hatherley, John Tempest and Hedy Fromings. Also to the numerous participants in the three case studies who need to remain anonymous for ethical reasons but have been extremely generous with their time, energy and thoughts.

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Barnaby and Marvin this is for you. I hope it makes sense.
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Rachel Barbaresi and I began a dialogue between our emerging practices during our undergraduate years at The Slade in the early 90s. We remained close friends and continued the conversation post-college.

Together we developed a mutual interest in the collision of Architecture of the 1960s and 70s, urban space, and Painting. We began to collaborate in 2005, making work together for the exhibition *New for Old* (Barbaresi & Round, 2005a) at OVADA gallery in Oxford. The project focused around the Greater London Council’s (GLC) development of Thamesmead in south-east London in the late 1960s and 1970s. We expected to be wowed by the innovative architecture of the GLC and we were. What took us by surprise were the interventions in the buildings by the residents who had made Thamesmead their home. These interventions told an alternative story of habitation and became as fascinating as the buildings themselves. Of particular interest was the common occurrence of garden sheds on balconies, a juxtaposition that brought together innovative architecture with a very British idea of what a home
is. We realized that the residents’ interventions formed part of a narrative relating personal identity to place.

Fig. 2 Thamesmead Garden Shed (2005)

Thamesmead also presented the notion of an emerging collective identity in the context of a new build development. Unlike places with a history of settlement, the first residents of Thamesmead had to start afresh to form the new identity of place. Through our installation, Sprawl / what gets carried by the river (Barbaresi & Round, 2005a), we explored the relationship of the existing marshland to the new build development.

2 The new arrivals in Thamesmead brought their own histories, many of which were collectively formed as part of the slum clearance and post-war rebuilding programme.
3 The Marshland on which Thamesmead was built had prevented previous settlement.
Through other projects and exhibitions, *E8: The Heart of Hackney* (Barbaresi & Round, in Transition, 2007) and *Oxford / Paris Correspondence* (Barbaresi & Round, 2009), we developed our interest in post-war architecture and infrastructure, and how this related to notions of place.

We also developed a collaborative approach to practice, which involved putting people at the heart of our working processes. We brought together artistic methodologies that came out of reflections on pre-fab architecture juxtaposed with imagery that spoke of the intricate and intimate details of people’s lives and surroundings.
These lines of inquiry led to a desire to focus these collections of thoughts and ways of working in more depth. In the context of the resurgence of interest in 1960s and 70s architecture and with the publication of Owen Hatherley’s *Militant Modernism* (2009) and *A New Kind of Bleak* (2011), I began to think in more depth about ways of understanding our images of garden sheds on the Thamesmead balconies. While sharing the interest in architecture from this period, I also sought a conceptual framework to more fully explore and understand the things that people do to the spaces they inhabit. A practice-based PhD afforded the structure to bring together practice as a form of research into this area within a theoretical context.
**Satellite Dishes are Wonderful!** (Uhl, 2012)

**Introduction**

The title of this section is a quotation from the architect Johannes Uhl (2012) while speaking at the Failed Architecture workshop (2012) in Berlin. When asked what he thought about the current state of the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum housing development which he designed with Wolfgang Jokisch (completed in 1974), he replied, ‘satellite dishes are wonderful!’

His wry, throwaway comment goes to the heart of my research. The anecdote holds within it a dialectic between the architect’s plan and what happens to a building in its post-completion life. But it also implies an acceptance and potential embracing of the customisation by residents.

Within this introduction, I will outline my research questions, and my approach to the practice-based research. The trajectory of the chapters will be presented, which make up the thesis via the case studies. I then move on to provide a context for the research with an introduction to the postwar political climate alongside an introduction to the work of the architecture department of the LCC as it impacts on the following research. I discuss Ben Highmore’s essay, *Playgrounds and Bombsites: Postwar Britain’s Ruined Landscapes* (2013) to consider both the postwar physical condition of the country and the complexities inherent in that period’s, ‘structure of feeling’ (2013:327). I conclude the introduction by reflecting on an interview with the architect Hedy Fromings, who was motivated to become an architect by her experiences as a child refugee, and witnessing the war damage around her.

**Research Aims**

Within my research, I will be investigating the relationship between an architectural vision and how it can be adapted, negotiated and transformed in its post-completion life. When I refer to the ‘post-completion life of buildings’, I am alluding to both the material structure and the social activity and life that together constitute the production of space generated after the building has been built.
My research has two connected aims:

- To draw greater attention to the value of users’ contributions to their own environment and to investigate ways in which these can play a more foregrounded part in conceptualising the on-going life of a building.
- To question the way that 1960s and 70s buildings are perceived in the present and to extend the debate about possibilities for framing our understanding of them and the impact that may have on their future.

These two aims prompt the questions: what types of strategies would allow users a greater sense of identification with and role in their own habitat? How could these strategies play a part in the on-going life of a building?

From conceptual frameworks and perspectives of personal and collective memory, notions of decay, architectural modernism, and the afterlife of alternative political outlooks, I’m also engaged in asking what are the potential ways and impacts of seeing 1960s and 70s buildings in the present?

The research aims are addressed in the chapters, particularly in examining the users contributions to their own environment, and how that changes the possibilities for framing our understanding of them. The concluding chapter brings together connecting themes across the case studies.

In order to extend debates around these questions, I will be adopting a practiced-based approach. Practice-based approaches enable researchers to engage with alternative forms of knowledge, as opposed to those methods that are based on verbal or numeric forms. As Dean and Smith (2009:3) argue in their introduction to *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts*,

> Since it is clear that a sonic or visual artwork can sometimes transmit knowledge in non-verbal and non-numerical terms, we believe that any definition of knowledge needs to acknowledge these non-verbal forms of transmission. It must also include the idea that knowledge is itself often unstable, ambiguous and multidimensional, can be emotionally or effectively charged, and cannot necessarily be conveyed with the precision of a mathematical proof.
In the context of my research I will be adopting the form of three projects, which I’ve termed ‘case studies.’ This term, more often used within social sciences, is appropriate for the following research as the methodology I adopt focuses on the specificity of three architectural developments. As with the definition outlined by PressAcademia, I investigate the post-completion life of buildings via their ‘real life context’ (PressAcademia, 2018). I research the buildings holistically, employing a range of strategies including conversations with users, former users and via my practice.

The architectural developments explored in the case studies have been selected to reveal different aspects of the post-completion life of buildings from the 60s and 70s. The buildings: a sports centre, a power station and housing have different purposes, structures and lend themselves to contrasting modes of habitation and adaption in their post-completion lives. Collectively they build an argument around the value of practice-based research to explore and communicate inhabitants’ experience of the immaterial, experiential, and emotive qualities of buildings in a way that verbal or numerical methods are more limited in doing.

The practice for the research was bespoke both for the project as a whole and for each case study. Rather than approaching the research with a fixed notion of the form my practice takes, I enabled the places, people and buildings I encountered to determine forms and working strategies within the practice.

There is a distinct trajectory through the sequence of completing the case studies, as the role of participants becomes more central within the practice. I move from *Where clouds are made*… where conversations with participants form starting points for the practice and participants contribute to the exhibition, to *Swimming in the Cathedral*, where the audience become participants, activating the work via their inhabitation of it, to *Do my flying ducks prove me an outlaw?* where I worked directly with a family in the Bampton Estate supporting them to influence their own living space. So my practice has both adapted to the live situations I worked with, but also the process of doctoral research has shifted the approach to make the role of participants more central within my practice.
Case Study as Practice

Using practice-based studies, I will be looking at specific architectural developments to explore the research questions. The three practice-based case studies I have used in the context of my research are Crystal Palace Sports Centre, Didcot A Power Station, and the Bampton Estate in Forest Hill, South-East London. They were chosen for attributes that are shared as well as diverse. The buildings are all from the 1960s and 70s, and relate to the post-war state provision of sports facilities, energy and housing respectively. They have all been affected in different ways by privatisation, which has influenced both the physical fabric and social lives of the buildings. Yet, they also have different qualities, purposes and histories, which have influenced their post-completion life and bring alternative perspectives to my research questions.

Within my case study of Crystal Palace Sports Centre, the focus is on the production of space that can occur around sports activities. The interaction between the creation of space generated by the architecture and the transformation of that space by its users is explored. As Lefebvre (1991:190) asserts, ‘Space is conceived of as being transformed into ‘lived experience’ by a social ‘subject.’’ I examine the question, what is the nature of the production of space at Crystal Palace and how is it experienced?

I consider the immersive context of the space, via the experience of swimming, taking in different interactions of building, light, water and space. The 50m swimming
pool is set in a vast cathedral-like space, activated by the injection of stripy light from the glass sections of the façade and the multifaceted refraction of that light via water in motion. The open spatial design of the sports centre also means that different activities are experienced simultaneously, or as Lefebvre (2004:31) describes, ‘poly-rhythmically.’ In this context, I also examine the act of swimming in relation to the reverberation of other activities.

For Didcot A Power Station the ‘post-completion life of buildings’ is characterised by the gulf in time, which is revealed in specific ways: through engineering developments, technology and environmental concerns.

As a coal-fired Power Station, greenhouse emission targets led to the closure of Didcot A. The case study was carried out across the last few months of its working life and into the first few months of its closure. The focus on this point in time has enabled a reflection both backwards and forwards on the social life of buildings and the notion of loss in relation to place.

From its opening in 1970, the vastness of Didcot A in comparison to the older more numerous smaller power stations it replaced, required a scale-up of processes. This required adaptation in practice as machinery and processes in many cases did not

Fig. 6 Didcot A Power Station cooling towers, countdown to the moment the power station was switched off, 22.03.13. (2013)
work as predicted. I consider the innovative approach of engineers in problem-solving as part of the post-completion life of the power station.

Didcot Power station was designed to integrate social connections between employees and to link to the local area via the sports and social clubs. As a vast and dominating structure in the landscape it also played a huge role in developing what Yi-Fu Tuan describes as the, ‘affective bond between people and place’ (1974: 4).

In the third case study of the Bampton Estate, I consider how the state provision of housing enables individuality in relation to the intimacy of home life. I focus on DIY, customisation and adaption by residents to their homes. Many homes in the Bampton Estate have been bought by their owners under Thatcher’s ‘right to buy’ (Housing Act, 1980) policy for council homes, which raises particular issues of identity, politics, ownership and the individual in relation to a collective identity.

The case study juxtaposes the innovative design developments from the London County Council (LCC) Architecture Department with a very British idea of what a home is. I explore different ways of perceiving the value of residents’ interventions by
proposing a reconsideration of assumed judgments of taste via a discussion of alternative meanings and sources for residents’ additions to their homes.

The research considers users’ contributions to their own environments through a dialectic with the physical landscape and architectural structures that generate the production of space. Before presenting research from the case studies, I am going to pause for a moment to consider two aspects of the situation out of which the developments took place.

**Post-war Political Context**

The post-completion life of buildings has a relationship to the design and intentions of the architect, as the design of the building enables many of the aspects of the life of the buildings after the architect has walked away. In considering the intentions behind the design of buildings from the 1960s and 1970s, the post-war political climate and the particular needs and motivations of that period are an important context.

Although the buildings which I focus on for the case studies have specific purposes, in order to better understand the wider impetus behind British architecture of the 1960s and 1970s, I will provide an overview of the postwar political climate and how that led to an extraordinary period in public building. In particular this political climate supported the development of the London County Council architecture department under which two of my case studies were designed.

I am starting my story in 1945 at the point where World War 2 has ended. During the Second World War there had been a coalition government led by Winston Churchill. Despite the popularity of Churchill’s leadership during the war, he lost the election in 1945 to Labour who won with a landslide victory and the promise to rebuild the physically and emotionally scarred country with a vision of greater equality and provision for all. The need for rebuilding was dictated by the vast numbers of families made homeless by the Luftwaffe, but also by a change in national mood. The war had brought people together from different walks of life and there was a sense of entitlement to a collective provision (A History of Britain, 2002).
Nicholas Day, in his thesis paper, *The role of the architect in post-war state housing: a case study of the housing work of the London County Council, 1919-1956* (1988: 72) outlines the prevailing view of the time: ‘the 'homes fit for heroes' attitude, and the fear of social unrest, (based on the experience of the years following the first world war) were ideas frequently expressed on both sides of the house.’ Pierse Loftus4 (HC Deb, 1945a), MP for Lowestoft, referred to ‘the housing problem as a national emergency comparable to the war emergency.’

The MP Arthur Greenwoods in his speech to parliament also stressed the potential for social unrest if the problem of housing was not resolved. He emphasised what was at stake:

> We believe that houses are the temples of the spirit of our people... a proud and worthy people, such as we have proved ourselves to be, are entitled to honourable and dignified conditions of life... it would be terrible if social disorders, social bitterness, social disappointment and new hatreds were allowed to grow because the ex-soldier and his wife have nowhere decent to live (HC Deb, 1945b).

While both Labour and the Conservatives agreed on the need for housing provision, they differed in their views on how to achieve it. Day (1988:72) also outlines how approaching the forthcoming 1945 election campaign, ‘there were distinct party policies on housing. These were developed and were to become central issues for the forthcoming election.’

The Labour policy drew on the Dudley report of 1944, which called for more socially balanced neighbourhoods, in contrast to the private developments from the interwar years that produced large areas of similar housing occupied by one social class. The election campaign by Labour offered the electorate the choice of a new society, which implemented the Dudley report’s recommendations, creating more socially mixed developments. Crucially, major housing and infrastructure projects were to be built by local authorities. Four out of five houses constructed under Labour were

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4 Pierse Loftus MP for Lowestoft (1934-1945).
6 I discuss the Dudley report in more detail in *Do my flying ducks prove me an outlaw?*
council properties built to more generous specifications than before the Second World War, while subsidies kept council rents low. (Jefferys: 1992)

There was also a conscious drive to move away from the capitalist supply and demand system of providing housing and the inequalities implicit in its functioning.

The Labour party can contemplate no effort at reconstruction in which considerations of equity are not paramount. It would not be equity... to go back to a world in which there are mass unemployment and distressed areas, in which the ground-landlord and the speculative builder can profit from the rebuilding of Britain. Equity means that the principles of ownership responsible for such conditions are no longer permissible in a democratic society. Equity means that there is a reasonable standard of life for all (Labour Party, 1942).

In contrast, the Tory party policy asserted that the state’s main task was slum clearance programmes. Once the immediate crisis was over, general housing should be left to private enterprise. As Day (1998: 73) elaborated, ‘These two objectives… failed to pick up on any of the radical ideas outlined in the Dudley Report7, as to how state housing could be redefined, and merely maintained and continued Conservative pre-war policy.’

*There are teams of people and they nudge each other and it moves along in that way* (Tempest: 2015)

The post-war rebuilding programme created an incredible opening in the possibilities open to architects. Within this context, the London County Council (LCC) Architects department, took on this wave of optimism and tasked themselves with the job of translating the climate of the time into material structures. The developments that I focus on for two of my case studies, Crystal Palace Sports Centre and The Bampton Estate, were both LCC developments.

As the LCC architect John Partridge recalled:

7 The Dudley report of 1944 called for more socially balanced neighbourhoods, in contrast to private developments from the interwar years, which produced areas of very similar housing, occupied by one social class.
I think we all knew that we were going to build the right architecture for the twentieth century. We were going to build a better and more equal society. We didn't talk about it a lot, it was an understood thing... but in the new department we worked weekends and slept in the offices and the enthusiasm was contagious and the department grew to hundreds of people. It was a very exciting time (cited in Utopia London: s.d.).

I spoke to the architect John Tempest about his time working in the Greater London Council (GLC) Architects' Departments. He described the LCC and GLC Architects’ Department as being a continuum, ‘imbued with the same motivation’ (Tempest, 2014).

We looked together at his copy of GLC Architecture 1965/70 (Greater London Council, 1970). He glanced down at the list of contributors to the publication and recognised many from his time there, ‘There are policies, but more than that - there are teams of people and they nudge each other and it moves along in that way. These were strong personalities’ (Tempest, 2014).

He went on to describe how there was, ‘a great team interest in how people lived … most people were young. They came from college and stayed. It had an international flavour. I knew two Americans and a German, a Sudanese. It was good fun. My impression was people enjoyed it’ (Tempest, 2014). He describes, a culture where, ‘we worked till midnight or one or two in the morning … one of the best places I have ever worked’ (Tempest, 2014).

‘There was lots of space for individuals to develop things in their own way. You were allowed to develop and blossom and influence architectural design’ (Tempest, 2014).

Mingled with the political landscape was the visual and physical landscape. So attempting to imagine how it would be to inhabit the years immediately post-war, how

8 The GLC was formed in 1965, and governed a larger geographical area than the LCC.
did this landscape play into a narrative of where the country was at and what the potentials might be?

In Ben Highmore’s essay, *Playgrounds and Bombsites: Postwar Britain’s Ruined Landscapes*. He considers ‘a set of feelings that circulated in the immediate postwar period (that period’s “structure of feeling”)’ (2013:327).

Highmore considers how being surrounded by bombsites and ruins influenced the way that people felt about the potentials of the time. In his argument he brings together bomb damage and the demolition needed for rebuilding. ‘As one of the functions I think of this particular genre of image9 is to fold together bomb damage and redevelopment into a single continuum: it is all in one-way or another, damage’ (Highmore, 2013:324).

As late as the 1980s, bombsites were a common part of the urban landscape10. So they are worth considering as part of the set of associations of place both from the inception of the welfare state and for some years into the life of developments.

How the present and future inhabitants of places feel about places and building developments can develop into something concrete. It feeds into a narrative about the potential and actual success of building programmes.

And for Barthes, it is an archive of cultural gestures that are imbedded deep in our cultural imaginations, feeling and actions, as well as being available (and unavoidable) in a corpus of film, photographs, novels and so on (Highmore, 2013:324).

Highmore goes on to argue that the bombsite could be part of the image repertoire of both culturally conservative feelings:

…That would claim that “core” social values were in decline and that the root cause of the “youth problem” was the lack of family discipline, the increase in divorce rates the new air of permissiveness and so on. But the same set

9 Highmore is referring to a ‘social imaginary’ of post-war Britain from a range of cultural sources, or what Roland Barthes describes as an ‘image repertoire.’
10 See chapter Do my flying ducks prove me an outlaw? for a description of how children on the Bampton Estate used a bombsite.
of descriptions could also support a more radically democratic critique that could point the finger of blame at instrumentalist governance keen on reproducing the conditions for capitalist expansion, and indifferent to the needs of complex adolescence…It is this ability to vacillate between quite different and conflicting social moods that make this seam from the postwar image repertoire so important for this period as well as for the emotional situation of redevelopment and the so-called postwar settlement that materialized in such socially liberal and optimistic formations as the welfare state (Highmore, 2013:325-6).

Highmore juxtaposes the destructive force of the Luftwaffe with the way in which bombsites were used for play. Considering the argument of my thesis in relation to the contribution of users to developments and places, as the educationalist Ken Robinson has stated, ‘play in all its forms isn’t some frivolous waste of time’ (Robinson, 2016). Play enables a situation in which multiple unanticipated developments and outcomes could occur. It is arguably a prerequisite for creativity.

The generation of young architects who began their professional life immediately post-war were motivated by a desire to do something constructive amidst the destruction they had spent their formative teenage years witnessing.

During a conversation with the architect, Hedy Fromings11, she related her childhood experiences as a political refugee from Czechoslovakia. Her parents had been communists, so they were not safe in Nazi occupied Czechoslovakia. She and her mother escaped via the Kindertransport, organized by British Quakers. They first lived in a hostel in Broadstairs, and then when the bombing became too much were moved first to Brighton and then finally to Denbigh in north Wales. She continued her schooling there, and then at the age of 14 compulsory education finished. ‘So at the age of 14 they couldn’t teach me any more. So what to do with me? I would like to carry on learning, learning, learning’ (Fromings, 2015). Then she was asked by a Quaker who was supporting her progress, “what do you want to be when you grow up Hedy?” I do feel there was so much destroyed, so many towns destroyed, we saw it on the news at the cinema in Denbigh. So I said somebody’s got to build it all up

11 As well as being an Architect in her own right, she was also the wife of Eric Stevenson, who was one of the designers of the Dacres Rd Estate, the sister development to the Bampton Estate.
again. I would like to be involved in that process. Well what about architecture she said you could design it new, how it will be in the future. Oh yes that would be super, absolutely super.’

In the introduction, I have reflected on aspects of the political post-war context as they relate to the project of rebuilding the bomb-damaged country. The motivation for re-building came from both the obvious presence of the ruins, but also from a desire to build a more equal society after the collective war effort. The political attitude and intent behind the re-build are important, as they have a bearing on the funding and purposes of the buildings, in terms of who they were for and how they functioned in practice.

Although the subject of this thesis is the post-completion life of buildings, this is understood in a dynamic relationship to the design of the buildings themselves. I have described the climate of innovation in the LCC Architecture department at the time as an important context for understanding the impetus behind the design. I have considered the postwar physical landscape and that period’s ‘structure of feeling’ (2013:327) through Highmore’s essay *Playgrounds and Bombsites: Postwar Britain’s Ruined Landscapes* (2013). This also provides an important context for the buildings I focus on in the case studies. The range of emotions around the damaged landscape fed into the postwar rebuilding and the narratives around their success or otherwise.

In the next chapter, I will place my research in the context of other artists, filmmakers and writers whose research has informed the thesis and my approach to the subject area.
Mapping the Field

Contextual Review

Fig. 8 Half term children’s workshop at Cornerstone Art’s Centre, Didcot (2013)

Introduction

The relationship of my research to other writers, artists, filmmakers or organisations who have explored both 1960s and 70s architectural developments, and concepts that come emerge from my investigation of their post-completion life will be discussed in this chapter. Informing my approach to the subject area, I will work with the writings of Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre. These writers are central to the way in which I interpret notions of value regarding The Everyday and The Production of Space. Thomas Doherty, Susan Kaisser and Michael McMillian have been important for my consideration of the implications of taste in relation to the home. For an exploration of the potential meanings and implications of architecture of this period in the present, the writers Owen Hatherley and John Grindrod are significant voices in the contemporary debate to which my research contributes. I also present an overview of a number of artists who engage with both architecture and habitation, notably the artists Jessie Brennan and Daniel Knipping who have an approach to practice which puts users at the heart of the work, and the organisation Failed
Architecture which seeks to ‘explore the meaning of architecture in contemporary society’ (Failed Architecture: 2018).

The physical and historical context for the research is the current condition of 1960s and 70s buildings in Britain. These buildings are a reminder of a very different political climate and specific historic impetus to meet public need; however, the validity of these buildings is constantly being questioned, their value dismissed, and many developments from this period are being demolished or are under threat. Although this can be the case for buildings from any period, buildings from the 1960s and 70s in Britain are particularly at risk, along with many aspects of the welfare state of which they are a visual and material reminder.

In conceptualising the buildings that I will be researching, via a series of three case studies (Crystal Palace Sports Centre, Didcot A Power Station and The Bampton Estate), I am connecting space created by the fabric of the buildings with the ‘social space’ (Lefebvre, 1974:73) generated by the activities inside and around them. I relate my arguments to de Certeau’s definitions of ‘space’ and ‘place’ and the sense that ‘space is a practiced place’ (1984:117). I also utilize Lefebvre’s conception of ‘Social Space’ as, ‘not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity – their relative order and/or (relative) disorder’ (1991:73). These concepts in relation to my research aims allow the development of social space as a crucial part of the user’s contribution to the post-completion life of buildings, and as one of the key notions in framing our understanding of 1960s and 70s buildings and their future life.

In developing arguments around social space, Lefebvre’s linking of ‘social space’ to other forms of production is key. In all three case studies there is an exploration of ‘place’ as influenced by building(s), function of building(s), or site. The social space generated by the structures extends beyond the buildings, from places of work or leisure to homes and vice versa. There is also a temporal extension of social space, for example the social space of Didcot A extending beyond its functioning life.

12 An example would be Robin Hood Gardens in Poplar, London, by Alison and Peter Smithson, which has now been demolished. In contrast, Park Hill Estate in Sheffield has been renovated by the property developers Urban Splash, but it will no longer be social housing in the sense for which it was designed.

13 Other parts of the welfare state that are currently under threat, include libraries and care for the elderly, whilst the NHS and Schools are being partially privatized.
I build on Lefebvre’s notion of the ‘production of space’ (1991) in my framing of sports activities and particularly swimming as part of the contribution of users in relation to Crystal Palace Sports Centre. Developing the experiential qualities of sports activities via Ben Highmore’s writing on sensation (2011:140), I consider the potential of extreme exertion and other sports-related bodily feelings as a way of experiencing the architectural interior of the sports centre.

De Certeau (1984:xvii) places an emphasis on valuing activities that are often seen as mundane or insignificant, such as cooking and watching television. The architect, Charles Holland makes the connection between the practices which de Certeau describes, extending the possibilities to DIY and adaption of buildings (2011:91). Holland proposes that customisation of buildings could be seen in the same way as a potentially creative activity. This sense of valuing the contribution of users to buildings and places is implicit across the research. It is both a key part of the research area and relates to the use of participatory practice as a research tool and method of reflection.

In considering ways to frame the adaptions of residents in their homes, a major theme is the notion of taste. I reposition adaptions and customisations of resident’s homes in relation to propositions by Thomas Doherty, Susan Kaisser and Michael McMillian (CCW Grad School: 2014). I search for ways of discussing taste, which are less rooted in class-based assumptions about interior and exterior décor. For example McMillian proposes ‘reclaiming kitsch and bling’ in the context of status for people of West Indian heritage. I develop this approach by considering a whole range of additions and adaptions to the home, and their potential implications.

Place is an important factor in each case study, considering ideas of loss from new structures changing a pre-existing sense of place and the contribution of the new developments to a transforming sense of place. My research relates to Doreen Massey’s concept of ‘place as a process’ (1991), and also Miwon Kwon’s examination of the relationship between location and identity in the context of the dynamic between artwork and site, and the identity of place in relation to functioning structures (2004).

Reflecting on the post-completion life of buildings from the 1960s and 70s my research relates to the work of several writers who have argued for a re-assessment
of buildings from this period. Owen Hatherley’s writing has made a central contribution to the debate in considering what buildings from this era might represent at this moment in time, alongside a critique of subsequent neoliberal political regimes (Hatherley: 2009, 2011, 2013). John Grindrod’s ‘Concretopia: A Journey Around the Rebuilding of Postwar Britain’ (2014) brings the era vividly to life via conversations with characters whose lives were intertwined with buildings from post-war Britain. He proposes a fresh look at the intentions and values behind the post-war building programme, while not avoiding the corruption and bad practices that existed in some cases. Jonathan Meades’ two part BBC series ‘Bunkers, Brutalism, and Bloodymindedness: concrete poetry’ (2014) makes some wider historical comparisons with architecture from this period and includes a more European perspective. My approach builds on the work of these writers and programme makers: however, in my focus on the production of space post-completion, my exploration of the architect’s vision is in relation to the life that users of the buildings have brought to the architectural developments, rather than on the buildings themselves. In this sense, my thesis shares some of the approach of Grindrod. Through my practice, I take these ideas into action by becoming involved and influencing people and places in each case study.14

Connected to the fate of these buildings is how they are aesthetically and socially perceived including widespread assumptions relating to their ‘failure.’ Failed Architecture is a discussion platform investigating, ‘how and why some buildings and urban environments allegedly malfunction, displease or fail to stand the test of time’ (Failed Architecture, 2013). The dialogue that they support relates closely to my research aims, and I participated in their workshop focusing on the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum housing development in Berlin (Failed Architecture, 2012). My research overlaps with theirs in questioning popular assumptions about the value of particular buildings and their potential future life. Rather than adopting assumptions around ‘failure’ as an approach to the buildings in the present, through the thesis I am arguing for alternative criteria by which to measure their success. I draw attention to aspects of their life in the present, which are often overlooked when decisions are made about the future of publically funded buildings from this era.

14 See Methodology chapter for a more detailed account of my approach to participatory practice for each case study.
My approach varies from Failed Architecture in my specific focus on buildings from the 1960s and 70s within the context of the British Welfare State, and the use of my artistic practice as a research tool, whereas Failed Architecture have a broader scope both geographically and do not focus on a specific period of time. Using strategies as an artist to explore forms of dialogue with users means that my discoveries may be visual, physical, material or verbal in their outcome.

Considering the field of practitioners, the exhibition *Architektonika 2* (2012) at the Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, laid out a set of pertinent examples exploring the historical and contemporary interchange between Art and Architecture. The focus was “how architecture defines urban space, the way we live, and thus also social structures” (Hamburger Bahnhof, 2012). I would argue for a repositioning of the question. Rather than architecture automatically being the active element in the relationship, I propose that it can be more about an exchange with social structures and the way we live also transforming architecture. My proposition relates to de Certeau’s (1984:117) assertion in “‘Spaces’ and ‘Places’” that, ‘space is a practiced place.’ Therefore places become something else via their relationship to inhabitants. Approaching the subject from a perspective of design, FAT’s *15 Islington Square* engages with resident’s DIY modifications to their own homes, using participatory practice to inform design ideas for new homes.

An essential approach to my practice is engaging directly with users of buildings and places. In this way my approach relates to a context of participatory practice, of other artists who work with people. Nicolas Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics (2002) is important in bringing together and articulating the work of a number of artists whose practice engages with social relations rather than, ‘an independent and private space’ (2002:113). In contrast to many of the artists that Bourriaud draws on in *Relational Aesthetics*, as a practitioner working within participatory practice, material, visual and somatic approaches are key to the way that I engage and work with people.

Claire Bishop is also significant in providing a more recent context for participatory practice. In the introduction to her edited collection of essays, Participation (Bishop,
she describes ‘three concerns – activation; authorship; community’ as the most frequently cited approaches to encourage participation in art since the 1960s. Of these three concerns activation has become an increasingly important context for my approach to practice.

Two practitioners who also explore different issues relating to the post-completion life of buildings are Marian Engle in his film “Living in the city of Tomorrow” (2007) and Tomás Saraceno in his 2011/12 exhibition ‘Cloud Cities’ at the Hamburger Bahnhof. Engle focuses on the Hansaviertel housing development in Berlin, a showcase for international architects built in the late 1950’s to early 60’s. Engle presents a series of interviews with current residents describing their present lives, histories and how they relate to the space of the apartments. In Saraceno’s work, an implication of town planning ideas is suggested via interactive airborne bubbles or clouds, which would operate in relation to existing structures. There is a suggestion of individuality within a repetitive structure through the ‘gardens’ inside the clouds. Both strategies, although very different, contain elements of how I have approached the research context. In terms of working methods, part of my approach involves engaging with residents creatively and actively, while working with and responding to their stories and histories. At the same time, I adopt material strategies as an artist to research and propose fresh ways of understanding the different lives of buildings.

An artist who is significant for my approach in considering strategies of intervention with users of a building is Daniel Knipping. In his work, *Inside Out* (Knipping, 2008-10) at the Pallasseum housing development, Berlin, he worked with a ubiquitous feature of the exterior of flats, the satellite dish. In writing about this work, Knipping describes how, ‘in households with migration background, this receiver is more than only the possibility to receive undisturbed TV-programs. For me this aerial also embodies a strong symbol. This satellite dish creates a connection between the present place of residence of a person and his original homeland’ (Knipping, 2010). As well as functioning for families as connections to the outside world, Knipping enabled the customisation of satellite dishes to be spaces for more personal images such as photos of family members or cherished objects or memories.

In considering the possibilities for working with residents on the Bampton Estate, I was searching for a form that would support the personal adaptations of residents, but related more closely to the design of the terraced house. The wheelie bin was
interesting both from its position in the porch and as an object with a relationship to detritus, objects, hoarding and of honing identity in the decision-making process of which objects become rubbish.

Jessie Brennan is an artist whose practice, in a similar way to mine, straddles participatory practice with a more material or image-based part. She works across drawing and photography and uses her practice as a way of engaging users of buildings or places. Recorded in her publication, *Regeneration! Conversations, Drawings, Archives and photographs from Robin Hood Gardens*, (2015) she made pencil rubbings of doormats from the entrances to residents’ homes from the estate in Poplar. The series is titled *Conversations Pieces*. In a similar way to my wheelie bin project for this thesis, she is drawing attention to an overlooked aspect of the porch. As they are constantly worn down, they speak of their age, treatment and the residents who have trod on them. The doormats are a form of representation of their own use. Brennan’s approach differs from mine in the type of material languages used, and the types of interventions with users of buildings. She works more closely with images, whereas I more usually work with material structures.

My practice interprets the language of architectural structures and a number of artists work within this field, notably, Ian Monroe and Heather and Ivan Morrison.

My position both in relation to artists who engage with users of places, and artists who reflect on languages within architecture is nuanced. My claim for original contribution lies in the flexible combination of approaches, together with the particular nature of the thesis I am developing. I build on de Certeau’s (1984:xxi) understanding of the value of activities, such as reading, and the extension of this to other everyday activities that take place within buildings, such as DIY, or customisation. This concept is brought together with an interpretation of activities and happenings occurring in and around buildings building on Lefebvre’s theories of *The Production of Space* (1991).

In the next chapter, I will outline the methodology of my approach to the subject area and the generation of research. This will involve a discussion of why the particular

17 This develops Charles Holland’s argument in ‘Questions of Taste’ (Holland, 2011)
methods I have used are appropriate, i.e. their relationship to the types of knowledge realised. The discussion encompasses both the practice and theoretical positions I work within in order to research the case studies.
In this chapter, I will discuss my rationale for the methods that I have used in the research. This encompasses both why and how I have worked with my practice, including the way in which I engage with people. I will also discuss the role of the writings of de Certeau and Lefebvre in my approach to the subject area.

My thesis has been developed through both practical engagement and written reflection. The intention is that the practice and written parts of the thesis would form a dialogue, both illuminating and challenging one another. A practice-based approach enables the generation of alternative knowledge rather than that based on verbal or numeric forms, as argued by Dean and Smith (2009:3)\textsuperscript{18}. In the context of the research, my practice communicates and interprets the experience of inhabiting the places explored in the ‘case studies.’ My practice proposes somatic, kinaesthetic, and spatial understandings via the presentation of structures, images and materials

\textsuperscript{18} See p18 in the Introduction for a fuller description of the value and purpose of a practice-based approach.
organised within particular spatial settings. The mobile relationship of the audience to these elements generates alternative perceptions of the places and developments explored. For the first two case studies this setting is a gallery, for the last case study the work exists in situ within the Bampton Estate.

The research is focused around three ‘case studies.’ The term ‘case studies’ is more often used in relation to research within other fields such as the social sciences, anthropology and psychology. It is associated with fieldwork and the hands-on gathering of evidence. It is useful in the context of my research because I ground the research in the specificity of places, becoming immersed in each development and gaining insights from a close understanding of the context and nuances of each place. I have researched the three developments using a range of approaches and gained different types of ‘data.’ It is important to the research that I am not making claims in the abstract as the structure of this thesis is around places rather than ideas or themes. As such, my research also makes its claims on the basis of a qualitative approach19.

It is important to state that working with people is at the heart of my methodology. As my research aims to explore users’ contributions to their own environments, their own perspectives and actions are crucial to the research. My approach relates to arguments within Nicolas Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics*, which assumes, ‘the realm of human interactions and its social context rather than the assertion of an independent private space’ (2002:14). For the artists that Bourriaud discusses whose work derives from relational aesthetics, ‘they all ground their artistic practice in a proximity which while it does not belittle visuality20, does relativize its place within exhibition protocols’ (2002:43). In contrast my approach aims to bring together participatory practice with a material practice as a means of interpreting and understanding buildings and places. For my practice the physical and visual means

19 Qualitative research as defined by Srivastava & Thomson (2009, p73) is ‘an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct and methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or a human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting’

20 Here I understand ‘visuality’ to mean a wider scope of material practices, with which the viewer may engage with somatically, rather than the purely visual.
are not ‘relativized within exhibition protocols’ but brought more centrally into the way in which I work with people (Bourriaud, 2002:43).

In her introduction to ‘Participation’, Claire Bishop (2006:12) discusses, ‘the desire to create an active subject, one who will be empowered by the experience of physical or symbolic participation.’ Similarly, I intend that working with people would not be just about extracting information, but instead actually entail being involved and influencing the situation through my interventions, as is most explicitly the case via the Do my flying ducks prove me an outlaw? case study. I am conscious of the generosity of the many participants who gave their time to work with me. Several participants mentioned that it had been a rich experience; by discussing or remembering an event or place, value had been placed on their contributions or perspectives.

The way that I approach developments and people takes on board discussions around researcher positionality (Ganga and Scott, 2006). I accept that the qualities and situations I bring with myself as a researcher influence the way that participants perceive me and thus the types of responses that they might bring to the three case studies. Factors in my own positionality that could influence the response of participants include: gender, class, ethnicity, age, being a parent, interests, my existing relationship to the participants and approach as an artist.

Instead of seeing these factors as elements that might interfere with responses of participants, my approach is to be transparent about my positionality and utilise it as an aspect of the research. As a researcher, I am not an impassive observer but enabling and supporting residents to have agency in their homes. The positionality has been different for each case study. For Do my flying ducks prove me an outlaw? I have a very close proximity. The Bampton Estate is on the road where I live. Some of the participants I interviewed were neighbours with whom I have long-standing relationships with, another was a parent who I used to walk my son to school with. As such my positionality enabled conversations that would not have been available to a researcher with a more removed relationship. As a resident I also have a nuanced understanding of the locality. For Where clouds are made… I was an outsider in understanding the engineering processes of power generation. I was also an outsider to the locality although my collaborator for this case study, Rachel Barbaresi lives in nearby Oxford, so had an understanding of the places that participants discussed.
For *Swimming in the Cathedral*, I am a user of Crystal Palace Sports Centre both for myself, and as a parent going with my son who used to attend swimming classes as a baby, toddler and pre-schooler.

However as Ganga and Scott (2006) discuss ‘being insiders in the social interview is much more complex and multi-faceted than usually recognized.’ As Hopkins (2007) explores it is important to consider my motivation in carrying out research. This is an ethical consideration, which as fresh and potentially unpredicted situations present themselves, ‘requires reflection throughout the research process’ (Hopkins: 2007).

I work with the theories of Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre in my reading of the places and practices observed in the case studies.

The writings and approach of de Certeau towards understanding ‘place’, function throughout the thesis in several different ways: de Certeau’s assertion that ‘space is a practiced place’ (de Certeau, 1984:117) is an implicit thread underlying a way of perceiving the role of users in forming the life and histories of the three developments on which my case studies are based. Specifically, in the chapter *Do my flying ducks prove me an outlaw?* I build on de Certeau’s notions of daily creativity to discuss adaption and customisation by residents of their homes, while in *Where clouds are made*… I take a position in contrast to de Certeau’s notion of *la perruque* (the wig).

In Charles Holland’s essay ‘Questions of Taste’ (Holland, 2011) Holland proposes a connection between de Certeau’s discussion of reading, ‘the improvisation… of meanings’, and other everyday activities. He contests that ‘the production of culture is never simply one-sided – that is, produced by someone and consumed by someone else – and that cultural objects are in a constant state of re-reading and adaption’ (Holland, 2011:95). Holland questions why this should not be extended to Do-It-Yourself or customisation and adaption of homes by their residents. I work with this framework in *Do my flying ducks prove me an outlaw*, reading the additions and alterations to homes as an extension of the creativity and agency of the residents.

In considering the dynamics of work life for *Where clouds are made*… I work with de Certeau’s theory to frame a context for seeing the experience of a worker. In ‘The Practice of Everyday Life’ (1984), de Certeau’s notion of *la perruque* (the wig) describes the practice of employees using employers’ resources (time) for their own ends. De Certeau is describing a situation where the employee is finding tactics to
resist, ‘in the very place where the machine he must serve reigns supreme, he cunningly takes pleasure in finding a way to create gratuitous products whose sole purpose is to signify his own capabilities through his work and to confirm his solidarity with other workers or his family.’ (1984:25) De Certeau underlines a stereotype of factory life whereby the worker is reduced to a part of the machinery; lacking initiative and so needing to seek strategies to resist.

I introduce the notion of *la perruque* as an alternative perspective for the practice of employees at Didcot power station, who would bring in their cars at weekends, in order to use the work machinery to fix them. Contrary to de Certeau’s notion of *la perruque* as a subversive activity, in the case of Didcot power station the workers were carrying out repairs to their own cars with the knowledge and tacit blessing of management. There is a sense of the workers having a degree of autonomy and the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) trusting and supporting their staff. So de Certeau’s notion of factory life, where there is a need for resistance is used as a means of contrast, to illuminate the unusual degree of agency with which employees at Didcot Power Station are enabled.

Together with de Certeau’s understanding of the everyday, Lefebvre’s notion of spatial production informs my framing of the post-completion life of buildings. The role of Lefebvre’s writing in the thesis is to develop an understanding of the production of space in the context of the buildings examined in the case studies. This comprises how buildings are inhabited, how the body relates to the dynamics of space as delineated by the architect/s, and also an understanding of bodily relations to other bodies or objects in space.

In the chapter, *Swimming in the Cathedral*, I explore the interior space of Crystal Palace Sports Centre utilizing and drawing parallels with Lefebvre’s understanding of space and movement in a cathedral in the chapter *Seen from the Window* from *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992).

Via an extension of Lefebvre’s reading of space and movement in a cathedral in *Seen from the Window* (Lefebvre, 2004), I apply this interpretation of space to the experience of inhabiting the interior of Crystal Palace Sports Centre. In particular, I draw parallels with the repetition of religious events and processions that take place
in the cathedral, with the repetition of movements that occur within sports activities, and most predominantly the repetition of swimming lengths in the 50 metre pool.

I also work with Lefebvre’s writing to consider the acoustic aspect of inhabiting space. Lefebvre describes this in relation to religious processions. I consider how in *Swimming in the Cathedral*, this acoustic element is generated by sports activities. The physical qualities of sounds and reverberations have the effect of drawing and delineating the interior space. Lefebvre refers to different activities being experienced ‘polyrhythmically’ (2004:31). The open interior space of the sports centre allows for an awareness of a multiplicity of other sports activities, whilst being engaged in a singular one.

In *Where clouds are made*… there is less focus on the production of space: however, in the context of the production of power, I quote from Lefebvre to draw attention to alternative forms of production, ‘the concept of social space becomes broader. It infiltrates, even invades the concept of production, becoming part – perhaps the essential part of its content’ (1974:85). I then develop this theme discussing how social space is produced in different ways by Didcot A Power Station. This places the role of social space as a key element in understanding the post-completion life of buildings.

I am interested in how a building has grown old and how its post-completion life has been influenced by particular social, economic or cultural conditions, and how users of a building or place see themselves as part of its history and on-going life. The methodologies I have used in my case studies involve extensive physical exploration of a building and place, as well as engagement with users of a building. This approach generates source material with a distinct character, creating pertinent ways into the research area for the audience or readers.

The ‘post-completion life of buildings’ has to be understood and researched in the context of and in relation to the building at the time of its completion. Part of the methodology is seeking out and examining archive material. Examples of the types of material that have informed the case studies include: architects’ exploratory drawings, architects’ plans, engineers’ drawings, newspaper cuttings, photographs supplied by users or past users and minutes of planning meetings.
My practice adopts a close relationship to its situation, or the spaces of installation, and exists only in that situation – I don’t make stand-alone ‘works’ that exist outside of the context of exhibition. As such the installations have a nuanced relationship to the interior architectural spaces of display. My practice takes a multiplicity of material forms including: constructions, painting, wall drawings, floor drawings, projection, vinyl laser cuts, artist’s books, and works with participatory practice and collaboration.

One of the aims of the thesis is to, ‘draw attention to the value of users’ contributions to their own environment and to investigate ways in which these can play a part in conceptualising the on-going life of a building.’ Subsequently, working with people is an essential part of the practice for each case study. The role of participatory practice is custom made for each place, and the approach to working with people has been formed in relation to attributes, qualities and themes for each architectural development.

My practice as a whole for each case study is also approached with bespoke strategies. For Where clouds are made… the exhibition was part of a project commissioned by npower, marking the closure of Didcot A. Part of the Didcot A Power Station case study involved collaboration with the artist Rachel Barbaresi. The working strategy brought the benefit of an inbuilt dialogue and testing to the artistic processes; however, the conceptualisation of the case study and contextualisation in relation to the research questions has been carried out independently.

Rachel and I produced a large-scale installation, which reflected the physicality of the power station. The show was in Cornerstone Arts Centre, Didcot and our primary audience was a group of people who had a close relationship with the life of Didcot A, such as employees, retired employees and residents of all ages who might have different sets of connections or family relationships with the power station. We ran semi-structured interviews with groups of retired employees, set up a stall in the work canteen at the power station, worked with a class at Northbourne Primary School in Didcot and led a half term workshop with school children during the run of the exhibition. Our approach to these different groups of people was facilitated by the commission from npower. The participants’ interest in Didcot A was part of their motivation to share their experiences. We also had access to a wealth of archive
material from the planning stage covering the life of Didcot A, which became important to the research.

One of the themes that emerged from the research was a sense of awe at the sublime scale of the industrial processes, alongside a difficulty in comprehending the scale of the power station, particularly the most visible part – the cooling towers. As the cooling towers are often seen from a distance, from the train or going past on the motorway, this had the effect of giving the cooling towers a toy town quality in many people’s experience. The exhibition provided an alternative understanding of scale for the audience.

The central scaffolding structure in the gallery formed an almost imperceptible arc traversing the width of the gallery. It was based on the curvature of a cooling tower at a scale of 1:1. The sense of surprise at the slightness of the arc gave an alternative way of understanding the enormity of the whole in relation to the scale of the viewer’s own body.

As you entered the gallery there was a vinyl cut floor drawing, which was a scale map of the area around the arts centre, shown in relation to the power station. Working with children in an open workshop during half term, scale models of shops and buildings around the arts centre were placed onto the map. Whilst children from Northbourne primary school in Didcot placed scale models of the cooling towers, onto the map of the power station. Thus the cooling towers could be imagined in relation to the presence and place of the viewers’ own current position in the gallery.

The knowledge gained by the audience was a sense of wonder at the tiny shops in relation to the cooling towers. The scale became more than numbers, and instead was brought to life by an encounter with the relative scales in the gallery.

Considering my research question ‘what are the potential ways and impacts of seeing 1960’s and 70’s buildings in the present?’ the installation also draws attention to the gulf in time via the juxtaposition of contemporary chain stores, with their kitsch shop fronts filled with current marketing material, against the austere but distinctive 1970’s cooling towers.
As such, the practice was an integral means of exploring how people encountered the power station in their daily lives, and by extension, the relationship between the power station and a sense of belonging to a place. As the primary audience for the exhibition at Cornerstone Arts Centre were residents of Didcot and employees of the power station, I was taking a part of the audience's experience and re-presenting it to them. The conversation between the parts of the exhibition generated a distilled version of the encounter.

For the *Swimming in the Cathedral* residency and event at Wimbledon College of Arts the audience was BA Fine Art and Theatre students and staff, who were mostly outsiders to the sports centre. This meant that they could come to the piece as an autonomous work, without the literal comparison to the space from which the work was derived. My approach to users of the sports centre came from a combination of personal connections as a resident, and meeting past and present users of the sports centre via a Crystal Palace Facebook group. We met up mostly one to one in bars or cafes in Crystal Palace. My research also came out of my own experience of the sports centre. I spent time observing within the building and making notes from swimming as part of the methodology for Crystal Palace.

For the residency at Wimbledon College of Art, I made a fabric version of the concrete internal struts supporting Crystal Palace Sports Centre. Via a material inversion, the (useless) floppy versions of the struts behaved as a counterpoint to their function inside the sports centre. The fluidity of the fabric structures was also suggestive of how the saturation of light from the floor to ceiling windows hits the 50 metre expanse of water in the sports centre, exploding the factual stasis of the building.

The knowledge generated by the practice was an experience of the piece from the perspective of the audience or participants. The alternative possibilities suggested by fabricating fabric versions of the struts drew attention to playful and unscripted ways of inhabiting the building.

The audience came together for a closing event that was as much social as an interaction with the piece. The piece facilitated particular types of interactions between the audience, in the same way that Crystal Palace Sports Centre puts
people in different situations in relation to one another through sports and social activities.

So, as the audience moved around and amongst the piece, they performed a suggestion of how the building forms a structure for less scripted and more improvised actions. The audience found their own spaces within and amongst the piece, thus they and I were able to reflect on the experience of inhabiting Crystal Palace Sports centre, via an alternative equivalent bodily experience.

For *Do my flying ducks prove me an outlaw?* as part of my case study at The Bampton Estate, my work was participatory. I approached the family I worked with via London & Quadrant housing association. Other interviews with participants arose from connections as a resident and neighbour. Spending time in the estate and taking and analysing photographs was also part of my approach. As the subject of this case study was the customisation by residents of their homes, it was important to explore the visual and material evidence of this in the estate.

For this case study, the practice part of the thesis involved a direct intervention in the spaces of the Bampton Estate. I worked with a family who live in one of the houses in Shifford path, running a workshop to customise their wheelie bins, thus supporting their ownership of their own environment. The practice part of the case study in this situation aligned much closer to the subject matter of the research. Rather than reflecting on the development, the practice instead existed in the home of the participants. As a researcher, I am not sitting on the fence about the value of customisation and its relationship to a sense of agency for users of buildings.

In this way, the practice enables a particular response to the research question, ‘what types of strategies would allow users a greater sense of identification with and role in their own habitat? And how could these play a part in the on-going life of a building?’ By proposing a way of supporting residents in customising part of their home, the practice generates an afterlife, in that the customised wheelie bins remain in the back garden and on the street. They mingle and find their place alongside a swing, trampoline and other garden additions, contributing to the post-completion life of the building.
As an integral part of the thesis, the practice enables a conversation between geographical situations, physical structures and the sensory aspects of habitation. It engenders in the audience a type of understanding that is made immediate via their bodily responses to structures and images. The organisation of space in the gallery becomes a proxy for encounters around and within structures in the explored developments.

In investigating ‘the post-completion life of buildings’, the thesis brings together the adaption and customisation of spaces by users with the production of space generated by movements and activities within the developments explored, as one conceptual whole. As the thesis aims to explore the life that buildings have after the architect has walked away, the practice provides opportunities to imaginatively enter into or explore different aspects of these spaces.

The practice brings a direct corporal experience on the level of sensation. The audience is exposed to ‘what if scenarios’ developed via material structures, which question or draw attention to aspects of the buildings or places.

Practice is essential to the knowledge I generate because it is the means by which I am able to draw relationships between: geography, the structures of buildings, the role of users of the buildings and the sensations connected with habitation. Via the practice, I am generating a particular type of Relational Aesthetics (Bourriaud: 2002).

In this chapter I have identified how I will approach my research, both via my practice as an artist and working with the theoretical approaches of de Certeau and Lefebvre. I explain the rationale behind working with practice-based research in the context of the writings of Bourriaud and Bishop, and why it is the most appropriate form of research to elicit the types of knowledge that I am seeking to foreground and make visible through the research.
Swimming in the Cathedral
Crystal Palace Sports Centre

... as the park is pregnant with the absence of Crystal Palace
(Challey, 2014)

Fig. 10 Crystal Palace after the fire (1936)

In this chapter I will address the research aims in the following ways:

1. Drawing greater attention to the value of users contributions to their own
   environment and to investigate ways in which these can play a more
   foregrounded role in conceptualising the on-going life of a building.

For this case study I explore the contribution of users as predominantly happenings
and actions. Crystal Palace Sports Centre presents a striking cathedralesque open
space. This generates an awareness of different sports activities experienced
simultaneously, taking the form of dramatic and poetic movements, as well as more
everyday or overlooked activities. These are conceptualised in a dialectic with the
architecture. I work with Lefebvre’s writings on The Production of Space (1991) to
interpret these movements.
2. Questioning the way that 1960s and 1970s buildings are perceived in the present and to extend the debate about possibilities for framing our understanding of them.

By drawing attention to the value of users in activating the architecture, I present Crystal Palace Sports Centre as a building that imaginatively enables this type of production of space.

Approaching the subject of the National Sports Centre at Crystal Palace, and contacting local groups, my interest in the 1960s sports centre was seen as a surprising anomaly. I came across the same response numerous times, that the dominant narrative connected with Crystal Palace Park is about the memory and ruins of Joseph’s Crystal Palace. Part of my approach to Crystal Palace is to address that and extend consideration of the site to include the sports centre of which relatively little has been written.21

Visiting the park today, traces of Paxton’s Crystal Palace are still highly visible. When entering the park from the parade, a path leads through the site where the Crystal Palace stood and then on to ‘the Italian terraces’ that were designed to resemble ancient classical structures. The terraces lead down via wide steps to the grand central walk. The crumbling structures create a huge sense of occasion. There is an uncanny awareness of the structures being ‘fake’ Roman antiquities, but at the same time their relatively recent demise is real, evoking the history of classical ruins and the picturesque. To add to the jumble of references, the colonnades are topped by Egyptian sphinxes.

21 Of course there are exceptions to this including Justin Nicholls blog post http://www.justinnichollsarchitect.com/2012/10/a-concrete-cathedral-for-sport-crystal.html
The faux classical ruins, reminiscent of a Claude Loraine painting, frame the distant Kent landscape. One experiences a constructed Victorian take on antiquity. There is an eclectic quality to the scope and mix of architectural references. The allusions to ancient empires demonstrates the ambition of the British Empire at its high point during Victoria’s rein.

Paxton’s Crystal Palace was first built in Hyde Park in 1851. It was designed to be a temporary exhibition. The immense structure showed off the latest cutting-edge technology in Victorian engineering. The cast plate glass method had recently been invented in 1848, enabling construction with large sheets of glass. After six months it closed, but its popularity generated a public campaign for it to remain in Hyde Park. This was not successful, but funding and a new site were found for the re-designed structure and exhibition on Sydenham Hill.22

The new building was opened in 1854. As with the original, it was designed to be a national centre for the enlightenment of the people by showing the industry of all nations. There were extensive examples of different periods of architecture, art and artifacts from around the world, as well as the latest technology from the industrial revolution. The scope of the exhibition demonstrated Victorian colonial ambition at its height.

The grounds of the palace contained magnificent fountains, a collection of statuary, specimens of trees and shrubs and, famously, full size models of prehistoric animals.

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22 For more information about the history of Joseph Paxton’s Crystal Palace see http://www.crystalpalacemuseum.org.uk
In a time unlike ours, which is not saturated with images and information from elsewhere, it was a place of learning and wonderment. The scale of the building was vast, occupying the section of the park adjoining the parade.

The Crystal Palace burnt down in a fire in 1936. The cause of the fire is not known. The sudden loss of this famous building was dramatic and traumatic, both locally and nationally (Piggott, 2004).
... **we were going to build a better and more equal society**

(Partridge, cited in Utopia London: s.d.)

When the National Sports Centre (NSC) was built in 1964, Paxton’s Crystal Palace would have been in living memory. Symbolically, it was constructed on the site of one of the enormous fountains. A local resident I spoke to pointed out, there are obvious parallels between the two buildings. Just as the 1854 Crystal Palace was at the forefront of Victorian engineering technology, so the LCC’s sports centre represented innovative design of the 1960s, with its open space and forest of supporting struts bearing the load of the building. But most obviously, the National Sports Centre is also predominantly a glass building, with its floor to ceiling expanse of windows. As the 1967 Panté film about the sports centre reflects, ‘from the ashes of the old, a new glass palace has risen’ (Panté, 1967).

The NSC at Crystal Palace was designed by the London County Council Architects’ Department under Leslie Martin followed by Hubert Bennett. At that time, when the department was newly formed, it was a pioneering place to work with a distinct ethos. As the architect John Partridge recalled:

I think we all knew that we were going to build the right architecture for the twentieth century. We were going to build a better and more equal society. We didn’t talk about it a lot, it was an understood thing… but in the new department we worked weekends and slept in the offices and the enthusiasm was contagious and the department grew to hundreds of people. It was a very exciting time (Partridge, cited in Utopia London: s.d.).

Another LCC architect, Oliver Cox, when recounting his time working on the Alton Estate in Roehampton, compared the ethos of the LCC to that of William Morris in wanting to make homes for ‘the poor’ (Nineham, 1996). In some ways, the NSC had things in common with Paxton’s Crystal Palace in its intentions towards the public good; however, the Crystal Palace was infused with the class divisions of Victorian Britain. In contrast, the LCC’s National Sports Centre had been shaped by the more egalitarian ethos of the post-war welfare state.

23 See also discussion of the LCC architects’ department in the introduction.
For Paxton’s Crystal Palace, the intention to ‘elevate, instruct and educate the people of the metropolis’ (Pathé, 1967) was not fully carried through into the reality of how it functioned. As Grazia Zaffuto (2013:2) argues in her essay ‘Visual Education’ as the Alternative Mode of Learning at the Crystal Palace, Sydenham, ‘restrictive opening times and high admission prices became a mechanism for managing the flow of working class visitors.’ In theory, the idea of ‘visual education’ showing replica images, statues and interiors was a strategy for democratizing art, but in practice, as she goes on to argue, there was also a divide in the ‘visual education’ for working class visitors and the ‘visual education’ for middle and upper class visitors (Zaffuto, 2013:2). The working class were expected to engage with the ‘artistic beauty’ (Zaffuto, 2013:1) of the courts, whereas the visual education for middle and upper class ‘connoisseurs’ was intended to relate to their superior knowledge of the historical and aesthetic accuracy of the exhibits.

Although Paxton’s Crystal Palace was in ruins at the time of the design and construction of the National Sports Centre, the ruins would have been more present than they are today. This was also true of the earlier life of the Sports Centre. A retired groundsman I met, who had worked in the park in the 1980s, spoke of how common it was to come across small statues or fragments of the exhibits as he tended to the trees and plants (Retired groundsman, 2014).

Turning to the less regarded development of the NSC, Paxton’s Crystal Palace is very much a presence, both through the physical remains in Crystal Palace Park and as a narrative about the site. Holding this in our minds, as part of the cultural memory embodied in the physicality of the building through which the NSC is experienced, I will now turn to the Sport’s centre itself and consider the daily experience of this space in its use by the public. By considering users contributions to the sports centre in this way, I will address the research aims of working towards a conceptualisation of these activities in the life of the building.
What is the value of a building such as Crystal Palace Sports Centre? In the context of my practice, I would like to approach this question by considering how it is that people inhabit its spaces? How can we create a framework for considering the relationship that brings the sensual experience of a building, our emotions, memories and awareness of other users of the building together? Ben Highmore describes a scenario:

A teenager (who) returns home after the long walk from school. Fractious and cold, and mulling over the various exchanges that have knitted and unknitted the day, she takes a shower. The full blast of almost scorching hot water drills into the shoulders and neck, marshalling the muscles and nerves, galvanizing the body for the tasks ahead (Highmore, 2011:140).

He goes considers how, ‘emotions and memories, sense and sensitivity, energy and affect congregate and congeal in complexly singular ways’ (Highmore, 2011:140). This seems a particularly apt way to think about the value of a Sports Centre. Sports activities create sensual experiences. You are often in the midst of intense physical
exertion or immersed in water as you take in your surroundings, thus heightening and extending one’s bodily experience of the building.

I would like to consider two different experiences of inhabiting that are present in the National Sports Centre. Their juxtaposition is a quality that continues to make the NSC distinctive today. They are the overwhelming monumentality of the space combined with a sense of the ordinary and every day.

In a sense this was part of the design. It was intended as a National Sports Centre with facilities for Olympic athletes to train, compete and for major international sporting events to be held there. It was also intended as a facility for local people. It was for the public good, to nurture talent amongst children and young people in the area, and to enable residents to keep fit and look after themselves. In the 1978 Sports Council report, the ‘integrated use of the Centre’s unique set of facilities’ is described: ‘For swimming, diving, synchronized swimming and water polo (the NSC) offers a complete service to sport from mother and baby classes to international swimmer, as well as adult beginners, teachers and coaches.’

Exploring Crystal Palace Sports centre now, these two intentions are still evident. The scale, structure, and imaginative design of the building speak of a lavish ambition, but at the same time, admission is inexpensive (£2.70 for an off-peak swim) and it is primarily used by local people.

There is an incredible luxury in the experience of paying £2.70 for a swim and using facilities designed for Olympic swimmers. How can we approach the practice of inhabiting this space and consider the simultaneous experiences of the monumental and the everyday as they collide in Crystal Palace Sports Centre? I would like to think about the incomprehensibility of the monumental and how, via simultaneous sensual experiences, a range of actions and events are woven into our understanding of this place.

24 See the film ‘Crystal Palace (1967)’ by Pathé for a fuller description of the intentions behind Crystal Palace Sports Centre.
Entering the Sports Centre, you are immediately struck by a dramatic forest of concrete struts that support the building. As an artist, I was curious about coming to terms with these, and exploring how they functioned as structures. Surrounded by photos of the interior in my studio, I had imagined it would be a fairly simple matter to understand their layout and role in carrying the load of the building. As a habitual user of the building, I had experienced the space and the effect of the forest of struts numerous times, although there was a sense in which the striking dynamic of these structures had washed over me as an immersive experience rather than an engineering concept. I found myself unable to work out the structure and ended up returning to the sports centre to look again more closely and make drawings. Perhaps this is an aspect of the monumentality of the building, there is a sense of incomprehensibility as you experience it partially. From certain angles it is not possible to gauge the limits of the struts. I wanted to explore the extent of our physical certainty in relation to these structures.

The sense of incomprehensibility and the partial relate to aspects of the sublime. As Umberto Eco (2004:290) describes when discussing William Blake, ‘predominant aspects of the sublime are non-finite things.’
The repetition of the struts, together with the sense that the whole cannot quite be grasped, generates a sense of extension with and connection into the park. The architect Justin Nicholls (2012) describes the struts on his blog:

When viewed on axis they form a calm avenue, like a tree lined boulevard. Come off-axis and they appear dynamic and lively, like a dense forest canopy. I love the way the columns continue outside to form the entrance (2012).

The struts create a dynamic framework that defines the space inside the sports centre. It is a matrix for visually travelling within the space of the building, enabling a particular comprehension of the space. The struts divide the space, but also rhythmically link one part to another. The space is articulated and understood via the struts.

In the same way, sports activities often involve repetitive movements, which articulate space and place the individual in a synchronized relationship to other participants, for example, in lane swimming, or a team sport such as basketball or aqua hockey. As sports involve movements through space, each sport has its own sense of pace and a distinct choreography. Likewise, the struts have an architectural sense of choreographic movement through the space of the building.

To understand the struts as structures, I played with translating them through different materials. I made them first from paper and then balsa wood. I was curious to explore what the bathetic opposite of these impressive load-bearing structures might be, so I then stitched a maquette for a larger piece from fabric (see figure 18).
Fig. 16 Paper version of the concrete struts, studio shot (2014)

Fig. 17 Balsa wood version of the concrete struts (2015)
Considering the key role of scale in monumentality, I wanted to alter this sense by operating with a scale closer to the body. The maquette is designed at the scale of play, large enough to envelope a member of the audience (see balsa wood figure), but small enough to be mobile and interacted with. Inside the Sports Centre the structures generate an overwhelming and expansive sense of space; however, this floppy equivalent has a more ambiguous ‘push and pull’ between expansion and boundary. As the audience could move parts of the piece and physically weave in and around it, the form of the work would be in flux. In their interactions with the flexible fabric structure, the audience are invited to actively play with the idea of boundary and openings in relation to their own bodies.

Drawing on notions of The Everyday the fabric piece was intended to humanise the distancing and monumental qualities of the internal struts. The malleable and soft qualities of fabric suggest a world of alternative formal possibilities in opposition to the rigid necessity of the supporting struts. The piece would invite the audience to engage and experiment by moving it into different arrangements. As the fabric struts

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25 Stephen Johnstone describes The Everyday as ‘Drawing on the vast reservoir of normally unnoticed, trivial and repetitive actions comprising our daily life.’ (2008, p12)
flop into different scenarios there is the explicit parallel with the concrete originals and a humour in the inability of the fabric piece to have a structural function.

I was given the opportunity to realise the fabric piece at a residency as part of Acts Reacts (2015) at Wimbledon College of Arts. The piece was made on a life-size scale, supported by student assistants, using the gallery at Wimbledon as a studio for five days. There was also an event and discussion with the audience as a conclusion. The experience of realising the piece and the concluding discussion bought up unanticipated ways of reflecting on the nature of the sports centre and the internal struts.

During the residency, I was considering the way that the experience of swimming refracts and explodes one’s experience of the building. In attempting to imagine the coloured forms on the fabric and plastic moving between the soft struts like seeing architecture via the experience of water and movement, I spent time arranging and rearranging the fabric. This was my decision-making process. The sense of juggling with colour and form on the gallery floor with cut-out materials reminded me of the process of making a painting and of Phillip Guston’s (1956:36) sense of how ‘to paint is a possessing rather than a picturing.’

At the weekend, I continued working with my 9-year-old son in tow. He immediately saw the spatial possibilities of the laid-out fabric in the gallery space. The fabric and cut-out paper patterns became makers in space, to negotiate via a series of long jumps, creating a parallel with the way that the originals in the sports centre mark space.
The actual fabrication of the piece was a race against the clock, which reminded me of the rhythms of the sports centre, how it is run in weekly timetables. It also reflected how, when engaged in sports activities, you are often attempting to achieve an activity within a certain timeframe. Records in sports are usually marked in time. The clock becomes the opponent, and although I had the support of three student assistants, there was a sense of urgency during the residency.

The piece was made by sewing together sections of fabric and stuffing them with layers of wadding. The process of attempting to fill the fabric with the stuffing resembled an attempt to wear a piece of over-tight clothing. It took at least two people, pulling forcibly, to get the wadding through on each strut. The struts, and particularly the way in which they joined, took on the appearance of limbs. One potential reading of the piece was as a sprawling amorphous figure.
During the closing event and discussion, the audience playfully and physically engaged with the work. It became an environment for them to dwell in as a whole-body experience rather than something to observe. This aspect drew attention to the possibilities of different types of habitation. The mobile nature of the work, and the element of unpredictability in the multiplicity of forms it could manifest, generated different types of spaces to engage with. The audience found themselves exploring these in-between spaces and shapes. The softness of the fabric was itself welcoming.
and inviting, and forms a relationship to the body of accommodation and adaptability, which is the polar opposite of concrete.

A point that was raised during the discussion related to the site of Crystal Palace and its ruins. There was a sense of the installation being precarious, or on the brink of collapse and its instability being close to the possibility of ruins. In the image below, during the de-install, the weight and floppy nature of the materials were allowed to take their own form, underlining this thread in the work.

In relation to the research aims, the residency and event as my practice drew attention in a different way to how users physically inhabit the sports centre. As with the act of swimming in water, there was a possibility to be surrounded and immersed in the soft fabric piece. The fractured arrangement of different fabrics and colours brought the experience of seeing the architecture via the perspective of swimming to the fore.

![Fig. 23 De-install suggesting the idea of ruins (2015)](image)

**The gymnasts who are graceful co-exist with the rough hockey players.**
(Teenage resident, 2014)

The concrete struts generate a frame for a range of actions and events inside the building. As a teenage user of the sports centre observed, the building creates a sense of connectedness between different activities (Teenage resident, 2014). Part of the presence of the building is to do with how you are aware of, for example, a Jiu-Jitsu competition taking place while you are engaged with the meditative process of swimming lengths in the 50m pool.
This co-existence was part of the design of the LCC architects, but in their current diversity they form part of the autonomous post-completion life of the building.

**Swimming**

As a presence and practice, swimming is a dominant experience of the building. In considering the interconnectedness between the different events and activities, I would like to pause for a moment to consider swimming both as an element in, and as a perspective from which to understand the building.

The presence is visual as a huge stretch of water, but it also generates distinct sounds and smells. As the internal space is open, the interior temperature of the whole building is at a warm poolside level.

The nature of swimming, in its horizontality and emersion in the refractive substance of water, produces a particular visual perspective through which to experience the building at Crystal Palace. With front-crawl the view is mostly underwater, you see the light playing on the walls and floor of the pool. Heading south by breaststroke, the sun is straight ahead through the glass panels. On a sunny winter’s morning while swimming backstroke, I have the sensation that the wood-panelled ceiling is almost floating. Although made from dark wood, the dancing light reflected from the water is brilliant enough to play on the ceiling.

A swimmer at Crystal Palace commented on how swimming reminded her of the amniotic waters during birth. She had been present at the birth of her sister’s baby, and the baby had been born inside the intact amniotic sack. In Roger Deakin’s book *Waterlog* (2000), he swims the length of Britain via the sea, rivers and lakes. He begins the chronicle of his journey by reflecting on the womb-like nature of swimming, ‘once in the water you are immersed in an intensely private world as you were in the womb’ (Deakin, 2000:3). There is also the sensation that, ‘swimming is a rite of passage, a crossing of boundaries… the amniotic waters are both utterly safe and yet terrifying’ (Deakin, 2000:3). As a user of the swimming pool at Crystal Palace commented, ‘as our bodies are 90% water’ (swimmer and scuba diver, 2014) there is a sense of being immersed in the same substance that we are made of. Deakin develops the notion: ‘when you swim you feel your body for what it is – water – and it begins to move with the water around it’ (2000:3). Swimming immerses one in an
intimate world of sounds, visual phenomenon and sensations. Similarly, the monumental and luminous presence of the Crystal Palace Sports Centre building is experienced via the refraction and amplification of the water.

The swimmer I spoke to mentioned that in some senses the 50m pool at Crystal Palace generates a comparable experience to outdoor swimming. The expanse of windows around three sides of the pool form a porous barrier to the outdoors, and the time of day and weather transform the experience of swimming. As the pool is (relative to other indoor swimming pools) a large expanse of water, the experience of swimming is interrupted less by reaching the edges and turning.

The pool lies next to paneled glass that reaches from floor to ceiling, demarcating it from the park. The pool thus transmits a brilliant reflective glowing presence on a sunny day. On a more overcast day, or after dark, it has a stronger reflection from the lights inside the building.

The dominance of the building through the luminosity of the water and the intimacy of the interior to the park, has the effect of optically collapsing the space, dissolving the rigour of the internal struts, and undermining the weight and gravity of the concrete structure.

...more connectedness

Lefebvre explores how in a cathedral-like space, the distances and interrelationships are felt acoustically:

> In a cloister or cathedral space is measured by the ear: the sounds, voices and singing reverberate in an interplay analogous to that between the most basic sounds and tones; analogous also to the interplay set up when a reading voice breathes new life into a written text (1991:225).

The various sounds generated by the bounces, movements and noises from sports are comparable to Lefebvre’s examples of voices and singing. There is also the repetition and sense of ritual and display, which is particularly present in the act of diving in the dedicated diving pool at Crystal Palace. The dramatic balletic descents of competitive divers are staged by the building as theatrical spatial events. The actions of the divers relate to Lefebvre’s description of ‘a body capable of indicating
direction by a gesture, of defining rotation by turning round, of demarcating and orienting space’ (1991:170), and of the ‘architectural volumes [which] ensure a correlation between the rhythms that they entertain (gaits, ritual gestures, processions, parades, etc.) and their musical presence’ (1974:224).

Sound can be experienced as reverberations having a physical property, as well as aurally. There is a sense in which the connections between people, dramatically made present in the space by contrasting sports activities, are experienced as a cacophony or mélange of varying pulses bouncing through the atmosphere, defining and exploring the internal spaces of Crystal Palace Sports Centre. Lefebvre goes on to reflect, ‘it is in this way that bodies find one another’ (1991:225). Entering the space of the sports centre, the mass of one’s body plays an active role and presence in the space. This is heightened through the drama of swimming and other sports activities, but more discrete movements are also part of the mix, such as the receptionist chatting to the bookings manager, or people in the café taking in the light and warmth of sunshine from the floor to ceiling windows. There is a sense in which you become a dynamic participant in the space, morphing and moulding the space and light.

**The gymnast and hockey players also co-exist with the everyday**

While inhabiting the cathedralesque space dominated by the concrete struts, users of the building experience it as a container for other less planned activities and events. While sitting in the café on a weekday morning, there was a flat-screen television on in reception. It was broadcasting a show in which an obese woman, who had recently had a baby, was having a shouting match with the new girlfriend of the man she claimed was the father, about the disputed paternity. Later when the programme had switched, a toddler was transfixed by some music being broadcast and began to dance. His father gently danced with him as he deftly managed to get the toddler’s coat on. Meanwhile, a member of staff needs to do his tie, and uses the glass on one of the portacabin style offices as a makeshift mirror. A group of grounds staff from the park take a break and chat together. All the while, a pigeon makes tiny movements waddling around under the tables, and then I notice another marking the length of the building by flying down the central spine.
Another collective space is the female changing room, which comprises a generous open space in the basement. There are some cubicles, but most people choose not to bother about privacy. There is a sense of people coming to the NSC for a common purpose that feels constructive. They are looking after their bodies through swimming or the other sports activities. The range of female bodies on view contrasts with the uniform media representation of women’s body shapes. There is something beautiful about the ordinariness or quirkiness of people’s bodily differences while getting changed. Life experiences, such as having children, one’s work life or simply time, leave their marks on the body.

In the spatial presence of these activities, I would like to propose an equality between the potentially unframed activities of having a cup of tea in the café or getting changed with the sports activities for which the building and grounds are designed to frame. These happenings become framed by the monumentality of the building and permeate one another as part of the mobile presence of the place. In Lefebvre’s essay, *Seen from the Window* he describes the minutiae of phenomena and small daily actions: ‘Continue and you will see this garden and the objects (which have nothing to do with things) poly-rhythmically or if you prefer *symphonically*’ (my italics) (2004:31).

The symphonic quality is apt for describing the interior experience of Crystal Palace Sports Centre. It suggests varied and rich simultaneity, with the sense of actions, events, movements and sounds reverberating off one another within a delineated space over time, as with an orchestral performance.

**Time and routines**

Linked to these experiences of the everyday generated by particular events and actions is the role of time and process. For example, swimming in the 50m pool, numerous repetitive strokes generate lengths, which in turn add up to a session marked by the clocks, including the minute clock for timing lengths. The various classes are structured by timetables. Users of the sports centre find that the place becomes part of their daily and weekly routines.

Adding to the sport centre’s place in residents’ memories is the repetition and routine of people’s lives, in continually returning to the NSC as a site, attending classes, or
just turning up to swim in a way that’s fits in with the rest of their work or family lives. There is a type of recognition when users meet and acknowledge the same people at the same time each week or day, and this forms part of a relationship with the building over time.

In the same way and over long stretches of time, there are associations of memory colouring people’s experiences of the present. As a place that has been a fixture in Crystal Palace Park since 1964, for many local people the NSC has associations with formative times in their lives.

A number of users of the building I spoke to told me how the NSC played an important role in their parenting experiences. One couple, who home-schoolled their children, described how the NSC ‘was one of the main things that got us through that period… it was affordable, as we were self-employed… our kids have good memories of Crystal Palace Park, you could just sit in the sports centre’ (local parents, 2014). Visiting the sports centre on a weekday morning, the entrance hall and café is full of toddlers and parents. This in turn reminds me of my own days of early parenting when I would take my son as a baby and toddler to swimming classes. These experiences form part of the collective memory of the sports centre and stadium.

In addition to the role that the sports centre plays in local people’s daily lives, the collective memory of the NSC also relates to the monumental. It contains the memory of major sporting events both for residents and the national population, such as Steve Ovett’s two-mile record in 1978 and Cathy Freeman’s post-Olympic return in 2003 at the athletics stadium. The strength of feeling that these events evoke and the sense of attachment to the NSC is shown by Steve Ovett’s recent comments on the proposed current changes to the NSC and in particular the athletics stadium26.

Returning to my consideration of how users experience the spaces of Crystal Palace Sports centre, I’ve focused on happenings and activities in and around the sports centre, which together are key to the life and mobile presence of the place. As Lefebvre asserts when discussing monuments, the relationships between these

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26 See http://insidecroydon.com/2014/10/20/coes-old-rival-ovett-backs-calls-to-keep-crystal-palace-on-track/
occurrences can be understood acoustically and they initiate spatial and social relationships, ‘it is in this way that bodies find one another’ (1991:225).

Crystal Palace Sports Centre was built to support people’s physical wellbeing, but it achieves this in a particular way. Thinking back to the ethos of the LCC Architects department, where there was an excitement and ambition about the country that was going to be built, the NSC embodies this by going way beyond just enabling residents to keep fit.

The building is ambitious and imaginative, which sends out the message that there is a very high value placed on the public’s physical wellbeing. The juxtaposition of Olympic facilities and national and international events held there, alongside its accessibility, create a sense that residents could also be aiming for that type of excellence in their own sports activities. Users of the building are both participants and spectators. There is a quality of luxury in this level of provision.

The way in which the building and stadium frame and enable a multiplicity of experiences is also luxurious: the sense of light and space when swimming backstroke in the 50m pool; the diver’s movements framed by the building and made possible by the bespoke diving pool; the internal struts suggestive of dynamic movement and rhythm through space echoing the movements of people engaged in sports activities. While having a cup of tea in the café you can take this all in as you chat to a friend.

Today, we are accustomed to public provision being something which is constantly stretched and only barely meeting minimum needs, if that. Crystal Palace Sports Centre flies in the face of this stereotype and goes way beyond meeting people’s needs, providing facilities of Olympic standard and a space, which has enabled a multiplicity of experiences. Some parts of its success were designed into the building, and others could not have been imagined by Leslie Martin and Hubert Bennett, but were made possible by them.

In the *Swimming in the Cathedral* case study I have developed the two research aims in the following ways:

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27 For example, recent cuts to libraries, the bedroom tax and services for older people.
1. Drawing attention to the value of users’ contributions to their own environment and to investigate ways in which these can play a more foregrounded part in conceptualising the on-going life of a building.

- I have demonstrated how the users of Crystal Palace Sports Centre contribute to their environment through the way that the building is activated by their presence, sounds and movements. The users act as interpreters of the space set up by the architecture. The sports activities serve as dramatic and poetic interventions in the internal architecture, while other less planned activities also function as interventions in the space.

- The incorporation of Crystal Palace Sports Centre into people’s daily routines and lives generates a different set of meanings and narratives around the building. By sustaining users' bodies via swimming and other sports activities, the building gains physical outcomes other than the material structure of the building.

- The significance of place and memory is also part of the users’ contribution. As de Certeau (1984:117) asserts, ‘place is a practiced space.’ The way that users and local people perceive the sports centre in its context and its relation to Paxton’s Crystal Palace also gives an altered significance to the sports centre than merely its material structure.

- I conceptualise the actions by users of Crystal Palace Sports Centre via Lefebvre’s understanding of the space of a building as ‘symphonic’ and ‘simultaneous’ (Lefebvre, 1996: 222). This develops into an understanding of the building where the actions of users are key to an interpretation of the space generated by the architecture.

- I also draw attention to the way this building enables particular qualities of the production of space. Aspects of the building such as permeability to the park, the open connectedness of the space and the forest of dynamic struts generate a poetic and dynamic environment for sports activities.
2. Questioning the way that 1960s and 70s buildings are perceived in the present and extending the debate about possibilities for framing our understanding of them.

By placing value on the contribution of users in interpreting and activating the space and the role of memory and routines, I frame the building in a dialectic between the building and its users, rather than perceiving the building as autonomous.

Developing an understanding of the post-completion life of buildings is part of a methodology of interpreting the life of buildings as activated by users. In the case of Crystal Palace Sports Centre there is a dramatic and poetic interplay between the movements of the sports activities and the interior space of the building. We have also seen that less planned, more overlooked activities such as a member of staff doing his tie in a makeshift mirror also contribute to the production of space within the building. This appreciation of the role of the production of space as generated by the actions and activities of users is a quality that potentially could be applied more universally in considering the post-completion life of buildings.
Where clouds are made… (Wiles, 2012)

Didcot A Power Station

In this chapter I will address the research aims in the following ways:

1. Drawing greater attention to the value of users contributions to their own environment and to investigate ways in which these can play a more foregrounded part in conceptualising the on-going life of a building.

For this case study the ‘users’ are people with a range of relationships to the power station including: employees, retired employees and residents of the surrounding area. The significance and value of users contributions will be examined in the context of: innovative engineering solutions involved in the scale-up from previous generations of smaller more local power stations, employees initiating and designing new machinery within the power station, and the role of social space within the power station and the surrounding area.
2. Questioning the way that 1960s and 1970s buildings are perceived in the present and to extend the debate about possibilities for framing our understanding of them.

I challenge received assumptions in relation to: the design of Didcot A Power station being narrowly around function rather than aesthetics, the intimate relationship of machinery to operators and I explore a range of complex emotions around the anticipated loss and demolition of the power station.

When the news was announced in 2012 of the planned closure of Didcot A Power Station, the writer Will Wiles tweeted, ‘what no more power station? But Didcot is where clouds are made, or so generations of South-Oxfordshire school children were told’ (Wiles, 2012). His comment goes to the heart of my approach to this case study. In Wiles’s tweet there is the anticipation of loss, intertwined with the role the power station played in the imagination of local people.

In considering the ‘post-completion’ life of Didcot A, a range of relationships were engendered from employees, to Didcot residents to passers-by on the train or the M40. Wiles’s comment is also rooted in a truth; the steam emitted from the cooling towers was evaporated river water and influenced a microclimate around Didcot.

I became involved with Didcot A Power Station via a commissioned project as half of the collaboration Barbaresi & Round, from RWE npower, which was planned to mark the planned closure of the plant in 2013. Through the commission, we were invited to visit the inner workings of the plant while it was still operating, had access to extensive archive material and were able to interview current and retired employees.

Importantly we were also given funding and an exhibition at Cornerstone Arts Centre in Didcot. This enabled us to reflect on the material generated through the project in material form. We also made a book to accompany the show that operated as a curated space for other people’s perspectives on Didcot A.

28 As Wiles elaborated in his essay for the book accompanying our exhibition at Cornerstone Arts Centre, 2013.
Didcot A Power Station was switched off in March 2013, the southern cooling towers were ‘blown down’ in July 2014, with the planned blow down of the northern towers scheduled later. Considering my research questions of the post-completion life in relation to Didcot A, an overwhelming element of this in the present is a sense of absence and loss. I also explore aspects of the working post-completion life of Didcot A and set this in a dialectic with the design-thinking behind the planning of the plant.
But Didcot has always been at the centre of things (Attlee, 2013)

Didcot A and Place

Fig. 25 Archive photo of the construction of Didcot power station (1968)

Didcot A Power Station\textsuperscript{29} was part of a new generation of large-scale coal fired power stations conceived in the late 60’s and designed to replace numerous smaller local ones, such as Oxford or Battersea.

As a location it made sense. A power station was needed in the south to supply power to the London area. Its proximity to the Thames was essential as it needed to be close to a supply of river water for cooling, as well as excellent national transport links via the rail network for the delivery of coal. The site was formerly, a storage site for arms, so from here the army would send weapons to the rest of the country or overseas via the rail network.

The principal architect of Didcot power station was Frederick Gibberd. Gibberd came from an architectural tradition within British Modernism that valued a carefully crafted relationship of landscape to architectural structures. As Gibberd (Desert Island Disks: 29 Originally known as Didcot Power Station, it was named Didcot A when the gas fired Didcot B was built adjacent to Didcot A from 1994-1997.)
Frederick Gibberd, 1983) described, ‘I got more and more interested in the kind of environment in which you build.’ The relationship of landscape to structure was seen through a notion of the picturesque that had its roots in British landscape painting, as Pevsner (1954:227) describes in his article for Architectural Review, ‘the modern revolution of the early twentieth century and the picturesque revolution of a hundred years before had all their fundamentals in common.’

While on a tour of the power station in 2013, we were shown two portfolios of drawings, plans and explanations, which had been put together as a proposal for the power station by Gibberd in 1965. Incredibly, these had only recently been discovered behind a locker on site. From this documentation it was clear that the question of how Didcot Power Station would relate to its location was foremost in Gibberd’s mind during the planning process. The two portfolios covered Landscape Design and Architectural Design. As Gibberd stated in his foreword to the Report of the Landscape Architect:

In as much as the buildings are inseparable from their environment, the design is one total conception embracing both landscape design and architectural design (1965b).

The trouble taken to make the buildings and cooling towers form an aesthetically pleasing relationship to the landscape is astonishing. Gibberd examined the
possibilities of having between 12 and 6 cooling towers, and different spatial configurations.

Fig. 27 Comparison of cooling tower arrangements from Report of Commissioning Architect, 1965 (2013)

Gibberd also rigorously explored various arrangements of the cooling towers from different vantage points in the landscape. He went out into the surrounding landscape and considered how the cooling towers would appear from different key places in the locality. In the plans are several sets of photographs of the site from a range of viewpoints, with the cooling towers drawn to scale.
Fig. 28 Photographs of surrounding landscape with proposed arrangements of the cooling towers drawn on, from Report of Landscape Architect (1965)
The final arrangement, which was settled on, consisted of two groups of three towers that were about a mile apart. In engineering terms, this was a less energy efficient arrangement than at a comparable power station such as Drax, which has its 12 cooling towers next to the turbine hall and other buildings. Gibberd described his thinking behind the relationship to the landscape:

As the structures are immense in comparison with anything in the vicinity, conflicts are set up between their great scale and industrial character and the natural beauty of the region...the main elements should be as widely spaced as possible to help in their architectural expression and to prevent them coalescing into huge amorphous masses (1965b).

The number of cooling towers was reduced to six from eight and spaced widely apart to reduce the impact on the landscape. The elements of the power station – the cooling towers, turbine hall, administration building, canteen and the railway lines - were all considered in terms of formal relationships to one another and the landscape.

Gibberd considered carefully how tree clumps would relate both to the flat landscape of a river valley and to the vertical forms of the power station. Planting for local views, ‘the tree clumps follow and reflect the geometric layout of the buildings and each one is very carefully placed in relationship to both the near views of particular buildings and to a general view of wider compositions’ (1965b).

**Expectations**

Even though the relationship to the locality was carefully considered, the idea of such large-scale industrial structures arriving in a populated area was controversial. The Central Electricity Board (C.E.G.B.) held meetings for residents to attempt to give a sense of the power station prior to the construction.
One event used balloons to demonstrate the height of the proposed 650ft chimney. A newspaper cutting from the time describes how,

The balloons were thrown from a winch at the south-eastern corner of the depot where the Central Electricity Generating Board…had unwound about 200 feet of nylon cord when the balloons nose-dived towards a storage hanger. The cord was dragged across some telegraph wires, snapped and the balloons soared into the cloudy sky (see figure 29).

Although this episode ended in comic failure, it demonstrates the difficulties in attempting to imagine the enormity of the planned structures. There was an expectation and anxiety that the power station would change the character of the area and a sense of loss for the particularity of place that was changing.

In One Place After Another Miwon Kwon links ‘functions of places’ to ‘establishing authenticity of meaning, memory, histories and identities.’ These elements existing, ‘always and already prior to whatever new forms might emerge from it’ (Kwon, 2004:163).

Didcot Power Station arrived within the space of two years, from 1968-70. Its contribution to a sense of place for residents was not to do with a natural geographic feature or location. What does it mean in terms of place-making to have this dramatic
structure arrive within such a short space of time? Could a manmade structure play a similar role in creating a sense of place as a geographical feature might?

A drawing sent by a young local resident, in response to the project (see figure 30), describes how the power station remained a controversial structure dividing local opinion. In her cut-out drawing of a cooling tower, she writes:

My power station is marmite
I love him But my friends hate him, ‘it’s so good it’s being knocked down!’ Thay say
But I think it’s verry sad! (see figure 30)

The writer Will Wiles contributed an essay to our book accompanying the exhibition at Cornerstone Arts Centre. Growing up as a schoolboy in Oxford, he describes his teacher’s reaction to a fellow pupil’s drawing of the power station on a field trip. The teacher found it incomprehensible that the power station could be seen as a thing of
beauty, but Wiles (2013) asserts: ‘there is more than one standard for beauty.’ He
describes how over time he came to treasure particular views of it in the landscape.
Marina Warner (1995:58) similarly explores the expectation that beauty is a ‘natural’
thing and how we cling to an ‘ideal landscape in which human artefacts are abolished
as impure, and consequently irredeemably ugly…we retreat from trying to develop an
aesthetic that faces up to the electrified society that we rely on and enjoy.’

Didcot Power Station was not simply a passive structure in the landscape, but one
which local people had a stake in and helped shape. At our exhibition at Cornerstone
Arts Centre in Didcot, we provided a space for the audience to respond to the
exhibition and share their thoughts about the power station. As the exhibition took
place after the power station had been switched off, but prior to the southern cooling
towers being blown down, many of the responses focused on the anticipated loss of
Didcot A as a marker in the landscape and as a way-finding system (see figure 31
and figure 32).

Fig 31. Drawing left on notice board at Cornerstone Arts Centre (2013)
Lucy Lippard adapts Denis Cosgrove’s (cited in Lippard, 1997:7) definition of landscape in relation to place, as ‘the external world mediated through human subjective experience’, i.e. somewhere becomes a “place” through people’s experiences.’ As a backdrop to people’s lives, Didcot A also formed part of their imaginative life. As Wiles (2013) articulates, ‘It is a well-travelled and many-faced beast.’ Qualities of the power station have become developed in people’s imaginary life. In figure 33, the notion of apocalyptic imagery and the reality of power generation are combined. Another audience member draws the cooling towers and chimney surrounded by steam, and writes, ‘our eco sistum’, which in the ‘our’ suggests a sense of ownership, imaginatively building on the tons of water vapour that created a micro climate around Didcot A.
In many cases people’s experiences of Didcot A accommodated this vast structure to inform a sense of belonging. As Wiles describes, when driving ‘on the M40 it was the twist of smoke from the chimney that showed the home fires were still burning’ (2013).
Almost everything about Didcot A is sublime (Employee, 2013)

From the outside, the distinctive forms of the cooling towers are the most visually dominant aspect of the power plant, they serve as an iconic symbol of Didcot A. Yet, these vast structures were actually peripheral to the power generating process. From the inside, it is the immensity and scale of production that dominates.

Each day 20,000 tons of coal were delivered by train via the national network and then onto some 30 miles of internal tracks. The trucks unloaded the coal via floor openings on to underground conveyer belts. The coal was then transported to the boiler house or stored on the stockpile.

The coal headed for the boiler was ground into a fine powder in a pulverizing mill so that it could be blown into the boiler to be burnt like gas. This gas-like coal heats purified water into steam within the 300 miles of tubing that are the boiler walls. The steam leaves the boiler at a temperature of 568°C and at a pressure of 165.5 bar.
The steam then passes through the turbine, turning the blades at 3,000 revolutions per minute. The generator rotor shaft is coupled to the turbine shaft. As the turbine shaft spins it rotates the generator rotator (an electro magnet weighing 74 tonnes). Electricity from the generator is produced at a voltage of 23,500 volts. It is then increased to 400,000 volts for transmission along the national grid.
The spent steam from the turbine is converted back into water by passing over cold water drawn from tubes taken from the Thames. The cooled water is then pumped back into the boiler water for reuse.

The warmed river water is then passed to the six cooling towers, where it is cooled by evaporation in the updraft of air. Some of the river water condenses into tiny droplets, ‘like an early morning mist’ (RWE, s.d.) which creates the plume that could be seen coming from the top of the cooling towers. The power station is literally a place, ‘where clouds are made’ (Wiles, 2012). Although vast in scale at 325 feet high, there is a paradoxical delicacy to the structure and function of the cooling towers. The walls are only seven inches wide at the top and two feet wide at the base. Close up, they appear to hover above the ground, supported on a series of stilts that enable the updraft of air. The condensed steam, which has been re-converted back to river water, appears as a wall of water rushing past.
Visiting the power station shortly before it closed, we were shown around by a guide. From her descriptions I was attempting to understand the enormity of the processes involved. Another employee remarked, ‘almost everything to do with Didcot A is sublime’ (2013). In the sense of Kant’s (1952) ‘mathematically sublime’, referring to the inability of the mind to comprehend an object as a whole, this is accurate. The overwhelming scale of buildings, machinery, and the quantities of raw materials generated this sense.

The particular physicality of Didcot A belongs to a specific moment and makes clear the gulf in time over the last 43 years. The changes in the ownership of power generation means that conceiving a publicly funded bespoke power station on a similar scale would now be impossible in the same way.

The cooling towers represent the idea of twentieth century plenty, ‘the heroic mad era of surplus, when the generator would respond with a mad surge of power to the population getting up to make cups of tea during a commercial break on the telly’ (Warner, 1991:58).
When an employee commented, ‘almost everything about Didcot A is sublime’ (Employee, 2013), this was equally true of people with more tangential relationships to the power station. In our exhibition at Cornerstone Arts Centre we explored the notions of scale, proximity and incomprehensibility in perceptions of Didcot A.

On one level, the proportions of the cooling towers are a simple fact, but somatically absorbing the implications of the scale is a different type of understanding. From a distance the cooling towers have an almost ‘toy town’ presence. Their enormity plays tricks with our perception of scale and proximity. We worked with children from Northbourne School in Didcot, together searching for strategies to come to terms with the enormity of the towers. They made scale models of the cooling towers, which became part of our exhibition, placed on a vinyl map on the floor of the gallery (see figure 39).

I also ran a half term workshop in which children considered their location (Cornerstone Arts Centre) in relation to the power station. They made scale models of the arts centre and buildings from the surrounding streets, which they also placed on the gallery floor, to gain a sense of themselves and the scale of their bodies in the
same space and scale as the power station. Objects such as cars, which are
designed to the scale of the body, became miniatures. The houses were just 1.5 cm
high, which brought home to the children their own proportions in relation to Didcot A.

Fig. 40 Models of Cornerstone Arts Centre and other nearby buildings made by children at half term workshop (2013)

Fig. 41 Models from half term workshop placed on the map on the floor of Cornerstone Arts Centre (2013)
The sense of working to scale also brought the children closer to the working methods of architects and engineers.

In the main part of the gallery we made a scaffolding structure, which instead of being constructed on the floor in a straight line followed the arc of the base of one of the cooling towers. As the cooling towers were so vast, crossing the gallery floor, the curve was extremely subtle, almost imperceptible, suggesting the enormity of the whole (see figure 42).

Fig. 42 The almost imperceptible arc shows the enormity of the whole (2013)

In the main part of the gallery we built a wooden scaffolding structure, which functioned as a semi-permeable boundary. Crossing this threshold, the audience were inside a different space with wall drawings suggesting the inner workings of the control room. The children's contribution to the show was to take the audience on a journey where they first came to terms with themselves and their location in relation to the cooling towers, before reflecting on some of the inner workings of the plant.
*I turn the dial that much and I know it’s about a ton of coal*

(Control room operator, 2012)

Fig. 43 The control room (2012)

One of the ways the 1970s technology negotiated a particular type of physicality at the plant was in the relationship between machinery and operators. When visiting the power station, a member of staff in the control room described how he turns, ‘the dial that much and I know it’s about a ton of coal’ (Employee, 2012). Susan Stewart develops this idea of a relationship with tools as ‘a world of handles, arms and legs…This is the image of the body as implement, as moving in and through the environment in such a way that the material world is a physical extension of the needs and purposes of the body’ (1993:102).
Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Don Ihde (2002) both define phenomenological forms of bodily relations to objects. Merleau-Ponty (1962) engages more generally with the body as a temporal and corporeal agent embedded within the world, whilst defining and reflecting the world through a negotiation of possible extensions into it so that body and world are co-existent. Ihde (2002, xi) explores more specifically, ‘an embodiment relation, that is, the relation of experiencing something through an artefact, a technology.’ Rather than being a perceptual tool in the sense of a telescope, the control room switch is a mechanism for action. The operator, ‘knows’ it is ‘about’ a ton of coal. This is a learned behaviour, but with a bodily memory of what a ton of coal ‘feels’ like in turning a switch. The immediacy generated between the kinaesthetic act of turning, and what that would mean in terms of the weight of coal, could be conceived as generating a physical fluidity between workers and machinery. Other instruments in the control room, such as dials with readings from parts of the turbine hall, also work with a sense of response and counter response, with the effects of these ‘actions.’
The machinery and processes in the turbine hall were operated via the control room. The octagonal space of the control room, projecting out from the turbine hall, (see Gibberd’s drawing in figure 45) faced all directions of the site, so that the kinaesthetic relation between mechanism and body extended to a spatial connection with the whole site. The shape of the control panels echoed the octagonal space of the room and created a sense of the operator as being at the centre of the entire power station.

In a sense, the control room was like a miniature representation of the power station. Visually, the control panels looked like diagrams in a manual for an electrical appliance (see figure 44). They had the dual function of operating the machinery in the turbine hall, but also graphically making clear the processes, so that the employees were not operating the switches as automatons, but with an understanding of how the whole functioned. The design and layout of the panels gave employees a conceptual grasp of the implications of their actions on the total power generating process.

The control panels were designed at a scale where operators could walk around the switches and dials. Again this generated a somatic relationship of scale and the panels were spaced so that they related to the proportions of hands and arms.
In our exhibition, at Cornerstone Arts Centre (Barbaresi & Round, 2013a), we explored the control panels as activating elements of the internal space of the power station. Referencing the language of pop art, which was contemporary to the power station, the sense in which the dials, switches and controls relate to the spacing, orientation and functions of the large-scale machinery was inferred. Considering the enormity of the processes at Didcot A, the kinaesthetic connectedness with machinery creates a sense of the body experiencing and acting upon processes at the scale of the sublime.

We reflected on our experience of visiting the control room and being drawn into the world of signs, controls and words as outsiders to the operating language. For example, in the control room, a label on pieces of Dymo embosser tape stated: ‘NORTH 2. ICING RING TO STAY IN SERVICE.’ This was interpreted in our wall drawings (see figure 47) removed from its functioning context so that the words gained an abstract quality. The letterforms became images alongside the other equally abstract imagery and signs which comprised our wall drawings. The work posed the question: what does it mean to understand that a series of signs, images, flashing lights and words have crucial and specific meanings, but to see them as an outsider to the operating language?
In contrast to the immediacy and transparency of the relationship between controls and machinery in Didcot A, the relationship between the two in contemporary technology is much more distanced. The digital operates on a micro scale in relation to the body and tends to hide the mechanisms by which things happen. As Renê Arcilla (2011:71) points out, it is a technology that ‘withdraws into invisibility.’ Thus, if an iPhone stops working there is no general knowledge and know-how to take it apart and fix it, in the way that past generations might have been able to fix an analogue radio or a car.
The visibility and physicality of Didcot A also extends to the transparent existence of power generation. As Warner (1995:58) states, ‘Didcot makes us own up to our needs.’ In the current debate about power generation, there is pressure to hide the means, for example in relation to wind farms. Instead, Didcot A was highly visible, located next to a medium-sized town in a relatively affluent, politically conservative part of the country not otherwise known for large-scale industry. The forms of the power station expressed their function in a transparent sense, as Gibberd outlined when discussing the design principles of the station:

The various elements of the design complex should be expressed as such: that is, each would have its own identity… the forms of the building should be as simple and direct as possible (1965a).

Lefebvre (1991:93) reflects on the city as that, ‘which consumes (in both senses of the word) truly colossal quantities of energy, both physical and human, and which is in effect a constantly burning blazing bonfire.’ In its visibility, Didcot A makes this explicit.

**DIY / ingenuity / adaption**

A different type of connectedness with machinery was also generated by the culture of DIY and invention at Didcot A.

We were committed in 1970—74. There were all sorts of problems with the plant in the early days and the coal plant was pretty well redesigned from the one that was actually built. It was probably the 1980’s before we had it (Retired personnel manager, 2013).

Rather than the power station being designed by Frederick Gibberd and Allott and Son (the consulting engineers) and then starting its working life according to the plans, there were many alterations that had to be made in practice. This was a process of skilled engineers experimenting and problem solving together over time. As one of the new generation of larger power stations, the scale up from

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30 The current government is cutting subsidy for on-shore wind farms (BBC News 04.12.13)
31 I mention politically conservative in relation to the way in which heavy industry is more usually located in less affluent, historically labour voting areas, such as Newcastle or Glasgow. The presence of a large power station in Didcot is culturally incongruous.
the previous generation of smaller power stations required a rethink of engineering solutions, which had not been foreseen at the design stage. A retired engineer related:

We were working on the edge of technology, even with regard to the pipe work and the connections between the boilers and the turbines. The pipe work was stainless steel. I don’t know the dimensions, but the thickness of the walls of the pipe was something like four inches. So you got a pipe that sort of size it was dealing with pressures with something like 2000 pounds per square inch and a temperature of something like 1050°F, which would melt ordinary steel (Retired engineer, 2013).

It was not a question of the workers at the station passively carrying out their roles as an extension of the machinery. The engineers were actively inventing new machinery and better ways for the existing machinery to work. This way of working was actually part of the staffing structure at the power station in the technical development section.

As well as employees innovating to improve existing processes within the plant, they also used work machinery for their own uses, with the blessing of management. An employee described how ‘the lads’ would sometimes bring their cars in at the weekend in order to use the equipment at the plant to improve or fix them. In de Certeau’s (1984:24) notion of ‘La Pureque’, which is the act of using work equipment for an employee’s own personal use, he frames this in terms of power relations between employees and employers. La Pureque is defined as a cunning tactic of the weak, ‘as sly as a fox’ (de Certeau, 1984:29), as a way of taking time rather than material objects from one’s employer. The car repair example shows how instead Didcot A employees had the trust of management. The use of work equipment did not have to be covert.

Instead, de Certeau’s notion of La Perruque could be useful in drawing attention to how the power station added to the sense of porous boundaries between work and home life, which was encouraged in different ways by the CEGB. I will now explore this idea further, reflecting on the connection between Didcot A and the home life of employees.
Mega Watt Mews (Retired personnel manager, 2013)

Didcot A and Social Space

Lefebvre (1991:85) comments on the generation of social space within production, ‘the concept of social space becomes broader. It infiltrates, even invades the concept of production, becoming part – perhaps the essential part of its content.’

As a major employer in the area, Didcot A brought people together, initiated social relationships and set in motion numerous other connections between people that happened in a more informal way. The power station was built adjacent to a medium-sized town, so the social effects of the power plant were not self-contained, but were influenced by existing residents and the already established character of Didcot. As well as natural relationships that developed from shared skills, knowledge and the proximity of people working together, the idea of social space was planned into the power station. The sports and social clubs were an important part of the life of the power station. They covered a whole range of sports and leisure activities with facilities and spaces on site. As our guide around the power station commented, they used to play hockey and cricket matches against other power stations, ‘it would have been the same for any publicly funded industrial site’ (Retired personnel manager, 2013). Gibberd plans for this in his Report of the Architect:
The rectangular area between the administration and canteen blocks and the eastern boundary will be sewn as a lawn for recreation: the area is such that it may be used for cricket, if so desired (1968a).

For our project around the closure of the plant, Didcot Photography Section, which was part of the sports and social club, shared a number of extraordinary images from inside the power station that we included in our book accompanying the exhibition (see figure 49). Approaching the closure of the site, DPS were given special access to areas of the power station not usually visited. As an organisation that was interested in technology, they had their own darkroom on site.
Another part of the sports and social clubs was the retired employees’ association. We were invited to the retired employees Christmas lunch 2012, which gave a sense
of the scale of this group. There were several hundred people there and the members go on holiday with each other every year. The strength of this group demonstrates a desire to maintain relationships established over a working life as well as a sense of pride and wish to remain connected to the life of Didcot A. The power station has generated a set of personal and social connections that are ongoing. The sports and social clubs also functioned as a connecting factor between the power station and area, as local people could use the facilities.

As a major employer in the area, the home life of many residents was sustained by and connected to the power station, which shows another way the social space of the power station extended beyond the physical boundaries of the site. When running a workshop at a local school, many children were keen to relate their family connections with the power station; we were presented with a forest of hands keen to share their family’s stories. A drawing left by a child at the exhibition, *Where clouds are made*… (Barbaresi & Round, 2013a) included the note, ‘I like the chimneys because of the steam and it shows me where daddy is.’

![Fig. 50 Drawing left on notice board at Cornerstone Arts Centre (2013)](image)

When the power station began its working life in 1970, the C.E.G.B. needed to recruit skilled workers. These employees came from all over the country and influenced the
cultural and social make-up of the area. We spoke to a retired personnel manager, who related:

> It was a whole national organisation. All jobs were advertised at every location, if you fancied something you could apply for it...As far as the operators were concerned, the only place you could get a skilled operator or a skilled engineer from was another power station. So in the early days lots of the people who came to Didcot were already within the company CEGB working somewhere else...we would advertise in say the Glasgow evening paper or the Newcastle evening paper, and would actually go up there to do some initial interviews, hire a room in the job centre there. And Liverpool, we had quite a few scousers here. Then the people we liked we then invited them to Didcot (Retired personnel manager, 2013).

So, in a short space of time this part of the Cotswolds had people from Glasgow, Newcastle and Liverpool living there, in some cases with their families. There would have been a significant mingling of cultures for a conservative, medium-sized South Oxfordshire town. For workers settling in the area, there was a difficulty with higher house prices in Oxfordshire in comparison with areas that employees might have lived before. The state-owned C.E.G.B. had an arrangement with, what was then, ‘Abingdon Rural District Council. They built 30 houses in Abingdon for what we would term key workers. The road was known as mega-watt mews! We had a similar arrangement with Didcot in later years’ (Retired personnel manager, 2013).

Characterizing the social space that was initially produced in connection with the power station was the sense of common purpose. As Lefebvre (1991:69) raises when talking about industrial processes, ‘Who produces? What? Why and for whom?’ The C.E.G.B. and unionised work force set in place a particular type of relationship between employees and also between employees and local residents.

The sense of Didcot A as a public service united employees. The ‘why’ of production was welfare rather than profit. In 1970, all power stations were run by the C.E.G.B. and there were numerous links between them. This produced national networks of interpersonal connections in parallel with the power generation of the national grid. After privatisation in the early 90s, there was a shift in attitude. ‘Other power stations are now our competitors’ (Employee, 2013), remarked one employee reflecting on
the change. Not only were the social connections between power stations dissolved by privatisation, but concrete barriers to links between competitor’s power stations were put in place by the pressure not to give away trade secrets.

For the first 20 years of the power station’s life, it was taken for granted that the workforce would all belong to the union. It is significant that the major event in weakening the power of the unions, the 1984-5 miners’ strike, had a hugely divisive effect on employees. As a retired engineer (2013) commented, ‘The minor’s strike split the workforce right down the middle.’

**Blow Down**

In the early hours of 27th July 2014, the southern cooling towers were blown down. With my family and Rachel, we camped out to watch in a nearby field. Gradually we were joined by hundreds of spectators. It was one of numerous groups gathered in the surrounding countryside. Coleman, the demolition contractors would not announce the planned timing of the blow down to avoid crowds of people forming. But instead thousands of people like us arrived from around 1.00 a.m. to hedge our bets and not miss the event, which in fact happened around 5.00 a.m.

I made a short film clip of the blow down. Inadvertently this also recorded in audio the range of emotions and responses at that moment. The explosions for each tower created echoing booms across the landscape. At first there was a few seconds silence, then applause, then words and in some cases tears from the spectators.

The blow down brought to mind the comic story of the balloons (figure 29), which were designed to give local people a sense of the scale of the power station before its arrival, and the anticipation of loss of what the area had been, prior to Didcot Power Station. Now suddenly in a few seconds the locality was coming to terms with the towers’ absence.

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The *Where clouds are made*... case study develops the research aims in the following ways:

1. To draw greater attention to the value of users’ contributions to their own environment and to investigate ways in which these can play a more foregrounded part in conceptualising the on-going life of a building.

Contrary to assumptions about how power stations and heavy industry would operate, there was a high degree of scope for invention and both collective and individual innovation at Didcot A. The case study presents an alternative aspect of the history of Didcot A, of how employees transformed the power station via a reinvention of machinery and engineering solutions.

Employees played a part in their environment by interacting with the machinery via a kinaesthetic relationship to the 1970s technology of switches and dials, so that the vast equipment in the turbine hall became comparable to bodily extensions.

A complex and many-layered understanding of place was initiated between the ‘users’ of Didcot A and the power station. ‘Users’ of Didcot A, would include current and retired employees, their families, local people and countless individuals whose imaginative lives have been influenced by catching sight of Didcot A from a passing train or from the M40.

The influx of employees altered the Cotswolds location of Didcot by bringing in a demographic from places where there were other power stations such as Newcastle or Glasgow. Many employees and local people contributed to the life of the power station by becoming involved in the sports and social clubs.

Gibberd painstakingly considered how Didcot Power Station would relate to the landscape, but the nuanced sense of place, which he initiated, developed its own autonomous life via the responses of ‘users’ in its post-completion life. For example, from my research, Will Wiles, Maria Warner, James Attlee and the 8-year-old who compared Didcot A to marmite offered different perspectives and ways of thinking about the power station which have added to the body of understanding of Didcot A.
2. To question the way that 1960s and 70s buildings are perceived in the present and to extend the debate about possibilities for framing our understanding of them and the impact that may have on their future.

By describing the multifaceted ways in which Didcot A is perceived by ‘users’, the stereotype of power stations as being unworthy of aesthetic attention is questioned. As Wiles (2013) revealed, ‘I realized that there was more than one standard for beauty.’

The power station is framed as a place in which people played roles of invention and there was an involved social space initiated by the presence of the power station, but developed and maintained by the users of the building.

Didcot A does not have a future as a working power station, or even as a landmark, being mid-way through demolition. But it has a legacy in the way that it transformed the area and developed a huge sense of attachment for users. Looking to the future, it is a powerful model for creative, collaborative innovation and example of the way that public sector can lead to a more cooperative sharing of technology.

As I have described, Didcot A power station generated a social life around the employees and residents of the locality. Part of the argument of my thesis is to connect the physical fabric of the buildings explored, through the case studies, with activities that take place in and around them. The extended social life of Didcot A was part of the ‘users’ contributions to their own environment and I am arguing that in reflecting on the life of Didcot A, this should form part of conceptualising it’s ‘ongoing’ life.

Lastly, another way of ‘framing our understanding’ of Didcot A, is connected to what Warner (1995:58) describes as ‘reminding us of human appetite’ and representing ‘the hubris of late twentieth century plenty.’ The way that Didcot A was built, as a monumental, highly visible structure, contrasts with contemporary debates about
power generation, where there is a clear political and assumed aesthetic agenda to hide the means.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{32} See footnote 14.
Do my flying ducks prove me an outlaw? (Docherty, 2014)

The Bampton Estate

In this chapter I will address the research aims in the following ways:

1. To draw greater attention to the value of users' contributions to their own environment and to investigate ways in which these can play a more foregrounded part in conceptualising the on-going life of a building.

For this chapter, the physical changes that users make to their own homes, is at the heart of the research. The value of users contributions will be explored via notions of agency and belonging. In this case study I play an active role in working with a family to support their own intervention in their home.

By looking at Michael McMillian’s *Front Room Project* I consider the value of customisation in the context of the West Indian Diaspora, in providing social space in the context of hostile alternatives.
2. Questioning the way that 1960s and 1970s buildings are perceived in the present.

By examining a range of different types of customisations to homes in the Bampton Estate, I will explore potential alternative meanings and question assumed taste hierarchies in relation to architecture from the 1960s and 1970s. I will consider the possibilities of the fake in opening up the range of references in the home.

I will propose a different model for thinking about the relationship between the architect and resident, putting more emphasis on the creativity of the resident in evaluating the value of buildings from this period.

In considering the way buildings from the 60’s and 70’s mingle with our daily lives, housing is where the welfare state meets the intimacy of people’s private and domestic lives most abruptly. On one level the welfare state’s building programme was meeting an extreme post-war housing need, providing warmth and shelter as a physical necessity. But in the simple fact of providing homes, it was also generating a particular framework to contain the residents’ own personal lives, as well as a multitude of social and family networks. It constructed an arena that enabled resident’s individual, and potentially quirky ideas about home.

Gender, class, income and ethnicity also influence choices about how you have your home (Doherty, 2014 and McMillan, 2014). And the whole notion or possibility of cherishing your home as a container of intimacy is cultural, practical, temporal and economic (Cooper Marcus, 2007). Home is the place where your children learn to walk, you have family rows, the heart-ache of relationship breakdown, joy in intimacy and contentment in familiarity. It can also be a place where your guard comes down, a setting for hospitality, a site for display, and with the possibility to arrange and customise a space creatively according to a mixture of your ideas about design,

33 An interesting area for further research would be the impact on the appearance of the home in relation to changing gender roles. LCC planning documents from the 1970s made very clear assumptions about the role of women in the home. (Lewisham archive, C1970s)
space, decoration, aspiration and personal mementos (Perry, 2013). How you choose to clean, maintain, decorate, fill and arrange your home has a relationship to the sense of intimacy. The very possibility and freedom to customise your home or not underlines a connection between autonomy and intimacy.

Related to the notion of autonomy is a history of ownership in British social housing, which originated from the right to buy scheme begun by Thatcher in the Housing Act of 1980 (Housing Act, 1980). In an obvious way you can observe which homes in a council estate are privately owned. Doors are changed, uPVC windows are installed and the exterior walls are often painted a different colour, making clear distinctions between privately owned homes and their council owned neighbours (see figure 52).

![Fig. 52 Row of terraces on Fifield Path with differently coloured fronts, identifying right to buy homes (2015)](image)

Customisation can also relate to a more elusive idea of ownership, which may not be actual or legal, as in right to buy, but in the sense that residents have a measure of autonomy over the internal and external décor of their homes - the freedom to adapt it so that it becomes a type of self-representation. It is an attitude of agency towards the tenants by the council or housing association, and closely relates to security of tenure, as the resident of Radcot Point described how it was possible for tenants to make quite significant changes to their homes such as knocking down walls.
As residents customise their homes, the fixed element is the architecture. In this case study there is also the story of how a very British idea of what a home is comes up against and forms a relationship with the innovative architectural and social developments within the London County Council (LCC) Architects' Department.

It's like (the result) of a child playing with different sizes and types of Lego
(Neighbours of the Bampton Estate, 2015)

The Bampton Estate is a 60s housing development, which is situated on the road where I live in Forest Hill, South-East London. My positionality as a researcher is one of near immersion. My son plays football in ‘the den’, I know a number of residents, and I am used to encountering it in different ways, times and social and physical relations.

In relation to other developments by the LCC Architects’ department, such as the Alton Estate in Roehampton, it is relatively modest and thus little discussed. It is not

34 See section on the LCC architects’ department in introduction for a more detailed discussion.
35 Tarmac area for football or baseball in the grounds of the Bampton Estate.
well known for being at the forefront of innovative design, but its design is in the context of the innovation that was part of the ethos of the department as outlined by Partridge (cited in Utopia London: s.d.). The Bampton Estate exemplifies how particular design philosophies found their way into residents’ daily experiences of place.

The relatively modest and ordinary nature of the Bampton Estate is helpful for the subject of my thesis. In thinking about the ‘post-completion life of buildings’, this quality enables the things that residents do to and with their homes to be the focus rather than the theatre of the building itself.

![Doorway in Whitney Path, The Bampton Estate (2015)](image)

The Bampton Estate consists of three tower blocks and several rows of low-rise terraced housing. It is set over a fairly steep slope and there is a generosity of green space between the tower blocks, with a couple of children’s play areas incorporated into the landscaping. The slope on which it is built generates a complex spatial sense mingled with the architecture. There is a feeling of visually weaving in and out through different levels, both with the contrasting heights and types of the buildings and in their relationship to the sweep of the ground.
It has a sister estate, The Dacres Road Estate, within a five-minute walk, which overlooks Mayow park.

I interviewed a retired couple that have lived adjacent to the Bampton Estate since the mid-sixties. They described the building types of Forest Hill as being like the result of, ‘a child playing with different sizes and types of Lego’ (Neighbours, 2015). This part of south-east London was heavily bombed during the blitz and the area on which the Bampton Estate was built included a bombsite. The appearance of gaps between older houses running though the surrounding area due to bomb damage where post-war housing would be inserted, contributes to this unusual juxtaposition of sizes and types of buildings.

Imagining the estate in its earlier days, the gangster Dave Courtney who grew up on part of the Bampton Estate, Shifford Path, describes playing in a bombsite close by aged 10 or 11. Fittingly for the sense of menace associated with bombsites and ruins, two rival gangs were using the bombsite to throw stones at one another. It ended dramatically, as Courtney (Courtney, 1999:15) describes, ‘I found this thin roof’

36 The Dacres Road Estate also combines tower blocks with low-rise housing and is set in landscaped green space.
37 See Ben Highmore’s essay, ‘Playgrounds and Bombsites: post-war Britain’s ruined Landscapes’, 2013
slate and stood up and chucked it hard, just as this kid was getting out the other hole. The slate caught him slap bang on the head – whack! – knocked him out cold. He keeled over like a chimney.’ His anecdote demonstrates how bombsites were a familiar part of the urban landscape and adapted for different purposes even as late as the early 80’s.

The LCC Architects Department approached this site, varied in both its cadence and existing building type. The aspirations embodied in the Bampton Estate relate to the innovative architectural and political intentions of the department. In the general provision of housing, there was a drive to rehouse returning soldiers and families made homeless through bomb damage, as well as a political will to raise general living standards and provide clean, modern homes. The LCC Architects Department embraced these aims with an innovative approach to design. As the architect John Partridge remembered, ‘I think we all knew we were going to build the right architecture for the 20th Century’ (cited in Utopia London: s.d.).

**Mixed Use Development**

The Bampton Estate is an example of Mixed Use Development, which was a current approach to housing development in the LCC, and later in the Greater London council (GLC). It was, to a large extent, a response and critique of interwar housing where one social group would be put together in a mass of similar housing. The wartime coalition government’s Dudley Report of 1944 issued a recommendation:

> ‘In considering one section of our terms of reference - namely layout - we have entered on a wider field. Here we suggest means for the erection of complete communities rather than the development of purely residential estates for a single social class.’ (Dudley, 1944:19)

As Nicholas Day (1988:67) describes in his thesis, *The Role of the Architect in Post-War Social Housing*, the intention was to create an, ‘ideal’ neighbourhood unit, as described in the report, and that this would generate a guaranteed ‘feeling of neighbourhood and community which is one of the fundamentals of social well-being.’

38 See introduction for a fuller discussion of the LCC Architects’ Department.
Day goes on to discuss the thinking behind this development in relation to the types of societies that were being set up:

The Dudley committee's recommendations were breaking new ground by extending the discussion of housing into the domain of social engineering. Local authorities were now expected, with the professional help of architects and planners, to construct beautiful neighbourhoods, which at the same time were socially balanced.

One of the problems of inter-war estates, it noted, was the lack of variety of types of accommodation. Nearly all homes were three bedroom types, which failed to cater for the needs of the variety of tenants (these ranged from single persons, the old, couples and various sized families) that were on local authorities' waiting lists. One solution to this was for a mixed development of family houses mingled with blocks of flats for smaller households (Day, 1988:67).

Nye Bevan, who was Minister for Health in the first post-war Labour government, (1945 – 1951) expressed the same idea but more directly and politically:

It would do the well-to-do members of the community a great deal of good to be brought up against the wholesome robustness of the lower income groups. If professional workers were more mixed up with other classes there would be less tendency towards Bloomburyism (Bevan, cited in The Times, 1946:2).

In her essay, *London County Council Architects (act. c.1940–1965)*, Elain Harwood (2013) describes the LCC’s first experiments with mixed use housing at the Ackroydon Estate, near Wimbledon Common, which was opened in 1954. It comprised a mixture of high and low-rise developments in the Swedish style. Influenced by this development, the images below from the Bampton Estate (see figure 56) give a sense of the building types and the spacing and landscaping around them.

39 The ‘Swedish Style’ embodied a softer kind of Modernism. There was a division in the LCC architects’ department of architects between those who favoured the Swedish Style and a younger generation of architects, such as Alison and Peter Smithson, who were influenced by Le Corbusier and Mies Van der Rohe (Harwood: 2013).
A range of buildings were planned to cater for a variety of tenants, as can be seen in the inventory of housing types which formed part of the architect's plan (figure 57).
Thinking about the ‘lived-in’ quality of the spaces and homes provided, how did the framework of mixed-use development play out in practice? Or put simply, did the ideals of the LCC Architects’ Department and the recommendations of the Dudley Report work? I spoke to residents and users of the estate, past and present, to gain some different perspectives.

Hedy Fromings is a neighbour of mine, retired architect, and wife of the late architect Eric Stevenson of the sister Dacres Road Estate. Her relationship with the Dacres Road Estate comes from both her husband’s involvement, and as a parent of young children. Her child-minder lived in one of the tower blocks and looked after her children there in the first few years of the life of the estate.

Putting herself in the child-minder’s position, she described, ‘I think this block is beautiful and it is the most wonderful view in London’ (Fromings, 2015). Hedy mentioned how the proximity to Mayow Park was a great advantage for children. She adds: ‘It was very normal, pretty neat and tidy’ (Fromings, 2015). The ‘normality’ is an

40 As the Estates are very similar, close geographically and built at a similar time, Hedy’s insights on how the tower blocks at the Dacres Rd Estate worked in practice are relevant to the Bampton Estate.
interesting point. She perceives the high standards of green space and landscaping as standard.

It also functioned well for her child-minder’s family:

I can see my children down below. The balconies are made in such a way that they could never fall to their deaths. My husband and I know everyone on the floor and those who have children of a similar age have grouped together to mind the children. …There was a mix of people of different ages and a caretaker who was very kind who had a flat (Fromings, 2015).

I asked Hedy if she thought the blocks had served the test of time.

I think they have lasted very well. They were made from a combination of brickwork… they did not have a steel frame. [There were] concrete panels for the floors, already structural, straight over the top and floor finish. The concrete beams were made in the factory and brought in. Everything was calculated in advance (Fromings, 2015)

Considering how the intentions of mixed-use development have worked in practice in the present, I interviewed a current resident of Radcot Point in the Bampton Estate, who spoke warmly of her neighbours. It is ‘quite a stable community, people live here for a long time. There is a chance to build relationships’ (Resident of Radcot Point, 2016).

I think it’s important because it’s your community isn’t it. …They cut my power. She (a neighbour) stayed with me… sat down with me…in the morning she was like…oh do you want a cup of coffee? (Resident of Radcot Point, 2016)

The resident had mixed views about the way that the intentions behind the design of the estate worked in practice. She appreciated the space around the flats and the shade of the trees; however, she had different feelings when I mentioned the play areas for children:
The blue things! (Laughs) The kids will go to it. But they are a bit random. They've just plonked them. There is 40 flats in these 3 blocks and to just have those there really. I don't know… (Resident of Radcot Point, 2015)

I mentioned that the den is quite well used, as my son plays football there and often has to come back later when it is free. She acquiesced, 'yes.'

Fig. 58 The Den (2015)

I asked about the degree of agency that residents had in customising their homes. She described a high level of autonomy for residents and showed me how the previous tenant had even changed the layout of the rooms, by knocking down the wall adjoining the bathroom and toilet to make a larger bathroom.

A big change from the early days was the switch to being managed by housing associations rather than directly by Lewisham Council. The site is split; the tower blocks are managed by Lewisham Homes, whereas the rows of terraced housing are managed by London & Quadrant (L & Q). The resident I spoke to attends the residents association. When I asked if it made a difference having the estate divided by different systems of management, she replied, 'it would be different, because
obviously L & Q do different things… You are not involved in the same conversation as they are. People are always willing to participate and obviously you need the numbers even with voting’ (Resident of Radcot Point, 2016).

These discussions with residents of the Bampton Estate led to my consideration of working directly via my practice to support the ways residents inhabit and customise their homes. Part of my methodology, is in not being a neutral observer. Via my own proximity to the estate, I treat the case study in a similar way to a residency. It is part of my community.

In my attitude to the ways that residents inhabit and customise their homes. I am also not sitting on the fence. I believe that residents having agency over their own environments, and the possibility of the domestic being an extension of daily creativity, are beneficial both to the residents themselves and more widely41. The LCC architects in their aims for mixed-use development provided dwellings for different family sizes and explicitly intended to mix different classes. In providing clean modern homes for large numbers of families, there was a commitment to the collective, but this does not exclude the potential of providing for the individual in the process.

Working with London & Quadrant (L & Q), I contacted a family from Shifford Path. In the next section, I describe the context and the work that they made and the implications of this. An aspect of my practice involves working with participants and presenting their interpretations of their surroundings. So my practice for this case study involves a direct intervention around a resident’s home, via an open brief for the participants.

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41 This was evident in my interview with the resident from Radcot Point, as she discussed how the approach of Lewisham Homes gave her the freedom to alter her home.
The porch and the potentials of wheelie bins

Spending time at the estate also led to a consideration of the relational role of the exterior of homes. Daniel Knipping’s project *Inside Out* (2008-10) reversed the usual function of the interior and exterior of buildings. For many residents of the Pallasseum in Berlin, satellite dishes are a way of maintaining links with places of their family origin. They cosmically beam in images from around the world. Knipping enabled them to function in reverse as sites to display more intimate images of family and mementoes, and presenting them as a display to the outside world.
For the terraced homes on Whitney Path, Shifford Path and Fifield Path, the porch is the place that occupies a liminal position in the order of the home and acts as a threshold. As with the satellite dishes at the Pallasseum, it is also a space used to present an aspect of the intimacy of the home to the outside world.

The porch is the place that negotiates the frontier of the intimacy of the home as a place where one’s guard is down and the exterior that is presented to the outside world. For the practice-based part of this case study, I worked with a family from Shifford Path on one ubiquitous feature of the porch, the wheelie bins.

In Italo Calvino’s short story ‘La Poubelle Agréée’ (2002), he refers to the act of ‘putting out’ the rubbish as belonging to a social contact. The identikit black rubbish and green recycling bins provided by Lewisham council speak of uniformity and order, and buying into a collective system. The nature of rubbish is by definition temporal, its meaning is obsolescence. Rubbish is always an unfinished business and plays a part in understanding the value system of a society or family. Think of the importance of ancient rubbish sites to archaeologists.

…through this daily gesture I confirm the need to separate myself from a part of what was once mine, the slough or chrysalis or squeezed lemon of living, so that its substance might remain, so that tomorrow I can identify completely (without residues) with what I am and have. Only by throwing something away can I be sure that something of myself has not yet been thrown away and perhaps need not be thrown away now or in the future (Calvino, 2002:71).

As Calvino describes, the selective act of throwing things away is a kind of honing of identity. It seemed significant that the participants who took part in my project came as a family unit. The act of image-making, and thus the creativity in the planning of décor in the family home, became a social event, in the same way that the home functions as a container of shared family life.

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42 In the same way, balconies can act as an arena to present an aspect of the intimacy of the interior of the home to the outside world in blocks of flats.
43 They were approached via the housing association, L&Q.
It has become common in the last five years or so to decorate or customize wheelie bins with numbers or images, but these stickers are usually bought readymade. I wanted to encourage this form of adaption by running a workshop in which participants could come up with their own images in a more free-form approach.

I approached the workshop with an attitude of empowering residents to have more agency in the customisation of their own homes. In discussing a range of approaches to participation, Claire Bishop (2006:12) posits an approach in which ‘the newly-emancipated subjects of participation will find themselves able to determine their own social and political reality.’

![Workshop drawings by 8-year-old participant (2016)](image)

From a selection of approaches including collage, working from their own photos, using different drawing media, and painting, the family chose to make paintings and coloured pen drawings for their wheelie bin stickers. The family members responded in different ways. An 8-year-old made coloured drawings that combined the functional (inclusion of the street number) with the decorative. Her images also had meaning related to family history. She included poppies in her imagery and spoke about a family member who had fought in World War 1. The poppies, for her, represented family history and when put on the front of the home presented the family to the external world.
A young mother made the most of the chance to do some painting at the same time as her toddler child, thus breaking down the expectations of who might participate and enabling a moment for her to take part in making. She quietly supported her child’s painting by role modelling the activity as something that is life long and
relevant to all ages, rather than assuming it was for children. The designs she created were decorative, but also showed an enjoyment in the transformation of the paper with marks.

Her small son also clearly enjoyed the painting process and was highly prolific. Like his mother, painting enabled him to watch his actions, via the brush, transform and activate the surface of a piece of white paper.

It was important that the workshop supported children as well as their parents in both making the stickers and in customising their home. In developing Charles Holland’s (2011:91) questioning of ‘who the authors of buildings really are’, I facilitated the interventions of residents in their own homes, i.e. encouraging their authorship. For my approach, it was crucial that there was not a hierarchy amongst the inhabitants or users whose actions form part of the production of space. I also wanted to connect the creativity of participants in the workshop with the daily creativity of maintaining a space. Holland (2011: 91) develops de Certeau’s study of how, ‘contrary to popular prejudice, everyday practices such as cooking, walking and watching television involved an active and creative degree of participation.’ Holland extends the argument to do-it-yourself (DIY), as an act of creative reinterpretation ‘par excellence.’ In supporting the family with their creative interpretation of their home, I see the various aspects and possibilities of presenting a home as being comparable to a director presenting a play in the theatre. Each production of a well-known play can be radically different, set in different time periods, and contain different meanings that relate to the present in a way that is constantly shifting. This is comparable to the relation between a building and its continual reinterpretation by residents.
Interventions by residents

I took a series of photographs around the Bampton Estate, noticing alterations and additions that have been made to the exterior of homes. These took different forms including DIY and alterations to the fabric of buildings such as cladding or replacement windows, decoration, and also extending to the choice of objects visible from the outside such as furniture, televisions, books or photographs.
Fig. 64 Interventions by residents to their homes (2015)
Additions to the buildings noticed from the photographs of the estate include:

Re-pointing  
Pebbledash cladding  
Troll welcome sign  
Beware of the dog sign  
Neighbourhood watch sign  
Fake flowers  
Lead criss-cross window patterning  
Cloud pattern covering for boiler  
Wooden panels containing planter  
Gardening, tulips  
Leaf pattern on net curtains
In his essay ‘Questions of Taste’, Charles Holland further develops a proposition by de Certeau, interpreting interventions in architecture within the context of reading:

> de Certeau suggests that ‘it has all the characteristics of a silent production: the drift across the page, the metamorphosis of the text effected by the wandering eyes of the reader, the improvisation … of meanings.’ De Certeau applies this idea to other every day activities, contesting that the production of culture is never simply one-sided – that is, produced by someone and consumed by someone else – and that cultural objects are in a constant state of re-reading and adaption (Holland, 2011:95).

I would like to build on this approach of cultural objects being in a state of re-reading and adaption, and consider the process of appropriating a building as being more about an exchange, or potentially as a collaboration. In this context it is between the architecture of the LCC and the residents, and work with this approach as a lens through which I can consider some of the adaptations in the Bampton Estate.

Looking around the estate today, the interventions by residents seem initially to be at odds with the design intentions of the LCC Architects’ Department. The LCC Architects’ Department was divided by a commitment to two strands in architectural modernism: the softer Swedish style and the more severe approach influenced by Le Corbusier (Harwood, 2014).

The aspirations of mixed use development have worked in practice in a number of ways. They created a range of housing types, providing for different sized households and families. The high-density provision of the flats enables open space and children’s play areas in the grounds. The design of Shifford Path and Whitney Path could also be traced back to the Victorian terraced house and a medieval Italianate sense of homes interlocking with one another, suggesting a notion of the human habitat as something woven.

44 John Tempest made the connection to the Victorian terraced house as an influence when I showed him images of the estate.
In contrast to the conservation model of 1960s buildings in the present, whereby the 'original' is something to aspire towards, the exterior of the homes in Shifford Path, Whitney Path and Fifield Path are scattered with numerous examples of DIY, such as additions, fittings and objects that point to a multiplicity of directions and influences.

This could be seen as a rejection of modernism by the residents, but perhaps the choice does not have to be so binary. Considering Holland’s (2011:90) notion of cultural objects as being in a constant state of re-reading and adaption, and applying Bishop’s (2006:12) proposition of agency for participants in art practice to the understanding of daily creativity (Holland, 2011 and de Certeau, 1980), we could see these interventions by residents in their own homes as evidence of a desire to reach out to a more eclectic set of associations.

45 For example, 2 Willow Road by Erno Goldfinger or The Barbican.
As with Calvino’s notion of the ‘squeezed lemon juice’ of identity, which is generated by throwing out rubbish, instead the inclusive and varied set of references presented via the exterior of homes in the Bampton Estate is more akin to the opposite process pointing to identity being multifaceted, playful and diverse.

The lead windows point to an influence from the interwar years where lead patterning on windows was common in mock Tudor 1920s and 30s homes. These in turn suggest nostalgia for Tudor times and a more rural version of home. The lead windows here are plastic additions, creating a transparent illusion rather than the lead having a structural role in the windows.

Referencing mock Tudor in the present creates an association towards the suburban, as vast suburbs and dormitory towns were created in this mode during the 1920s and 30s. There is a relationship here to a type of aspirational gentility connected with this housing type.

In a number of ways, the pebbledash cladding generates a similar group of associations to the lead windows. It was also popular in the 1920s and incorporated into mock Tudor housing potentially pointing to a more rural vision of a home. The history of pebbledash has a further complex set of references dependant on context.46 Within the arts and crafts movement of the late 19th century, pebbledash was used as part of a revival in traditional building methods which dated back to the Romans. It was also used to cover bad rendering and so was seen as the poor relation to brick housing. More than most additions, pebbledash evokes class associations. Its meaning now is closely bound up with a moment when it was fashionable in the 70s and the afterlife of that moment. The meaning is changed by the context in fashion.

The neighbourhood watch sign implies gentility, a rejection of the ‘rouger’ stereotypes of council estates and also promotes a sense of community. Part of the meaning of home is safety and security. The private, personal and domestic can only

46 See http://www.thisis money.co.uk/money/mortgageshome/article-2607745/Is-pebble-dash-eyesore-chance-baq-property-cheap.html for a brief account of pebbledash and it’s relation to the housing market in the present.
remain so if it is protected. Security maintains the threshold and the boundaries that define the sense of home.  

The boiler covered with clouds introduces humour and play into the porch. The functionality of the boiler juxtaposed with imagery that belies its function, is a witty addition. The decorative cloud patterning suggests daydreaming and represents immaterial, amorphous forms. Whereas the boiler is a highly material object; the world of plumbing far removed from the association with clouds. The rest of the porch is blue and white, echoing the colour scheme of the boiler covering. If additions to homes can be seen as connected with identity and daily creativity, surely humour is part of the spectrum of possibilities.

The flowers, and wooden panelling forming the planter, suggest an ambition towards a suburban lifestyle. ‘Nature’ is brought into the domestic context, an allocated and controlled space. Growing plants involves taking care of something that is alive, and nurturing over time. So, to have a well-tended planter suggests a regular practice of taking care of the home.

As well as gardening as an addition to the porch, ‘nature’ is also brought into the home in the form of imagery. In this case it’s interesting to note the patterning on the net curtains. This addition is different in type to the fake flowers. The leaf imagery here is stylized and decorative.

The desire to bring ‘nature’ into the home is so ubiquitous as to amount to a fetish. In our post-industrial era there is a sense of separation from nature, and perhaps this condition relates to a desire to include nature in the home, albeit in a highly controlled and decorative mode. The leaf patterning also relates to a history of home furnishings and the tradition of net curtain fabrics.

47 Consider the sense of violation of home, common when burglary is experienced.
48 In Drew Kalbach’s piece, The Nature Fetish, he discusses the notion of nature as being separate from the manmade... ‘this view of the natural as inherently good or better than humanity...(and) the idea of ‘nature’ as somehow transcendent.’ And then counters this with the view that ‘concrete is natural’ and ‘skyscrapers are natural’ in the sense that everything is derived from the raw materials of the earth.
49 The insertion of nature into the home could be thought of in a similar way to how Susan Stuart frames the souvenir (Stuart, 1991)
An important factor in enabling so many diverse references in the home is the possibilities of the fake. Michael McMillan has a section on fake flowers in his book, *The West Indian Front Room*. McMillan (2009:56) makes a point of practicality, ‘Artificial flowers made sense because if you locked your front room away then you wouldn’t have to go in there every week and water them.’

McMillan goes on to describe the elaborate lengths taken to recreate nature:

> So dressing the front room properly required ingenuity and innovation, such as sculpting the petals, leaves and stems with metal coat hangers, covering them with stretched recycled stockings and adding food colourings for the desired effect (McMillian, 2009:56).

The possibilities of the fake, such as with the flowers and lead windows seen in my photos of the Bampton Estate (see figure 64) enable references to multiple places and ideas that can be felt as a presence in the home. This would not be possible if every addition and object was required to have a material authenticity. As with the boiler covered in clouds, it allows for both a sense of play and opens up a huge range of potential choices for different taste preferences.

Many additions to the home, such as pebbledash and fake flowers, expose issues of class and culture. These elements could be seen as divisive in the sense that they signal a belonging to a particular social group and exclusion from another.

In McMillan’s (2014) paper at the conference *Taste after Bourdieu*, he interprets the notion of ‘kitsch and bling’ in the context of the West Indian diaspora experience.

At a time in which black people were often refused entry into pubs, home became ‘a place where black people [could] express their creativity and autonomy’ (McMillian: 2014). In relation to taste indicating a belonging to a particular class or social group, McMillian (2014) talked of the drive to ‘reclaim kitsch and bling… take away the pejorative. Yes I’m part of an elite.’ One of the questions which Ben Highmore (2014) posited in his paper at ‘Taste after Bourdieu’ was: ‘are there other ways of thinking about taste culture which are less judgemental?’

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50 Ben Highmore presented at the same conference and made this point.
As Highmore (2014) noted, ‘taste is always an unfinished business, one is always getting a feel for something.’ Its meaning today is different from the context in which it was installed. The understanding of objects and additions to homes shifts in a complex and multi-layered way in relation to the audience or user.

This thesis questions the conservation view of 1960s and 70s architecture, whereby additions to buildings are seen as clutter (clickclickjim, 2014). I aim to propose a different way of seeing the additions in themselves. I would like to open up the narrow assumptions of particular modes of customisation as being in ‘bad taste’ and consider the sources of DIY additions and alternative meanings that they might carry, which are less judgmental and relate to the residents’ agency over their own living spaces.

**Maintenance, repair / disrepair**

Fig. 67 Repair on the exterior of Radcot Point (2015)

A crucial part of the life of buildings in the present is maintenance. Buildings are temporal, material objects subject to change through the effects of weather and use. In its primary function as shelter, it is in the front line for defence against the elements. The bricks and mortar act like a bubble, retaining a bodily temperature through the seasons fit for habitation. But in this role, the building takes the hit from the weather. Use also degenerates a home. Simple acts like drawing a blind or opening a door generate minute traces of wear which build up over years of repetition.
So even to stay the same involves work on the fabric and interior of buildings. Highmore (2014) talked of being, ‘…interested in the afterlife of objects. You buy a sofa, but what happens to the sofa in 10 years time?’ Every time repair is needed a set of decisions is called for, which is a juggling act of economics, aesthetics and practicalities. For example as the UPVC windows perhaps err on the side of practicalities and economics. They are hard wearing, easy to clean and will save on heating bills.

When council housing from the 1960s and 70s are commented on, buildings are often described as being failures, while ignoring the key role of maintenance in the ‘success’ of buildings. Attentive maintenance carries the meaning of cherishing a building. For example, the re-pointing in the image below shows no attempt to make the colour of the new cement and bricks fit with the rest of the house, so the sense is given that the aesthetics here are not important.

As Hedy commented: ‘with time came an element of vandalism. I don’t know how with a caretaker. Now you have these roving caretakers. I don’t know how frequently they come’ (Fromings, 2015). So, the initial plan that had been made for maintenance was not carried through.

Fig. 68 Repointing on Acorn way (2015)

51 An obvious example of a successful development from this period, which has been well maintained, is The Barbican.
Maintenance speaks of the prestige of a place, how well it has been regarded at various times throughout its life. It also interlocks with taste. When a building is maintained it presents all kinds of options for repair. These can be attempts to recreate the ‘original’, or can speak more of the fashions of the time in which the repair is taking place. This is also the case if the fashion is to venerate the ‘original’, such as with the drive towards the conservation of Victorian housing in the 1980s and 90s (Wedd, 2007).
It is not just residents who customise the post-completion life of buildings. Figure 69 provides clues as to the priorities and concerns of different regimes of management. On one level, as an obvious practicality, the signs are dictating where it is permitted to park. They are policing space, while didactically enforcing communal rules, which suggests a lack of trust and the presumption of wrongdoing. It creates an atmosphere of control rather than autonomy for the residents.

Three of the signs repeat one another. The varying qualities of wear from weather and time indicate different eras and decisions by a changing personnel of management. The repetition indicates a disregard for the aesthetics of the exterior space. The indifference towards pre-existing signs, even to the extent of taking the trouble to remove them, demonstrates that the management does not recognise the space as a place in need of aesthetic consideration. In contrast, the LCC lettering of Standlake Point is made discreetly, but its aesthetic sense is altered by the more recent signage surrounding it.
Overall, The Bampton Estate has been maintained relatively well. This shows how successive regimes of Lewisham Council, and now the housing associations Lewisham Homes and L & Q, as well as the residents, have all had a stake in valuing its success.

**Conclusion**

Returning to the title of this chapter, *Do my flying ducks prove me an outlaw?* the meaning of the question lies in value judgments around issues of taste. For many who consider themselves connoisseurs of design, the flying ducks would be beyond the pale. At the conference, *Taste after Bourdieu* (CCW Grad School: 2014), Thomas Doherty then continued with the strapline, ‘I would say they are a satire on ducks.’

What seems here like a way out of the impasse is equally judgemental. Displaying ducks with a knowing, patronising chuckle might qualify you to gain a pass to the club of acceptable taste, but if anything, it’s more divisive as it is a direct and derogative comment on other people’s taste choices rather than merely making different choices.

As Susan Kaisser (2014) questioned, ‘who has the power of validation?’ The assumption of the role of validator is problematic. Instead in this chapter I have held back from judgement and explored alternative ways of seeing some observed additions in The Bampton Estate.

There is a political dimension to taste. It is not ‘just’ taste. What is at stake is social exclusion, as taste is socially binding and places residents of different homes into categories. When Doherty spoke of ‘flying ducks (proving) me an outlaw’, he alluded to the implications of inclusion and exclusion from social, ethnic and class-based groups.

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Considering my research aims, this chapter goes directly to the heart of the subject of users’ contributions, by exploring the physical adaptions and additions made by residents in the intimacy of their own homes.
1. I address the first aim, to draw attention to the value of users’ contributions to their own environment and to investigate ways in which these can play a part in conceptualising the on-going life of a building in the following ways:

I draw attention to users’ contributions by making them the focus of this chapter, in the context of additions to buildings by residents being an undervalued aspect of buildings from this period. I explore the different types of additions made and their potential reverberations and meanings in relation to the material structure designed by the architect.

The customisation by residents of their own homes generates agency and contributes to stable communities, the ability to do this generates a sense of belonging. This is a mutually supporting loop where stability also enables residents to invest the financial and time commitment in the adaption of their homes.

I have explored different ways of conceptualising and framing the contributions of users:

Michael McMillian discussed customisation in the context of the West Indian diaspora, ‘I want to reclaim kitsch and bling’ (2014). Instead of seeing the showiness of objects and decoration as in bad taste, they could be seen as a claim for status in a social situation in which people of West Indian heritage face constant discrimination.

I also explore an alternative interpretation of the fake, rather than the assumed position of fake being seen as kitsch or in ‘bad’ taste. I reframe the fake as an enabler of a multiplicity of playful references and associations in the home, which would be limited by a necessity towards authenticity.

I develop the possibility of seeing additions as a collaboration between architect and residents. This bypasses the assumed hierarchy, whereby residents’ decisions about customising their own spaces are always seen as secondary to the architect’s vision. The resident interprets the space in a similar way to different productions of a play, allowing for and enabling possibilities for the creativity of the performers and directors.
2. The second research aim, to question the way that 1960s and 70s buildings are perceived in the present and to contribute to the debate about possibilities for framing our understanding of them and the impact that may have on their future, is met in the following ways:

I challenge the way that many buildings from this era are assumed to be unsuccessful. The production of space generated by the adaptations of residents has a value, which needs to be recognised in considering the future of buildings from this era.

The autonomy provided by the attitude of Lewisham Council and now Lewisham Homes and L & Q housing association as landlords, has supported residents in creating a sense of home, which can be inventive, creative and individual. This points to residents’ agency enabled by management as being important in the future life of developments from this period.

I propose a recalibration of the relationship between the additions of residents and the work of the architect, understanding them as a type of collaboration. I see the contribution of residents as part of the success of the Bampton Estate; the work of residents in interpreting architecture is conceived as a creative act.
People who wouldn’t consider themselves to be supporters of this stuff aren’t thinking it, but they’re living it (Hatherley, 2016).

Concluding Chapter

This thesis has investigated the relationship and tensions between an architectural vision and how it can be adapted, negotiated and transformed in its post-completion life. It has identified and argued for the social and political value of such interventions and through my practice-based investigations provided a framework for reorienting the perception and cultural readings of the spaces under consideration.

In my explorations of Crystal Palace Sports Centre, Didcot A Power Station and The Bampton Estate, I have been considering material structures and additions together with the activities that form the post-completion life of buildings. They have brought to the fore various types of production of space in the life of these developments and thus the potential for a different understanding of the way in which we perceive the on-going life of these places.
As Owen Hatherley (cited in, Shook, 2016) commented, ‘…people who wouldn’t consider themselves to be supporters of this stuff aren’t thinking it, but they’re living it.’ The adaptions and activities, which together form the production of space, become the lived experience of buildings. To inhabit a space is to live in it. The moment when the architect walks away from the building they designed, the life that the building then has post-completion, is created by the relation it forms to the ‘living practices’ of the users of the building.

In this thesis, I have shown how the ‘life’ of a building is acted out in the lives of its inhabitants. It is both an environment for people to dwell in, but at the same time something that is moulded and shaped by their activities. This extends conventional consideration of such spaces by prioritising a richer poetic sense of such spaces as entwined in the complexity of actions enacted by users of those spaces.

In considering The Bampton Estate from the perspective of buildings having multiple authors (Holland: 2011) and thinking back to the analogy for its buildings as being like plays that could be interpreted in a range of ways by different actors and directors (the users), I have shown how living in or using a building is an incorporation (literally meaning of the body or corpus) of a building into people’s lives. This incorporation encompasses how inhabitants physically move in the space and adapt it to meet their physical, emotional or sensual needs. This might be literal, as in the adaption of a space to meet the diminutive stature of a child or for a person with a loss of mobility. But, as I considered in *Do my flying ducks prove me an outlaw?* it can also be to do with taste or identity.

When Hatherley (cited in, Shook, 2016) comments, ‘people who wouldn’t consider themselves to be supporters of this stuff aren’t thinking it, but they’re living it’, there is a dialectic set up between people who might think of themselves as connoisseurs of 1960s and 70s buildings and those who live in them. In this thesis, I have argued for and demonstrated an alternative way of perceiving these developments in the present, in contrast to the connoisseur / conservation view and the demolition camp,

52 As with the kinaesthetic relation to the switches and dials for employees in the control room at Didcot A Power Station.
that the production of space, post-completion, and the lived experience of the buildings is an undervalued aspect of what these buildings are in the present.

The first of my research aims sets out to draw attention to the value of users’ contributions to their own environment and to investigate ways in which these can play a part in conceptualising the on-going life of a building.

In *Swimming in the Cathedral*, the production of space emanating from sports activities, swimming and other happenings in the sports centre, generate a central part of the post-completion life. These happenings occur in an open, connected space so that each activity has the effect of reverberating with one another, ‘poly-rhythmically’ (Lefebvre, 1996:222).

In *Where clouds are made*… the culture of DIY and innovation at Didcot Power Station subverted expectations about what a power plant is. The relationship of employees to the plant involved invention, as skilled engineers rethought the machinery needed to generate power on the scale required at Didcot.

The evolving relationship to a sense of place generated by the enormity of the cooling towers was a response from employees, Didcot residents and countless individuals who passed by on the motorway or train (Attlee, 2015).

And in *Do my flying ducks prove me an outlaw?* I considered the interventions by residents in the fabric of their homes, and the potential meanings and implications of customisation of the home in relation to taste.

A clear relationship between customisation and space demonstrated the importance of taste in the construction of personal and social meaning in relation to the architectural context of ‘home’ on the estate.

My second research aim was to question the way that 1960s and 70s buildings are perceived in the present and to contribute to and extend the debate about possibilities for framing our understanding of them and the impact that may have on their future.

Through the prism of the stake of users in the spaces they inhabit, a number of connected themes have been revealed, which impact on their perception in the
present and thus the assumptions and plans that are formed about their future life. These include the concept and possibilities for ‘the individual’ within situations generated by the welfare state, the notion of luxury, the generation of social space, the role of place, and the implications of the interventions of users on the level of sensation.

**The individual and the welfare state**

One standard assumption by critics of public ownership is that the individual is irrelevant. The state only considers the collective good and an individual attempting to engage or achieve anything outside of ‘the system’ will get lost in the mammoth bureaucracy. Nick Clegg (2008) expressed this consensus in 2008 when he said, ‘we have nationalised education, nationalised health, and nationalised welfare: run by inflexible, centralised monopolies. It adds up to the nationalisation of our whole lives.’

Considering this current perspective on the legacy of the post-war welfare state, there is a view, mostly unchallenged, in the media that buildings or institutions made under the welfare state represent some kind of monolith and that there is no space for the individual to be heard or have needs met that do not belong to the collective.

The phrase ‘bog-standard comprehensive’ is aligned to this negative assumption (Curtis, 2009). When using this phrase to reference state comprehensive schools, the speaker, Alistair Campbell did not even think that this viewpoint needed justification or argument. There is an implicit agreement, which has supported and contributed to justifying the current political neo-liberal consensus.

The origins of this perspective lie with the late Margaret Thatcher. Thatcher strongly believed in and aggressively promoted the idea: ‘If a Tory does not believe that private property is one of the main bulwarks of individual freedom, then he had better become a socialist and have done with it’ (Thatcher, 1975). Again in 1984, she commented, ‘I came to office with one deliberate intent: to change Britain from a dependent to a self-reliant society – from a give-it-to-me to a do-it-yourself nation. A get-up-and-go, instead of a sit-back-and-wait-for-it Britain.’ (Thatcher, 1984)
Within the context of these mantras there is a characterisation of state provision as being something passive and monolithic, whereas the idea of private ownership stood for initiative and the freedom of the individual.

Considering buildings made under the welfare state, this is most obviously apparent in the right to buy scheme introduced under Thatcher’s Government in 1980. Looking at a council housing estate, there is a well-noted sense of privately owned homes being visually distinguished by changes to windows, rendering, and external décor. In Britain there is a particular prestige attached to home ownership and there is a sense in which owners are keen to mark out their homes as being privately owned by using these visual markers. This can be seen in the Bampton Estate (figure 52). In email correspondence Owen Hatherley (2016) used the critical phrase, ‘right to buyised’ to describe this phenomena.

This argument is important as the assumption behind it has driven more recent government policy. David Cameron (2011) said in a speech:

> Public services should be open to a range of providers competing to offer a better service… Instead of having to justify why it makes sense to introduce competition in individual public services – as we are now doing with schools and in the NHS – the state will have to justify why it should ever operate a monopoly.

In this context, it’s worth considering the examples of public buildings I have been exploring for my case studies and asking if this apparent assumption is true across a range of public buildings? Thinking about the aspects of buildings that I am examining, the activities which happen in and around them, social space and adaption and modification, is there a sense in which public provision can instead actually enable innovation and the creative input of individuals?

Didcot A Power Station actively encouraged employees to think individually and inventively. Through the technical development department, it was considered essential for the success of the power station to be constantly upgrading and rethinking machinery (Retired engineer, 2013). When talking to retired employees, there was a sense of experienced engineers getting together and problem solving to ensure that the scaling up of previous technology from smaller power stations worked in practice.
A retired employee also made the point that post-privatization, many other power stations were owned by their competitors, so that innovative engineering solutions developed by a power station could not be shared.

An employee described how he came up with the idea of making a laser-cutting machine for making signs around the plant (Barbaresi & Round: 2013b). Another employee also related how he could use plant machinery at the weekend to fix his car (Engineer, 2013). In operating the mechanisms in the turbine hall, employees had agency via a tactile and bodily engagement with the way in which switches and dials related to their vast counterparts in the turbine hall. As an employee commented, ‘I turn the dial that much and I know it’s about a ton of coal’ (Control room operator, 2013). The role of workers at the plant was far from the passive stereotype of industrial life; many employees were actively and inventively involved in the life and workings of the power station.

In Crystal Palace Park, a former park warden related how the publicly funded aspect of the park enabled a large degree of creative freedom for the employees in how they went about the upkeep of the park. For example, if a gardener wanted to plant flowers or trees in a particular arrangement, the management would encourage them to take ownership and follow their own ideas.

General improvements came from the park’s own management rather than an outside body. If they (a warden) saw something that needed improvement, or just had a different idea – they would use their imagination (Retired grounds man, 2014).
Inside the sports centre, on one level the production of space emanating from sports activities, swimming and other happenings in the space are experienced as part of a collective. While swimming you are to an extent co-ordinating your movements with other swimmers, and part of your experience is awareness and observation of other bodies in the space, whether they are diving, playing jujitsu on the other side of the sports centre or part of the audience. But the sports centre also enables sensual experiences on the level of the individual. When you observe the reflected play of light on the ceiling while doing a length of backstroke, or understand the dynamics of your own movements as a diver in relation to the cathedralesque interior, it is also a gift to the experience of the individual.

The Bampton Estate very directly provided for residents on an individual level, by enabling them to customise their living spaces according to their own tastes and preferences. Pre-fab housing from the 1960s (as with the tower blocks on the Bampton Estate) have an inbuilt relation to the notion of the collective and individual. The building system provided ‘made to measure’ parts fabricated elsewhere and bolted together on site as assemblages. For a previous project in my collaboration, Barbaresi & Round (2005b), we made an artist’s book, Thamesmead Project 05,
through which we explored the interventions of residents in the pre-fab architecture of Thamesmeads. Figure 70 below, shows how the context of the identikit architecture had the particular effect of underlining the quirky, individualistic additions and customisations.

As well as enabling space for the individual creativity of users in customising spaces, in the LCC architects’ department there was also space for innovation in terms of design. The architect John Tempest (2014) referred to this culture of design

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53 Thamesmead was begun under the GLC in 1967. For more on the different phases of building at Thamesmead see http://www.trust-thamesmead.co.uk/sub_page.cfm/section/history/editID/207
innovation, ‘There was lots of space for individuals to develop things in their own way.’

In all three case studies, there is a sense of innovation and pride that emerges from the users of the buildings. This story or perspective has been buried in the characterisation of public services as bureaucratic, wasteful, old fashioned and against the individual. The way that publicly funded buildings made under the welfare state are perceived is part of a wider context of how public services are viewed in general.

Currently there is a widespread view that capitalism or neo-liberalism promotes the individual and socialism aims to provide for the collective goods. Those in favour of public services argue that they are important, because they support the collective, and those against talk the language of self-reliance and individual choice. However the picture is much more nuanced, alongside a history of counter arguments.

An example of how capitalism can work against individual innovation, is the debate around the domination of our high street by chain stores. In 2004, the New Economics Foundation wrote a report titled Clone Town Britain, arguing that chain stores, a form of large-scale capitalism, were damaging due to a lack of diversity and local distinction. Small or individually run businesses were closing at a rate of one per day between 1997 and 2002, and excessive power was being put in the hands of supermarkets as distributors (NEF, 2004).

In Capital: a critique of Political Economy, Marx (1976) critically explores the post-war rise in mass production. Capitalism is seen as a monolith, which dehumanises through the tedious repetition of factory work and turns individuals into identikits though the conformity of mass production and consumerism. ‘[The worker] is depressed, therefore both intellectually and physically to the level of a machine, and from a man becomes abstract activity and a stomach’ (Marx, 1976:285). This contrasts with the empowering kinesthetic sense in which the employees at Didcot A Power Station describe the dials and switches in the control room.

54 See introduction for more detail on the LCC architects’ department.
55 See earlier quotations (Clegg, 2008), (The Guardian, 2009).
56 Notably from Marx and Lefebvre.
57 Marx wrote ‘Capital: a Critique of Political Economy’ from 1867-1883.
Ben Highmore (2002:113-114) also describes how in Lefebvre’s writing, everyday life is ‘one orchestrated by the logic of the commodity where life is lived according to the rhythm of capital….as France ‘reconstructed’ in the wake of the war, modernisation became synonymous with consumer culture.’

The installation and event at Wimbledon College of Arts, as part of Swimming in the Cathedral (Round, 2015), provided an opportunity to reflect on notions of the individual and the collective.

![Photo of event](image)

Fig. 73 Event and discussion for Swimming in the Cathedral, Wimbledon College of Arts (2015)

The soft structure made possible spaces for the participants to find or invent for themselves. As the structure was a subversion of the internal concrete supporting struts of Crystal Palace Sports Centre, its message was one of non-functioning bathos. The defunct nature of its form enabled it to be occupied in unanticipated and playful ways. In the same way as Crystal Palace Sports Centre generates a myriad of internal spaces that visitors can interact with (see figure 73), the event at Wimbledon exposed unexpected possibilities for the audience. There was a sense in which the fabric structure contained the audience as a group, while also making possible a range of physical relationships with the piece and one another. The piece suggests a material metaphor for how the welfare state provided for the individual as well as the collective.
The debate about the welfare state and the individual goes to the heart of my argument. The three developments explored through my practice all demonstrate in different ways how the collective provision contains and makes possible the participation of the individual. There is no contradiction between individual and collective provision. In many cases, one enables the other. For example, one need of the individual is social connections. The Central Electricity Generating Board explicitly provided for this at Didcot through the sports and social clubs, Crystal Palace provides access to participation in numerous team sports, and the Bampton Estate provides stable tenancies where supportive networks of families and friendships can develop.

**Social Space**

From the perspective of many employees, Didcot power station was far more than just a job. Via the sports and social clubs, different types of connections were built between employees from other power stations. The strength of these bonds is demonstrated by the attendance of approximately 200 people to the retired employees Christmas lunch, which I visited in 2012. Employees who relocated from northern England and Scotland, where there were existing power stations, were supported in finding homes. The HR department at the power station worked with Abingdon council to provide housing. The C.E.G.B. made provision to look after the whole person and their families, including housing and social needs which were particularly crucial for people who were relocating. The strength of these social bonds even after the closure of the power station was also evident at the Barbaresi &
Round workshop at Northbourne primary school, Didcot. We asked the class if some of them had family connections with the power station. A forest of hands went up.

At Crystal Palace Sports Centre many sports activities are inherently social and bring people together in different forms and groupings. The sports centre provides for team sports such as synchronized swimming, football and beach volleyball. There are numerous group classes for different activities including pilates, yoga, swimming, diving, scuba diving, gymnastics and climbing wall sessions. These generate different modes of physical and mental interaction between people. Demographically, there are also sessions for different age and gender groupings, such as toddler world, women only, over 55s and the crèche. These make different types of social connections possible and bring together residents who might not interact elsewhere.

As discussed in *Swimming in the Cathedral*, the open space of the sports centre produces a sense of connectedness between the different activities, potentially encouraging wider social connections between participants of different sports.

The Bampton Estate was designed in a number of ways to support social interaction. The Den enables older children to come together and play sports and interact from different parts of the estate. Northmoor provides sheltered housing for older people, but is strategically placed by the tower blocks to promote connections between different age groups.

Less explicitly, the rows of terraced housing in Whitney Path and Shifford Path also produce social space. They meet one another across a pedestrianised pavement. Often there are children from different homes playing with one another, improvising games made to work with the space of the walkways. The houses follow the slope of the ground and are built into each other, slotting into and over lapping one another. This physical meshing is potentially a mirror of social connectedness. Stable tenancies have historically enabled close family and neighbourly connections to develop. One resident related how her mother lived next door and how important that had been for feeling rooted in their homes. Another resident related a story of the

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58 A space in the grounds of the Bampton Estate for football or basketball.
59 In the interview with Hedy Fromming (2015), she discussed the deliberate placing of sheltered accommodation in the Dacres road estate.
kindness of her neighbour when she was without power (Resident of Radcot Point, 2016).

**Luxury**

Another way in which the case studies subvert expectations and connect is via the notion of luxury. The image of public provision is that it provides the bare minimum and is focused on survival and ‘making do’ rather than high quality services and experiences. The phrase, ‘bog-standard comprehensive,’ used by Alistair Campbell in a press briefing in 2001 (Curtis, 2009), plays into this stereotype about public provision. In contrast to this view, the case studies all demonstrate in different ways an immense generosity of provision.

In Crystal Palace Sports Centre, the monumental innovative design is articulated and activated by the experience of swimming and other sports activities. The enormous curtain glass walls generate a porous sense of inside and outside, so that you feel a proximity to the park whilst swimming and are immersed amongst the play of stripy light on the water. In *Swimming in the Cathedral*, I show how seemingly inconsequential moments, such as a pigeon flying the length of the building or a member of staff doing his tie in the reflection from a section of window, mingle with the production of space from sports activities and the dynamic grandiose forest of struts. The cathedralesque space frames the actions, generating a magnificent generosity of relationships.

The sports centre at Crystal Palace was not built in isolation but was one of a number of National Sports Centres, which were part of a programme of provision carried out built across the country. There were centres in Nottinghamshire, Berkshire, Shropshire and Snowdonia in the Welsh mountains. There was a vision in the scale of the planning involved for this, whilst at the same time swimmers could use the Olympic facilities at Crystal Palace for just £2.85.60.

As an employee commented during a tour of Didcot Power Station shortly before it was switched off, ‘almost everything about Didcot Power Station is sublime’ (Employee, 2013). The employee was referring to the difficulty of comprehending the

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60 For an off-peak swim.
enormity of the physical processes of power generation that took place there. The scale of the processes took huge planning and infrastructure; however in relation to the current context, the simple fact of public provision and ownership of power generation is in itself a luxury. There was an ethos that it was the role of the state to, ‘keep the lights on.’ This task was seen as too important to be left to investors or private companies. The state guaranteed energy for the population.

There was an incredible luxury in the whole approach of the LCC architects department’s provision of housing, which is carried through in the design of The Bampton Estate. The approach contrasted with the housing developments of the inter-war years that just produced a single type of housing, without consideration for the whole needs of the community. The landscaped setting, relation to the lie of the land, consideration of views, the way that older people were placed amongst the young, and the standards of space for living, point to a generosity of provision and desire to supply high quality housing. This is in marked contrast to the subsequent history of housing which included Thatcher’s first government abolishing the Parker Morris standards\(^{61}\) in 1980 to reduce the cost of housing provision.

The types of experiences these buildings generate for the user go far beyond the merely functional. These contrasting examples demonstrate high-quality and, imaginative experiences for the user. A sense of luxury is often associated with exclusivity, yet in the context of publicly funded and in the case of Crystal Palace Sports Centre and The Bampton Estate, publicly used buildings. The luxurious experiences set in place via these buildings engender both individual and collective well-being, as well as the awareness of social connections via their use of these buildings. It is a deeply inclusive luxury.

**Place**

The case studies each negotiate a nuanced relationship to the role of place, both in their conception and in their post-completion life.

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\(^{61}\) The Parker Morris Standards were set out in the 1963 ‘Design Bulletin 6 – Space in the Home’ and established legal requirements for the amount of space provided per person in the home, the amount of storage space, that there should be one flushing toilet per home and provision for heating.
For Didcot Power station, Frederick Gibberd’s *The Report of the Landscape Architect* (1965b) showed the painstaking care to establish the cooling towers in relationship to hills, trees and landscape. Gibberd went through numerous different scenarios to consider the most pleasing alignment. The trouble taken resulted in the large affection that towers were held in by local people and the sense of loss as a marker in the landscape. One visitor left a drawing on the notice board saying, ‘but how will we know when we are nearly home?’ There is a relationship between the architect’s plan and the post-completion life in relation to place. Gibberd’s positioning of the cooling towers in relation to the landscape was inefficient in terms of power generation but was exquisite for the public’s experience of the power station. How the public related to the power station was not seen as something expendable, but crucial. This care taken over the design contributed to the sense of loss around the closure of the power station in 2013 and the ‘blow down’ of the southern cooling towers in 2014.

For the Bampton Estate, the buildings and external spaces were designed to function with the slope of the ground. Mixed use development generated its own topography, creating buildings of different heights and sizes alongside the lie of the land. The design of the surrounding green spaces, including play areas for children, all contribute to the sense of space and quality of life for residents.

Rather than just arriving in Crystal Palace Park to provide sports facilities, the Crystal Palace sports centre was also designed with a nuanced relation to the history of the site and the legacy of Paxton’s Crystal Palace. Like Paxton’s Crystal Palace, it is an innovative glass building and was built on the site of one of the fountains from Paxton’s park layout.

*Sensation*

Production of space is connected with sensations. When I discuss taste in *Do my flying ducks prove me an outlaw?* it is in the context of taste preferences for customisation of the home, but the other meaning of taste is sensual.  

62 For a discussion of this aspect of taste see Terry Eagleton, ‘The Ideology of the Aesthetic.’
Our installation, *Where clouds are made*… (Barbaresi & Round, 2013a) represented and reflected the bodily experience of being in proximity to Didcot Power Station. From a distance, as most members of the public experience the towers, they become more like toy town objects in relation to the landscape. In close proximity, they produce an awe-inspiring sensation in relation to the scale of one’s own body. We explored this sensation in *Where clouds are made*… by installing scaffolding structure with a slight arc that mirrored a tiny section of the curve of one cooling tower. The arc is so subtle that it could easily be mistaken for a straight line. The structure brings home the enormity of the whole, as Maria Warner (1995:57) said, ‘a football field could fit comfortably within each of them.’

This sense of two modes of experiencing Didcot Power Station, of proximity and distance, as a kind of inside and outside, were re-configured spatially and materially via the scaffolding structure as a liminal zone. As a threshold, the scaffold physically engaged the audience. You had to climb through the structure to arrive at the vinyl wall drawings; the scaffolding functioned as a semi-permeable marker in space.

The wall drawings interpreted the switches and dials in the control room and engineers’ design drawings of the boiler. As artists, we approached the control room and engineers’ drawings on the level of sensation and memory. They related to graphics from the 1970s, our childhoods and part of the collective memory of that time. Not understanding the functions in a literal way as a control room operator would, we explored their sense of implicit functionality.

*Swimming in the Cathedral* explicitly examines the sensations of being present in Crystal Palace Sports Centre whilst engaging in sports activities, particularly swimming. Here I consider the experiential qualities engendered by the inter-relationship between the building and sports activities. The fabric piece made for the residency at Wimbledon College of Arts, (see figure 73) produced a parallel sense of a sensual physical experience for the audience from which to reflect on the sensation of inhabiting the sports centre.

63 As part of the collaboration, Barbaresi & Round.
Via the notions of the individual, social space, luxury, place and sensation, the case studies have challenged perceptions of how publicly funded buildings from the 1960s and 70s operate in relation to their lived experience. As I set out in my second research aim, perception is crucial to framing debates about the possibilities for the future of these buildings.

**Reputation**

Through my research it became clear that part of the post-completion life of buildings and places is their reputation. There is an interchange between the actuality of a place and the way it is perceived. The perception effects the actuality as it influences decisions that are made about the future of a development, and opinions about who belongs there, the potentials of a place and what is possible.

The collapse of Ronan Point in 1968, a tower block in Newham, had a significant impact on the reputation of tower blocks and council housing in general. A gas explosion at the block caused one entire corner of the building to fall through, resulting in the death of 4 people and injuries to 17 people. It was subsequently believed that there was a weakness in the joints holding the pre-fab parts together, causing the gas explosion to act as a catalyst for the floors above and below to fall through like dominos.

At this point, approximately mid-stage in the story of post-war pre-fab housing, tower blocks began to be seen as potentially dangerous and undesirable places to live, with poor construction practices. This had the effect of changing the demographic of residents. Frequently, it became the case that it was those with few other options who lived in tower blocks. The Bampton Estate, completed in 1965, very early in its post-completion life, would have been affected by this shift in public perception. In contrast to the original ambition for mixed use development as providing for a range of different social classes, this altered perception presented a bumpy ride for the aspirations of the relatively new estate.

In the introduction I discussed some points made in Ben Highmore’s essay, *Playgrounds and Bombsites: post-war Britain’s ruined landscapes*. Highmore (2013:324) explores the image repertoire of post-war bombsites, connecting demolition from the Luftwaffe with the demolition needed as part of the post-war
building programme, ‘it was all in one way or another damage.’ He goes on to make a link with the effect that the imagery of bomb damage had on buildings made under the welfare state, ‘the social and political instabilities within the mood of the post-war settlement were used in a particular way to legitimate the late 1970s conjecture we call neoliberalism’ (Highmore, 2013:327). The imagery was open to differing interpretations, it is as if the seeds of a critique of the welfare state were present at its inception.

The loss of reputation for buildings made under the welfare state could be seen as not wholly negative. In his book, *Uncommon* (2011), Owen Hatherley connects the dilapidation of Estates such as Park Hill in Sheffield with the development of experimental music:

> The likes of Park Hill and Hyde Park had an enormous effect on the development of public housing throughout Europe – or for various experimental pop musics. This was the home of The Human League / Heaven 17, Vice Versa / ABC, Cabaret Voltaire, Comsat Angels, and after a fallow period throughout the mid-80’s, its techno city rep – the sense it was Britain’s analogue to Detroit, in the way its electronic musicians held a ruinous, dilapidated deindustrialized present to account for its failure to create a future – was cemented when it became home to Warp Records and its early groups the likes of Sweet Exorcist and Forgemasters. They made a stripped down, dub-influenced techno seemingly designed to fill the empty sheds left when the steel industry departed (Hatherley, 2011:40).

I met with Owen Hatherley and in our conversation he mentioned that inhabitants of Park Hill had also made the connection with the subcultures that thrived in Berlin’s Kreuzberg. During the era of the cold war, Kreuzburg was surrounded by the Berlin wall on three sides. It was at the margin of West Berlin, a pocket protruding into the communist east. For this reason, it was seen as an undesirable place to live and became inexpensive. Students, artists and immigrants made it their home.

In a similar way, for my installation and event at Wimbledon Space, the defunct nature of its form enabled it to be occupied in unanticipated and playful ways. As well

64 Date of conversation was 12.10.14.
as cheaper rents enabling innovation, loss of reputation can also allow possibilities for less controlled use of spaces.

The current reputations of the buildings studied in my three case studies are nuanced and specific to their functions, ways of operating and locations. Didcot A Power Station ended its working life in 2013. The South towers were ‘blown down’ in 2014 and there are plans to demolish the north towers. Its active life ended in response to European Union directives on CO2 emissions, which made this coal powered station untenable. Its neighbour, Didcot B, which is gas powered continues its working life. So, the future of Didcot A was connected with climate change and the obsolescence of its technology in that context. As Maria Warner (1995:58) described, ‘these cooling towers represent the hubris of late twentieth-century plenty…they symbolize heedless, overflowing consumption.’ But part of its reputation is now tied to memory and a sense of loss, as both a significant marker in the landscape and as a major employer. A visitor to our exhibition at Cornerstone Arts Centre in 2013 graphically described an imagined future without the power station (figure 75).

65 On 23rd February 2016 a section of the turbine hall collapsed killing four workers involved in the demolition. At present three of the bodies are still trapped under the rubble.
Crystal Palace Sports Centre is widely used and held in affection by local people. In comparison to its heyday of hosting major sporting events, such as Steve Ovett’s 1979 mile record, it is no longer seen as an obvious sporting venue, which is demonstrated by the lack of any events which took place there at the London 2012 Olympics. There are plans for its redevelopment, which are currently under discussion. This shows a stake in the future of the Sports Centre, while at the same time demonstrating a critique of the physical state of the building and the way that it functions for users. At the same time, the uncertainty about its future has meant that maintenance has been carried out with only a view to the short term. This can be seen in the context of figure 76, showing repairs to the perimeter fence using whatever materials or objects were to hand to fix the breach in the fence.
Thinking back to the exchange between reputation and actuality, and relating it to Crystal Palace Sports Centre, the makeshift repairs demonstrate that the development is not cherished in the present. They support the view of those who would argue that the building is not successful in its current form and needs to be re-thought and reconfigured.

The Bampton Estate is well maintained. It belies David Cameron’s characterisation of ‘brutal high-rise towers’ (Davies, 2016). It is not crime-ridden, vandalized or threatening. It currently provides stable housing for a representative group of local people. However, the context is a housing crisis which makes estates like the Bampton Estate, all the more needed, but simultaneously valuable to private developers. Other, more well-known housing estates, such as the Aylesbury Estate in Elephant and Castle or Robin Hood Gardens in Poplar, are being demolished or
are under threat of demolition. The argument of ‘failure’ is used as a justification for their demolition and their replacement by largely private developments.

Highmore (2013:327) describes how the writer ‘Virno puts experience and feeling at the centre of his political economy. In Virno’s terms, what is essential is grasping the ambivalence that circulates around the feeling like job fear and its attendant mutability.’

In considering the post-completion life of these three developments, the emotional ramifications of change become part of the life of these places. They are connected to reputation and the perception of their futures. In the needs they meet and the functions they were designed to perform, the developments provided stability for their users. So, the question of how it feels, for example to have your home under threat, be moved away from your family and social ties, or to lose your employment is a pertinent one.

While carrying out this research, the context in which buildings made under the welfare state are perceived and valued has shifted. Through the coalition government of 2010-15 and then accelerating in the current Tory regime 2015 – present, there have been violent and deliberate attacks on the concept of public ownership. This can be seen time and time again through every area of the public sector, including the NHS, schools, housing, the probation service and libraries, to name a few.

The future of these buildings is inevitably tied to politics. In the same way that the impetus to build the welfare state came from the post-war Labour government’s vision in their 1945 election campaign, the current neo-liberal regime is ideologically opposed to state ownership (Monbiot, 2016). The future of these buildings is political.


67 This could be the case from either short-term tenancies or the threat of the building being demolished.
I have argued that in the debates about ‘failure’ and obsolescence, the vital life of these buildings is being overlooked. There is an assumption that the life of buildings that have been developed by their inhabitants is disposable or can be regained easily elsewhere, rather than being something of value that is irreplaceable. The type of value, which I have been drawing attention to through this thesis, is often low-budget and improvised. The people who inhabit the spaces I have explored are much more than ‘users’ of buildings. They are co-authors and collaborators with the architect in creating the life of the building in the present.

As the literal demolition or change of status through privatisation of buildings from the 1960s and 70s continues, we need to hold on to this fuller picture of exactly what is at stake alongside the physical structures. Let’s consider this aspect of buildings from the 1960s and 70s and what they have enabled. Their value is not just about a stunning vision designed by architects, but that what has happened since is crucial and inseparable as part of what the buildings are. The discoveries developed in this thesis have revealed a vital life in the present.
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