

Unpopular Taste

Formulating a Framework for
Discussing Taste with reference to
English Volume-Built Housing and
the Schism in Visual Preferences
between the Lay Public
and the Architectural Elite

Volume I

Unpopular Taste

Formulating a Framework for Discussing Taste with
Reference to English Volume-Built Housing and the
Schism in Visual Preferences Between the Lay Public
and the Architectural Elite

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Abstract

People's visual preferences in architecture are little researched or understood, yet there is growing evidence that aesthetic appeal impacts on people's sense of wellbeing and community belonging. There is an evident divide in taste between the architectural elite and the lay public that promotes a disconnection of the laity from much of contemporary architecture. This study seeks to investigate the nature of the taste schism in order to better understand the drivers and influences on visual preferences that lie at its heart, and to begin to find a language with which to meaningfully discuss taste inside and outside of the architectural elite.

I have centred this study on volume-built housing – the most ordinary and ubiquitous building typology in Britain. I do so in two ways: one, looking through different theoretical lenses that together build a knowledge structure of taste, drawing on the work of philosophers, social scientists and architectural theorists; and two, looking for precise and detailed data about people's visual preferences through a purpose designed survey, with quantitative and qualitative aspects. I propose that the key characteristics of the elite-popular taste schism centre on three axial polarities: expert-nonexpert aesthetic appreciation; preferences towards a modernist-traditionalist aesthetic; and preferences towards a detail-plain aesthetic. I conclude that the taste divide hinges around differences in architectural knowledge, values (that are both formally and informally received) and evaluation processes. Whilst I argue that a taste divide is inevitable to some extent, I propose ways of bridging the gap. From my research findings I formulate a framework to structure a discourse on taste – a vital first step in reconciling the current obstructive differences.

Prologue

The personal and professional are interlinked for architects, perhaps even to the point of fusion. Not in lifestyle, though undoubtedly that could be argued, but as a way of thinking that begins at 18 for the majority who go straight from school to architecture school. Born again into the world with a fresh pair of eyes that begin to see that which was always there but not really noticed before. These new eyes were different to our old ones because they could see beyond the surface of things and would send constant, questioning messages to the brain, in the way of a curious child that has yet to develop a foundation of received knowledge and needs to find out through questioning flummoxed and bemused adults who have become immune to the magic and mystery that infuse the world that surrounds them.

The radical and remarkable aspect of architectural education is exercising the looking-seeing, thinking-knowing, experiencing-feeling connections that have atrophied through neglect in mainstream primary and secondary education. I say exercising in lieu of remaking mindfully here. There is a sense that architects are *reconditioned*, even brainwashed in their thinking; that something is taken away in a seven-year (re-)programming and replaced with a reputedly superior functioning faculty of discernment. But this education process is not an undoing of one set of beliefs and substitution with another; the only thing that it tries to take away is unquestioning ignorance and complacent unawareness, through opening to a different potential and quality of knowing that is not developed in our spatially illiterate and phenomenologically deprived state pedagogy. Critical thinking and awareness are actively encouraged in schools of architecture; although it could be argued that there is bias, even if unwitting, in the critical practice. Such bias protects the sanctity of the core principles of modernism that, to varying degrees, are the established orthodoxy of architectural education.

Any cultivation of prejudices in taste aside, the newly developed neural connections and new pathways they make, resulting from the looking-thinking-experiencing, seeing-knowing-feeling attitude of mind that is developed in architectural education, can neither be undone nor switched off. With new eyes and the encouragement of questioning curiosity, nascent architects learn how to see into things and around things, to connect things that appeared discrete and to discern the affective impact of our environment. The personal and professional thereby become entwined in our thinking-being minds. To write professionally then is to write personally. And to write personally is to write as an architect. An architect educated to look, to observe, to see, to question, to wonder, to challenge. But perhaps, also to believe in a certain set of principles, even values too, that maybe colour the lenses with which I see, and cloud the subsequent thinking. In researching and writing this thesis I have tackled the subject of taste as an architect, taught how to look, see and really start to think in architecture school. This research has been an act of return - to looking, seeing and thinking anew, with fresh eyes once again.

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Glossary of key terms

A number of terms that I use in this thesis require some definition in my interpretation of their meaning and use of them.

anti-moderns

from Latour (1993): those operating in the condition, and to the practices, of modernity that separates nature and culture, but in mutually dependent opposition to the moderns. (cf moderns). Expanded in chapter five.

architecture

there are varying opinions on the classification of architecture (Sharr, 2018). For the purposes of this thesis I use it to mean buildings that are designed with an aesthetic intent, that requires consideration of the material and make-up of their constituent elements (cf building).

architectural establishment

the architectural cultural hegemony, represented in the work and opinions featured in architectural magazines, the buildings recognised with design awards, the teachings passed on in architecture schools and the ethos of the professional body of architects, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). It does not encompass all architects and represents the tastes and approach of the orthodoxy not of individual architects.

(architectural) elite

the architectural establishment, defined in status by architectural expertise, as opposed to wealth. It also extends to the cognoscenti that comment on, commission, support and actively engage with the profession.

building

the process or product of construction of a structure with roof and walls, without aesthetic intent (cf architecture).

contemporary

current. (I do not use contemporary in reference to a modernist style or approach).

doxa

an unreasoned and unquestioned assumption that is accepted without knowing or reflection (Eagleton & Bourdieu, 1992).

historicism/ historicist

a contemporary architectural approach that directly refers to the past through the use of historical iconography. Expanded in chapter four.

housebuilder-vernacular

the typical style of volume-built houses. Description of the style in chapter one.

ideology

a set of ideas that underlies a belief system through which a group of people understand a domain. Expanded in chapter five.

modern

for clarity of meaning and distinctions, I have attempted to avoid using the term *modern* in this thesis, adopting the term *modernist/modernism* for architectural approach and

moderns for the proponents of modernity. When used, it is in the context of being up-to-date, not in the meaning of current (cf contemporary).

moderns

from Latour (1993): those embracing the condition of modernity, that separate Nature and Society, in contrast to pre-moderns who connect them (1993, p. 41). In the same framework of mutually dependent opposition as *anti-moderns*, but incorporates post-moderns as a sub-set (postmodernism being “a symptom, not a fresh solution”(1993, p. 46)) (cf anti-moderns). Expanded in chapter five.

Modernism

an early twentieth century architectural doctrine that espoused a break from the high architecture of the past and the historical iconography and ornamentation associated with it (cf Modern Movement). Distinct from the pluralist *modernism*, that I refer to as a more general approach in mainstream architecture from the mid twentieth century onwards.

modernism/ modernist

I use these terms broadly, to mean an architectural approach that emerged from Modernism that remains the bedrock of mainstream architectural practice today. It employs the free plan, free elevation, abstraction, the absence of ornament, structural innovation and the primacy of function. It includes many sub-genre styles with different emphases on approach, including Brutalism, Post-Modernism, Minimalism, High-tech, Parametricism. Description of the general stylistic characteristics of modernism in chapter four.

Modern Movement (in architecture)

an international movement of architects that largely unquestioned the doctrine of Modernism, from the late 1920s to early 1960s.

modern-vernacular

a style that sits between the housebuilder-vernacular and modernist. Description of the style in chapter one.

popular taste

the visual preferences ascribed to the lay public (in contrast to elite taste being that of the architectural elite)

(architectural) style

the formal expression of a building. Expanded in chapter three.

traditionalist

proponents of traditional architecture

traditional architecture

older architecture (before mid-twentieth century) that employs the use of historical iconography or have vernacular features.

(contemporary) Traditional Architecture

current architecture that employs the use of historical or vernacular iconography. Description of the architectural style in chapter four.

values

principles or standards that someone holds to be important and informs their attitudes.

vernacular architecture

indigenous, anonymous, unselfconscious architecture, rooted in place, material, need and tradition. Expanded in chapter three.

volume housebuilder

a speculative housing developer that delivers over 2,000 units per annum (lower in previous times). Expanded in chapter one.

volume-built house

the market sale product of volume housebuilders. Expanded in chapter one.

Introduction

Thesis aim

In this thesis I aim to explore and better understand what lies at the root of the division in opinions about the appearance of buildings between those of the architectural elite and the lay public, in order to set out a framework for discussing architectural taste. To speak of two broad, polarised groups may seem simplistic, but this division in taste does manifest itself in the media, in studies that I will later cite, and in my experience as a practicing architect. On the one hand there is the nonexpert laity with, by definition, popular taste, and on the other, the customary preferences of the expert architectural elite, the unpopular taste of my thesis title. popular taste. In this consciously expansive and heterogeneous study of taste, I aim to interrogate and examine some of the possible influences on taste judgements that may help to reduce the current opacity of the subject and better define its territory.

I will argue that it is important to direct an open and inclusive enquiry of taste towards that which is ordinary and pervasive in our built environment. There are currently no available mechanisms for discussing architectural taste – there is neither a shared language to talk about it (within the architectural establishment itself as well as between it and the lay public) nor a proper framework in which to discuss it. This results in taste being a subjective discourse, when it is remarked upon, structured by the established cultural hierarchies of discrimination identified by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (2010) that ranks the taste of the elite minority higher than the taste of the lay majority. I aim to formulate a framework through which the complexity of the factors that influence aesthetic judgement can be disaggregated and discussed. Through this I hope to challenge the value distinction between elite and popular taste as well as consider how the schism between them can be reduced.

Taste is an elusive and knotty subject of enquiry, that I will attempt to unpack in the thesis. Architectural taste has explicit and tacit components that I will consider: the hedonic, aesthetic responses to appearance, and the factors that influence judgement with varying degrees of cognisance, such as perceptions of status, identity and risk. I use the typical contemporary volume-built house that is the predominant output of the UK housebuilding industry as the reference for the study. I touch only briefly on how volume-built housing has come to be a ubiquitous presence in our environment, as context, directing my enquiry on responses to and perceptions of it. Focusing on domestic architecture adds to the challenge of a study of taste as it cannot be isolated and detached from the influence of a myriad of potent material and emotive issues, that range from the large financial investment of a home to the sense of identity attached to it.

I test visual preferences through a sizeable online survey. Then through the analysis of the findings against the themes I have identified as influencing taste, I formulate a framework of issues to consider in the discussion of taste. This investigation is introductory in this little furrowed field of study and I suggest further research that can develop the findings of this thesis.

0.1

My position in the research

My approach to this study, as well as the baggage I bring to it, are very much informed by my experiences in architecture as part of the architectural elite that I describe and scrutinise. This is firstly as a principal in practice with its attendant studio culture and language, and what I would call the *taste aspirations* of colleagues, clients and planners. Then as a participant and chair in Design Review Panels in the context of expert evaluation. And finally as an educated, and educating, architect – trained to see, appreciate, use and to an extent reinforce the principles of both modernism and contextualism. This requires that I try to situate myself both inside and outside of my architectural position at the same time; drawing on my observations and experiences as an architect on the inside of the mainstream architectural culture, and taking a wider view of this as a researcher looking outside of this niche.

0.2

Relevance of this research

The exercise of taste is one of the ways in which we define who we are and as such is an important dimension in our sense of satisfaction and well-being, both individually and collectively. There is a growing body of research substantiating the potential positive impact of aesthetics in our built environment on community coherence and well-being (Florida, Mellander, & Stolarick, 2011; Knight Foundation, 2010; Seresinhe, Preis, & Moat, 2015), though there is little research or discussion about the actual parameters of people's tastes.

In November 2018 the Government launched the Building Better Building Beautiful Commission, with the following three aims:

1. To promote better design and style of homes, villages, towns and high streets, to reflect what communities want, building on the knowledge and tradition of what they know works for their area.
2. To explore how new settlements can be developed with greater community consent.
3. To make the planning system work in support of better design and style, not against it (MHCLG & Brokenshire, 2018).

After decades of silence in the architectural establishment on the question of beauty and taste, this venture has been greeted with suspicion and concern from many architects, fearful of a return to style wars and a reduction of the complexity of both architecture and the housing delivery problem to mere aesthetics (Block, 2018; Finch, 2018; Woodman, 2018). Architecture critic Jay Merrick commented, for example, that the problem of elevating the status of beauty in twenty-first century development is that it "can only be presented and discussed in a reductive manner; and this is likely to produce, at best, 'beautiful' architecture that stolidly repeats that past rather than addresses the socio-urban conditions, aka most lives, of its time" (Finch, 2018).

The absence of debate on taste is paralleled by scant robust research on visual preferences and consequently little understanding of attitudes to physical characteristics and features that influence aesthetic choices. Consequently, as I discuss in 'Methodology', I am especially reliant on grey literature from specialist interest organisations for a picture of attitudes towards new housing design. That the appearance of new build homes impacts on residents is borne out by an Ipsos Mori residents' survey for the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE – the Government's advisor on architecture, urban design and public space from 1999-2011). This found appearance ranked as the fourth most important aspect in a housing development, after safety and security, construction quality, and provision of car-parking (CABE, 2007a). It ranked the sixth most important 'bigger picture' aspect of what respondents wanted from a housing development, after location, type and size of home, safety and security, cost/rent/value for money and the provision of a private garden or outside space (CABE, 2007a). In another survey for CABE by Savills, residents rated external appearance as the second most important of all, general factors of existing property and period character as fourth most important dwelling-only feature (CABE, 2010b-Occupier Demand Survey 2007).

Research studies generally support the common assumption of a preference in the general public for older buildings compared to new ones (Herzog & Gale, 1996 - though notably in this study, only if the old buildings are maintained; Herzog & Shier, 2000). Other studies have found exceptions to this, for example a survey of first time buyers found a general preference for new-build over existing properties (ZPG, 2017), but the factors stated for the preference were mainly process and financial considerations not qualitative. Also an Ipsos MORI survey found that the attraction of older homes was not consistent and varied by locality (2012).

Despite the popularity of TV shows such as *Grand Designs* that showcase bold and innovative house designs, there is little indication in the mainstream housing market to suggest this represents anything more than vicarious entertainment. Anecdotally there is a presumption of a taste divide between cosmopolitan architects and provincial Middle Englanders; between sleek, stripped metropolitan modernism and picturesque, adorned suburban historicism. Behind this is the supposition that the British public are nostalgic (Powers, 2007) and old-fashioned (Ballantyne & Law, 2011) in their architectural taste. Surveys by traditionalist-leaning bodies such as the campaigning organisation Create Streets, the architect Robert Adam and the think-tank Policy Exchange, seemingly endorse this position, with claims of a substantial public preference for traditionally styled contemporary buildings (Adam, 2009; Airey, Scruton, & Wales, 2018; Ipsos MORI & Create Streets, 2015). But there is clear bias in the framing of the questions on some of these surveys. Take for example, the survey question: 'Which of the following best describes the style of new homes and communities that you would most like to see built in future?' and the multiple-choice response options: 'Dramatic and futuristic designs; Housing developments or estates in a modern style; Traditional terraces with tree lined streets; Some other design style; Don't know' (Airey et al., 2018, p. 13). The questions are unevenly phrased, adding the bonus of trees to the streets of the 'traditional terraces' and the burden of 'estate' status (as well as an assumed absence of trees relative to the option that specifies them) to the modern style or the extreme of being 'dramatic' and 'futuristic'. It confuses style with typology in the writing of the questions and so does not clarify the various qualities that were being questioned – it may well be that the majority prefer the ideas of trees in their communities and would settle for traditional terraced streets to get them.

The Government's *Starter Homes Design* document (DCLG, 2015), introduced in March 2015, reflects the supposition that the general public like traditional aesthetic for new housing. It features eight 'exemplar' designs, shown below in figure 0.1, half of which are historicist and of

the other half, three in modern-vernacular style and only one modernist (I set out what I mean by these and other key terms in the Glossary and describe the style attributes in chapter one).



Figure 0.1
Images of the
eight exemplar
schemes in the
Government's
Starter Homes
Design (DCLG,
2015).

Furthermore, there is a common assumption that tastes of the public must be represented by the market, with the argument used that “in a market environment, if they weren’t [good], people would not buy”, here given by Steve Turner at the Home Builders’ Federation (Marrs, 2015, para. 13). But it cannot be assumed that volume-built housing, which dominates new housing output in the UK, represents public preferences in a market in which demand outstrips supply by up to 3:1 (Graef, Faulkner, McDonald, & Banham, 2012), and housebuilders are recognised for representing shareholders’ interests ahead of public interest (Callcutt, 2007).

When I started this research in 2014, taste and beauty were not on the agenda in the housing debate and their discussion was rarely explicit in the architectural establishment. The quality of new homes featured in the background of what has been a debate dominated by numbers – namely of supply and cost (Barker, 2004; Callcutt, 2007; DCLG, 2017a; Letwin, 2018; Select Committee on Economic Affairs, 2016; W. Wilson & Barton, 2018). Housing quality has been raised as a concern by industry bodies (CABE, 2007a, 2010c; RIBA, 2018a, 2018b; The Housing Forum, 2017). For example, CABE conducted a housing audit from 2004-2007 of 300 recently developed homes across England, assessing their quality in terms of layout, placemaking and urban design. 18% were found to be ‘good’ or ‘very good’, and 29% were found to be ‘poor’, the quality “so low that they simply should not have been given planning consent” (CABE, 2007b, p. 4). In one of the regions the proportion in this category was found to be as high as 40% (CABE, 2007b, p. 4). Quality was also touched on in Kate Barker’s *Review of Housing Supply* recommendations for improvement, by way of reported customer satisfaction (Barker, 2004, recommendation 32). Furthermore, the whole supply chain for housing delivery, from developers to bankers and even Government has been criticised for not promoting design quality (Thompson, 2012), and the 2017 Government White Paper pronounced the current housing market as broken (DCLG, 2017a).

Space standards and the size of our homes in England, shown to be the smallest in Western Europe (Morgan & Cruickshank, 2014, p. 711, table 1) have also been a target of criticism and campaigning (Park, 2017; RIBA, 2011). However, there has been little discussion on the appearance of new homes, which is not covered in criticisms of quality. References are often made to *poor design* (such as by the RIBA President elect, Jane Duncan (Marrs, 2015)), but not to *ugly appearance*, avoiding the mire of aesthetic language and subjectivity. Another example of this is in the *Building for Life 12* guide, “the government-endorsed industry standard for well designed homes and neighbourhoods” (Birkbeck & Kruczkowski, 2015, p. 1), which side-steps the

aesthetics predicament with the use of the word 'character'. This is raised in just one of its twelve criteria, asking: "Does the scheme create a place with a locally inspired or otherwise distinctive character?" (2015, p. 12). Although there are now signs that this may be changing. The RIBA response to the Letwin Review of Build Our Rates, published in October 2018, *Ten Characteristics of Places Where People Want to Live* (RIBA, 2018a), raised aesthetic qualities in four of the ten recommended characteristics, using expressions such as 'visual identity', 'attractive and appealing', 'pattern', 'harmony', 'distinct and beautiful', 'authentic character', 'looking good', "'kerb appeal'", 'pleasing balance' and 'good proportion' (2018a, p. 22,23,26,30,31,32), and linking a strong visual identity to a sense of belonging and community .

0.3

Research Context

There have been a number of evidence-based research studies exploring responses to residential architecture in the last 30 years, in the interdisciplinary field of environmental psychology. They are survey based and tend to use bi-polar differential semantic scales to measure responses, under categories such a pleasant-unpleasant, beautiful-ugly, complex-simple. Nearly all of the published articles are from *The Journal of Environmental Psychology* (a quarterly publication founded in 1980 by psychologist David Canter) and *Environment and Behaviour* (a bi-monthly publication founded in 1969), the two main journals for this area of empirical research.

A significant proportion of the evidence-based preference studies in housing and in others less explicitly related to housing, have been concerned with the difference between architects' and non-architects' responses to buildings and have shown a marked schism both in preferences (Akalin, Yildirim, Wilson, & Kilicoglu, 2009; Devlin & Nasar, 1989; Fawcett, Ellingham, & Platt, 2008; Imamoglu, 2000) and in perception of preferences, such as Brown and Gifford's study looking at architects' prediction of lay evaluations of contemporary buildings (Brown & Gifford, 2001). In her 1996 study, Wilson looked at the preferences of architectural students over the course of their studies to consider how the differences emerge (M. A. Wilson, 1996).

The study of taste, however, is much wider than the evidence-based studies investigating people's preferences. I examine what I call a knowledge structure of taste below.

0.3.1 A knowledge structure of taste

The study of taste can be usefully viewed through a range of enquiries, broadly identified under different academic disciplines, that constitute what I call a knowledge structure of taste. Each discipline brings its own lens for looking at the subject and focuses on different aspects of it, for the most part self-contained and in isolation from the other disciplines. They are each effectively discrete knowledge siloes; with none singly capturing the whole operation of taste, which ranges across all of these specialist areas of interest and study. The knowledge structures can be thought of as different arenas of taste that comprise different aspects of study. Taste is not necessarily central to the disciplines or their scope of enquiry, but all of the areas of study touch on and have relevance to an understanding of the operation of visual preferences. They

can be divided into four broad areas of interest: the object of evaluation; how people decide and judge; the cultural context of the judgements; and the taste judgements themselves that people make.

Designers focus on the creation of the object of evaluation. Enquiries into the nature and interpretation of the object centre on aesthetic theory and judgement, formulated by philosophers of art and critiqued by art and architectural historians and theorists. Influential philosophers who have focused their enquiry on the nature and judgement of the object range from Immanuel Kant, whose argued that aesthetic judgement is similar to moral judgement, thereby unifying physical and moral domains (1790), to Friedrich Nietzsche, who positioned the value of art in its power of illusion (1872); historians from E.H. Gombrich (1966) to Alan Powers (2005); and architectural critics from Robert Venturi (1966) to David Watkin (2001) and Charles Jencks (1990).

Research into how people decide and judge consider the process of evaluation and the unconscious mechanisms behind how people make decisions. These are experimentally investigated by behavioural psychologists and cognitive neuroscientists. Key researchers in behavioural psychology include Daniel Kahneman (2012), and Dan Ariely (2009).

Investigations into the cultural context of the judgements people make are directed at the socio-cultural construction of aesthetic decisions and the cultural value attached to them. These are investigated by: social scientists, especially sociologists, social geographers and social anthropologists; and cultural theorists. Notable scholars in this field include: sociologists Pierre Bourdieu on class conditioned judgements (2010 [1979]) and Ulrich Beck on risk (1992); social anthropologist Bruno Latour on the modern condition (1993) and cultural theorists Thorstein Veblen on consumption (1899) and Erving Goffman on identity (1956).

The examination of taste judgements themselves can be split into three distinct knowledge structures: what people like; what people are observed to like; and what people say they like. The first of these, what people like, tests and analyses the aesthetic judgements that people make in structured empirical research studies, led by environmental psychologists. Prominent figures in this area include D. E. Berlyne (1974) and Kimberly Devlin (1994). The second, what people are observed to like, focuses on a narrative of experience, in which preferences are part of broader spectra of issues, studied through engaged observation by social anthropologists. Notable people in this field range from Mary Douglas on risk (1992) to Alison Clarke on domestic and material culture (2002). What people do and what they say do not necessarily align. The third branch of taste judgements focuses on what people say they like. It centres on consumer behaviour and trends, that is the domain of market researchers, such as Ipsos MORI.

The core of the enquiry of the various disciplines can be divided into one concerned primarily with the object of evaluation and one concerned primarily with the judgements of the object of evaluation. These are linked to objects of evaluation and to people evaluating the objects. The different knowledge structures focus on different aspects of this split: some sit behind the objects and the evaluator (the design of objects and the internal processes of evaluation); some input into the nature of the central enquiry (philosophies of art and the external conditions influencing judgements); and some concentrate on outputs from that enquiry (critiques of the objects and individual judgements about them). This is summarised in the diagram below (fig. 0.2) which shows the core focus of interest with respect to taste on the left hand side – on the object of evaluation, the evaluators of the object or both – the main field of enquiry in the

centre, as described above, and the disciplines associated with it on the right. In fig. 0.3 I expand on the particular taste concerns of these disciplines.

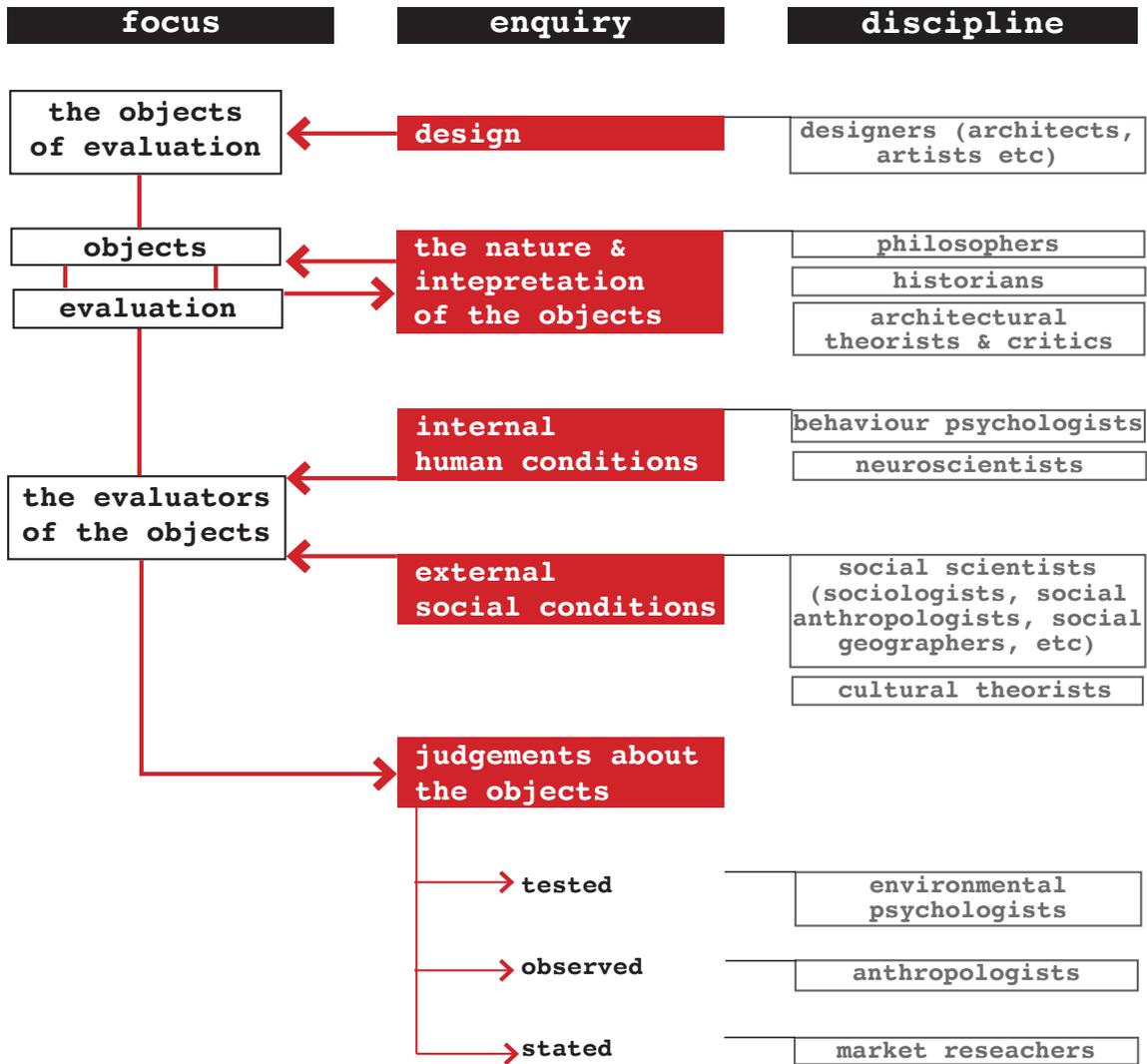


Figure 0.2 Diagram of my proposed Knowledge Structure of Taste showing the relationship between disciplines connected with taste and their key field of enquiry and focus of interest.

discipline	taste concern
designers (architects, artists etc)	creating objects that are subject to aesthetic evaluation
behaviour psychologists	examining the mental processes that impact on people's judgements
neuroscientists	examining the neural processes connected with people's judgements
social scientists (sociologists, social anthropologists, social geographers, etc)	examining the socio-cultural conditions that impact on people's judgements
cultural theorists	examining the nature of objects and their judgement
philosophers	examining the nature and meaning of the object and its interpretation
historians	examining the development of objects and their cultural impact
environmental psychologists	examining the impact of objects on people
anthropologists	examining the role of objects for people
market reseachers	gathering and analysing people's preferences
theorists	examining the processes of production and consumption of objects

I draw on this knowledge structure of taste within the thesis, using material and references from all of the disciplines I have identified. I have deliberately not organised the thesis around a systematic review of each of the areas of enquiry, choosing instead to look across the different territories from the outset, pulling the knowledge of the different disciplines together to gain an understanding and develop an argument that is not restricted to any one knowledge structure. In citing key authorities I note their discipline, which can be located in the diagrams above. I am not exhaustive in my coverage of knowledge structures. *External conditions* for instance, is a large area touched by many disciplines, particularly in the social sciences. I refer to the research in some of these, such as sociologists and social geographers but do not discuss others, such as political psychologists that could also be relevant to the understanding and discussion of taste and could be included in further research.

0.4 Methodology

Taste is not neatly confined to a single discipline, so to study it is necessarily to embark on a multidisciplinary journey. This raises the first methodological challenge for this research— how to find a route to focus and precision in an area that is wide and diverse. The challenge is twofold: how to engage in a literature review of a topic that is touched on in many subject fields but is central to none; and what methods are appropriate to address my research question. Given these conditions, my approach has essentially been one of evolving research that has continuously developed and progressed with the new material that I have discovered on the journey. It is akin to grounded theory (Robson, 2011) in that it is a methodology of unfolding concepts rather than a fixed hypothesis tested with a singular method and evaluated through an established conceptual framework.

The use of diagrams has been an important part of the distillation of themes I investigate in this research, and the synthesis of the propositions I make. As observed by the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, in his work on logic and semiotics, diagrams represent structural relations, in contrast to images that represent direct visual qualities (Kazmierczak, 2002); “images depict what is already apparent, while diagrams inform about that what is not yet apparent” (Kazmierczak, 2002, p. 177). Diagrams sit between the precision of language and the open-endedness of visual imagery, offering a broader content than text alone (Buckley & Waring, 2013). They can be used to show relationships between categories and sub-categories, and to show conceptual linkages (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), both supporting conceptualisation and encouraging clarity of thought (Buckley & Waring, 2013). Whilst used in many types of research, diagrams play an active part in theoretical development in grounded theory approaches, offering both “a direct and indirect means of analysis, representation and catalyst for discussion” (Buckley & Waring, 2013, p. 149).

Another aspect of my methodology is in setting up the enquiry as a schism. To put forward a framework for discussing taste requires understanding the operations of taste. I chose to focus my attention on difference, by way of looking at a notable schism in visual attitudes, in order to uncover key characteristics at play in taste judgements. This provided me with a methodological means of directing my investigations within a vast terrain and of converging my findings. Using a specific, restricted architectural subject as a reference for the study (the public facing façade of typical contemporary volume-built housing) also enabled me to control the scope of my enquiry.

The two key methods I have used in the pursuance of this research enquiry are literature review and survey. There has been an ongoing interaction between these two methods, that have influenced and informed each other. The literature review has been a dynamic rather than static process, seeking relevance and insight into the subject as opposed to completeness of coverage. Researcher in education and research methodology, Joseph A Maxwell, highlights the difference between literature reviews ‘for research’ that are “intended to *inform* a planned study” (Maxwell, 2006, p. 28) and those ‘of research’ (p.28) that provide a thorough summary of the literature in a specific field. He argues the importance of relevance over comprehensiveness, seeing the literature review “as an essential component of research rather than the foundation of research” (p.31). I have adopted this attitude, with the findings of my rolling literature review being integrated into the thesis development and narrative, rather than used as an introduction to it.

0.4.1 Literature Review

My literature review has been a process of gathering relevant cross disciplinary research evidence with which to both understand the subject and to feed into formulations about my research question. Grey literature features strongly in some areas of this research, in particular around attitudes to housing design, firstly as there is no extensive peer reviewed literature on the subject, and secondly to capture topical and pertinent housing policy and opinions. I am aware of the credibility, accuracy and objectivity risks inherent with grey literature, and have exercised judgement in my use of it. I assess the data sources, where relevant, and methodology used – this is particularly important on attitude surveys and I sometimes refer to the limitations of the such research in my discussion. I also judge the authority of the authors, who are generally recognised organisations with specialist interest in the field, such as CABE, RIBA, Ipsos MORI, MHCLG, Create Streets and Policy Exchange. Despite its potential shortcomings, grey literature is a valuable source of relevant, current material in my literature review.

As noted in ‘A knowledge structure of taste’ in research context above, there are a range of canonical texts from numerous disciplines that I refer to in this research. Bourdieu’s ground-breaking work in the field of taste, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (2010), and Latour’s seminal theories about the modern condition (1993), provide the most consistent thread through my investigations and serve as the two key theoretical foundations for the development of my arguments.

0.4.2 Evidence based survey

My primary research centres on an experimental evidence-based survey that is used to validate, test and inform my research. I use a mixed method, or multi-strategy (Robson, 2011), approach, that integrates qualitative and quantitative data. There are recognised strengths and limitations to both of these research methods. Quantitative analysis is good for group comparisons and testing strengths of variables, but is limited by its real world detachment (Castro, Kellison, Boyd, & Kopak, 2010) and decontextualisation (Viruell-Fuentes, 2007). Qualitative analysis, on the other hand, is good for being contextualised and offering accounts of human experiences. But it is regarded as methodologically weak, in the context of scientific research, not having robust prescriptive methods that allows robust conclusions to be drawn and difficulty establishing links between responses (Castro et al., 2010). In integrating both approaches I am able to look both at issues of variance (associated with the succession oriented approaches typical of quantitative research) and process (associated with the generative oriented approaches typical of qualitative research) (Robson, 2011). The detailed survey methodology is discussed in chapter eight.

I recognise that there is a deeply embedded resistance and antipathy in the architectural establishment to empirical preference studies and to treating architecture, and in particular housing, as a measurable product. The profession is sceptical, at best, of attempts to correlate people’s behaviours with their environment, and wary of what is seen as the narrow, reductive determinism and wide over-generalisation associated with this field (Macmillan, 2003). This renders the relevance of the research outputs as highly questionable to architects. These prejudices warrant addressing, as evidence-based research plays a key part in this thesis, used to support some of my arguments and in my preference study that is pivotal in the formulation of my proposed framework for discussing taste.

At the root of these prejudices is the suspicion (or belief) that empirical research studies are one-dimensional and abstracted out of context. In identifying and testing singularly scrutinised variables, the network of wider architectural aspects are neglected, that may either be contributing indirectly to the examined issue or be adversely affected with changes to the tested issue. For example, focusing on the impact of environmental factors, such as material and form, on behavioural patterns and visual reactions may miss other important architectural aspects such as moral factors, for instance a sense of belonging and community, and possibly even have a detrimental impact on those excluded factors (Fisher, 2016). Additionally there is unease that preference studies are reductive, closed and deterministic.

I share these reservations but I do not subscribe to the belief that architecture is absolutely immeasurable. Indeed I am convinced that many more of the impacts of architecture need to be made tangible for a better understanding of both its value and shortcomings. I also think it is imperative for the profession to robustly engage with the lay public's opinions and grapple with understanding its motivations and preferences.

The literature review of relevant preference studies set out in chapter eight on my experimental evidence based preference study on attitudes to volume-built house façades, highlight the deficiencies and failings I have found in some of the methodologies used. Rather than dismissing this mode of study, I attempt to address the flaws in the empirical work I have undertaken. In referencing evidence studies through the thesis I also have not blindly taken the conclusions as unquestionable truths, but considered points of notable and relevant detail in findings along with wider reflections. And I have attempted to avoid reductive determinism in the analysis of my own data evidence.

0.5

Thesis structure

The thesis is divided into four parts. '*Context*', sets the scene of the enquiry; '*Investigate*', explores themes that characterise the schism; '*Test*', evidences visual preferences; and '*Formulate*', synthesises the findings and themes and proposes a framework for discussing taste.

Part I, '*Context*' has three chapters. It starts with an exposition of volume-built housing: the volume housebuilding industry today and in historical context; formal characteristics of the typical volume-built house that I describe as the housebuilder-vernacular, its place in the housing market and representation in design awards; and the suburban context that is standard for volume-built housing. The second chapter sets the context of a taste schism as the subject of this thesis enquiry. First I locate taste, describing its characteristics and historical context relevant to a study of architectural attitudes, touching on the influential work of two prominent figures in the field: nineteenth century philosopher Immanuel Kant (1790), and twentieth century sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 2010). I then consider the implication of setting up an enquiry as a schism: the benefits and pitfalls of dualistic classification and the casting of two binary groups in doing this. I finish the chapter looking at how psychographic and profiling models categorise and define *the people*, and reflecting on the place-based nature of some of the models. The third chapter looks at architectural style; the visible, outward expression of a building that is being directly responded to in a taste judgement, be it through sensual

perception, cognitive associations or symbolic meanings. I consider the close relationship of style and taste and the question of styled and un-styled architecture, referencing the work of architectural historians R. W. Brunskill (2000, 2004) and Peter Buchanan (2012) on the vernacular, and the place of what I call the housebuilder-vernacular within this. I end the chapter considering the changing role of style in architectural culture from the pre industrial age to the present era, with particular reference to the architecture critic Charles Jencks, known for his work in defining modernist architectural styles (1990, 2015).

Part II, *'Investigate'*, has four chapters, each exploring different themes that I identify as possible contributors to the elite-popular taste divide. The first of these, chapter four, investigates the issues around the reference to a traditional aesthetic in the housebuilder-vernacular style. I look at the qualities and the limits of traditions, with reference to writings on tradition by Raymond Williams (1985), Eric Hobsbawm (1983) and T.S. Eliot (1932), and consider the connection between these characteristics and contemporary Traditional Architecture. I then compare both the meanings and stylistic traits associated with the terms 'traditional' and its binary opposite, 'modernist' testing my proposed attributes against three contemporary buildings that could be thought to sit on the margins of these style classifications. In chapter five I go on to investigate the learnt values that lie behind the architectural elite's resistance to historicism that characterises the traditional-modernist style dualism. Using Latour's critical work (1993) on the values and mechanisms of the modern project as a reference framework, this uncovers the legacy of the ideology of Modernism in the architectural establishment. I consider the view of architecture as a moral instrument - a locus of ideology, then identify three aspects to this ideology that could be factors in a framework of taste: a conviction in the Hegelian idea of *Zeitgeist*; a belief in progress and originality; and a moral position on authenticity. In chapter six I investigate the inherited values that could have a tacit influence on taste judgements, in particular those of security, associated with the familiar, and risk, associated with the new. These fall under the headings of internal processes and external conditions in the knowledge structure of taste I set out above. In this enquiry, I draw on the work of behaviour psychologists and social geographers such as Daniel Kahneman (2012) on decision-making processes and sociologist including Ulrich Beck (1992) on issues of risk in modern society as well as the observations of art historian Leo Steinberg on the disruption and normalisation of the new (2007). In chapter seven, I move my attention from influences on taste to the evaluative processes in taste judgements, and the impact that the roles of expert knowledge and nonexpert experience has on them. I investigate cognitive evaluation and reason, that are deployed by experts, guided by the work of psychologists such as Helmut Leder, who developed a model of aesthetic appreciation (2004). I then consider the implications on the expert-lay taste schism of the value attached to them over those of perception and associative meaning, substantiated by the work of Pierre Bourdieu on social conditioning (2010). I end the chapter exploring the distinction between the focus on the object and the experience of the object that underlies expert and non-expert evaluations, looking at the rise of the experience economy and considering its impact on architectural judgement.

Part III, *'Test'* has two chapters that evidences visual preferences and assesses them against the themes that emerged in the last part of the thesis. Chapter eight sets out my experimental evidence based preference study on attitudes to volume-built house façades. I devised a set of comparison images to test responses to the housebuilder-vernacular style typical of volume-built housing and to a modern-styled alternative, stripped of the original's decorative embellishments. I also test other key visual aspects of the housebuilder-vernacular, namely its windows and roof, across demographic variables of occupation, age, environment and gender.

The survey, and the analysis of its results, have a quantitative and qualitative component each of which are considered separately. In chapter nine I set out the survey findings.

Part IV, '*Formulate*' synthesises the investigations and findings of the thesis to propose an outline framework for discussing architectural taste. In chapter ten I assess the key themes I explored as influencing taste preferences against the evidence of the survey findings and suggest further research that would usefully extend this enquiry. I then compare the attitudes I have proposed arise from the learnt values of the elite (in chapter five) and the inherited values of the lay public (in chapters six and seven), and consider them with respect to the volume-built house aesthetic. I conclude the thesis reflecting on the nature of the schism, questioning the usefulness of a traditional-modernist duality in discussing architectural taste, and consider the place of what I provisionally term a *homely amodern* style that addresses some of the key issues that emerged in my research. I finish with the formulation of a framework for discussing taste, distilled from my research findings.

0.5.1 Assumptions and limitations

I am restricting my enquiry to the outward, public façade of the suburban family house, which is the most prevalent dwelling type in the UK (DCLG, 2014). I focus on responses towards volume-built house façades, that may extend beyond ideals of beauty to say qualities of homeliness, wonder or calm, seeking to understand what may be at play in taste preferences for the external appearance of houses. I am not looking at beauty, nor trying to situate and define the essential qualities that may be intrinsic, and of universal value, in the façades. Furthermore, I am not trying to ascribe an order of merit of response by grading taste preferences from good to bad, high to low.

I take as given in this study, that taste and the subsequent divide in taste, is socio-culturally conditioned. For example in my primary research survey I restrict respondents to adults who have lived in England for at least five years on the presumption that environmental context may influence preferences. Source references and philosophical traditions that I refer to are also limited to a Western context.

Some things I am not considering due to the need to limit the scope of my enquiry, not because I deem them irrelevant. These include: ethnicity, education, income, political view, personality type, regulation, perceived performance, gender and age (though I do address the last two in my survey). Additionally, I do not address questions of taste regarding domestic interiors or layouts, and anything but cursory perceptions and connotations of 'home'. Nor do I attend to poetic interpretations of dwelling. In order to directly focus on the key themes that I have identified as relevant to an understanding and discussion of taste, I have consciously bypassed the potential theoretical quagmire of postmodernism and poststructuralism in this enquiry, albeit being aware of their presence and impact in critical thinking from the late twentieth century.

As noted above, I state the primary discipline of key referenced authors. I also note their general political stance when it is evident in order to loosely locate them within the discipline, but I am conscious that this is a crude and somewhat rigid characterisation.

0.6

Contribution to knowledge

This study takes place at a pivotal moment in architectural culture. A generation of architects has entered practice after an education in which even their teachers' teachers were not committed Modernists. They are pluralistic and open-minded about the relevance of the whole range of historical and geographical precedents. They also inhabit a diverse and globally connected culture without precedence. I hope that in this time when old certainties and accordances of privilege are being abandoned, my research will provoke and inform a fresh look at taste, a topic little discussed and even less understood in contemporary architectural culture.

More immediately, the establishment of the Building Beautiful Building Better Commission at the end of 2018 signals a potential turning point in the official discourse about domestic architecture. There is very little research evidence or reflective consideration on what beauty in housing really means to people, to contribute to a meaningful debate on visual attitudes. I hope that the research set out in this thesis is constructive in this emergent debate. It is not a comprehensive or exhaustive investigation of taste, which would be impossible within the scope of a doctoral thesis given the paucity of research in this field. But I believe that the evidence I present, synthesised with the themes I have investigated in the formulation of a proposition on the nature of the schism in taste between the architectural elite and the lay public, and a framework for discussing taste, makes original contribution to knowledge in this little furrowed field.

Part I
CONTEXT

1

Volume-built Housing

Historically, architecture was only ever the special and iconic - the church or mansion - but since the rapid urbanization and industrialization of the nineteenth century it has come to touch all of our environment, to greater or lesser extent (Habraken, 2005). With the loss of vernacular housebuilding (which will be discussed in chapter three) and an aspirational shift towards social equality, the territory of architecture has spread to encompass the humblest of dwellings and most routine of workplaces. My investigation of taste in this thesis centres around attitudes to volume-built housing as it lies in this extended territory of ordinary architecture that forms the bulk of our built environment. I begin here explaining the importance of looking at ordinary housing for a study of taste in 'Why volume-built housing'?

In the chapter I look at various facets of volume-built housing in order to situate it socio-economically, spatially and visually as the reference for this study. The volume-built house is a familiar typology. It has become a ubiquitous feature of the suburban landscape. In 'The producer' and 'The setting' sections I look at the historical housing market and wider development conditions that are the background to the current dominance of volume-built housing in the market and its prevalence in the built environment. I then consider aspects of the volume-built house itself in the last section, 'The product', to understand what characterises it stylistically; how much aesthetic choice there is in the new-build housing market; and how well volume-built housing represents good design by the standards of the industry.

The main sources for this chapter are: Government housing reports; national statistics; independent housing reviews, such as Barker's *Review of Housing Supply*, Callcutt's *Review of housebuilding Delivery*, and Letwin's *Independent Review of Build-out*; industry studies and reports from CABE and RIBA; the work of Fred Wellings who wrote a definitive account of the housebuilding industry, *British Housebuilders: History and Analysis*, which had hitherto had little academic attention; and the work of URBED (the Urban and Economic Development Group), notably *Building the 21st Century Home*. Many of the sources are necessarily grey literature given the nature and topicality of the housing enquiry.

1.1

Why volume-built housing?

Museums and houses are all very nice (hence their domination of architectural media), but that's not where most people meet architecture, nor where architecture meets its greatest challenges (Lange, 2018, para. 11)

Of the scant research that has been done on taste preferences, very little of it addresses *ordinary* architecture. Some previous studies, such as Devlin and Nasar (1989) and Purcell and Nasar (1992), have compared responses to ‘high’ with ‘popular’ architecture (referred to as ‘avant-garde’ and ‘ordinary’ by Arthur Stamps (1999)). Whilst characterising styles in such a distinct way may be useful for looking at opinions at the extremes, it misses the nuances and subtleties at the centre-ground of architecture and taste where differences are slighter and opinions may, as a result, be less polarised. The premise underlying my research is that through examining the subtle and specific differences in ordinary domestic architecture, we may gain a closer understanding of where divergences lie in response to them.

In this section I set out why I think it is important in a study of taste, to look at people’s common experience of the everyday built environment, that I call ordinary architecture. This is typified by volume-built housing that, I establish, predominates the new build housing market. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to address philosophical explorations of the everyday, the work of Henri Lefebvre’s *Critique of Everyday Life* (2002) and Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (2002) warrant noting. These enquiries into the nature of the processes and events of daily life expose the extensive but imprecisely defined territory occupied by the everyday and highlight the limitations of totalising narratives ¹.

1.1.1 Housing - the archetype of ordinary

Housing is a fundamental building block of our society. Shelter lies at the very base of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (2013 [1943]) and has been recognised since the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a fundamental entitlement (UN Habitat & Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2014). Housing will be the predominant experience of architecture for most of society – it is literally what surrounds us for much of our days and lives – especially for those who live outside metropolitan centres and those who do not frequent cultural institutions. Volume-built housing, through its ubiquity and dominance of the new build housing market (discussed further below), constitutes so much of this *ordinary*.

Unsurprisingly, attention in both the architectural and mainstream press still focuses on the extraordinary – be it cultural institutions or one-off luxury houses; the obvious icons and exemplars of the age and of the architectural profession. But the sheer mass of the ordinary houses that continue to be produced by volume house-builders around towns and villages over the UK to supply an ever increasing demand of a growing and fragmenting population arguably also gives the volume-built house iconic status. And although I am classifying these buildings as *architecture*, architects have little involvement in their design (Marrs, 2015) – architects’ involvement and impact in mass housing has mainly been in mid twentieth century social housing, which took off in the rebuilding programmes after WWII, peaked in the late 1960s and all but ceased after right-to-buy legislation of the 1980 Housing Act and subsequent funding restrictions to local authorities in the Local Government and Housing Act of 1989 (Disney & Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2015). Architects’ involvement in private housing is predominantly in urban and relatively dense developments, mainly of flats.

¹ Lefebvre describes the everyday as ‘residual’ (p. 97), the indeterminate result of ‘what remains’ (p.97) through exclusion from distinct, special activities. This outsideness of the quotidian is a key theme taken up in de Certeau’s work that explores the ‘tactics’ (p xix) of subversion and creative resistance by who he calls ‘users’ (p.xi) (as opposed to consumers), to the ‘strategies’ (p xix) of top down power structures and institutional representation.

1.1.2 The current market dominance of volume-built housing

Despite recent historically low output rates (HBF, 2013), housing is currently the most productive sector of the British construction industry, accounting for 30% of all new orders in 2016, with almost twice the output of the infrastructure sector and three times that of the offices and education sectors² (ONS, 2017). Almost 90% of this is private dwellings (ONS, 2017) and 75%, or over 100,000, of the new homes built are houses (DCLG, 2017b, p. 10, 2018). The majority of the estimated 24million homes in the England are suburban houses - 62% are suburban and 80% are houses³ (DCLG, 2014; MHCLG, 2018a). Over half of new homes are built by just eight housebuilders (Select Committee on Economic Affairs, 2016, p. 8) - this output I refer to as volume-built housing. The dominance of the housing market by just a handful of volume-housebuilders has been a cause for concern in terms of housing delivery (DCLG, 2017a; Letwin, 2018), quality (Barker, 2004; Lyons, 2014) and competitiveness in the market (OFT, 2008).

1.2

The producer – Volume Housebuilders

Housebuilding has been a major industry since the 1930s, supplying hundreds of thousands of new homes to the market a year, but it has not always operated as it does today. The history of volume housebuilding in Britain is part of the history of mass housing and cannot be separated from the influences of Government housing policy measures; demographic changes in the population; economic factors connected to market shifts in tenure; and wider economic events. In this section I give an overview of the development of the private housebuilding industry and some of the key factors that have influenced it. The background of the position of the volume housebuilders in the current housing market gives insights into the nature of the volume-built house; that it is the economic product of a handful of large businesses that are led by shareholder interests, and sold in a captive, sellers' market, that offers very little choice. This is important context for looking, later in this thesis, at taste judgements towards volume-built housing, as it exposes the unreliability of looking at the market as an indication of popular taste preferences.

1.2.1 The business of volume housebuilding

The volume-built house is a product, a commodity that is manufactured and sold by very large companies (the volume housebuilders), to individual consumers (the housebuyers). After its initial sale, the house will take on the dual role of home and investment in the subsequent cycle of inhabitation and resale, although it is beyond my purview to consider the afterlife of the new build house in this study. It is interesting that we say housebuilders not housestylists, housedesigners, housecreators, housemakers, or houseproviders, reducing the complexity of the

² The top four sectors for new work output in public and private sectors in 2016 were: Housing £35,400m; Infrastructure £18,353; Offices £11,907; Schools and Universities £11, 211 (ONS, 2017).

³ For a fuller picture: 65% of them are owner-occupied; 60% have 3 or more bedrooms, rising to 74% for owner occupied homes; and 41% of households are families, compared with 28% one-person households and 28% couples (DCLG, 2014)

act of creating homes to the undertaking of the construction of the product. In name it suggests that housebuilders *build* houses, no more, no less. But whilst housebuilders do build houses, building them is not what categorises them as *housebuilders* as the term is used in the industry (although there are attempts in the industry to use the friendlier *homebuilders*, such as by the Home Builders Federation, ‘the voice of the homebuilding industry’ (HBF, 2015) that changed its name from House Builders Federation in 2005). A more fitting name for housebuilders might be land speculators as their businesses are characterised more by their speculative purchase and development of land for housing than the design and construction of the housing (Barker, 2004; Callcut, 2007; OFT, 2008). And it is a peculiar feature of the UK context that housebuilders combine land acquisition and development with housing construction (Archer & Cole, 2016).

A volume housebuilder is a speculative housing developer that delivers homes in large numbers. For the first half of twentieth century this equated to the production of over 500 units per annum and at the end of the century to over 1,000 units per annum (Wellings, 2006). It is now taken as over 2,000 ‘units’ per annum (DCLG, 2017a, p. 47) – the use of the term unit as opposed to home is significant, although industry leaders now produce over 10,000 units per annum (Select Committee on Economic Affairs, 2016).

Many building firms construct houses but if they are contracted to do so without the element of speculation required of development, they are known as contractors. Over the last century, some housebuilders have emerged from contracting (eg Laing), some went back to it, especially in the war years (eg Taylor Woodrow), others have built for local authorities as contractors whilst also delivering in the speculative, private market (eg Wimpey which merged with Taylor Woodrow in 2007 to become Taylor Wimpey (Taylor Wimpey, 2019a)), and many have separately contracted out their construction work (Wellings, 2006). Notably the businesses now at the top of the market have a sole focus on housebuilding, with subsidiary businesses and contracting arms that characterised the picture in the last half of the twentieth century having almost disappeared from the top 20 housebuilders (Callcut, 2007).

In operation, housebuilding is in some ways more akin to the car industry than the construction or service industry, with the investment in and manufacture of the product undertaken prior to its sale. The fundamentally different relationship between product and purchaser in speculative ventures compared to that between output and client in commissioned contracts is easy to overlook. Housebuilding is regarded as part of the construction industry, through the focus on the construction aspect of the business that is reported as part of construction economic output (for example, Jackson, 2018; Salmon, 2017), rather than the land speculation or product sales. But even though housebuilding may in ways more suitably be considered as a branch of the retail industry than part of the construction industry, its basic product is not *consumed* in the same way that most other consumer products are. CABE’s *Simpler and Better* report on transforming housing design quality challenges the argument of some housebuilders that housing is a retail product: “Homes are not, though, a normal retail product. Unlike iPods or kettles, homes cannot be shipped around. They are rooted in places, in highly localised markets” (CABE, 2010c, p. 4). Whilst recognising the obvious importance of the home to direct purchasers, it points out that “we are all, however, consumers of the housebuilders’ products” (CABE, 2010c, p. 4). Furthermore, housing cannot be excluded from the impact of the *experience economy* that I discuss in detail in chapter seven. The cost of housing also differentiates it from other consumer goods. As noted in the 2017 White paper on housing, the house price to average earnings ratio has more than doubled since 1988 (DCLG, 2017a) and in 2018 the cost of buying a house was on average nearly eight times annual full-time workplace earnings (ONS, 2019).

Other than speculative housing and offices, most buildings – from company HQs and museums to schools and prisons - are commissioned directly by the organisation, institution or individual for whom they are designed and built. This is a service-industry world of clients and users assisted by service providers, from architects to building contractors (brokered by lawyers and project managers); very different to the trade, sales-based world of consumers and customers in speculative development, brokered by entrepreneurs and estate agents, in which the consumer chooses from the market rather than directly dictates it.

The distinction between contracting and speculating bears out important economic differences on the business of housebuilding that have significant impact on the nature and operation of the industry. Risk and financing are central to housebuilding and distinguish it as an entrepreneurial (rather than construction) led activity that is highly sensitive to economic variables and market cycles. It may take a number of years between the purchase of land for development and the completion of the first houses for sale. This requires financing for a substantial period of upfront capital investment for land and infrastructure costs prior to return, which brings the key risk element; the uncertainty of future borrowing rates, land costs and house price sales for that investment period of design, approvals, land improvement and construction, in which the market could go up and bring significant rewards, or down and bring significant losses (Callcutt, 2007). The business of housebuilding is closely tied to mitigating the financial risks of this speculation activity. For most housebuilders it has proved very profitable for most of the post war years (Turner, 2016; Wellings, 2006), albeit with four substantial collapses in the market over that period that saw profits collapse and many businesses fail (Wellings, 2006). So whilst the product of sale, the volume-built house, is the object around which the business of housebuilding revolves, it is actually a fairly small part of the success equation, which is much more dominated by financial judgements on land purchase and turns in the housing market and economy. As Wellings put it: “Land is the housebuilder’s raw material” (2006, p. 12).

That the housebuilding industry is driven by profit and shareholder gains, not public interest, was made explicit in the 2007 Callcutt review of housebuilding delivery:

Housebuilders are not in business to serve the public interest, except incidentally. Their primary concern is to deliver profits for their investors, now and in the future – in other words, to ensure that their business is a good investment. Housebuilding executives are answerable to their investors, not to Ministers or the wider public. (Callcutt, 2007, p. 4)

The housebuilding industry then is first and foremost a business, the trading unit of commodity for which is the house. The house itself is only relevant to the business in as much as it needs to get sold to realise the investment value. The “key activity of all housebuilding companies” notes Callcutt, is “identifying, acquiring, preparing, developing and selling land (with houses on it)” (2007, p. 136) . Housing construction generates a very small part of the profit margin, which is weighted towards the land speculation that is driven by the wider housing market (Wellings, 2006). Land and cash are the key the business mode (Callcutt, 2007), not the end product of the house, which as a result may not be as cultivated a product as might be imagined in such a large and lucrative industry. It does not have the invigoration of R&D, consumer market analysis and quest for improvement and refinement of competitive, successful products in the retail industry such smartphones and sports trainers.

1.2.2 Historical overview of volume housebuilders and private housebuilding

The practice of speculative private housebuilding is generally attributed to Thomas Cubitt who developed, built and sold housing in north London in the early nineteenth century (Ramsey, 1938 in Wellings, 2006). But the roots of the current housebuilding industry, and the volume housebuilders, lie in the private housing boom of the 1930s, not in the Victorian era. It was in the 1930s that the rise in mass owner-occupation began, evidencing a period of the greatest production of private housing in the country yet known (NHBC Foundation, Richard Partington Architects, & Turner, 2015). Until the First World War most people, including the newly emerging middle-classes, rented their homes, with only about 10% of the population owning property. At the time of Lloyd George's social and tax reforms in 1909, the richest one percent owned two thirds all property (Monnery, 2011). Despite the Great Depression that had a significant impact at the beginning of the 1930s, by 1938 home ownership had increased to 38% (NHBC Foundation et al., 2015), fuelled by better borrowing terms and rates that increased accessibility to mortgages (estimated to account for 75% of the finance for the new housing (Monnery, 2011)), along with an increase in housing demand, especially in the south-east (nationally, new households doubled to 1.4 million in the decade 1921-31, which was four times the rate of the preceding four decades (Wellings, 2006)). The 1930s boom was also stimulated by the introduction of subsidies to private housebuilding by Neville Chamberlain's administration in the 1923 Housing Act, further boosted in 1924 by John Wheatley under Labour's first government. These subsidies had originally gone to local authorities as part of the widespread measures to improve and increase housing after the First War – known as 'homes fit for heroes' – incorporated in the 1919 'Addison' Housing Act, by Lloyd George's Government (Swenarton, 1981). Housing was a major part of the post war political agenda. From the late Victorian period, and through the first half of the twentieth century, it considered primarily as a basic health and wellbeing concern when the paramount problem was the poor conditions and sanitation of the slums (Monnery, 2011). Indeed, it lay under the remit of the Ministry of Health from its establishment in 1919 until the creation of a Ministry of Housing and Local Government in 1951.

There were over 250,000 housing completions per year in the mid 1930s, twice the output that would be achieved at the end of the century. The structure and make-up of the housebuilding market went through major changes over this period. In the interwar years housebuilding was very much a local business, albeit many firms having relocated from their original northern base to the flourishing south-east. Many housebuilders were also general building contractors (Powell, 1996). Wellings estimates that in the interwar period, 50 companies were building around 500 units per year, and only about 10 companies producing more than 1000 units a year. The top 10 producing housebuilders at this time accounted for 6-7% of the market (2006). This period saw the first use of the Stock market to inject finance into the businesses – a strong characteristic that would mark the future trajectory and growth of the industry (Wellings, 2006).

Housing output began to dip in the late 1930s, first in the London region, then nationally. This may have been due to increasing numbers of defence contracts that some of the major builders such as Laing and Taylor Woodrow turned towards (Wellings, 2006). Production then halted in the six war years with the introduction of stringent building controls (Defence Regulation 56A) and restriction of private building licences (Jensen, 2007). The housing need was certainly great after the war; in addition to the dearth of new houses over that period, varying estimates of between 200,000 and 1 million homes were destroyed and a further 3.5 million damaged

(Merrett & Gray, 1982; Monnery, 2011). The Government committed to rebuilding the country after the war, but it was not until 1954 that Defence Regulation 56A was completely lifted with a new Conservative Government (relaxation on licensing having begun in 1951) and private housebuilding was able to take off again. It was in this post war period that high volume council housing dominated the housing output. Housing completions reached 200,000 a year by 1949, less than 14% of which were from private enterprise, peaking at a total of over 350,000 in 1954, when private completions had recovered to just over 90,000, ie 26% (MHCLG, 2019). This long period of relative dormancy in private housebuilding changed the make-up of the industry. Many of the leading pre-war firms shifted to general contracting, including building the new local authority housing, and some returned only reluctantly, with the industry receiving a poor reputation. Sir Maurice Laing said in an interview in 2000, “everybody thought we were housebuilders and everybody looked down on housebuilders as the bottom end of the market” (Wellings, 2006, p. 65). Such was the reputational concern that in returning to housebuilding in the 1950s, John Laing renamed its housing division John and David Martin to preserve the Laing brand in the construction industry.

In the post-war period of regrowth in private housebuilding, even those who did return reduced their output, with only two of the pre-war firms building over 1,000 units a year (Wimpey and Idea) returning to those production levels (Wellings, 2006). But those who joined the market saw two prosperous decades of increasing house prices, sizeable outputs and high profits until a drop in the 1970s with the economic crash of the 1973-5 when real prices fell through a period of high inflation (Monnery, 2011). This period of *stagflation* (a stagnant economy with high inflation) along with a sharp fall in land prices had a major impact on the housebuilding industry, resulting in many firms failing or withdrawing from the market. Private housing completions fell from an historic high of 226,000 in 1968 to a two decade low of 145,000 in 1974, not returning back to 200,000 until 1988 (MHCLG, 2019).

The period from 1965 to 1973 saw a significant change in the structure of the industry, and the rise of the large housebuilder, with the top 10 housebuilders more than doubling their market share, from 8-9% in 1965 to 17-18% in 1973, with only one of them, Wimpey, having had any weight in the market before the war, and six being post-war formations (Callcutt, 2007). The number of volume housebuilders increased in these few years from an estimated 13 to 33 (Wellings, 2006). In this flourishing period for the industry, acquisitions began to play a part in the growth of housebuilders leading to the formation of expanded, regional businesses. At this time only the largest housebuilder, Wimpey (producing over 8,500 units a year in the mid 1960s -over four times that of its closest rival, MRCE), could be considered a national builder (Wellings, 2006), but it was a course that the rest of the industry was to follow such that by the late 1980s six of the volume housebuilders were national with a further six to eight more having strong regional coverage (Callcutt, 2007).

Although many firms went under in the 1970s and the number of volume housebuilders halved, those at the top of the industry grew, the top 10 increasing their market share to 28% by the end of the decade (Callcutt, 2007). By 1980 Barratt, a dedicated housebuilder, topped the industry tables, with an average output of over 10,000 units per year. It had a high public profile, being the first to advertise on television in the 1960s. Tom Baron, a prominent surveyor and operator in the housebuilding industry at that time is quoted by Wellings in a 1986 interview, talking about the strong influence of Lawrie Barratt, who “persuaded the rest of us that we are in a marketing business rather than a building business. He alone convinced the industry that it had to be market oriented” (Wellings, 2006, p. 86). Barratts’ profile from the 1970s has come to characterise the rest of the industry now.

From the late 1970s, Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government introduced a series of measures that saw a virtual end of the production of new local authority housing. Central to this shift was the 1980 Housing Act, that extended the right for tenants to buy council properties at heavily discounted rates. Local authorities were required to put their half of these sale receipts into paying off their debt rather than back into new building, and Government money was no longer channelled through local authorities to build new homes. The private housing market picked up again during this time, peaking in another boom at the end of the decade. The subsequent crash and recession in the early 1990s saw trading losses, reduction in land value and more business failures again (Wellings, 2006). But this time the top end of the industry was better supported by banks and saw less of the insolvencies. This led to a more managed restructuring of the industry such that half of the top 30 housebuilders of the 1980s were sold or run down by the end of the 1990s, but with none going into receivership (Callcutt, 2007). The trend of mergers and acquisitions continued, creating the shape of today's industry. The number of firms producing large outputs increased dramatically, those delivering over 1,000 units rising from 19 to 49 through the 1980s, although at this time the market share of the top 10 remained at around 28% (Wellings, 2006). Since then, the number of volume housebuilders has plateaued, though with proportionately more very large producers. NHBC figures published in the Office of Fair Trading study indicated that in 2006, 43% of the total housing output was by firms producing over 2,000 units a year, 26% by those producing between 101 and 2,000 units a year, 23% building up to 100 units per year and an estimated 9% by self-builders (OFT, 2008, p. 21). In parallel with the increasing market share of the largest housebuilders, housing production steadily dropped since the 1970s (MHCLG, 2019).

Notwithstanding the 1990s downturn, house prices progressively rose in the three decades to 2006, averaging a nominal 8.6% per year increase or real term 2.5% per annum increase since 1974 (Callcutt, 2007, p. 206). To put the increase in historical perspective, real house prices were about the same in 1960 as at start of century and then steadily rose at less than 1% per annum until 1995 and approximately 5% per annum after that, whereas house prices doubling in less than a decade from 1998 to 2007 (Monnery, 2011). Business analyst Neil Monnery identifies house price commentary as a 'recent obsession', noting "the major themes [before 1960] were slum clearance, improved sanitation, overcrowding, house-building programmes, the rise of building societies to facilitate house purchases by working people, and movement in construction costs." (2011, p. 158). The investment value of housing has been a significant change in the market in the last few decades. Home-ownership peaked in 2003 at 71% but is still relatively high (Osborne, 2016): an average of approximately 65% of UK households were owner-occupiers (ranging from a minimum of 50% in London to 70% in the south-east). Renting is split almost equally between private and social landlords (17% and 18% respectively) (Barton, 2017, p. 3,6).

1.2.3 The housing crisis and current picture of housebuilding

The UK housing crisis, marked by a prolonged period of insufficient supply and increasingly unaffordable prices, has been the subject of fierce debate and analysis across the industry, housing charities and mainstream press. The fact that there is a chronic shortage of supply is in little doubt. Whilst there are some dissenting voices, such as human geographer Danny Dorling (Dorling, 2014) and journalist Simon Jenkins (Jenkins, 2015) who claim that housing occupancy not shortage is the root problem of the housing crisis, there is general agreement that more housing is needed, and the shortfall in supply for decades has compounded the current problem. Debate tends to focus on numbers rather than quality or choice. In 2003 the Government

commissioned the economist Kate Barker to conduct a review of the problem of housing supply. She found that despite growing demand, housing supply was stalling, with completions in the decade to 2002 12.5% lower than the previous ten years and 2001 showing the lowest level of construction since the second world war (2004). Despite Barker calling for a need of supply of 220,000 homes per year to keep inflation at 1.1%, construction rates continued to fall, with only 108,190 completions in 2012-13, the lowest level since 1923 (HBF, 2013). In March 2014 the Home Builders Federation (HBF), reporting on the tenth anniversary of the publication of the Barker review of housing, reported a shortfall of one million homes from that recommended by Barker for adequate supply and economic welfare (HBF, 2014). Production has steadily increased since 2012-13, rising to 195,290 new completed homes (222,190 total net additions) in 2017-18 (MHCLG, 2018b), but the continual undersupply has increased Government net addition annual targets to 300,000 by the mid 2020s (Hammond, 2017).

The Government's Housing White Paper presented in February 2017, titled *Fixing Our Broken Housing Market* (DCLG, 2017a) is a clear statement of the continuing housing crisis. In January 2018 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) was renamed the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to reflect the Government's "renewed focus to deliver more homes" (W. Wilson & Barton, 2018, p. 3) and in October 2018 Oliver Letwin published his independent review of build-out rates, focusing on the issue of large sites, of over 1,500 units, in areas of high demand (Letwin, 2018).

The increased concentration of large housebuilders at the top of the industry has not abated and the number of smaller housebuilders, building 100 units or fewer per year, has continued to decrease. The Director of Economic Affairs at the Home Builders Federation, reported to the Select Committee on Economic Affairs in 2016 that the numbers of smaller housebuilders peaked in 1988 at around 12,200 firms but dropped to around 2,400 by 2014 (2016, p. 21). The top three housebuilders (Barratt, Persimmon and Taylor Wimpey) built 27% of the new homes 2015-16 (DCLG, 2017c, p. 5; Select Committee on Economic Affairs, 2016, p. 22). In 2016, over 60% of new private housing (which equates to over 80,000 homes (MHCLG, 2019)), was built by the top 10 housebuilders and the top five accounted for 38% of the output (Building, 2017; Rhodes, 2018). If the Government housing targets of 300,000 homes per year are met and the present patterns of volume housebuilder and suburban housing dominance of the output are kept, over one million new houses will be built over the next five years, the majority by just a handful of volume housebuilders.

The dominance of a small number of large players in the industry has been raised as a cause for concern and potential obstacle for delivery of the numbers needed (House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, 2017; Select Committee on Economic Affairs, 2016). The Select Committee of Economic Affairs Report *Building More Homes* described the market as having 'oligopolistic characteristics' (Select Committee on Economic Affairs, 2016, p. 8) in which smaller builders find it difficult to operate. The House of Commons Community and Local Government Committee report, *Capacity in the Homebuilding Industry*, published in April 2017 was unequivocal about the role of the large volume housebuilders in the delivery problem, stating "...if the country is to build the homes it so desperately needs, then we need to reduce the dominance of the high volume builders by encouraging a far greater mix of developers." (2017, p. 3). Letwin also concluded in his review that "the homogeneity of the types and tenures of the homes on offer on these sites, and the limits on the rate at which the market will absorb such homogenous products, are the fundamental drivers of the slow rate of build out" (Letwin, 2018, p. 6).

Concerns about the competitiveness of the housebuilding market, dominated as it is by such a small number of businesses, effected the 2008 Office of Fair Trading market study of homebuilding. This found no evidence of anti-competitiveness in the housebuilding industry, noting that new developments needed to compete with existing stock and other local new-build sites developed by different housebuilders⁴. But it also recognized that in a demand-driven, locally-focused market, choice is very limited for homebuyers. (For example a 2017 survey of homebuyers found that the majority searched for properties within 10 miles of family or their current home (62% and 50% respectively) (ZPG, 2017, p. 22)). Whereas design was raised as a feature for consideration in buying their new home by nearly a third of people in one consumer survey cited in the OFT report, location and price dominate homebuyers decisions (OFT, 2008, p. 47).

Profits for the market leaders have been increasing sharply since the 2008 market crash. The top five housebuilders' end of year profits increased to over £2 billion from 2010 to 2015 (Archer & Cole, 2016, p. 8). In their report on volume housebuilding performance trends, of outputs and profits, Tom Archer and Ian Cole directly expressed the relationship between the two between 2010 and 2015:

for the biggest five firms, housing completions rose by 48%, housebuilding revenue increased by 103%, while housebuilding profit before tax (PBT) increased by 473%, and end of year total profits increased by 484%. In short, the rate of growth in profit is ten times the rate of increase in completions (Archer & Cole, 2016, p. 18).

Profits have increased further since Archer and Cole's report. In 2016, the four largest housebuilders, all in the FTSE 100 (The Share Centre, 2018), had a combined turnover of nearly £14 billion and average profit of 21%, totalling over £2.8 billion (Building, 2017). Boosted by the Government help-to-buy scheme, profits reached record levels in 2018 (Kollewe, 2019): in this year Persimmon reported a profit of over £1 billion for 2018, equivalent to £66,265 from each of the 16,449 homes it sold last year with an average selling price of just over £215,000 (Neate, 2019).

The 2008 crash had a considerable impact on the housing market with 2009 seeing a significant fall in house prices and property sales almost halving (ONS Digital, 2015). The 2017 White paper on housing summarised the present situation thus:

In 21st century Britain it's no longer unusual for houses to "earn" more than the people living in them. In 2015, the average home in the South East of England increased in value by £29,000, while the average annual pay in the region was just £24,542. The average London home made its owner more than £22 an hour during the working week in 2015 – considerably more than the average Londoner's hourly rate. That's good news if you own a property in the capital, but it's a big barrier to entry if you don't (DCLG, 2017a, p. 9).

The picture that emerges in the history of the industry I have set out here is of a housing market led by the interests of big business. Other than concerted central Government investment in housing after the first and second world wars, that continued into the 1970s, private enterprise

⁴ An analysis showed that approximately 10% of all UK local planning authorities granted permission to a single firm to build 50% or more of their private new-build homes, and that this 'concentration' was more likely due to the size of certain sites in an area than the control of a large number of sites by a single housebuilder (OFT, 2008, pp. 58–59)

has dominated the market. This has had little need for the concerns of consumers, or the environments that are produced and sold, given the localised nature of the housing market and the decades of housing shortfall. This situation has been recognised as a problem by Governments for 20 years but as yet a fix has not been effected to mend this broken market.

1.3

The setting – suburban estates

Nearly two-thirds of households in England live in residential suburban areas, with a further 14% in rural residential areas (DCLG, 2014, p. 33). It is hard to separate perceptions of volume-built housing from its socio-spatial suburban context, as the twentieth century explosion of suburban development was primarily brought about by private housebuilders, that, as I set out in the last section, became increasingly dominated by volume housebuilders from the 1960s. In this section, I put the current spatial context of the typical volume-built house in a historical context, looking at the emergence of the suburb from Victorian and twentieth century development patterns, then consider the nature of the suburbs in the twenty-first century.

1.3.1 Historical context of suburbia

Cities have historically been dense, concentrated centres of people and activity, and until public transport enabled new models, were the necessary place of residence for those engaged in the myriad activities of the city – from commerce and governance to arts and entertainment. In pre-industrial cities, the prime location for the privileged nobles, clerics and merchants to live was in the centre, in the heart of the action. The attraction of a site and the status of occupants declined with further progression from the centre, even in small, walkable cities (Rudlin, Falk, & URBED, 1998).

Industrialization saw the massive increase in urbanization through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain. From 1800 to 1900, as the population grew threefold from around 11 million to 32 million, the urban population increased tenfold, from around 2 million to over 20 million (NHBC Foundation et al., 2015). This saw not just a huge increase in people living and working in the city, but also the factories and warehouses powering this industrial growth such that cities rapidly became overcrowded, polluted, unsanitary and often dangerous- places to avoid rather than covet, for any who had the choice. It was in response to the dense squalid nineteenth century city that key, dominant ideologies about the built environment emerged. They were sustained through to the end of the twentieth century, despite vastly changed urban conditions, and served to characterise the pattern of development of modern Britain: namely the conception of the city and high density as bad and the countryside and low density as good. From this ingrained position followed two distinctive trends: the reversal in the pre-industrial spatial hierarchy of the city centre through to the countryside; and the aspirational model of commuting – the separation of home and work – for those who had the choice (Rudlin et al., 1998). It is easy to caricature the so-called British love (and embrace) of suburbia as an intrinsic rather than conditioned response, but the seemingly inherent and enduring desire for and growth of the suburb as a place to live separate from work very much stems from the unmanaged growth and conditions of the Victorian industrial city (Oliver, Davis, & Bentley,

1994). The difference in France, for example, is arguably not due to national traits but to government policies and incentives that rebuilt the centre of Paris to attract the middle classes and so set up a different set of city and suburban associations (Rudlin et al., 1998).

Whilst suburbia and volume housebuilding are seen to go hand-in-hand, it did not begin that way and there are instances when they still do not. John Nash's 1824 Park Villas is considered to be London's first suburban development and a model for many of those that followed. Designed around picturesque principles and ideals of perceived informality, individuality and variety, they give a sense of accretive rather than planned development, that may, in Nash's words "produce the same effect to the eye as the High Street of Oxford so generally admired" (quoted in Watkin, 1986, p. 460). But although popularized by the Victorians, suburban withdrawal was not a nineteenth century invention, having been practiced by wealthy Tudor merchants who would leave the city for a country retreat, though more commonly for weekends than for daily commuting (Rudlin et al., 1998). The word 'suburb' originates in Middle English, from the Old French *suburbe* or Latin *suburbium*, (sub- 'near to' and urbs, urb- 'city') (OED, 2012). The tie to the urban centre is fundamental to the idea as well as to the word 'suburban'. The connection started with the availability of horses and carriages in the early nineteenth century, only affordable to the affluent, but by the 1880s, with the introduction of the omnibus, train, tram, bus and, in London, underground public transport systems the possibility of suburban living had extended to the working as well as the middle classes.

The exodus from the city for those who could afford to leave continued into the new century. This was despite the impact of the 1875 Public Health Act that introduced new sewerage systems and requirements for greatly increased standards of construction and conditions for housing (such as adequate street widths for daylighting homes and access to privies), and prompted a boom in the 1880s of speculatively built tracts of terraced and semi-detached housing on city outskirts, conforming to the new guidance, referred to as bye-law housing. This was the first time that plans had to be submitted and approved and the construction inspected by the local authority (Jensen, 2007), and resulted in a significant improvement in the quality of construction and living conditions for mass housing. The minimum standards of the guidance however became the maximum standards that developers provided and led to little variety of housing and uniform townscapes that were much derided for their monotony (Jensen, 2007).

The 1918 Tudor Walters Report, and subsequent 1919 (Addison's) Housing Act and Housing Manual, was a major influence on suburban housing development in interwar years (itself heavily influenced by Raymond Unwin who with Barry and Ethel Parker created the first Garden City in Letchworth in 1903, and who was a member of the committee). Although it was concerned with working class housing and set minimum standards for state-aided housing, it also became the reference for speculative builders. It recommended very low densities of 12 dwellings per hectare (eight in country), in cul-de-sac layouts that were cost effective to provide, with a minimum of 70ft between facing houses for adequate light. Significantly, there was no reference to flats in the report other than to say that no advocates for large blocks or tenements came forward and therefore they were not being addressed, though it conceded they may be necessary in some circumstances (Jensen, 2007).

Building in the suburbs exploded with the housing boom of the 1930s. This was characterized by unplanned ribbon development that was cheap and easy for private housebuilders to develop but cut off land behind the linear strips lining new roads and railways, limiting the options for later, managed suburban development. A 1935 Act restricted this short-termist practice but

with little effect until after the war, through the introduction of the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act (Jensen, 2007).

The advent of the private car broke the key link of suburban development to public transport networks and with the boom in car ownership from the 1960s (when household car ownership rose from just over 20% to nearly 50% over the decade (RAC Foundation, 2008)), more remote development connections became viable, giving rise to the one-road-in-one-road-out residential enclaves outside suburban centres that have become typical of volume housebuilder development. There was widespread urban decline in the second half of the twentieth century (both in population and employment), with the impact felt, once again, of those who had the choice to be able to leave the city. This exacerbated the problems of the inner city by ghettoising the deprivation and social problems in the centre and creating physical distinctions reflective of economic and social divisions. The private car no longer tied suburban residents to the city centre for employment. Out of town industrial estates, distribution centres, business parks and shopping centres changed the previously close structure of city and suburb to one of extended urban conurbations made up of sprawling suburbs independent from the metropolitan centre (Rudlin et al., 1998).

1.3.2 Suburbs in the twenty-first century

In the twenty-first century, UK cities have significantly grown in population, with few exceptions, and suburbs have remained static, or declined. This may be due to changes in demography (such as more students, immigrants, singles and childless couples), economic conditions (such as more city-centre investment and services and knowledge economy) and increased costs of petrol (Smith, 2013). Despite this turnaround, most larger cities have grown more slowly than the UK as a whole – so have effectively shrunk as a proportion of the national population since 1981 (London being the major exception, along with Bristol and Leicester). The smaller towns (under 165,000 population in 1981) tracked by the Centre for Cities all grew in this period, with only a small minority below the average national population growth rate (Elledge, 2016).

What the suburbs mean in the twenty-first century is not clear. Various terms have been devised to give a different spin to the form: the pejorative 'Subtopia' (English Heritage, 2007) - conveying the unsightly and impoverished elements of suburban sprawl; 'Metroreefs' – coined by a criminologist, Marcus Felson, to convey the idea of a divergent metropolitan expansion fused into a single low density spread-out, interconnected organism that sustains numerous free-moving activities, including crime (Felson & Eckert, 2015, Chapter 5.1.4); 'Exurbia' (English Heritage, 2007) – describing the wealthy area beyond the city suburbs; and the optimistic 'Supurbia' (Derbyshire & Blakeway, 2014) - imagining suburban tracts recast, with greater density through phased redevelopment and backland infill that enables the critical mass that can sustain more community functions, amenities and activities to recast the idea of the suburbs.

1.4

The product – volume-built houses

In this section I consider the external appearance of the volume-built house, which is the reference for the taste schism I am exploring. I first look at the characteristic features of a typical volume-built house façade that make it a recognisable style, then I investigate the extent of their prevalence in the new build housing market. Lastly, I try to gauge the design value of volume-built housing through an industry lens, the national Housing Design Awards. This evidence suggests firstly that volume housebuilder schemes are significantly underrepresented amongst award-winning schemes and secondly the house as a dwelling type is also underrepresented.

1.4.1 The style of the typical volume-built house

Unlike the new cars parked in their driveways, that vaunt modernity, volume-built houses outwardly hide their modernity, to the extent their tight budgets allow, gesturing instead to premodernist architectural motifs such as: small-paned subdivided windows, once the only technical possibility before a processing breakthrough in glass manufacturing, but now in modern upvc instead of the traditional wood; brick window arches, once a structural necessity before steel or reinforced concrete lintols could do the same job, but now stuck on in brick slips in front of the real structure; tiled pitched roofs on all elements exposed to the sky (porches, gables, main roof), once the only means of keeping a structure dry before the development of sheeting materials that could sit flat, but now with plastic bargeboards, guttering and downpipes.

Volume-built houses are distinctive in appearance and would likely to be generally recognised as such. In the table below I set out the features typical of their style, that I am calling housebuilder-vernacular, compared to what I am very broadly calling a modernist style (including what I term the modern-vernacular). This list was developed through observational analysis of contemporary volume-built houses and architect-designed modernist houses, based on my architectural experience. It is divided into the respective approaches towards four distinct categories in the two styles, of: architectural elements; embellishment and detail; composition; and materials. I will discuss the wider issue of style in chapter three, here I am setting out the distinguishing visual attributes characteristic of volume-built housing. In general, a combination of some of the listed features will be found in a domestic façade style. Many of these are not exclusive to one particular style category and therefore feature on both lists, though some are untypical of a style, which I have noted. What I consider to be the necessary attributes in defining the housebuilder-vernacular, are starred. These are: a pitched roof; windows subdivided into a grid of smaller panes; punched windows-in-wall; a predominance of wall over window in the façade; additive (as opposed to flush or minimalist) detailing; and overhanging eaves.

In this study I am focusing on the primary, street-facing, public façade of domestic buildings and the features listed appear on this primary façade. Many of the houses in the housebuilder-vernacular style will have more modern features on the private, rear façade, such as higher ratio of windows to wall, glazed patio doors and less decoration.

Housebuilder-vernacular style	Modernist style (including modern-vernacular)
Architectural elements	
*Pitched roof	Pitched roof - untypical
-	Flat roof
Chimney	Chimney - untypical
Porch	Porch
Clearly expressed window frame	Clearly visible window frame
-	Frameless windows
-	Ribbon windows
Sash windows	-
Dormer windows	Dormer windows
Panelled doors	Panelled doors- untypical
-	Plain doors
Embellishment and detail	
*Gridded windows (sub-divided into smaller panes)	-
Pilasters	-
Capitals	-
Cornices	-
Mouldings	-
Keystones	-
Different coloured brick	Different coloured brick
Bands and string courses	Bands and string courses
-	Flush or minimalist detailing
*Additive detailing	Additive detailing
Composition	
*Punched windows-in-wall	Punched windows-in-wall
-	Window walls
-	Ribbon windows
-	Large expanses of glass
-	Strip windows
Window proportions that do not typically exceed a width to height ratio of approximately 1.5:1	Window proportions that do not typically exceed a width to height ratio of approximately 1.5:1
*Predominance of wall over window in façade	Predominance of wall over window in façade - untypical
-	Predominance of window over wall in façade
*Overhanging eaves	Overhanging eaves - untypical
Symmetrical - typical	Symmetrical -untypical
-	Asymmetrical
Materials	
Brick	Brick
Render	Render
Terracotta tiles (in part)	Terracotta tiles
Timber (in part)	Timber
Mixed materials	Mixed materials
Roof - tiles	Roof - tiles

Figure 1.1 Table of features typical of housebuilder-vernacular and modernist styles.



Figure 1.2 left, examples of housebuilder-vernacular style houses; right, examples of modernist style houses.

The modern-vernacular style sits between the housebuilder-vernacular and modernist. Like the housebuilder-vernacular, it will have a pitched roof and punched windows-in-wall, but less predominance of wall over window in the façade and possibly no overhanging eaves. Critically, it will not have windows sub-divided into a grid of smaller panes. It may also have minimalist or flush detailing to windows and openings, and strip windows neither of which are found in the housebuilder-vernacular.



1.4.2 The market offer

I have set out above my categorisation of the typical style used by volume housebuilders. There are no formal, national statistics on house style, so to estimate the market offer and the extent that this style prevails, I undertook occasional searches on national property portals, *Rightmove* and *Prime Location*, between May 2015 and December 2018 for three-bedroom houses for sale in eight different locations across England. From a visual review of the primary façades shown on the website I categorised the houses that were in the housebuilder-vernacular style, based on the characteristics and necessary conditions set out above. A total of 852 properties were assessed across the eight searches. 719 of these properties were in the housebuilder-vernacular style, an average of 84%. The substantial majority of those not in this style were what I would call a stripped vernacular, with very few expressly modernist designs evident in the market.

Figure 1.3 example of modern-vernacular style

The details of the locations and results are set out in Appendix 1.

1.4.3 Award-winning house designs compared to the market

It is clear that volume housebuilders dominate the new-build housing market and that it is a market of little choice, dominated by the housebuilder-vernacular style out of city centres. I have also argued that a perennially demand-led market does not need to be consumer led. So there is little that the market can reveal about consumer choices and preferences. To what extent can volume-built housing be taken to represent good design? To consider this I look at one of the industry's indicators of good design – design awards.

I conducted a desktop study of the national Housing Design Awards (HDA), the longest running national design awards, set up in 1948 to reward better municipal post-war rebuilding, then opened up to market sale homes in 1960 by Harold Macmillan (Housing Design Awards, 2019). I compiled and examined the HDA Completed Project Winners over a 10 year period, the results of which are set out in Appendix 2. The aim of analysing this data was to get a sense of how representative the awards are of the new build housing market (namely, the top volume housebuilders and the type of dwellings) as an indication of perceived design value.

I chose the HDA not only because it is a long running specialist housing award scheme, but because it is promoted and judged by a wider group than the architectural profession and so takes a wider view than that of the architectural establishment. But whilst being more representative of the housing industry, it cannot be taken to represent the lay public view as it does not include lay assessors or residents in the judging panel. The HDA are promoted by five key industry bodies: the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), the Landscape Institute and the Chartered Institute of Architectural Technologists (CIAT), and are assessed by representatives from these organisations along with judges from Homes England, the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the Homebuilding Federation (HBF), the NHBC, the Good Homes Alliance and Design for Homes (Housing Design Awards, 2019).

In the 10 years 2007-2016, 14 Completed Project Winners, out of a total of 52 awards, were awarded to nine of the top 20 volume housebuilders. (Two of these were specific Large Housebuilder Awards). That's less than a quarter of the general awards (or just over a quarter including the specific Large Housebuilder Awards) going to the top 20 housebuilders who account for approximately three quarters of all new housing orders (Building, 2017; Rhodes, 2018).

All of the winners in this period were in the broad category of modernist style that I set out above; none were in a housebuilder-vernacular or traditional (the characteristics of which are discussed in chapter four) style. Eight of these (15%) were in a modern-vernacular style (also described above). Of these, only one, The Avenue in Saffron Waldon by Hill was by a top 20 housebuilder. The other housebuilder winners were in a modernist style, sometimes with vernacular-like elements, such as pitched tiled roofs on smaller scale house-based schemes. Seven of the 14 volume housebuilder winners were of large, urban flatted developments, all but one of which are in London. (Ref Appendix 1, Table 2). Just over half of award winners included houses in the scheme – some only in part- whereas three times as many houses are built than flats (DCLG, 2017b, p. 10)). Ref Appendix 1, Table 1. Just over a third of the winners were in suburban or rural locations, whereas over four fifths of existing households live in such locations (DCLG, 2014, p. 33) (though I do not have data on new build dwelling locations).

1.5 Conclusion

Housebuilding is an economically significant and profitable industry that is concentrated around a few large companies. The largest of these companies are in the FTSE 100 and are committed to good returns for shareholders over any public duty or placemaking. The primary business of volume housebuilders is land speculation, not the construction of houses, though they do both in the UK. Whilst different in many ways to everyday consumer goods, the houses that they build are products that sold in the general housing market and it is through their sale that the returns on land investments are made.

The shortage of housing supply relative to demand for over two decades has caused a sustained housing crisis, exacerbated by the global economic crash of 2008. Whilst reviews of the housebuilding industry have found it not to be anti-competitive, the new build housing market offers very limited product choice. In terms of architectural style it primarily offers what I have termed the housebuilder-vernacular style that is so named for its being distinctive to volume-built houses with an aesthetic that overtly references domestic English vernacular architecture. This is in contrast to a modernist or modern-vernacular style, the characteristics of which I have attempted to categorise for both. I estimate that 85-90% of the new build housing market outside of metropolitan centres is in the housebuilder-vernacular style. The top eight volume housebuilders now produce more than half of new homes. If representation in design awards is a guide, their output is not of high design quality and is bettered by other, smaller companies in the market with different delivery and business models.

The lower design quality of volume-built housing could suggest one reason for the schism in taste between architectural elite and the lay public, if design quality is rated more highly by

design professionals. In chapter seven I explore different emphases of appreciation between experts and nonexperts. The architectural establishment has long expressed a deep antipathy for the private volume-built housing, back to the 1930s when the first boom of interwar speculative development made its mark on a growing suburbia (Jensen, 2007; Oliver et al., 1994). Criticism has ranged from the suburban form itself, the monotony of the planning and sense of placelessness, to the size, layout, build quality and style (for example, in CABE, 2010a; RIBA, 2007, 2011). The lay public may be presumed to like the form, style and setting of volume-built houses given their predominance in the market, but I have made a case here for why this cannot be taken as an indicator. In chapter eight I set out an experimental preference study in order to better understand architect and lay public responses to the housebuilder-vernacular style and their aesthetic preferences with respect to a more modern-vernacular aesthetic. But firstly, in the next chapter I go on to consider the context of taste as a study, and the polarising nature of schisms.

2

A Taste Schism

As explored through what I have called a knowledge structure of taste in the introduction, taste has many threads, operating across numerous fields that involve hidden influences at play behind our judgements. To embark on an investigation of a schism in taste in the context of volume-built housing it is necessary to understand the wider territory of taste; and because I will be looking at the division between groups of people in respect of taste, it is also necessary to understand the implications of positioning and examining a phenomenon as a divide. In this chapter, through 'Locating Taste' I explore the etymology and connotations of taste as a term; briefly look at the key concepts of two important thinkers that have shaped the way aesthetic appreciation has been, and continues to be, understood – Immanuel Kant and Pierre Bourdieu; and end the section by defining taste as I use it in this thesis context. In the second section, 'Implications of a Schism', I consider the ramifications of casting an enquiry as a schism, looking at issues around binary classification. I also examine the nature of the two groups that I have identified as central to the taste divide – the architectural elite and the lay public. I end this section looking at some of the ways social scientists, market researchers and psychologists classify sub-groups of the public, recognising that it is too broad a category to capture a single position.

2.1

Locating Taste

Taste is nuanced, mediated and difficult to accurately locate, making it a slippery subject of enquiry. That there is neither a common language to describe and agree on visual responses and judgements to architecture nor a will to discuss them in current architecture culture (Samuel, 2018) also compounds the difficulties in understanding it. In this section I first consider taste in a historical context; give a brief overview of the influential work of Immanuel Kant on nineteenth century ideas of the operations of beauty and of Pierre Bourdieu on twentieth century understanding of the operations of taste; then set out what I understand taste to mean in the context of this thesis

2.1.1 Taste in a historical context

The notion of taste as being a tendency of a person has been implicit in the word since the fifteenth century (OED, 1989a). This subjective emphasis distinguishes it from *beauty*, which, since the fourteenth century, has been seen as the quality of a thing, or person (OED, 2013). Choice is also implicit in *taste*, absent in the more neutral *like* or *enjoy*, which brings the inference of discernment to its use. It was from the seventeenth century that this sense of discrimination became attached to the word (OED, 1989a). With the surge of wealth and a

burgeoning new class of rich merchants that commercial, global power brought in the eighteenth century to Britain came a rising anxiety within the aristocracy over disruption to the established order (Bragg, 2007). In this context, of what historian Amanda Vickery calls a 'tide of luxury' (Bragg, 2007), the role of taste was central in discriminating not just beauty but people and their status. The new social orders that the influx of wealth was facilitating engendered a fear in the establishment that any social structures based on a set of rules was open to the masses to appropriate, so the idea of taste as a sensibility that separated and in so doing, classified offered a means of protection of the hierarchies in society (Bragg, 2007). Taste became a battleground for cultural position. Alexander Pope's satire on the vulgarity of the eighteenth century country house, of great expense but bad taste, *Epistle to Burlington*, 1731, typified this. The Committee for the Inspection of Models for National Monuments set up by the Treasury in 1802 – the so called 'Committee of Taste' – which was effectively the first national design review (Carmona & Renninger, 2018), further illustrates the cultural currency of taste at this time.

It was from this time that the overtones of judgement and discernment of taste took on more loaded, partial meanings that can still be invoked in its use. As cultural theorist, Raymond Williams notes in *Keywords*, there is 'taste' and 'Taste':

the abstraction of a human faculty to a generalized polite attribute, emphasized by the capital letter and significantly associated ... with the notion of *Rules*, and elsewhere with *Manners*... The strong and active sense of **taste** had been replaced by the weak because habitual attributes of **Taste** (Williams, 1985, p. 314).

Capitalised *Taste* carries a sense of appropriateness that involves a double judgement process; the judgement of personal preference, expressed neutrally as a liking for one thing over another, overlaid with a social judgement of that preference such that it can be labelled as either *good* taste or *bad* taste. In this way taste can be thought of as oscillating between the personal and the collective – between individual (subjective) experience and social (positioned as objective) judgements. Bourdieu also notes the opposition between the 'scholastic' and the 'mondain' ('the effortlessly elegant') at the heart of taste discourse (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 62).

Applying taste to the study of housing is germane, given the pecuniary associations of both. The shift of taste from a quality associated with the senses in the thirteenth century to a more general one of discrimination in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries paralleled the rise in Britain's economic power that came with the huge growth of global trade. Taste became overtly aligned, and bound, with wealth as a means both to classify and to determine social (and cultural) discrimination (Bragg, 2007). Consumption and excess came to lie behind the predominant, cultural operation of taste. Consumption became a means of demonstrating taste and with that, status. Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929) was an influential voice on modern consumption and coined the terms 'conspicuous consumption' and 'pecuniary emulation'. In his now classic satirical critique of consumerism, *The Theory of The Leisure Class* (Veblen, 1899, pp. 43, 15), he examined the ties between consumption, taste and status and set out the thesis that conspicuous consumption of time and goods demonstrates dissociation from productivity and necessity of productive labour.

Consumption and the consumer demonstrably go hand-in-hand, and share the same Latin root, *consūmere*, meaning destruction, devouring, exhausting and waste (OED, 2009). It was not until the eighteenth century that the term *consumer* began to take on a neutral sense, through its new coupling with *producer*. This reflected a more abstract idea of a person with the capacity to

consume than a *customer* had- a term which had been in usage since the fifteenth century- who was implicitly already connected to a particular supplier or trader (Williams, 1985). Williams notes that having developed in parallel, taste cannot be delinked from the idea of the consumer in modern usage, with the consumer being the implicit observer who exercises and then displays their taste (1985). The link between taste and consumption is relevant in a study of taste in contemporary domestic architecture, even though it is obfuscated by the lack of aesthetic choice available, and the limitations of what effectively operates as a localised series of markets (as raised in the last chapter).

2.1.2 The legacy of Kant and Bourdieu

Whilst I will not attempt a comprehensive historical overview of the philosophical and sociological study of aesthetics and taste, two key figures who have made a lasting impact in the understanding of beauty and taste do require some introduction: eighteenth century philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) who is central to modern philosophy and continues to influence many fields from ethics to aesthetics (Rohlf, 2018) and twentieth century sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), whose groundbreaking research on the links between social class and power and taste continues to inform cultural theory from gender studies to education (Susen & Turner, 2011). Despite nearly two centuries lying between them, such is the centrality of Kant's aesthetic theory over this time that Bourdieu stated in his preface to the English language edition of *Distinction*, his major empirical and theoretical thesis on taste, the 'not immoderate ambition' (p. xv) to give:

a scientific answer to the old question of Kant's critique of judgement, by seeking in the structure of the social classes the basis of the systems of classification which structure perception of the social world and designate the objects of aesthetic enjoyment (Bourdieu, 2010, p. xv).

With this work, Bourdieu opened up the concept of taste to sociological scrutiny (Keijo Rahkonen in Susen & Turner, 2011) and challenged the heart of Kant's thesis of the aesthetic judgement.

2.1.2.1 Kant on beauty and aesthetics

Theories and philosophies of beauty go back as far as the foundations of Western philosophy, but it was not until Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, the last of his three Critiques, published in 1790, that questions of the nature of beauty and art became an integrated, independent and systematic philosophy, which came to form the basis of modern aesthetic study. Whilst art was only incidental to Kant in so far as it is something that may be beautiful, his main interests being the beauty of nature, Kant's framework for considering aesthetic judgement became the bedrock for subsequent art theory (Hammermeister 2002).

The term aesthetic was first used in its Latin form *aesthetica* by Baumgarten, in his 1750 and 1758 publications developed from his academic teaching on aesthetics - the first philosophical teachings on aesthetics (Hammermeister, 2002) - derived from the Greek *aesthesis* (OED, 2011). In Greek, it referred to sense perception as material and distinct from thought (Williams, 1985). In the *Critique of Judgement* Kant brought the wider sense to the term now attributed to it, of the conditions of sense experience (Williams, 1985) and elevated aesthetic judgement to the same levels as cognitive and moral judgements that were the traditional preoccupations of philosophy (Ginsborg, 2014). Kant approached the philosophy of beauty through that of

judgement, differentiating the beautiful from the agreeable and the good through the judgement of taste:

...if [someone] pronounces that something is beautiful, then he expects the very same satisfaction of others: he judges not merely for himself, but for everyone, and speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things. Hence he says that the **thing** is beautiful, and does not count on the agreement of others with his judgement of satisfaction because he has frequently found them to be agreeable to his own, but rather **demand**s it from them. He rebukes them if they judge otherwise, and denies that they have taste, though he nevertheless requires that they ought to have it; and to this extent one cannot say, "Everyone has his special taste." This would be as much as to say there is no taste at all, i.e., no aesthetic judgement that could make a rightful claim to the assent of everyone (Kant, 1790, p. 98, translator's emphasis, in line with original text).

For the agreeable, however, he said "everyone is content with their own judgement" (p.97), because it is agreeable to them and not assumed to be so for everyone. He uses the examples of liking a colour or particular instrument to illustrate this, concluding, "the principle **Everyone has his own** taste (of the senses) is valid" (p.97). The key difference of the beautiful, he claims, is in its universal as opposed to general validity.

The tussle between universal beauty and subjective taste, is at the heart of Kant's thesis on aesthetic judgement. Beauty, for Kant, is neither a divine property of an object (in the Platonic tradition) nor the divine right of appreciation of an authoritative elite (the standard eighteenth century conception of taste; Hume, Shaftesbury, Addison) but a universal, subjective experience that oscillates between the faculties of imagination and reason, neither of which dominate. This he called 'free play' (p. 102). As with moral judgement, he considered 'pure' (as opposed to 'empirical' p.108) aesthetic judgement to be universal and to rely on disinterested pleasure, stating: "All interest presupposes a need or produces one; and as a determining ground of approval it no longer leaves the judgement of the object free" (p.95). I discuss Kant's aesthetic thesis further in chapter seven with respect to the values attached to judgement and pleasure.

2.1.2.2 Bourdieu on taste and class

Kant's emphatic contention that taste for beauty is *demand*ed of others and any dissent is the cause of judgement of them, is a central theme of Bourdieu's seminal work on taste as the active site of class-based power relations and social judgements, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, (first published in French, *La Distinction*, in 1979 and in English in 1984). But unlike Kant for whom the appreciation of beauty was universal, for Bourdieu, the ability to appreciate aesthetics is tied to social class and power, accessible only to those who have been exposed to the tools necessary to decipher its codes – the 'cultural nobility' (p. xxv).

In his analysis and theoretical interpretation of large empirical ethnographic data surveys of French cultural preferences undertaken between 1963 and 1968, Bourdieu refers to taste as 'manifested preferences' (2010, p. 49). He highlights the fact that taste (one's own) and tastes (those across a society) are necessarily relational and operate through divergence - "the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference" (p. 49). The inevitability is reference to the discriminating class root of taste. This, he states, is perpetuated through a process of exclusion that unites those that share 'legitimate' (p. xxiv) taste for 'high aesthetics' (p. xxix) and separates those that do not have access to it, and in so doing feeds 'class endogamy' (p. 49).

Bourdieu refers to “a circular mode of thought” (p. 46) and to the use of language of associations, analogies and references that cast a “complex web of factitious experiences” (p. 45). Quoting Proust he says: “One finds an actress’s robe or society woman’s dress beautiful, not because the cloth is beautiful but because it is the cloth painted by Moreau or described by Balzac.” (p. 46, from *Pastiches et Melanges*). These taste preferences, he asserts, masquerade as ‘natural’ (p. 49), and so consequently cast others automatically as unnatural, observing that “the most classifying privilege thus has the privilege appearing to be the most natural one” (p. 48):

At stake in every struggle over art there is also the imposition of an art of living, that is, the transmutation of an arbitrary way of living into the legitimate way of life which casts every other way of living into arbitrariness (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 49).

I refer to the concepts developed by Bourdieu throughout the thesis⁵, in particular ideas of *cultural capital* - the symbolic elements, or assets, (such as way of dressing and speaking, education, tastes) acquired by a combination of formal education and informal social education that comes from being in a particular social class, and *habitus* - ingrained dispositions and cultural behaviours that are seemingly natural but in fact learnt- the physical embodiment of cultural capital. The concepts of *fields* – socially formed environments (defined by location, profession and class), and *symbolic violence* (or symbolic power) – the everyday modes of engrained socio-cultural domination that manifests in maintaining social hierarchies (I. Buchanan, 2010b, 2010c; Scott & Marshall, 2009) are also present, but not explicitly discussed, in my arguments.

2.1.3 Defining taste

The term *taste* is apposite in this study as it emphasises the response to something rather than the qualities of the thing itself, thereby keeping the attention on experience and avoiding the philosophical mire of the question of innate beauty. But it does not come with a ready, clean definition that is universally employed, so requires a clarification of my intended meaning.

I use taste here to mean personal visual preference; essentially, what someone likes looking at, but with a hint of predilection - be it maybe from habit, inclination or other bias - that distinguishes it from the simpler, anodyne, and potentially haphazard *like* or *preference*. The suggestion of tendency in taste brings a suitable sense of consistency without fixity that is valuable in this thesis context.

Commercial power has waxed and waned, wealth grown and redistributed and social orders expanded and blurred since taste became an established mechanism in the repertoire of social classification. In this time it has become assimilated as an accepted cultural means for assigning and demonstrating status and identity. “Taste classifies” says Bourdieu, “and it classifies the classifier” (2010, p. pxxix). Whilst I use taste to mean personal preference without the rules or judgements of society attached to it, the wider social ordering commonly associated with it

⁵ References to Bourdieu are mainly in chapter seven with respect to the value of expert judgement, and also in chapters five and six with respect to the illusion of ideology, and the impact of familiarity and associations on judgements.

inevitably carries a residue that brings a welcome, lively tension to the use of the word. This is particularly resonant in the context of the elite-popular schism that I am exploring in this thesis.

2.2 Implications of a Schism

Casting the disparity in taste as a schism reinforces the cultural elite-popular differences highlighted by Bourdieu and risks unnecessarily divisive, reductionist classification, but helps to show up essential differences in position through which a better understanding of the whole can be gained. Related to this is the consideration of who the divided groups actually are, and the pitfalls of simplifying a group as large as the lay public. So I look in the last part of this section at different models of psychographic profiling that may be a useful means of thinking about the disproportionately large group of *other* whose commonality is only that of being outside of the architectural establishment.

2.2.1 The benefits and pitfalls of dualistic classification

To classify is human (Bowker & Star, 2000, p. 1).

In *Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences* (2000) Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, researchers in information infrastructures, look at systems of classification and the role of invisibility in their processes, through which hidden biases emerge potentially to shape and order social interactions. They reveal how classification systems are embedded within social and ethical agendas and histories. Gombrich too, in his reflection on the role of the normative in art criticism (1966), reminds us of the inclination not just to classify, but to assume an objectivity in doing so, declaring: "Man is a classifying animal, and he has an incurable propensity to regard the network he has himself imposed on the variety of experience as belonging to the objective world of things" (Gombrich, 1966, p. 82). It is convenient and helpful to categorise; to look for shared characteristics and for distinctions that will break down the collective jumble of everythingness to parcels of somethingness as an aid in the comprehension of a complex issue. The risk lies in solidifying the conceptual convenience and simplicity of category distinctions into concrete fixes.

The tendency to polarise classifications has a deep cultural antecedent. It is a key concept in structuralism, that asserts that binary opposition is inherent in language (Saussure, 2013 [1916]). Structuralism itself owes much to Hegel and his notion of the dialectic (Maybee, 2016), taken up by Marx in his viewing of history as class struggle. Psychologists have since shown that we think relatively (Ariely, 2009). Binary opposites feature in every aspect of our lives: from the simple clarity of yes/no and left/right to the more loaded moral complexities of right/wrong, left-wing/right-wing, guilty/not-guilty, winners/losers. Binary oppositions are both relational, each of the two deriving meaning in relation to the other, and exclusive, the two unable to co-exist (I. Buchanan, 2010a). These characteristics both lend the opportunity for clarity and risk the danger of simplicity.

Dualistic classification is necessarily reductive, but this can be useful for the effective distillation of key characteristics and issues, understood through essential difference. Polarizing of

concepts also inclines debate towards the extremes, prone to crude stereotyping through a focus on the black and white ends of the spectrum rather than the various shades of grey between them. In this way, binary classifications can tend towards caricature through the focus of striking characteristics that are exaggerated, at the expense of more subtle features that may be overlooked. This can be employed to great effect in polemic argument, as demonstrated, for example, in Pugin's *Contrasts*, that I discuss in chapter five. And as binary tags can be easy to understand and remember, they have a tendency to stick, such that the subtleties in the tonal mid-range can be overlooked or forgotten. Diametric positions can then become more entrenched, to the extent that they can come to be thought of as true, seen through the binary lens in which they are viewed. And so it is that this useful, short-hand organisational method to understand an issue carries the risk of producing nothing but short-sighted half-truths. (The tendency of the brain to jump to conclusions and be taken in by illusions of truth is taken up in chapter six).

2.2.2 Casting the divide – the architectural elite and the lay public

By naming differences in visual preferences as a divide of two groups, rather than their judgement, I am clearly suggesting that the nature of the taste divide is directly due to the disparities in the groups; that being the architectural elite gives a common set of taste principles, arising from their particular Bourdieusian field, that are distinct from those held outside that group. I have framed it in this way to keep the focus on the contrast between the two groups and to keep open the divergencies of judgement in taste that arise from these two positions. To set the research question as a study of attitudes to pseudo-vernacular housing, for example, would have put the emphasis on the pseudo-vernacular aspect of volume-built housing in which some of the core distinctions between elite and popular attitudes that I explore (such as the division of expertise in chapter seven) may not have surfaced. But to characterise the division as being between these two generalised groups does not of course limit the taste preferences to them. The split is not absolute, or exclusive, either in affiliation or in opinion, for not all architects will share the elite position that I paint, nor will those views be limited to them.

I use the term elite in this thesis to mean the architectural elite; the architectural establishment extended to include the cognoscenti: non-architects, that comment on, commission, support and actively engage with the profession. It is an elite defined in status by architectural expertise and standing, as opposed to wealth. I use the term to conjure both the idea of a group claiming a certain superiority, and the influence, power and status such a group has within its sphere (whilst noting that the reach of the sphere in society as well as in the construction industry has diminished over the last decades). The architectural establishment, then is a group exercising architectural cultural hegemony, represented in the work and opinions featured in architectural magazines and books, the buildings recognised with design awards, the teachings passed on in architecture schools and the ethos of the professional body of architects, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). It does not encompass all architects and represents the tastes and approach of the orthodoxy not of individual architects.

Just as categorizing the architectural elite necessarily distils the voices of many to that of the typical, so too with its counterpart, the lay public. *The public* are a far more diverse, amorphous group than the establishment and it would be erroneous and naive to think of this group as singular. Indeed some have the training and design skills that may bring their visual sensibilities close to those of the establishment *other*. Using the definite article as a prefix to a group risks a distorting reductionism, by attributing a singularity to the group- mistaking the generalised

reference for the particular instance and thereby assuming a false commonality and uniformity to the individuals that collectively make the group. This has been made very evident in recent discourses on Populism in which references to *the people* assume a singular position; a collection of cookie-cutter individuals that can be described and understood as one (Müller, 2016).

So whilst I am using the categories of architectural elite and lay public as a means of interrogating the topics being investigated to better understand broad principles of similarity and difference across a wide field, it is not to confuse the general with the particular and to substitute individuals with their umbrella group classification. The labels define useful roles for the included and excluded in a cultural division. They are not limited, with a multitude of other label-roles fitting and defining the individuals to whom they can be applied, but are merely pertinent to the question in hand.

2.2.2.1 Psychographic Profiling and Segmentation Models

Considering the lay public as either one singular body or 60-odd million distinct individuals that inhabit the UK, are equally fraught and unhelpful. Social scientists tend to cluster people in terms of demography, in terms of age, gender and so on. In this thesis I am primarily focused on the demographic of occupation in relation to architecture, though my evidence-based preference survey, set out in chapter eight, also considers the demographics of age, gender and location along with broad occupation categories. There are other demographic categories that could be valid viewpoints of taste, such as ethnicity and education, that show clear disparities in homeownership (the primary volume-built housing tenure) which may indicate a bearing on taste preferences, but which fall outside my viable scope for consideration. There is, for example, an overall lower proportion of home ownership -as represented by the household reference person (HRP)-in ethnic minority households (48% average and 35% for black owner occupiers) compared to white (67%), although Asian homeownership is similar (66%) (DCLG, 2014); and there are higher levels of homeownership in households with higher educational attainment, a US study indicating a difference of nearly 90% in homeownership rates between those of the lowest (without high school degrees) and highest (professional post graduate qualifications) educational levels (Young, 2017).

A number of psychographic profiling and segmentation models have been developed that are used to classify attitudes, values and personality types through a more complex set of considerations than straightforward demographics. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to undertake a comprehensive or detailed review of all the various models that have been developed, but it is useful to be aware of some of the ways in which psychologists, academics, market researchers and economists break down the singular mass of *the public* into affiliated clusters, which could have alignment with broader psychosocial patterns that lie within taste judgements.

The Five-Factor Model of personality traits, often referred to as 'the Big 5' is a descriptive taxonomy of personality dimensions commonly used in big data analysis for marketing targeted at particular personality profiles (Clark & Çallı, 2014). It is a statistically (rather than theoretically) driven, vocabulary-based model, derived from factor analysis of clusters of associated personality descriptors. It identifies five dominant traits with associated tendencies and behaviour characteristics: Extraversion -sociable and lively; Agreeableness - friendly and considerate; Conscientiousness- determination and responsibility; Neuroticism- anxiousness and depression; and Openness - curiosity and preference for novel experiences. There have been studies using this model to identify dominant traits in geographical areas (Rentfrow, Jokela, &

Lamb, 2015), and in aesthetic preferences (Abu-Obeid & Ibrahim, 1999; Chamorro-Premuzic, Reimers, Hsu, & Ahmetoglu, 2009; Cook & Furnham, 2012).

A Three-Factor Model, PEN (Psychoticism, Extraversion and Neuroticism), was also developed, by Hans Jurgen Eysenck, as a distillation of the Big 5 personality dimensions into three temperament dimensions - hence also known as 'The Giant 3' (Scholte & De Bruyn, 2004)– with Conscientiousness and Agreeableness considered as aspects of Psychoticism and Openness (sometimes referred to as Intellect in the Five-Factor model) also partly incorporated under Psychoticism and partly separated as a cognitive rather than behavioural attribute, and assessed using other methods such as IQ measures (The Personality Project, 2018). Whilst these personality-trait models are used to identify (and target) similar types of people, they are more directed at individual temperament than social conditioning.

The Values Modes model combines empirical data analysis with a theoretical model derived from psychologist, Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 2013 [1943]). It was created in 1973, by Pat Dade and Les Higgins and is now the trademarked tool of company Cultural Dynamics Strategy & Marketing who advise many organisations and the three main UK political parties on brand positioning, targeted marketing and campaigning. The model considers Maslow's hierarchy of needs as three primary, broad motivational drives: sustenance, outer-directed and inner-directed, which inform the characteristics of its three umbrella groups: *the Settler*, *the Prospector* and *the Pioneer*, into which sit a total of 12 value modes (Cultural Dynamics, 2018). The emphasis of the labelling in this model is more role-based than that of the Big 5 model, which is more dominant tendency-based.

Variations of the tripartite role-focused attitude-type model include Robert X Cringely's description of companies as *Commandos*, *Infantry* and *Police* (Cringely, 1996), borrowed and renamed by Simon Wardley for understanding company organisation structures through the types: *Pioneers*, *Settlers* and *Town Planners* (Wardley, 2015). More recently journalist and author David Goodhart devised the labels *Anywheres*, *Somewheres* and *Inbetweeners* (Goodhart, 2017) to describe the British electorate. These three-way classifications emphasise dualistic difference whilst also introducing a middle-ground.

There is a general caveat applicable to all of these models that estimate plausible segmentations of the population into identifiable mindset groups; none is proven and all have flaws. But they do challenge any un-conscious assumption that there is just one type of person represented by *the public*.

2.2.2.2 The role of place in personality models

The recurrent situational vocabulary in some of these population categorising models is notable in the context of a thesis about housing. The relationship to place in these models is used to describe a core attitudinal approach to values and motivations beyond the spatial realm. The imagery that is conjured by the descriptors of Settlers and Somewheres feels strongly connected to, and rooted in place. Whereas Prospectors and Anywheres feel disconnected from and free from the ties of a particular place. Whether they are describing outlook, drives or values, the vivid distinctions created in these particular models also suggest categorising principles of being most comfortable or effective either out there finding new things and places; staying home and nesting; or trying to make a nest out there once the trail has already been blazed.

Goodhart's Somewhere-Anywhere taxonomy introduces a political, cultural division not around party politics, but in the manifestation of need for connection and belonging. Anywheres - the

educated, professional, socially mobile he describes as having ‘achieved identities’ (2017, p. 3), are individualistic and trans-locational, finding identity and belonging not in set, stable places but in fluid, shared ideas and ideals⁶. Somewheres on the other hand, who have ‘ascribed identities’ (2017, p. 3), are group-minded and find connection locally, through spatial and temporal continuity, security and fixity. The division between the architectural elite and the lay public seems to resonate with the divisions Goodhart describes between Anywheres and Somewheres, that extend beyond Bourdieu’s divisions of cultural capital into a spatial realm that is connected with a sense of identity.

2.4 Conclusion

An advantage of considering taste preferences rather than, say, ideas of beauty is its openness to the wider affective scope a response to a building can provoke. It extends further than opinions about beauty and ugliness, embracing, for example, feelings of comfort, familiarity, unsettledness, energy, calm, neutrality, security, uplift, awe, fear, power, order, pride and many others. Another positive aspect of the term taste, apposite to this study, is its emphasis on the response to something rather than on the thing itself. I will return to this in detail in chapter seven in considering the different targets of appreciation of experts and nonexperts. Being allied with appreciation, with the fluid and conditioned as opposed to the static and intrinsic, taste also keeps the attention on perceived evaluation rather than inherent worth thereby avoiding the philosophical mire of the question of innate beauty – although it is perhaps also in this slippery association with experience that much of the dismissal of taste as a subject of enquiry, and worthy of debate, lies.

Kant’s theory of aesthetic judgement as subjectively universal still captures the frisson between the personal and the collective in taste. Bourdieu’s concepts of field, habitus and cultural capital bring a critical socio-cultural dimension to this understanding of taste that is germane to this enquiry into the differences between a niche group that occupies a very distinct field and commands high cultural capital, and the wide mix of the lay public that sits outside it. These issues will thread through my exploration of themes of influence on taste in Part II.

The drive to categorise and the clarity in understanding it can bring is evident. But the risks of intransigent reductive thinking that simple binary classification can bring are also clear. Binaries can help to shed light on a position by seeing it in relation to its opposite and thereby accurately locate the tipping point of contention, but I heed the axiom that “you can never get more out of your classification than you put into it” (Gombrich, 1966, p. 88). Binary classification is an effective means to structure information but not necessarily as valuable as an end of information in itself. In using the notion of a schism in this thesis I aim to use the directness of the binary classification of taste differences as a means to better understand the issues at play, in order to expose and deepen the debate. I also intend, in the concluding chapter, to create a

⁶ A further place-based sub-group category of *the public* is the Transnational Capitalist Class (TCC) (Sklair, 2002), that has resonances with Goodhart’s Anywheres, in being cosmopolitan and unconstrained by place boundaries. Sociologist Leslie Sklair has looked at the link between this wealthy elite international group and the trend of global iconic architecture by *starchitects* and their derivatives, that promotes increasing corporate dominance and consumerisation of cities (Sklair, 2017).

more pluralistic model of the taste schism made of a field of overlaid and interconnected binaries. In this way I hope to benefit from the clarity of dualistic categorisation, but not be limited by it.

Whilst it is beyond the purview of this thesis to investigate the validity of personality-based categorisation models and explore any concurrence they share with the occupational demographic split I have set up, the implications on taste differences with respect to place-focused models such as Goodhart's Anywheres and Somewheres would be rich territory for further research on taste; contrasting the ideals and values of the two groups and studying any correspondence they may have with aesthetic preferences.

3

The Contention of Style

When someone speaks of their taste in architecture, it is generally taken to mean their taste for this or that style. To understand the operations of taste in contemporary domestic architecture one needs to appreciate the role and place of style. Style has been contentious in architectural culture for a hundred years. Le Corbusier begins his first of 'Three Reminders to Architects' (1970, p. 25) in his influential polemic, *Vers Une Architecture* with the following declaration:

Architecture has nothing to do with various 'styles'. The styles of Louis XIV, XV, XVI or Gothic, are to architecture what a feather is on a woman's head; it is sometimes pretty, though not always, and never anything more (Le Corbusier, 1970, p. 27 [1927]).

And to speak of style is still provocative in current architectural culture. "How many architects would aspire to inclusion in a style defined by another?" asks architect and theorist, N.J. Habraken (2005, p. 28) in his examination of the role of the professional architect. It is thought to be too reductivist - belittling of complexity and richness. An example of the consequences of the categorising tendency discussed in last chapter. But it has not always been so. In this chapter I look briefly at the meaning, role and history of architectural style to better understand this present position. In 'What is style?', I first reflect on what style means. In 'The vernacular, or unstyled', I consider what I suggest is the obverse of styled, the vernacular, which in its generic sense is by definition unstyled, before moving to the margins of this territory and what I call the housebuilder-vernacular. In 'Historical context of architectural style' I give a brief overview of the changing role of styles in British architecture, concentrating on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I then finish, in 'Stereotypes and branding', by considering what style means in architecture today.

I take the position that style is the main visual distinguishing element that calls forth a taste judgement, but I acknowledge that it is not the only aspect of a judgement. Form and typology; quality of materials and construction; performance and use will also be interpreted and judged in looking at a façade and will also have an impact on our taste preference to greater or lesser extent. However, I would argue that these factors cannot be looked at independently from style. Their detailed investigation is beyond the scope of this thesis, but would be valuable topics for follow-on study.

3.1

What is style?

Since Aristotle, who first posed the question...many philosophers and philosopher-artists have regarded form as the essential, the higher, the

spiritual component of art, and content as the secondary, imperfect component insufficiently purified to attain full reality (Fischer, 1963, p. 116).

Jean Luc Goddard has acerbically described style as “just the outside of content, and content the inside of style” (Roud, 1967, p. 13), likening the style-content connection to the outside-inside relationship in the human body. In tapping the evocative analogy of the inseparable skin and substance of a body he situates style as form *in relation to* function rather than independent from it. But what the body analogy, and its concern with innateness misses, is the intentional aspect of style, more readily evoked by the clothes that cover the body. Clothes respond to the body’s size and shape but also can distort, accentuate and hide its form through purposeful intent and choice. In architecture, styles create and manipulate formal elements and attributes to distinguish the appearance of a building. In this process meanings are evoked through association and reference.

There are a host of meanings for the word ‘style’, many of them subtly interconnected. As a noun, it can mean both the form of appearance of a product, as well as the way in which something is done; the prevailing fashion in dress, as well as a refinement of dress and a fashionable mode of existence; the manner of outward expression of something as different to its intrinsic content; and a distinctive, formal mode of expression in the arts. Further distinct meanings include: the form of address of a person; the mode of punctuation and design in printing; part of a flower in botany; a descriptor of a pointed structure in zoology; a stylus; and a sundial (Collins English Dictionary).

Just as with taste, there is a mix of objective description and subjective judgement in these definitions; style then is also not always a neutral word, as it can carry a weight of interpretation and opinion, of discrimination and belief. As a verb, it is less nuanced: to design, shape or tailor, or to adapt. The connecting threads across these meanings are intent, manner and expression with respect to appearance, all underscored by the implicit capacity to exercise choice. A tree, for example, is classified by type – be it family, genus, or species- not style, as a tree cannot choose its leaves or fruits in the way that we can choose our clothes and haircut. We may intervene however, and style a tree by, say, training it into an espalier or shaping it in the form of a peacock.

The element of choice is a necessary condition for both style and taste. To exercise taste is to exercise choice, and to perform or make in a style is to choose the way in which to perform or make. That is not to say that, in principle at least, taste is only exercised in matters of style. We can have a taste preference for apple trees over oak trees. And indeed, we may have a taste preference for the unstyled and *natural*; for a face without make-up, a vista without artifice or a tree that has not been wrought. Or, for a natural *style*, perhaps even unwittingly mistaking it for the unstyled; for discreet make-up, picturesquely constructed vistas, or subtle tree pruning, all of which we may think enhance rather than override the subject’s natural beauty. There is very little in our everyday surroundings today that lies beyond the reach of human intervention. Decisions have been made to determine the forms that we encounter such that one could say that most of our visual choices involve style, even if ill-considered or poorly executed. They are all designed, and therefore all styled.

Style has held a varying significance in architectural appreciation through history. Whilst always being present as a conscious expression of architectural built form, style has meant different things in different periods of architectural culture, that I will discuss later. The modern age of architecture, by which I mean the age defined and marked by Modernism, does not sit

comfortably with notions of style as a meaningful and defining characteristic of architecture. I will discuss the paradox of Modernism as a style later. The term is not commonly used in current elite architectural debate, but that is not to say that matters of style are either absent or immaterial in this modern age – where there is formal intention there is style – only that it is not explicit.

3.2

The vernacular, or unstyled

At its simplest, style in architecture refers to the manner of formal expression of a building design that frames its outward appearance. The unstyled, that which is built aesthetically unselfconsciously, is generally classified as vernacular architecture, sometimes called ‘architecture without architects’, ‘unpedigreed’ architecture (Rudofsky, 1965), or ‘folk’ architecture (Brunskill, 2004, p. 23). That is not to say there is no aesthetic consideration at all, but that it is secondary to the functional needs of the building and not a systematised approach to formal composition. In this section I explore the distinction between the styled and unstyled, then look at the thresholds of vernacular architecture before situating the unstyled-looking style of the housebuilder-vernacular.

3.2.1 The styled vs the unstyled

‘Vernacular’ first came into English use in 1601. Its origins lie in the Latin *vernāculus* meaning domestic, native, indigenous; and *verna* meaning a home-born slave. Used to describe both language and arts including architecture that are peculiar to a place (a country, district or locality) (OED, 2015b), the word implies ordinary and domestic use and is associated with character, innateness and unselfconsciousness. In 1821 the verb ‘vernacularize’ was introduced: “To render or translate into the native speech of a people; to make vernacular” (OED, 2015c). Architecturally this would be equivalent to styling in the vernacular to give the appearance of ordinary, unselfconscious character. This coincides with a time of acute consciousness of style and style choices, which will be discussed further later.

Vernacular architecture is ordinary, uncontrived, indigenous and anonymous. It is also considered - rooted in place, material, need and tradition. In the words of Peter Buchanan, its “seemingly spontaneous rightness was arrived at almost unconsciously, yet was also the distilled wisdom of centuries of slow trial-and-error improvements. Not designed on paper, vernacular buildings are a direct, first-hand response to what pre-exists” (P. Buchanan, 2012, p. 82). Although its classification is by the knowing cognoscenti. Vernacular architecture is the product of tradition, rather than fashion, and of received wisdom, rather than invention, it “does not go through fashion cycles. It is nearly immutable, indeed unimprovable, since it serves its purpose to perfection” (Rudofsky, 1965, fig. 1).

The distinction between the styled and unstyled is rooted in the age-old opposition between the manmade and natural, the tainted and the pure, or civilized and base, depending on your perspective. The vernacular, and so too the styles that evoke it, represents the idea of a natural way, an evolved architecture that conjures the inherently true and appropriate. This is in

contrast to the determined will and control over nature represented by the styled, that Brunskill labels ‘polite’(2004, p. 23) architecture (though it might have been more apt to call it bold).

Buchanan differentiates instead between ‘historic’ (2012, p. 82) and vernacular architecture, situating them against a number of polarities that expand on the basic differences set out by Brunskill. These are, respectively: in town versus in country; with versus without architects; abruptly changing versus slow-evolving; distantly created versus locally formed; representational of status versus representational of use; and rhetorical and functional (P. Buchanan, 2012). Intentionally styled and unintentionally style-less could be added to this list. Whilst being clearly identifiable and distinct in appearance the vernacular is, effectively style-less in intention. It has, however, spawned derivative styles in its name, that intentionally deploy formal elements found in originally in-formal, functionally driven buildings.

Taking Buchanan and Brunskill’s distinctions between the unstyled vernacular and the styled polite/historic, along with further associated oppositions that can be related to them- some of which I have touched on above- I have derived the following list of suggested attendant values and meanings connected with the binary positions of the styled and the unstyled:

Styled		Unstyled
Polite/Historic		Vernacular
Form		Content
Sacred		Temporal
Special		Ordinary
The elite		The people
‘Them’	<- ->	‘Us’
Of an era		Timeless
The product of theory		The product of experience
Invention		Inherited wisdom
Choice		Fixed
Knowledge		Innocence
Selfconscious		Unselfconscious
Represent status		Represent use
Moral		Amoral
Cultural		Natural
Art		Life
Contrived		Genuine
Fashion		Tradition
Indirect (Words)		Direct (Visual)
Rhetorical		Functional
Conceived		Intuited

The picture of the untainted virtue of natural innocence and inherent wisdom that the unstyled list builds up is striking. I argue later that this is relevant to the widespread adoption and persistence of the housebuilder-vernacular style described in chapter one.

3.2.2 The polite threshold: the limits of the vernacular

Brunskill uses the term ‘the polite threshold’ (Brunskill, 2000, p. 27) to describe the cross over point between vernacular architecture and professional, or polite, as he calls it, architecture. “The difference between the two is a matter of degree” he writes:

The ultimate in polite architecture will have been designed by a professional architect or one who has acted as such though under some other title, such as surveyor or master mason; it will have been designed to follow a national or even international fashion, style, or set of conventions, towards an aesthetically satisfying result; and aesthetic considerations will have dominated the designer's thought rather than functional demands. Aesthetically and, probably, constructionally the designer will have been adventurous, exploring new ways of achieving his conscious wishes; in so doing his materials will have been chosen to help achieve the aesthetic or constructional ends and have been obtained from whatever source could supply such materials. On the other hand, the ultimate in vernacular architecture will have been designed by the amateur, possibly the occupier of the intended building, and one without any training in design; he will have been guided by a series of conventions built up in his locality, paying little attention to what may be fashionable on an international scale. The function of his building would be the dominant factor, aesthetic considerations, though present to some small degree, being quite minimal; tradition would guide constructional as well as aesthetic choice, and local materials would be used as a matter of course, other materials being chosen and imported quite exceptionally. (Brunskill, 2000, pp. 27–28)

Brunskill maps out a loose time period that sets out the 'vernacular zone' (2000, p. 27) in Britain, sitting between the polite threshold of professionally designed buildings and the 'vernacular threshold' (p. 28) of permanent vernacular buildings that have survived and been recorded. This varies somewhat across different regions of the country and more considerably for different building sizes and types: the larger, grander dwellings of the wealthy moving into the polite zone much earlier, by about the end of the seventeenth century, than the smaller, modest dwellings of the poor, by the end of the nineteenth century (2000, p. 31). According to this method, there is no current true vernacular being built in Britain.

Just as we have lost the innocence of our bare bodies, allayed through the wearing of clothes that serve to direct interpretation and manage a degree of mystery, so too has self-consciousness and knowledge dispelled our architectural innocence for the unstyled, be it "either primitive or totally spontaneous" (Venturi, 1966, p. 18), such that we can only now legitimately talk about the effectiveness of style, in any contemporary architecture, in our perception, interpretation and experience of our built environment.

3.2.3 The housebuilder-vernacular

The vernacular which gave inspiration [to 20th century suburban housebuilding] was generally a confection of designs and details from the South of England but, nevertheless, at several removes the vernacular buildings of the countryside had provided that inspiration. The present-day vernacular is not a rebirth of the true vernacular of past centuries, it is based on a revival in polite architecture of the true vernacular, but [...] is the popular or vernacular architecture of our time (Brunskill, 2004, p. 198).

What Brunskill describes here, I am calling housebuilder-vernacular, used in volume-built housing since the 1930s. Other types of vernacular styles include the wider genus of pseudo-vernacular, Vernacular Revival (used to describe the English turn of the twentieth-century style

that followed the Arts and Crafts Movement) and Neo-vernacular (a reaction to International Modernism practiced by architects in the UK since the 1970s).

Housebuilder-vernacular is a style that references the vernacular. It allies with the ordinary and domestic qualities associated with the vernacular, as well as the process of vernacularizing – of rendering architecture in the language of the people. In this associational alignment, the housebuilder-vernacular also borrows the sense of the unselfconscious and innate, lending it a seemingly inherent naturalness; alluding to it being a default, *authentic* style, even if it is as deliberate and contrived as any other style. Whilst the housebuilder-vernacular is a function of constructional and cost efficiency as much (or most likely more), than calculated style positioning, as with all styles, it is representational, extending as it does beyond the functional. But the artful, one might call it hermaphroditic, aspect of the housebuilder-vernacular is that while it sits more on Buchanan's 'historic' side of his architecture spectrum, it vicariously alludes, through its representation, to the vernacular traits and attributes at the other end of the scale. (Notably, it is not the only style masquerading as style-less given modernism's stance against style and in particular the rhetoric of functionalism). But although the housebuilder-vernacular has appropriated the imagery of the vernacular, it has lost its content.

3.3

Historical context of architectural style

To understand the role of style in architectural appreciation and debate today, it is important to understand the historical context of style in architectural discourse. In this section I give a brief historical overview of the perception of architectural style, focusing on the key shift from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries with the advent of Modernism. Doing so risks over simplifying the intricacies and nuances of architectural history and in particular the complexities within the Modern Movement that I have necessarily to generalise. My aim here is not to provide a comprehensive historical account of British architecture over this period, but to convey the unfolding conditions that affected the changing status of style in architectural culture.

I start with a brief overview of the role of style primarily as a chronological marker before the nineteenth century before looking at the explosion of architectural revival styles in the nineteenth century and the renowned Battle of the Styles. I then look at the Arts and Crafts movement as a crossover to Modernism at the turn of the twentieth century. I go onto to consider the socio-political context of Modernism, technical innovations associated with it and lastly, what Jencks calls the 'voracious Phoenix' of Modernism (1990, p. 13).

3.3.1 Style before the nineteenth century

Until the period of revival styles in the mid-eighteenth century, English architecture could be chronologically identified and classified generally in alignment with the reigns of the monarchs. Building types were limited until about the end of the eighteenth century and most were uncomplicated. The most regularly constructed new buildings were simple rural labourers' cottages, often of cursory and short-lived cob construction (Ballantyne & Law, 2011). Family homes of the gentry were passed down through generations and generally extended rather than

rebuilt, few public buildings were constructed and new churches and cathedrals were occasional, long term projects.

The notion of architectural style only became relevant when there was a choice of approaches to building – be it in material, form, features or organizing principles. Buildings that are now referred to as ‘Gothic’ or ‘Tudor’ for example were not so–termed in their day as there was no need then to refer to the manner in which buildings were built, nor to label the period of the time. That is not to say that there weren’t perceivable differences in the way things were built from which values could be attached, but that those differences would be within the recognised genre of the time. For example, it was not until the mid-seventeenth century that the pejorative, Gothic was coined, to mean ‘not classical’ (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019) as a differentiator, from the new, Renaissance style. Tudor was also a retrospective label, first used as a descriptor in 1779 and not used regarding architectural style until 1815 (OED, 1989b).

Economic growth in the mid-eighteenth century led to more and bigger buildings requiring more services, variety of materials and design choices. Though it was not until the industrialisation and urbanisation of the nineteenth century that building types proliferated and the demand for the design of purpose-built buildings -from schools and hospitals to hotels and departments stores- massively expanded, enough “to keep a whole profession afloat upon design alone” (Saint, 1983, p. 57) ⁷. This proliferation continued and the profession expanded with it: there were 159 members of RIBA in 1840 (Saint, 1983) and over 28,000 today (RIBA, 2019), with over 1200 annual new admissions to the Architects’ Registration Board (ARB, 2017). This upsurge of demand ushered in significant changes in the construction industry that still characterise it today. The major increase of newly professionalised architects in the second half of the nineteenth century, paralleled by increasingly specialised and proficient contractors, were able to exercise clients’ (and personal) preferences in style over an intense period of technological and societal change.

3.3.2 Battle of the Styles

Must this nineteenth century, then, come to a close without ever possessing an architecture of its own? Is this epoch, so fertile in discoveries, so abounding in vital force, to transmit to posterity nothing better in art than imitations, hybrid works without character and impossible to class?" (Viollet-Le-Duc, 1875, p. 473)

The vastly expanded scope for building in the industrial era also spawned an abundance of choice and styles in which to build, that became a hallmark of the nineteenth century scene. There were two primary, competing styles at this time: the Classical and the Gothic, though within each there were a myriad of variations. Rival claims as to the correct architecture for public buildings, Gothic or Classical, became so fractious that they came to be known as the Battle of the Styles (Jencks, 2015). The Gothic styles alone, referred to in *British Architect* magazine, for example, included: ‘Victorian Gothic’, Gothic of Victorian character’, ‘pseudo-Victorian Gothic’, ‘Gothic’, ‘Early English Gothic’, ‘Flamboyant Gothic’, ‘Classic’, ‘Anglo-Italian’ and ‘Queen Anne’ (Mays, 2014, p. 8). The so-called battle of the styles pitched to crisis level in the

⁷ Chambers and Soane (1753-1837) are credited as the first full-time architect specialists in the construction industry (Saint, 1983).

second half of the nineteenth century as the quest to find an appropriate new style fitting of the age and the nation escalated (Mays, 2014).

The belief that there should be a style that the spirit of the age (Hegel's conception of a *Zeitgeist* will be discussed as an ideology in chapter five), fuelled the public and political debate on styles in both the Victorian period and through to the early twentieth century. The immense changes brought about by industrialization begged, to some, for an architectural response that would epitomise the heart of the expanding, powerful empire and the glory of the modern era. Style came to bear a great weight. The question of style became so much more than a simple matter of hedonic preference. Meaning, now also loaded with morality, as will be discussed in chapter five, took on a significance that came to dwarf other critical factors of judgement.

For new institutional building commissions, style represented British Victorian identity, ideals and achievements. Such projects were highly sought after by architects battling for the 'winning' style and they were engaged with by politicians at the highest levels, intent on driving the outcome of such import. Whilst each style had its key, committed and outspoken proponents, many nineteenth century architects practiced in a suite of styles⁸. The fixation with finding *the* style of the age served to reduce critical judgements about architecture to a choice of styles. In his renowned *Pioneers of the Modern Movement*, Nikolaus Pevsner bemoans the European preoccupation with 'surface fashion' (Watkin, 2001, p. 110) in European architecture from the mid eighteenth to mid nineteenth centuries, declaring that "a universally acceptable style could not spring from its endeavours" ([1936] republished as *Pioneers of Modern Design*, 1984, p. 112).

By the end of the nineteenth century, style was loaded with signification to the point that it could stand in as a substitute for *architecture*, serving as the prime distinguishing aspect of a building. This status of style in respect of architectural judgement remains relevant today as I contend it lies behind the architectural establishment's resistance to style classification that started with the Modern Movement, discussed shortly.

3.3.3 The Arts and Crafts Movement - the crossover to Modernism

At the turn of the twentieth century, when the seeds of the Modern Movement were growing in continental Europe, Arts and Crafts was the dominant architectural style in England, which had emerged from the principles and ideals of the 1880s Arts and Crafts Movement. It was characterised by formal qualities most closely associated with vernacular architecture: of crafted, traditional, local materials; pitched roofs; informal composition and asymmetry; and a unified, integrated approach of building and landscape. But despite what superficially may look like starkly contrasting styles and approaches, including the lack of interest in the Arts and Crafts Movement to create a style of the time, key principles and features of the movement and associated style were aligned to what would later emerge as Modernist ideals. Honesty in material and expression; a break with rigid, symmetrical composition; an emphasis on horizontality and of long strip windows; and explorations of a freer plan were all shared themes and interests. So it follows that John Ruskin and William Morris are considered to have laid the foundations of the modern style (Pevsner, 1984), and that Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, a legend

⁸ Decimus Burton for example, known for his Classical style works such as Cornwall Terrace in London, also designed some 'rustic' and Gothic style buildings such as in Beulah Spa in Upper Norwood and his own cottage in Surrey. George Gilbert Scott famously adopted a Classical design for the new Foreign Office building in lieu of his preferred Gothic style at the behest of Lord Palmerston.

in early Modernism, cited the work of Voysey, Mackintosh, Lutyens and Baillie-Scott amongst his influences (Powers, 2005).

Notwithstanding the connections with the Arts and Crafts Movement, the Modernist aesthetic itself was slow to catch on in Britain; the ground breaking developments of early Modernism in Europe were scarcely even published in British magazines and trade journals until the 1920s, when Modernism was thought of as a stripped, abstract aesthetic, little different to the late Georgian and Regency lineage⁹, and it did not take off in Britain until the 1930s (Powers, 2005). But British architects, engineers and contractors did address modernity in turn of the century building, exploring techniques and technologies of modern construction and efficiency, though clothed in nineteenth century styling. Examples of this 'modernity without modernism' (Powers, 2007, p. 17) include Selfridges London, a steel framed, reinforced concrete building enabling wide window frontages, and the 1916 'Dorlonco' housing system using brick, concrete and a steel frame, in a Georgian style, used to construct about 10,000 local authority houses (Powers, 2007, p. 30). Even in the 1930s, Modernist examples were rarely seen outside of London where jazz modern, or Art Deco, now synonymous with cinemas of that era, was mainly used. This was little covered by the architectural press at the time, then seeking pure Modernism as represented in the International Style (Powers, 2007).

3.3.4 The socio-political context of Modernism

Ultimately it was Modernism not Classical or Gothic that was to be the 'winner' in the battle for a style for the post-industrial era. Ironically this was achieved by pointedly abstaining from an argument about the most appropriate style for the age and denying that such things were needed. There were bigger issues at stake and to fight for than surface treatment. So while the International Style that characterised early Modernism was in aesthetic opposition to the decorative opulence and stylistic preoccupations of the Beaux Arts School that enshrined the nineteenth century approaches to architecture, the Modern Movement was much more than the banner for a new architectural style. It was a radical, holistic proposition for design that claimed to be a direct response to dramatically altered social and economic conditions. Many architects and commentators resisted its labelling as a style, deeming it reductive, such as the pioneering historian of modern architecture, Sigfried Giedion who wrote: "There is a word we should refrain from using to describe contemporary architecture – 'style'. The moment we fence architecture within a notion of 'style' we open the door to a formalistic approach. The contemporary movement is not a 'style' in the nineteenth-century meaning of form characterization. It is an approach to the life that slumbers unconsciously within us all" (1967, p. xxxiii) and architect, Hendrik Petrus Berlage who urged thinking in terms of utility rather than style (Watkin, 2001). But despite these aspirations, with its readily recognisable aesthetic, Modernism did not avoid becoming a style, and came to be referred to as such, as well as a movement.

The Modern Movement sprang from epochal events and transformed social and economic conditions. There was a new and more distant relationship between labour and production. There was massive urbanization and extremes of poverty and wealth in cities. In just 15 years from 1914 to 1929 there was a World War (1914-18), the Russian revolution (1917) and the Wall Street Crash (1929) leading to an unprecedented depression. At the same time industrialisation

⁹ Powers notes, for example, a hint of the 'ghostly presence' of Regency classicism in British Modernism, with its 'gently undulating control', citing buildings such as Peter Jones store in Sloane Square and the Gilbey offices in London (Powers, 2005, p. 11).

continued to open up extraordinary new material possibilities while creating massive demand, for example for low-cost mass housing post War. This intoxicating mixture of crisis, capability and hope engendered a passion and idealistic zeal for deep and widespread change in the production of buildings and the role of architecture. The key shift in thinking from the mindset of the style-war years of the mid and late nineteenth century was the belief that design could be, indeed must be, deployed in aid of the social and economic cause, using emerging technologies that could liberate an approach to architecture. This approach would be focused on content over form and ethics over aesthetics. This 'new architecture' (enshrined in the concept of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* or 'New Reality' architecture (Powers, 2005)), was characterised by the key themes of honesty, technology and social purpose, all bound in a belief in *Zeitgeist*.

3.3.5 Technical innovations

The technical innovations that led to the availability of cheap steel and reinforced concrete unleashed the possibilities for a different approach to architecture – the desire for a new expression of the modern industrial age that evaded the Victorians was ultimately progressed through advances in building technology; buildings could now be taller, thinner, lighter; windows could be larger and more expansive; plans and elevations could be freed from the constraints of traditional masonry construction and follow a different master. In reality, the efficiency and technology being embodied in the new architecture was more successful as an idea than in practice in the early years of Modernism as the limits and pitfalls of the new methods were encountered; there were numerous problems with early concrete structures, many of which failed, and of white render and concrete flat roofs that were not suited, as then detailed, to the conditions of the British climate.

It was not until the post war housing and school needs of the 1940s that the technological aspects of Modernism were positively embraced in Britain, with the development of pre-fabricated systems such as SPAN and CLASP. Notwithstanding the teething problems of the new construction materials and methods and the slow adoption of the Modernist design principles that they offered, by the mid twentieth century Modernism had decisively usurped the nineteenth century revival styles as the style for the age and was the dominant architectural style in Britain, evident in most building types, from offices and institutional buildings to public housing. Pevsner's universal 'style of the century' (Pevsner, 1984 [1936]) had landed.

3.3.6 The 'voracious Phoenix' of Modernism

Having achieved supremacy by the 1950s, Modernism encountered no external threats to its position as the architectural style for the post industrial age in the eyes of the architectural profession. It still holds forth in principle, if not in absolute, nearly one hundred years on from its establishment. The demise of the International Style, an early manifestation of Modernism, was evolutionary. It followed reappraisal and reconsideration from within the movement, with architects such as the group Team 10, rejecting dogma and exploring the place of culture, and Venturi Scott-Brown questioning the doctrine of simplicity and consistency and championing complexity and contradiction instead. Jencks broadly classifies four sub-movements: Modern (1920-60), Post-Modern (1960-), Late Modern (1960-), and Neo-Modern (1976-) (1990, p. 18,19) and likens Modernism to "a voracious Phoenix" that "not only rises from its ashes but positively feeds off them" (1990, p. 13), becoming actively reinvigorated in the process.

The social, political and technological conditions emerging at the turn of the century in Europe inspired a movement and architectural style that both encapsulated and came to represent social and industrial progress. Though the principles of modernist style have prevailed as the dominant architectural language of the last century, replacing classicism as the referent benchmark in schools of architecture and the mainstream majority of the profession, its symbolism and articulation have hugely diverged, now representing the extremes of both capitalist growth and corporate success, and state frugality and expediency.

The early collective idealism of Modernism, of anonymous authors in service to the people, had largely been replaced by the end of the twentieth century, by interest in economic benefits and corporate capitalism and the importance of individual creativity. But the references back to early Modernism remained and form a key anchor for what I call modernism which encompasses a broad range of sub-styles. Their main distinction is from 'traditional' revival styles, especially of classicism, which although still practiced and built, lies outside of the architectural mainstream and press, notwithstanding recent exhibitions and accompanying lectures at the RIBA (RIBA, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). I will discuss the distinctions between modernism and contemporary traditional architecture in the next chapter.

By the end of the twentieth century, as well as traversing significant aesthetic expressions, styles also considerably changed in their perceived relevance and status within the architectural establishment and within architectural debate. From the posthumous taxonomic classification of an age before the nineteenth century, to a competing struggle to define a modern industrial age, style has now become a relegated term deemed to be a superficial form of categorisation, which I will discuss in the next section.

3.4

Stereotypes and branding - the status of style today

What starts as a personal search for identity and authenticity – 'make it new and original' – leads by market logic to a signature-style, [...] Style as stereotype, by the 1960s, became a problem of our time in all the arts (Jencks, 2015).

In this section I briefly look at the role of style in architectural debate today and consider the breadth of aesthetic expression within the overarching style of the establishment, modernism.

There are still innumerable styles of architecture being practiced today (Jencks estimates 150 are current globally (Bottazzi, 2012)), although there is no common taxonomy for them. There are no direct equivalents of the widely understood later nineteenth century styles: Tudor Gothic, Middle Gothic, Regency, Neo-Palladian, Greek Revival and Queen Ann. Jencks has his own complex taxonomy with six threads: Historicism; Straight Revivalism; Neo-Vernacular; Adhoc Urbanist; Metaphor Metaphysical; and Post Modern Space, which merge with each other and spawn new sub-styles over time in his evolutionary diagram of architectural styles of the twentieth and twenty-first century, 'A Sea of Many Streams' (2015). However this is barely used in the architectural profession or press, and even less so by the lay public. This suggests that even if the concern for style is still present in design and critique, it operates in a different

context and manner to that of the late nineteenth century¹⁰. A different list could read: Materially Poetic; Spatial Concept; Expressive Shapes (encompassing parametricism); Global Corporate; Modern Contextualism (a mix of materiality, spatiality and context); Stripped Formalism (encompassing minimalism); Constructionist (encompassing high tech); 'Patterns of Ornament' (from Jencks); Historicism; and Pseudo-vernacular. All but the last two ascribe, however loosely, to modernist principles as opposed to pre-modern styles.

So although we are in an age of pluralism in architectural style, a dominant broadly modernist language has replaced classicism as the default referent. And despite there being innumerable styles, the fact that there are no standard, common labels for them suggests that they are either less easily characterised (or caricatured), or that there is less interest in the classification of style. It may now be more fitting and relevant, for the architectural establishment, to consider style as a set of preoccupations, of, for example: Surface and Pattern; Materiality and Context; Spatial Concept and Narrative; Shape and Form; History; Construction; Representation of Brand (and status). This would allow for the freedom to practice multiple preoccupations and not be confined to a particular group, labelled by a singular style. This may indeed suit the more brand conscious, less style-defining period that we are in, in which ideas of individuality and originality have taken a stronger hold, characterised by the use of the term 'signature-style' (as illustrated above by Jencks), attributable to individual architects rather than a labelled genre or school.

Parametricism could arguably be thought of as the heir to Modernism, in its values – through the pursuit of digital technology to create new architectural expression (Sharr, 2018) and in its potential universality as a style – claimed by architect Patrick Schumacher to be “the new hegemonic global style” (Bottazzi, 2012, para. 9). However, the search for a new universal style is not currently a widely shared aim of the architectural establishment, that remain suspicious of a return to architectural debate centred around style, as noted in the introduction with respect to the response to the new Building Beautiful Building Better commission. Architect Farshid Moussavi has also declared the importance of style again, seeing it as relevant to understanding the work of architects and the decisions that they make in design (Hunter, 2014). But she takes a different take on style to Schumacher, resisting the grand narrative of it as representation, and codifying style instead in terms of function allied to the experience of it, that she extends to use, form and affective factors (Moussavi, 2015): “Instead of thinking of style as what a form represents” she says “ – as a way of representing an epoch, a nation, or an architect – I propose to think of it as how a form performs” (in Hunter, 2014, para. 23).

Although the purpose and tenor of the style debate has changed from its zenith in the nineteenth century Battle of the Styles, the expectations of architectural expression and the association of style with identity and value have not disappeared. From beach huts to corporate headquarters, imagery and style carry undeniable, albeit mutable associations. Passions still run high on the question of style (Bottazzi, 2012; Hunter, 2014; Jencks, 2015), it is perhaps just the framing of the debate, the values that are looking to be represented and the formal expression of the styles themselves that have changed.

¹⁰ It is also worth noting that Jencks only classifies architectural styles by architects, not builders or developers, in his diagram, albeit there are occasional reference markers to notable developments such as Disneyland, the Madonna Inn in California and Covent Garden in the 1960s.

3.5

Conclusion

Just as I have claimed in the introduction that the mainstream architectural establishment eschews debate on taste, I maintain that the mention of style is also dismissed as irrelevant. But that there are clear, distinct forms of architectural expression and articulation identifiable throughout history, coupled with the previously identified tendency to classify, means that the categorisation of architecture into styles is, to an extent, inevitable. Many styles have developed, prevailed, waned and revived over the centuries of building in Britain, including not only the unintentionally styled, or vernacular until the late nineteenth century but also the many strands and sub-styles spawned by Modernism or in reaction to Modernism since the early twentieth century. I would suggest the core reason for the current suspicion of style is similar to wariness over empirical studies I outlined in the introduction; that style is thought of at worst as demeaning of architectural creativity and at best as a peripheral issue that is a diversion from the truly important challenge of creating liveable, lovable and genuinely sustainable places. This is a legacy of Modernism, in its rejection of the perceived superficiality of style as mere ornamental wrapping that dominated nineteenth century architectural preoccupations and discourse. An additional element of the prejudice against style is the inference that a concern with style will lead to a painting-by-numbers approach threatening to the ideal of the architect as individual creative genius, not to mention the impact on status and income generation connected to this. The argument going that if architects follow styles, where is the artistry? And without artistry, what is architecture? In chapter seven, I touch on the creative mystique that is the safeguarded territory of the architectural profession, but it is beyond the purview of this thesis to explore the tension between creative artistry and pragmatic reason that architectural historian Andrew Saint argues has sat at the core of the profession since its founding (1983).

This chapter concludes Part I of this thesis. Having considered the key context of this study: the producers and product of volume-built housing; the question of architectural taste and the implications of looking at it as a schism; and the nature and contentiousness of architectural style, I will next go on to Part II of this investigation and explore various threads of potential influence on architectural taste.

Part II
INVESTIGATE

4

Positioning a Traditional Aesthetic

The allusion to tradition is a distinct characteristic of the English housebuilder-vernacular style. From my architectural establishment perspective I would conjecture that this characteristic, more than any other, is the primary point of aversion to the aesthetic of volume-built housing for the architectural elite. Tradition is therefore the starting point of my first avenue of enquiry into the elite-popular taste divide, based on the, as yet tacit, assumption that while not necessarily embraced by the lay public, the housebuilder-vernacular seems to be accepted as part of a national imaginary. Several aspects of this harnessing of tradition present themselves: the attractiveness of an aesthetic that invokes tradition; the allusion to the past that is central to its aesthetic; the pretence and fakery that is offered up with such insouciance; and the possibility that it would look worse without the adoption of these tropes. In this chapter I look at the first of these - the characteristics of a traditional aesthetic. In doing this I explore the link between traditions and contemporary traditional architecture (that I refer to as Traditional Architecture) and the differences between them and characteristics of being modern and modernist architecture.

In 'Understanding tradition', I investigate the qualities of traditions and the regard held for upholding convention; of doing things that look, however nebulously, like the way they have always been done. I set out an understanding of what traditions mean- from their defining characteristics to their value and limitations, though I do not address their religious implications. I draw my references from writings on tradition by Raymond Williams (1985), Eric Hobsbawm (1983), T.S. Eliot (1932) and Bruno Latour (1993). In 'Tradition and Traditional Architecture', I consider the connection between the characteristics of tradition and Traditional Architecture from the perspective of practicing traditional architects. In 'The traditional-modern binary', I then compare both the meanings and stylistic traits associated with the binary opposite adjectives, traditional and modernist. I do not dwell on the place of post-modernism in this discussion, which may present as a hybrid of the traditional and modernist. In the next chapter I will situate it instead as a configuration of modernism. In comparing the traditional and the modernist I clarify the limiting conditions for style categorisation along with highlighting the limitations of classification through binary style definitions. This enquiry also exposes the prejudices on both sides of the architectural debate, with respect to contemporary traditional architecture and contemporary modernism.

4.1

Understanding tradition

In this section I look at the meaning of tradition from a range of perspectives and sources: Raymond Williams's *Keywords* brings an understanding of the etymology of the word and modern cultural ambivalence to it; Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm's *Inventing Traditions*

offers a challenge to their contemporary relevance and validity; Modernist poet T.S. Eliot, in his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' invites an appreciation of their inherent qualities; and science sociologist, Bruno Latour, in *We Have Never Been Modern* advances their provocative reinterpretation. Together they bring to light some of the key socio-cultural issues embedded in the setting of a modern culture with a history of strong traditions. I selected these writers for different reasons: Williams because of his historical grounding and cultural insights in his pithy essays; Hobsbawm because, from his progressive, Marxist standpoint, he scrutinises the cultural role of tradition; Eliot because he is a venerated Modernist poet, whose literary criticism inspired and influenced architects including Robert Venturi (1966), Sandy Wilson (Menin & Kite, 2018) and Neville Ward (Laurence, 2006); and Latour because he puts ideas of tradition into the frame of his provocative examination of the modern condition (which will be discussed in the next chapter). Through their observations I build up a sense of the fragile status of tradition in a fast-changing society and the qualities that are valued in following traditions. This provides a useful basis from which to then explore the meaning of tradition in architecture and the link between traditional style and the features of traditions in the next section.

4.1.1 Characteristics of tradition

The action of handing over, or transmission, underlies tradition, and has been central to its meaning from its various early roots in Latin (*trādītōn-*, *trāditiō* from *trādere*; to hand over, deliver), Anglo-Norman (*tradicion*) and Old French (*tradition*), which in the mid fifteenth century, even extended to the handing over of a person as a betrayal (OED, 2015a). Whilst this particular meaning has now disappeared the unwritten mode of passing down customs and practices has remained core to the sense of traditions as being verbally or practically transmitted. Latterly a tradition also came to mean an artistic method or style subsequently adopted by followers, so too reflecting the key process of transmission (OED, 2015a). A style, then, could be considered a tradition if it has a life and following beyond the originator. Hence 'the Classic tradition' or 'the Scandinavian tradition'; and by extension we could talk of 'the Modern tradition', though rarely do.

There appear to be three key traits associated with tradition, those of: ritual and belonging (and with that also exclusion) (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983); continuity with the past (Eliot, 1932); and commanding duty and respect (Williams, 1985):

4.1.1.1 Ritual and belonging

Traditions are culturally situated, being established and practiced within a social group (OED, 2015a). Ritual and ideology play a key role in traditions, and separate them from the purely functional 'routine' or 'convention' (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p. 4), and it is through the ceremonial stylization of ritual that identity and belonging are conferred. Hobsbawm uses the examples of lawyers' wigs that carry modern significance as a tradition only when other people have stopped wearing them, and the spurs left on Cavalry officers' dress uniform when there are no horses, to illustrate the symbolic power of tradition 'unfettered by practical use' (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p. 4). These also illuminate the importance of identity and belonging. This can be said of architectural styles too, that carry more symbolic weight once divested of their original function. A case in point are brick window arches, once a structural necessity before steel or reinforced concrete lintels could do the same job but which are now stuck on as brick slips in front of the real structure. Similarly dummy GRP (glass reinforced plastic) chimneys lined with brick slips that are a feature of many volume-built houses and are readily available, preformed, to 'provide the ideal cost effective solution to traditional chimney building methods'

("Quickstack Brick Slip Chimneys," 2018). I will address the ideology of authenticity in relation to Modernism in the next chapter.

Many traditions are place-based, having been handed down through contact, not the written word, in predominantly stable, unchanging pre-industrial communities. Consequently the notion of tradition carries with it a sense of cultural authenticity; a way of doing things that has come from the people of a place or specialised group, not imposed from outside. This can enhance the significance and bond of belonging, for those identifying with the tradition, and likewise, the separation and exclusion for those left out.

4.1.1.2 Continuity

The sense of continuity, of linking the past through to the future, is fundamental to traditions (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) and is the result of the generational transmission over an extended time period. In the example of the GRP chimney above, the chimney takes on a purely symbolic role in its expression of home, with iconic rather than practical value. It is able to do this by expressing continuity with a formerly essential, functional aspect of home – the hearth, central to homeliness through the provision of heat for warmth and cooking, that was a ubiquitous housing feature for centuries until central heating became the norm in the mid twentieth century. The false chimney thereby stretches out the symbolic thread that connects the modern home to the ancient home, and through this reference, is thought of as a traditional feature. The continuity and ritual aspects of tradition serve as strong cultural markers for community identities and belonging (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983).

The long historical tail of traditions prompts a link to the past. This is exploited in what Hobsbawm and Ranger call 'invented traditions' (1983) which Hobsbawm describes as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (1983, p. 1). This implied notion of history is used, he argues, for authentication and to strengthen group cohesion (1983).

4.1.1.3 Duty and Respect

Williams picks up on the dominant, principal sense of necessary duty and respect that is allied with traditions (1985). He relates this to the process of handing down from father to son that would have been the norm for so many past traditions. It would follow that to shun tradition could be seen as both disrespectful and an abdication of duty to maintain the historical continuity of custom, ceremony and, for specialised (craft) traditions, wisdom. The sense of duty and respect attached to the following of traditions, noted by Williams, might offer a clue to the fervour of protagonists on both sides of the debate on the place and role of tradition in architectural culture.

Not all traditions have a strong ritualistic or symbolic aspect, especially those that centre around a useful output, as in long-established craft techniques and construction methods. Tradition in these cases is an established way of doing something. For example, the tradition of using architraves and skirtings arose from the need to cover the junction between two materials that would in time separate haphazardly, which became so well-established as to become standard practice. In the twentieth century, new products such as expanded metal mesh and aluminium stop beads offered an alternative to this traditional, standard detail. In this example the original condition has not disappeared – cracks still appear at junctions – but there are now alternative methods for being able to successfully resolve this practical issue that does not necessitate planted architraves and skirting boards. Setting aside the skill required and cost of the

alternatives in the consideration of the choice (the non-standard generally attracting a cost premium), there may be a number of reasons for following the traditional method. It may be the expression of choice for actively respecting (or passively sticking to) convention with an idea of it having some cultural authenticity, rather than breaking with it for something that may seem novel, even if not new. Or the choice may be one of style: a preference for the layered or the flush aesthetic; and/or the traditional or modern look – or the hybrid created from a standard, traditional detail combined with contemporary profiles. The latter is, from experience, is a common practice for architects when faced with constraints of construction sequencing and budget that require going along with standard, conventional practice but which can be articulated in a non-traditional style. Although outwardly aesthetically led, these choices may also have a considerable element of identification attached to them, wanting to identify with following or breaking from tradition.

4.1.2 From active to static - the limits of change in traditions

Traditions are not timeless. They do not absorb rapid change of conditions (be they social, cultural or technological in nature). And in the modern era of acute and chronic change, many traditions have expired or been halted in their tracks such that the steadfastness of the idea of the permanence of tradition has been seriously threatened, and challenged (Latour, 1993). In this context, the meaning of tradition is difficult to pin down in contemporary society, having become somewhat slippery and unspecific (Williams, 1985). Moreover, Williams notes that it is a privilege granted only to some practices and customs to be ratified with the rubric (1985). Tradition is a word that can mean all things to all people, on the one hand evoked for legitimisation of customs and the values they represent (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), and on the other, dismissed as an anachronistic obstacle to progress (Latour, 1993). It can be thought of as both an active process – an engaged passing down (Eliot, 1932), and a passive encumbrance – an outdated inheritance.

The idea of a stable tradition is an illusion that anthropologists have long since set to rights. The immutable traditions have all budged – the day before yesterday (Latour, 1993, p. 75).

In many respects, traditions symbolise the past not just because they have a long history that stretches back in time, but because they have so often stopped evolving and ossified to the extent that they also signify a time that has long passed. What was the continuity between the past and the future in an active, live tradition shifts to a gulf between the past and the future in a static, obsolete tradition. In a culture in which technology and communication have changed more rapidly than could be evolved in traditions that are bound by a slower, restricted rate of adaption and advance, the very notion of traditions, and *the traditional* that is used to describe their output, becomes connected more with the past than the present or future. Brunskill's phrase 'gradual innovation' (2004, p. 21) captures both the capacity and limitation for evolving adaption in traditions. The main issue in construction and craft traditions has been the rate of technological advance, and with that requirements – from financial to performance – that demand whole new ways of doing things, not just improvements to the existing ones. For example, changes to the traditional method of making timber sash windows could adapt to the technological improvements of glazing to double glazed units, but not to the enhanced capacity of modern material advancements that require a different relationship of the constituent

elements and a new, rather than evolved, technology to effectively incorporate them. This can deliver significantly improved maintenance requirements and thermal performance¹¹.

The pace of change has exposed the limiting boundaries of tradition and precipitated the invention of new ones to accommodate the new or radically altered conditions, and to fill a cultural gap (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Hobsbawm notes the bursts of new traditions since the end of the nineteenth century, advising that:

...we should expect [invented traditions] to occur more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which the 'old' traditions had been designed, producing new ones to which they were not applicable, or when such old traditions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible, or are otherwise eliminated: in short, when there are sufficiently large and rapid changes on the demand or supply side. (1983, pp. 4–5).

He contrasts “the strength and adaptability of genuine traditions” (p. 7) to “the rigidity and inflexibility of invented traditions” (p. 8), noting that “where the old ways are alive, traditions need be neither revived nor invented” (p. 8).

Tradition is fundamental to the vernacular; the passing down of a local or regional language – be it of speech, dress, ritual or construction – from one generation to the next; evolving over time, but held within the recognizable continuity of the tradition. This is integral to the unstyled aspect of vernacular architecture; the considered but unselfconscious alternative to expressive invention. But as has been previously discussed, in chapter two, genuine vernacular architecture is now only historical and, to borrow from Hobsbawm, ‘invented’ vernacular would be a fitting description of contemporary buildings striving for vernacular status.

Words such as *old-fashioned* conjure both a sense of the pastness of traditions along with the impression of a time passed when traditions were an active, live presence in cultural and craft production. This can provoke either a nostalgic response for the-good-old-days or an aversive response against being stuck-in-the-past. Ideologies and value systems are attached to both and will be explored further in the next chapter. The latter position is associated with a fear of complacency and inertia, and a need to advance. Traditions from this perspective represent a kind of oppressive, forced obedience, limited by the need to conform with precedent and social continuity (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983 -given his politics it is perhaps not surprising that Hobsbawm takes this view). They are seen as old, dead and irrelevant; they are static and preserved, like comestibles with limited shelf lives that need salt, aspic or the protection of a vacuum pouch to keep them intact for future use. In this light, instead of standing for the best balance of evolved, perfected practice holding the experience and wisdom of generations of artisans, *traditional* comes to stand for the incapacity to respond to the demands and changes that characterise modernity and modern life.

¹¹ A triple glazed composite window can give a U-value (a measure of thermal performance) of 0.6W/sqm compared to a traditional single glazed timber sash window of at least 4.8W/sqm (Yougen, 2019), though modern double glazed sashes can now get to 1.1W/sqm (Lomax+Wood, 2014)

4.1.3 The value of active traditions

In his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1932 [1917]), T.S. Eliot considers the perception of tradition in English literature, noticing that 'tradition' as a word is dumb apart from the occasional disapproval of its absence, and 'traditional' only finds rare voice either in disapprobation or with reference to the 'reassuring science' of archaeology (p.13). Eliot goes on to place tradition in a creative context. He dismisses tradition that is the 'blind or timid adherence' (p. 14) to the ways of the previous generation, preferring 'novelty' to 'repetition' (p. 14) in such cases, and argues instead, for tradition attained 'by great labour' (p. 14). Instrumental to this is what he calls 'the historical sense' (p.14), which "involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" (p.14). And it is the historical sense, he contends, that "makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity"(p. 15).

Eliot argues that the process of tradition lies in the interdependency of the present and past; how actions of the present remake the order of the past. In this way traditions continually fold the past into the present and future, each in constant, ever-changing dialogue for as long as the tradition is practiced (1932 [1917]). Whilst not directly contradictory of Hobsbawm's take on invented and dead traditions, which implies that when the past stops being refolded into the present the tradition halts, leaving the past as separate and increasingly distant from the present, Eliot's emphasis is on the rich potential of live traditions. Relevant in the consideration of tradition in architecture, he applies this to the creative process and the place of the artist, reasoning that "no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone"(p.15):

... what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work or art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past (Eliot, 1932, p. 15).

This relationship of the present to the past will be explored in the following chapter.

In a similar vein to Eliot, Latour offers a twist to the static and unquestioning view of traditions when he says "one is not born traditional; one chooses to become traditional by constant innovation" (Latour, 1993, p. 76). This challenge to the passive resistance of traditions opens up the space for change, for 'constant innovation' that sits not in the realm of wilful, naive or blind experimentation but in the trajectory of informed knowledge, wisdom and experience. Both Eliot and Latour expose a path for considering what is lost with a demise of traditions.

I conclude from this investigation into the nature of traditions that they are subtle, complex and various in their form. They can be alive and active, responding to gradual change, but are limited by rapid change when they may become static and obsolete. But such is their cultural

importance in their symbolic weight, connection to the past and channel of identity and belonging that the new traditions are frequently invented.

4.2 Contemporary traditional architecture and tradition

One definition of a tradition is a style established by one group and subsequently followed by others (OED, 2015a). Certainly, to say ‘traditional architecture’ prompts the image of a style; of a building, most likely historic, or at least not contemporary; perhaps vernacular with a pitched, tiled roof (possibly even thatched), subdivided windows (maybe leaded too), and solid, likely brickwork construction; or perhaps classical, with a roof hidden behind a portico, atop a carved entablature and stone columns. But what is the connection between such notions of traditional style and the deeper meanings of tradition? Is traditional architecture just about the way something looks, synonymous with a traditional *style* of architecture, that references certain long-established (historic) tropes? Or does it go deeper, to the way something is, or has become, as the result of following time-honoured traditions, be it in construction or design?

In a climate of rapid socio-cultural change accompanied by a consequent decline in old, or genuine, traditions, it would follow that ideas of traditional no longer necessarily have any original traditions embedded in them, with the aping of traditional practices supplanting the practices themselves. We are left with a suit without the body, the appearance of a tradition without the essence of the practice that created it. For example, laminate faced composite sheets marked out with six inch board lines that substitute for solid wooden planks (such as illustrated in fig. 4.1). In this sense has traditional, in the present day (as opposed to in historical reference) come just to mean a style that suggests, pretends even, that there is a tradition to which it refers? Implying long-standingness, worth, rootedness in a culture, and place, but in surface appearance only, exposing a mismatch between the appearance of ‘traditionalness’ and its construction.

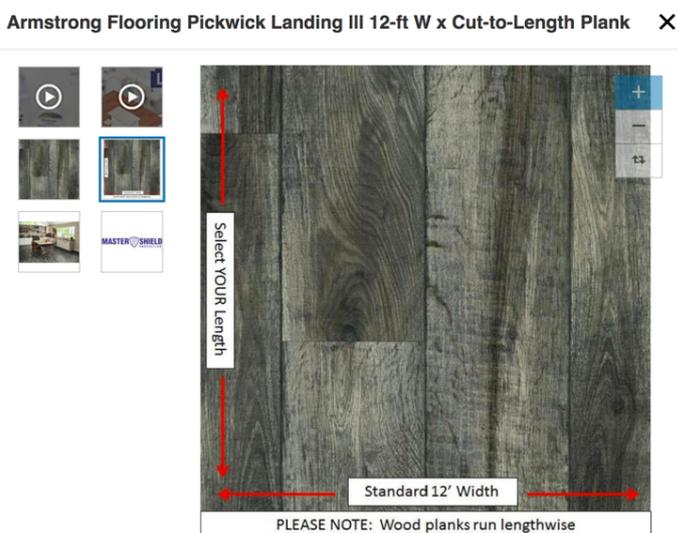


Figure 4.1
Wood effect laminate sheet
flooring (Lowe.com, 2019)

In this section I explore the relationship between tradition and Traditional Architecture. To understand what is *traditional* about Traditional Architecture I look to practicing contemporary traditional architects and how they express their approach in terms of building traditions and traditional styles.

4.2.1 Building traditions or style traditions? – the perspective of traditional architects

In an address to the Traditional Britain Group in 2015 titled: ‘Why Traditional architecture matters, and what it means to our culture’, Quinlan Terry, a senior figure on the traditional architecture scene, defined it as: “the way of building that has been handed down to us by our forefathers for countless generations” (Terry, 2015, p. 1), elaborating on what he saw as the core differences in modern and traditional construction, namely that the former has proved itself a failure and does not create buildings that last whereas the latter has faithfully stood the test of time. It makes sense in theory, but is not borne out by observation. Take the example of Poundbury, the extension to Dorchester and showcase of Traditional Architecture (Duchy of Cornwall, 2016; Terry, 2015; Thompson-Fawcett, 2003). It extensively deploys modern methods of construction that, for example, improve thermal performance (with insulation), structural efficiency (with reinforced concrete elements), and construction efficiency (with prefabricated panels) (see fig. 4.2). Indeed the construction does not appear dissimilar to that of the majority of contemporary domestic buildings built in any manner of styles



*Figure 4.2
Left, Poundbury
Below, building
construction at
Poundbury, 2014, showing
modern cavity wall
construction with brick
slips and prefabricated
brick slip arches*



Taking Terry's definition of Traditional Architecture then as of a broader *way* of building than just construction, that has been handed down by our forefathers, opens up the potential for what could classify as traditional, depending on the ancestry one chooses to follow: whether it is one of seventeenth century crofters, with skills of cob and thatch used in building their short-lived dwellings; or eighteenth century gentlemen, with lessons in classicism learnt on the *Grand Tour* and used in extending their ancestral homes; or twentieth century progressives, with ideas of working with new technologies in building homes for the new class of urban workers. Tried and tested building methods and ideas, could, through these different traditions, be handed down through vernacular, classical and modernist lineages. But despite its now well established heredity, the passing down of modernist ways does not accord it Traditional Architecture status. The transmission process maybe thought of as necessary, but is clearly not a sufficient condition to classify as Traditional Architecture. This could indicate a cherry-picking of the traditions that are considered worthy of honouring as traditional, by those with the authority to do so (consistent with Williams's observation of the abstruse selection process (1985)), or suggest that it is not a matter of continuing traditions per se that really counts. Terry gives a clue when adding to his perceived failings of modern construction that it "expresses a culture that has no history and no future" (Terry, 2015, p. 1), opening the door to the idea that traditional and modernist architectures each represent different value systems.

The Traditional Architecture Group (TAG) of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) was founded in 2003 in response to the growing number of architectural practices building contemporary traditional architecture. At the time of writing its website lists just over 100 members, with Quinlan Terry's son and former business partner, Francis Terry, the group's Chair (Traditional Architecture Group, 2018). The TAG website neither explicitly defines what it means by contemporary traditional architecture, nor the values that it reputedly represents. But there are cues. It makes numerous, and notably strong, claims on the advantages of contemporary traditional architecture, such as "traditional architects understand that buildings of the past are uniquely capable of satisfying people's needs" (Traditional Architecture Group, 2018), making reference to:

- 'the past' (assumed, but not stated, as being pre- twentieth century) and to its values, calling out the 'degradation' of our environment since then. Notably there is little reference to

history given how much there is to 'the past', but this fits with the classical education system in which history was valued only as a secondary route to the goal of beauty, not a primary objective (Swenarton, 1987);

- the importance of beauty, which is consistent with pre-modernist classical architectural education to which it was central (Swenarton, 1987);
- the themes of construction and materials, echoing Quinlan Terry, emphasising better durability and resource efficiency, and less extravagance and reliance on 'elaborate and quickly outdated technology' than modern construction;
- some of the inherent characteristics of tradition: of the skills and knowledge of traditions, of continuity, of the ability for traditions to adapt, and the changes that caused the decline in traditional practice.

And what is it in modernist architecture that traditionalists are against? The TAG website is avowedly anti-modernist, decrying the majority of architects in the twentieth century who 'aimed at a rupture with the past' (Traditional Architecture Group, 2018). They are against 'subservience to technology', seen as a replacement for 'the desire for beauty'; 'abstract theory'; modern materials; the 'utopian dreams of reforming society and the individual'; and architects trying to make society and the individual 'fit for **their** vision for the future'. This recalls the centrality of respect and duty Williams associates with traditions (1985) and fits with the emotional reaction to the new that can trigger a sense of rejection (Steinberg, 2007), described in chapter six. Seen from the traditionalist perspective, modernists are blinded by a sense of their own potential and worth, with total disregard for the lessons, wisdom, and even the fact-of-just-being-there of the past. Whilst that may well have been the case for the heyday of mid twentieth century Modernism (but beyond the remit of this thesis to argue either way), can those same charges be justly made now? Many practices that are not in TAG and would be very unlikely to be described as traditional architects, nonetheless also share the sensibilities TAG extolls, such as working with respect and sensitivity to preindustrial architecture in both context and inspiration, focusing on low technology, material resources and long building life, and valuing of public space. These do not then appear to represent sufficient conditions to define Traditional Architecture.

This leads to two possible conclusion: that Traditional Architecture is at heart a style issue, with the rhetoric used to try to justify a style preference through association with a set of nebulous values; and/or that the antipathy to *the modern* is a deeper issue than expressed in the particular claims against modernism. These could also be said the other way round: of the modernist elite who claim not to dismiss classicism as an acceptable contemporary style (for example as expressed by RIBA awards judge Jo van Heynigan in Booth, 2008), but barely suppresses a disdain for Traditional Architecture (for example as expressed by Richard Rogers in Rogers, 2013), which is perhaps rooted in a hostility to Traditional Architecture that is deeper than a dislike of its stylistic expression. I look at the question of style in the next section and explore modern and anti-modern attitudes in the following chapter, in which I also disaggregate the factions within architecture, that this enquiry has exposed, from the positions of the lay public.

4.3

The traditional-modern binary

My attempt to specify the traditional in Traditional Architecture by looking at self-proclaimed traditionalist architects was inconclusive, except to suggest that there are values associated with it – even if not specifically spelled out– and that it sets itself apart from the modern which is assumed to hold different associative values. I look at the idea of mutual self-definition and interplay through Latour’s observation of what I call symmetrical inversion later in this section. First, in ‘Dualities of meaning’ I interrogate the oppositional meanings of the terms *traditional* and *modern* in terms of their associated meanings. In ‘Dualities of style attributes’ I go on to define the differences of the architectural styles, *traditional* and *modernist*. I then test the broad contrasting definitions I have derived for meanings and style against a selection of buildings that could be thought to sit on the margins of traditional and modernist architectural categorisation.

4.3.1 Dualities of meaning

In language, the adjectives traditional and modern have become the representational repositories of oppositional value systems that over time have come to feel entrenched and innate. To show this dualism and to define a workable set of associations for the two terms, I compare different meanings of the terms, based on dictionary synonyms for each of the words. I first take synonyms for the terms *traditional* and *modern* listed in the online Oxford Dictionaries (2018b, 2018a) and list them in terms of what I assess to be oppositional pairs, as follows:

Traditional	Modern
Conventional	Unconventional
Customary	Newfangled
Long-established	Fresh
Orthodox	Up-to-date
Standard	Advanced
Conservative	Progressive
Habitual	Novel
Old-fashioned	Hip
Staid	Fashionable
Clichéd	Now/ Up to the minute
Undistinguished	Modish
Old	New
Time-honoured	The Latest
Classic	Flash
Tried and tested	Using the most up-to-date techniques, ideas, equipment
Historic	Contemporary
Old-world	Twenty-first-century
Ancestral	Present-day

Whilst this shows the general polar dualities in the meanings of the two terms, it does not represent a definitive comparison of meanings, as not all of the synonyms fall into pairs. So below, I list the remaining dictionary synonyms given for the word traditional with adjectives

associated with modern that I consider to be binary counterparts (but are not listed as synonyms in the Oxford Dictionaries):

Traditional	Modern
Accepted	Challenging
Common	Special
Fixed	Variable
Unadventurous	Adventurous
Proven	Unproven
Craft	Mass produced
Familial	Anonymous
Ritualistic	Informal

Finally, I undertake this same method for the outstanding dictionary synonyms for the word modern:

Traditional	Modern
Backward-looking	Forward-looking
Relating to the past	Relating to the present

This process in effect charts the stereotypes of opposing traits associated with the two words. Reviewing this combined list, albeit from a progressive modern-centric perspective, it appears to have a fairly pejorative cast on the idea of *traditional*. This could reveal a personal bias that underplays the risks of being *unproven*, *newfangled*, *flash* and *mass-produced* in favour of the promise of being *advanced*, *progressive* and *forward-looking*, and focuses on the less appealing qualities of *old-fashioned*, *staid* and *unadventurous* instead of the potential virtues in being *tried and tested*, *ancestral* and *ritualistic*. But it could perhaps also be taken as an indication that in this late modern era, associations with the modern are still generally optimistic and inspiring whereas traditional connotes a more downbeat, less rousing picture.

So if the general tone of our language goes in favour of the modern, what is it about the transition of this to the architecture of the home as represented in the housebuilder-vernacular that seems to shift to the traditional as an ideal? Does that suggest that it is not about approach at all, but stylistic features? Or that the *traditional* qualities are considered positive about a home but not necessarily towards other things in our lives such as dress, or cars? Or that it is perhaps not the *traditional* aspect of the housebuilder-vernacular that appeals? The first question I will consider here in this chapter, the second in chapter six in looking at security and risk, and the last will be addressed in the findings and analysis of my experimental evidence-based survey in chapters eight and nine.

4.3.1.1 Symmetrical inversion

A consequence of classifying by binary opposites is the reliance of the obverse in relational meaning in denotations – what I call symmetrical inversion. It is in effect a dualistic form of relativism in which the inverted meaning of something is integral to its connotation. This feature is central to Latour’s argument in *We Have Never Been Modern* (Latour, 1993), in which he highlights the oppositional bind that puts ideations of both the past and the future on the same spectrum. Jencks also sees it in the arising ‘vested interest’ that brings dependency to the binary relationship of Modernism and what he calls Traditionalism:

... not only must [Modernism] feed off the corpse of its predecessor and thrive on the tabula rasa, but it must be against the reigning culture - the arriére-

garde, whether this is real or fictitious. To be new Modernism must characterise any opposition as staid, nostalgic and uncreative, or else it fails to re-establish credentials as the avant-garde. From this it follows as night the day that Modernism and (for want of a better word) Traditionalism have a vested interest in keeping each other in place. For logical and political reasons, the health of the former depends on the existence of the latter (Jencks, 1990, p. 13).

Taking this two-sides-of-the-same-coin principle to the meanings attached to the two sides of the modern-traditional divide set out above tells us that the new is only so in comparison with the old and the fresh likewise relies on the long-established. Also, to challenge, be unconventional, modish and advanced necessitates other practices to be customary, conventional, undistinguished and standard. And so too from the alternative perspective, the ritualistic gains its meaning in relation to the informal, the time-honoured and classic are set-off against the latest and flash, and the tried and tested demands comparison with the most up-to-date techniques.

4.3.2 Dualities of style attributes

When architectural style is reduced down to its crudest and simplest alternatives it will tend to be described using the terms *traditional* or *modern*. *Contemporary* is also used to describe modernist design and architecture, although *modern* was used four times more than *contemporary* in my research survey in describing a stripped housebuilder-vernacular style, set out in chapter eight. The traditional-modern dichotomy can serve as a stand-in for age, indicating either *old* or *contemporary* buildings, but also for two contrasting approaches to design that I would say are loosely, but widely, understood.

The two images in fig 4.3 below, show the results of an online image search of the terms 'traditional new homes UK' and 'modernist new homes UK' (I have previously also conducted searches for 'modern new homes UK', to include as wide a base of descriptor for a modernist style as possible, conscious that there is fluidity of terminology in what I have defined as modernism or modernist for the purpose of this thesis. However this search also showed a handful of traditional-looking homes that would fit the classification of *modern* in age but not in style). They show a clear contrast of aesthetic: the homes classified as traditional feature pitched roofs, often with gables, familiar house forms and proportions, and clearly defined windows set within walls; the homes classified as modernist often feature flat roofs, abstract forms, a variety of proportions, and a range of window types and sizes.

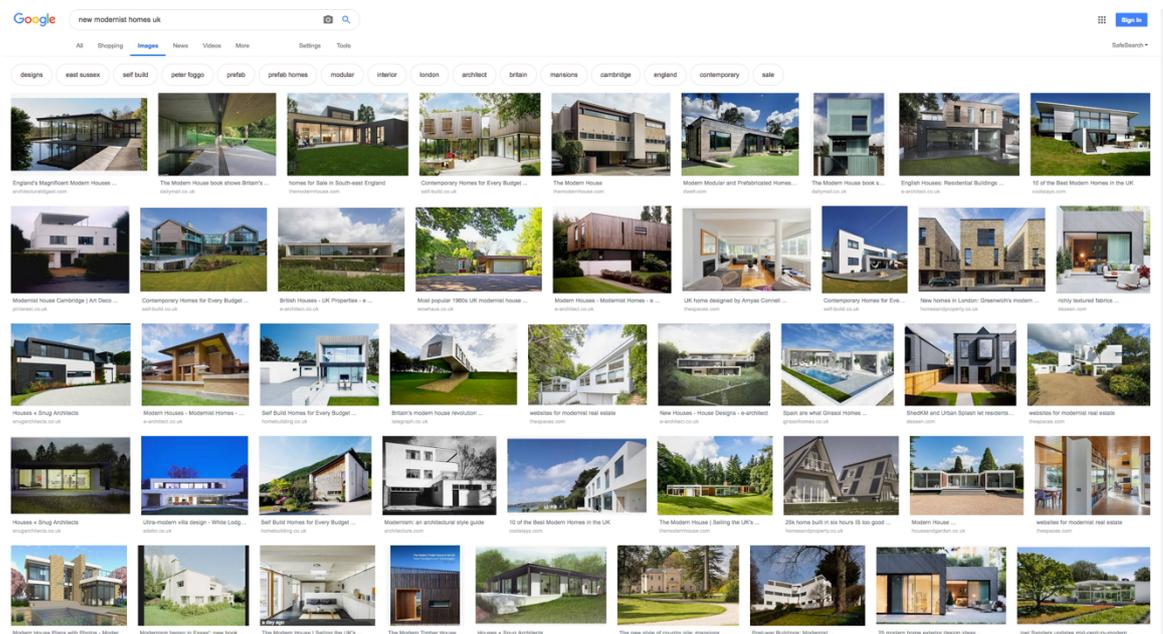
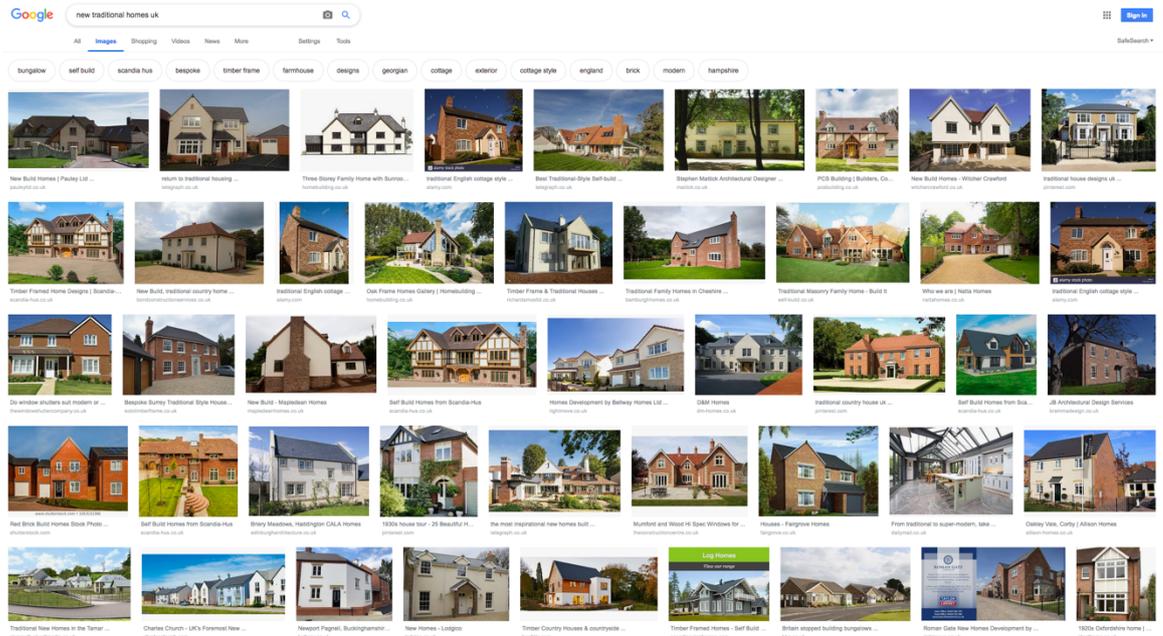


Figure 4.3 Screenshots of Google web searches for 'traditional new homes uk' (top) and 'modernist new homes uk' (bottom) –13 April 2019.

In chapter one I set out the typical features of what I term the housebuilder-vernacular style (what could be thought of as a sub-set of traditional style) and modernist style (including modern-vernacular). Here I am interested in the tendencies in design approach that create characteristic qualities identified as being traditional or modernist styles rather than a definition of features. Below I attempt to broadly set these out. I derive the list from looking at the essential traits of modernism with respect to visual appearance that I draw from the key tenet of Modernism; to break with the ways and styles of the past in the embrace of modernization (M. Johnson, 2016; Sharr, 2018). This embeds a drive to innovate within the modernist approach (rather than follow established rules and methods) and has the corollary of not replicating the

style motifs and iconography of the past. It also leads to the Modernist rejection of ornament and unnecessary elaboration, and the adoption of a rationalist approach, resulting in a more plain and reductive aesthetic than earlier traditional styles. The pursuit of a universal language (M. Johnson, 2016; Pevsner, 1984) also stems from a break from past attitudes, and Le Corbusier’s rule of a free façade, from his ‘Five Points’ (Le Corbusier, 1970) – the only modern architect to set out rules for the new architecture (Colquhoun, 1981) – also represented a radical break in expression from past practices. These give rise to the embrace of abstract composition in Modernism in contrast to the figurative tradition of traditional styles. (I will discuss the impact of Modernist ideology on today’s architectural establishment in the next chapter).

I cross-checked the resultant list through a visual analysis of typical examples of the two styles taken from web-based image searches (as described above and illustrated in figure 4.3) of the two styles.

Traditional

- Ornamented
- Elaborative
- Figurative
- Directly uses historical motifs and iconography
- Works from established rules and methods

Modernist

- Plain
- Reductive
- Abstract
- Does not directly use historical motifs and iconography
- Attempts to innovate

Whilst cases could be cited that do not fit all of these generic categorisations for the two styles – such as the use of decorative patterning that is becoming more of a feature in contemporary modernism (for example in Proctor and Matthews’ work, in fig.4.4 below), and innovation within the classical tradition (Mannerism being an obvious example) – these divisions act as useful placeholders and would probably be commonly recognisable and understood in most instances.

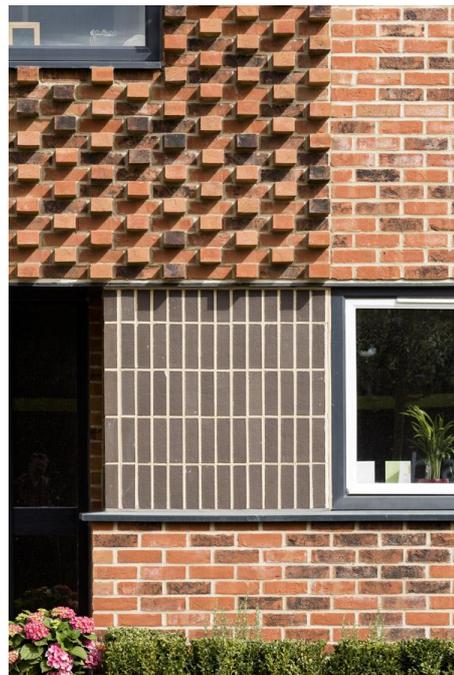


Figure 4.4
Horsted Park housing,
Proctor and Matthews

To test the tie between associated meanings and stylistic approach in classifying traditional and modernist architecture, consider a description of a building using words from the *traditional*

meanings list (in section 4.3.1). Is a conventional and widely accepted, not say clichéd, approach enough to count as traditional? There are countless examples of modern-styled buildings that could be described in these terms but would not be labelled as traditional. And taking the *modern* meanings list, could an unconventional, novel design using up-to-date techniques, ideas and equipment be described as traditional? This is harder to answer as it is so dependent on the perspective of the appraiser.

Consider Robert A. M. Stern Architect's Pauli Murray and Benjamin Franklin College buildings at Yale, opened in 2017 (fig 4.5). The project has one and a half miles of non-repetitive Gothic façade, with feature ornamental window detailing inspired by DNA patterns, and uses factory-prefabricated wall panels and building elements. This could be argued as fitting a modern approach, as it could be described as novel (with some unusual, quirky features), unconventional (not fitting in with the current norm of modern aesthetics) and using up-to-date techniques (deploying modern methods of construction). But it is hard to imagine dyed-in-the-wool modernist architects able to consider it modern with its Gothic styling, however up-to-date the engineering or construction techniques used may be (for example as expressed in Freeman, 2017). From this perspective no amount of adjectival modern descriptors could offset the style trait of using historical motifs and iconography.



Figure 4.5 Left and above, Pauli Murray College and Benjamin Franklin College, RAMSA.

To explore this further, let us consider the description of a building from the *traditional style* list, with the exception of the *using historical motifs and iconography* category, and the *modern meanings* list. For example an ornamented, elaborate, figurative building that uses long-established methods of building that is also adventurous, novel, and fresh. How would (or should) it be classified? A good example to test this configuration of style characteristics and associated meanings is Eric Parry Architects’ Piccadilly building, one Eagle Place, completed in 2013 (fig. 4.6). It was described in the architectural press as provocative, new, “creative and challenging (Allford, 2013, p. 56), “a development-as-palimpsest” (Allford, 2013, p. 46), “fresh and historically alert” (Merrick, 2013, para. 15), with classical qualities. It is notable that architect Simon Allford and critic Jay Merrick describe the building as a ‘dandy’ in their title, playing with the old-fashionedness of the word coupled with the sense of self-conscious, flamboyant style. Allford maintains this aura when he talks about it as a being a stage set for the city, fitting a west end tradition, but neither author uses the word *traditional* in relation to the architecture other than to the load bearing structure and cast ceramic techniques used on the primary façade. So despite it having many of the style markers of a traditional building it is not thought of as Traditional Architecture in the elite press. There could be various reasons for this: that an architect comes pre-labelled based on their previous body of work, weighting critics’ judgement of their output; that it is the approach to design, not the architectural attributes that is key to style classification; or that it is the direct use, rather than tangential reference of historical iconography, that is a necessary condition for Traditional Architecture. To reduce the appreciation and understanding of the architecture of these buildings to a *traditional* or *modernist* tag is clearly, in itself, simplistic and reductive. But to test through these examples the classification rules that sit behind these labels is instructive. It suggests that in the elite discourse, the attributes of Traditional Architecture are reduced to the explicit use of historical iconography, and that is unacceptable in the British architectural establishment.



Figure 4.6 One Eagle Place, Eric Parry Architects.

To further tease out these possible rationales, consider a similar building description with the addition of using direct reference to historical iconography, for which the example of Culham Chapel by Craig Hamilton Architects, completed in 2016 (fig. 4.7), serves well. The architect's website claims they have "a reputation for progressive Classical and traditional architecture" (Craig Hamilton Architects, 2018) – an unusual assertion that already crosses the expected demarcation lines. In his review of the building Gavin Stamp describes it as work of "subtle originality" (Stamp, 2017, para. 1). "The first impression is of a traditional building" he writes, "but even here, nothing is quite conventional" (para. 4), referring to "the many felicities, to the variety of treatment, to the adaptations and invention" (para. 8) in the building. The Architecture Foundation describe it as "a gesamtkunstwerk [total work of art] without recent parallel" (2016, sec. Events) and "one of the most richly conceived works of architecture - classical or otherwise - built in Britain in the past century" (2016, sec. Events). Hamilton's description of progressive traditional architecture seems fitting for this work, inspiring many of the modern adjectives in approach, but it is ultimately labelled by the direct use of historical iconography in the language.



Figure 4.7 Culham Chapel, Craig Hamilton Architects

It is hard to conceive of Culham Chapel being labelled modern without reference to it being in the classical style. The style appears to surpass all other aspects of invention, originality, novelty and adventurousness in its classification. And similarly, my analysis here would suggest that unless a building directly refers to historic iconography, however crafted, conservative, staid and unadventurous it may be it is unlikely to be thought of as traditional. This evident and seemingly irreducible aspect of historicism is, I would therefore argue, the essence of a traditional-modernist style schism. I explore this in the following chapter.

Just as Parry is preceded by his reputation as a modernist architect, so too Hamilton, member of TAG, is known as a traditionalist architect. But it is perhaps more than just reputation at play in the pre-conditioning of judgement. Parry's building will be thought of as being conceived within a modernist sensibility and Hamilton's in a classical-traditional one and the works that each produce will be understood, at least by the architectural establishment, in those terms. There are other examples of architects who push at the confines of their genre classification, including experimental nineteenth and twentieth-century classicists such as Karl Friedrich Schinkel and Jože Plečnik (Vienna's Zacherlhaus, fig 4.8), and contemporary modernists such as David Chipperfield, working with the grammar of classicism (for example, Museum of Modern Literature, Marbach (Sudjic, 2006)) and Maccreanor Lavington reinterpreting the domestic Victorian (for example, Futurehome housing, fig. 4.8).



Figure 4.8 Left, Zacherlhaus, Jože Plečnik. Right, Futurehome, Maccreanor Lavington Architects

4.4

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the position of a traditional aesthetic in contemporary architecture through investigating the nature of tradition, and its relevance with respect to construction and expressive aspects of architecture, and the associations of the adjective and style *traditional*, relative to its binary opposite, *modern/modernist*.

In looking to understand tradition, I identified three key traits associated with it: ritual and belonging, continuity with the past, and commanding duty and respect. With respect to these I explored the symbolic weight traditions can carry, commonly divested of function; the place-based nature of many traditions that enhances a sense of belonging; and the sense of historical continuity that is capitalised by invented traditions. I discussed the limits of traditions in a rapidly changing society and the rise of new traditions since the end of the nineteenth century, comparing active, live traditions with static obsolete ones. I ended considering the idea of constant innovation within tradition.

In looking at Traditional Architecture and tradition, I questioned the role of tradition in contemporary architecture and investigated, through practicing traditional architects, what may be *traditional* about Traditional Architecture in terms of building and style traditions. I concluded that though broad values could be identified, they were not exclusive to Traditional Architecture, suggesting it was a style and/or an anti-modern issue.

In looking at the traditional-modern binary, I explored the dualities of meaning associated with the adjectives modern and traditional, and five key contrasting aesthetic characteristics of the two allied styles. I found that using dictionary synonyms of the adjectives seemed to present a stereotypical, generally pejorative view of the idea traditional that did not capture all of the potential qualities of tradition previously identified. In testing both the adjectival meanings and style characteristics against three building examples that sit on the margins of traditional and modernist style classification, I found that many of the typical associations with the two adjectives could be applied to both styles and none could be exclusively tied to just one aesthetic expression. I concluded that the primary distinction of the traditional aesthetic, and the only necessary condition for it, is the use of historical motifs and iconography. I summarise the proposed distinctions between the two styles in fig 4.9, below.

	Traditional Architecture	modernist architecture
Primary necessary style condition	Directly uses historical motifs in a language of historical iconography	May reference but not directly use historical motifs or iconography
Secondary exclusive style characteristics	-	Abstract
non-exclusive style characteristics	Ornamented Elaborative Works from established rules and methods Figurative	Plain Reductive Attempts to innovate -

Figure 4.9 Proposed summary of the style distinctions between Traditional Architecture and modernist architecture.

Post-Modernism is a moot style in this dualistic classification given that most versions of it include historical motifs. But they are overtly used as stylistic parodies, often being exaggerated and out of context and reference to the wider attributes of the historical styles from which they have been appropriated. Post-Modernism does not operate within the language of historical iconography as Traditional Architecture does. I would therefore argue that it does not fit into this category, which assumes an inclusive embrace of historical iconography and language. And whilst Post-Modernism is an evident stylistic trend reacting to Modernism, and thereby bears on the question of taste, I do not consider further examination of it as germane to this enquiry.

The convention of following traditions is as old as traditions themselves; a tradition is only kept alive through the will to continue it (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). That will could be framed as the drive, or pressure, to follow convention, and to continue to conform to the customs and practices that have been enshrined within it. Hobsbawm makes the point that the role of suggested history legitimises invented traditions (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). This is instructive in the case of the housebuilder-vernacular style typical of volume-built houses, that could be thought of as an invented architectural tradition. The reference to historical and vernacular motifs give the sense of a continuous thread over multiple generations, however tentative that thread may be. But the evocation of tradition in the housebuilder-vernacular is more than aesthetic. The idea that it is important for things to look like they have been done that way for generations; that following traditions, or the gesture towards it, when changes in modern western lifestyles and working practices, have changed so much as to halt in their tracks many previously long-standing customs and traditions, has itself become a convention. And to break from that is more than stylistic.

The idea and impact of tradition works at a number of levels in the context of contemporary architecture. In the case of the typical volume-built house it can be seen, however tentatively, in:

- convention, fitting into established practice and precedent in order to conform;
- duty, that confers a sense of obligation to continue a tradition out of respect, be it for the lineage and identification, the prudence, or the values of the past;
- a quality of continuity, identity and belonging; as a continuity of ways of building, with the methods, wisdom and accumulated experience of generations before;
- a connection with the past; an association of the qualities of being long-established, accepted, tried-and-tested, time-honoured etc; and
- as stylistic traits that directly refer to pre-modern architectural language and iconography along with secondary style characteristics I have identified with Traditional Architecture.

In the introduction to this chapter I identified four issues linked to the harnessing of tradition in the exterior aesthetic typical of volume-built housing: the attractiveness of an aesthetic that invokes tradition; the allusion to the past in this aesthetic; the pretence and fakery in the way this aesthetic is approached; and the possibility that it would look worse without the adoption of these tropes. In this chapter I have explore the attraction of a traditional aesthetic. In the next chapter, I look at ideologies that influence attitudes to the past and the morality of fake that arise from a consideration of this aesthetic.

5

Learnt Values: The Ideological Legacy of Modernism

Ideology is an illusion consistent with interest, but a well-grounded illusion.
(Bourdieu, 2010, p. 67)

In the last chapter I identified the adoption of historical motifs and iconography as the primary differentiator in the traditional-modernist style division. Here I continue with this theme, exploring the role of ideology in the formation of taste judgements through three key facets of the ideological legacy of Modernism that persist in the architectural establishment. Whilst there are a number of theories of Modernism, most agree that at its heart are: a belief that the spirit of an age that must be respected in design; a belief in the forward advancement of progress that design must look towards; and a belief in authenticity in the purpose and execution of design. These were articulated perhaps most forcefully and influentially by the historian Nikolaus Pevsner. These beliefs, I posit are at the heart of the elite's resistance to historicism and also influence other attitudes that play an important part in the elite-popular architectural taste schism. They give rise to a set of what I call learnt values, in that they are promulgated in architectural education and maintained in mainstream architectural culture. I argue that these values centre around: the role of the past in contemporary architecture; the importance of creative originality; and the integrity of architectural expression. This is summarised in figure 5.7 in this chapter's conclusion.

In the same way that my enquiry in the previous chapter explored the relationship between ideas of tradition and Traditional Architecture in order to understand the impact on taste judgements, here I consider the extent to which some of the key ideologies associated with modernism influence visual attitudes. As Bourdieu notes above, ideology is attached to interest, making it prevalent in interested groups and atypical in indifferent groups. The ideologies that I explore here are attached to those with an architectural interest, namely the architectural elite. I will set out that within this group bound by interest, there are ideological positions for and against modernism, both tied to similar conceptions, just separated by different stances taken towards them. Bourdieu also asserts that ideology is an illusion; it is not a reality, however robust it may seem, but a point of view that is rooted in beliefs that feel true to the holders. This is relevant to the elite-popular taste divide as it is a separating dynamic. This *sense* of truth is a factor that I consider further in chapter seven in looking at the values attached to expert evaluation and is important in challenging the presumed authority of elite taste that I raise in the thesis conclusion.

I start by considering the emergence and flourishing of the view of architecture as a moral instrument; a locus of ideology. In 'Conceptions of the past', I use Latour's critical work on the values and mechanisms of the modern project (1993) as a reference framework for looking at architectural ideals and doxas. I am concerned with the disparity in opinions that specifically revolves around the best way of building now, for the future, not the merits of what was built in the past. I look at how conceptions of the past impact upon ideas for the present, exploring why modernists think that the present must be modern, and the traditionalists do not, and the distorted view of the past from both of these ideological positions. In 'Progress and originality' I

then go on to look at the ideals of progress and originality attached to modernity, that also translates to architectural modernism, and the consequent fear of stagnation in not advancing, referencing Friedrich Nietzsche and Walter Benjamin in my arguments. Lastly, in 'Authenticity and the antagonism of ornament', I look at the ideology of authenticity, exploring beliefs in genuineness and the morality of the fake, and the Modernist rejection of ornament that is rooted in this ideal of truthful expression. The aim here is to unpack the underpinnings of the elite-lay divide with regard to ideology.

5.1

Morality and ideology in architecture

Ideology and morality are closely linked; a belief system is often interconnected with an ethical position and principles of behaviour that are judged to be right and wrong. The Modern Movement was strongly interlinked with a moral position (Powers, 2007); that there is social purpose in architecture, with it operating as an instrument for creating a good society (Watkin, 2001). Morality is integral to the ideology of Modernism and I will argue persists in the legacy of Modernism that underlies the taste preferences of the architectural elite even today. In this section I briefly trace the roots of morality in architecture that preceded Modernism, and consider its current position. I focus on the publications of architect Augustus Pugin, who is acknowledged as a key figure in the introduction of morality into architecture.

5.1.1 Nineteenth century origins

The coupling of meaning and architecture is as old as architecture itself. But it was not until the nineteenth century that the evaluation of architecture acquired a moral dimension (Habraken, 1997; Landow, 2012; Watkin, 2001) in addition to other layers of interpretive meaning, such as the reflection of power and status, that still persists today. This moral leap was perhaps an inevitable consequence in the context of an expanded choice of style in this period, caused by the proliferation of building types and increase in architectural demand (Saint, 1983), as discussed in chapter three in relation to style. This introduced an arena for differentiation, through associated morality attached to the different revival styles, in a rising climate of moral relativism emerging with the loosening of the sacrosanct hold of religion and its attendant absolute morality (Hill, 2007).

The connection of architecture and morality was given impassioned voice in the influential writings of Augustus Pugin, the polemical *Contrasts* (1836) and *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (1841). In *Contrasts*, using illustrations and commentary Pugin compared fifteenth century (Gothic style) and current (nineteenth century Classical style) urban buildings, with the effect of not just highlighting formal style differences but the social, political and moral weight of architecture. Intended as a thesis about the decline of architecture and taste as a direct consequence of the change in religion from Catholic to Protestant, the contrasts that Pugin set out made conspicuous the ethical dimension of building; that form could not be considered in disconnection to function. His response was to argue for a return to medieval faith, social structures and architecture (Hill, 2012). Whilst the text and illustrations concentrate on ecclesiastical and related works they also include two provocative contrasts: one of cities, the

other of 'Residences of the Poor' (fig.16). The 'Catholic Town of 1440' (fig.14) features a defensive wall and a multitude of soaring church spires. 'The same town in 1840' (fig.14) shows the city wall replaced by riverside warehouses, the grand abbey in ruins, the skyline dominated by chimneys billowing smoke and foregrounded by a new jail and adjacent pleasure gardens. The last of the series shows the 'modern poor house' (fig.16), shown as an effective prison and the 'ancient poor house' (fig.16) as a religious sanctuary. Pugin's message was clear: you are, as a society, what you build. And in his view that was degraded.

This struck a chord at a time when the city was massively expanding, with industry and workers under unprecedented stress (Hill, 2012). The highlighting of the role of the architect in the creation of the organism that was the emergent industrial city was timely and sowed the seed for the moral positioning of architects that became fundamental to Modernism. So too the notion that architecture was a moral instrument, a vehicle through which social problems could be created or solved, taking it beyond a consideration of just style and fashion to a higher level of action that became a persistent thread of Modernist ideology decades later. Whilst this bond of morality with architecture assumed an intrinsic status in the twentieth century, it did not stand entirely without questioning. David Watkin, for example, author of *Architecture and Morality* and ardent critic of the modernist project, takes issue with the assumed moral authority of both architecture and architects to promote social and political ideals and effect a better society (Watkin, 2001).

The primacy of the social role of architecture and architects diminished from the last quarter of the twentieth century with both the rise of free market ideology and modernism's own mutation into post-modernism. Jencks, for example says of who he calls the 'Neo-Moderns' that "they say are no longer utopians who wish to change society but rather aesthetes who play with Modernist forms; their essential message is not ethical but stylistic, a new baroque elaboration of the language synthesised in the twenties." (Jencks, 1990, p. 17). But that is not to say that morality has disappeared from architectural ideology. Just as the dogma of Modernism has softened in the heterogeneity of contemporary modernism, but still leaves its trace, so too the belief in architecture as an instrument to societal change has tempered into seeing it as a contributory part of the operations of society that can support or obstruct socio-political objectives. For example, concerns over 'poor doors' that distinguish social and private housing in a development (Wall & Osborne, 2018), and 'poor playground' segregation to communal play space for different residential tenures (Jessel, 2019).

Although morality is strongly associated with the architectural Modernism of the mid-twentieth century, its roots lay in the strained conditions of industrialisation and the rapid urbanisation of the early nineteenth. In the following sections I explore how its tie still remains embedded in the architectural ideology of the architectural establishment today.

5.2 Conceptions of the past

Historicism is the trend to believe in the power of history to such a degree as to choke original action and replace it by action which is inspired by period precedent...the phenomenon which interests me and which I mean by the

return of historicism is imitation of, or inspiration by, much more recent styles, styles which have never been revived. Of course, all reviving of styles of the past is a sign of weakness (Pevsner, 1961, p. 230).

Historicism as a design approach is characterised by using styles of the past. As an architectural design approach, it is characterised by styles, not just from the past, but specifically, those that are pre-modernist. The International Style of the 1920s and 1930s would not fall within its catchment, for example, despite being from a time that would otherwise be designated as *the past*. It would perhaps then be more precise to describe it as *unmodernist*, but I will stick here to established terminology of historicist. In this section I will focus on unpicking the controversy of the past in situating ideals about the present. I am interested in the ideology behind the preoccupation with the past expressed through historicism, including what is it about historic Modernism that curtails this attention, and correspondingly, the ideological root that so inflames the mainstream architectural elite (but is not limited to them) about such a fixation with the past and its pre-modernist styles.

Attitudes to architecture of the past - the historic past - are not to be confused with attitudes to using the past in the present in architecture - the rekindled past. There is no indication that architects value historic buildings any less than the lay public do. The mainstream architectural establishment sees the fine buildings of the past as fine buildings of the past, but not as templates for buildings of the future, and snub the contemporary adoption of traditional formal styles for being inappropriate for the modern age (for example as expressed by Richard Rogers in Rogers, 2013). The critical attitude differences between this moderncentric establishment position and that of the traditionalists discussed in the last chapter, are in the *role* of the past and its architectural languages, not in the value of them in their own right.

The past, and most pertinently, its relation to the present, is contested ideological territory that Latour probes in his enquiry of the modern condition in *We Have Never Been Modern*. In this section I draw on his model of 'moderns' and 'antimoderns' (1993, p. 41) to get a foothold from where I can consider the ideologies that are attached to different conceptions of the past. The moderns, says Latour "suffer from the illness of historicism" (1993, p. 69); with this he tantalisingly casts historicism as a modern condition, irreparably bound to it. In 'Moderns, antimoderns and the past', I explore the co-dependency of modernism and historicism. I use Latour's formulation of the characteristics of being modern as a basis from which to consider modernist and historicist positions on architectural taste. In 'The grip of Zeitgeist', I extend the argument about the past to its role in the present by considering the notion of Zeitgeist in mainstream modernist and historicist architectural ideologies. I end this section questioning the limitation of the binary positioning of these two attitudes, exposing the alternatives that fall outside of a dualistic ideological framework.

5.2.1 Moderns, antimoderns and the past - lessons from Latour

Bruno Latour's seminal book, *We Have Never been Modern*, serves as a useful framework in unpicking the different ideological relationships to the past that are embedded in different taste attitudes. He vividly sets out the positions of two main oppositional mindsets, borne by who he calls the 'the moderns' and 'the antimoderns' (his cast also extends to 'premoderns', 'nonmoderns', 'postmoderns' and 'amoderns' (1993, pp. 41, 47), that I will draw on in the concluding chapter, but the primary pull of his argument for consideration here is in these two interlocked binaries). Although setting out to expose the fallacies and limitations of dualistic

positioning, in favour of networked interrelationships, Latour revels in the drama and caricature of binary oppositions. He appoints the 'moderns' and 'antimoderns' as interdependent stances, like the surfaces of a shell, that share the same misconception of time, and what he calls the terms of the 'modern Constitution', such that "only the sign and the direction of their indignation vary" (1993, p. 47):

Time's arrow is unambiguous: one can go forward, but then one must break with the past; one can go backward, but then one has to break with the modernizing avant-gardes, which have broken radically with their own past. (Latour, 1993, p. 69)

All definitions of modernity, he says "point, in one way or another, to the passage of time. The adjective 'modern' designates a new regime, an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution in time. When the word 'modern', 'modernization', or 'modernity' appears, we are defining, by contrast, an archaic and stable past" (1993, p. 10). The shared narrative of time in the two positions is that it flows in a linear trajectory. For the moderns this flow is permanently forward in an advancement of progress that extinguishes the past behind it. The "chief oddity of the moderns" is, for Latour, "the idea of a time that passes irreversibly and annuls the entire past in its wake" (1993, p. 47). Calendar time and conceptual time are brought together to give coherence and order to recognisable sets of elements, such that to go backward would be 'archaic' and 'irrational' (1993, p. 73). For the antimoderns, the future of modern progress is marked by degeneracy, spawning the desire to reverse the flow of time and to return to the past, thereby sharing the fallacy that there is a past that can be returned to. "The idea of an identical repetition of the past and that of a radical rupture with any past" he says "are two symmetrical results of a single conception of time. We cannot return to the past, to tradition, to repetition, because these great immobile domains are the inverted image of the earth that is no longer promised to us today: progress, permanent revolution, modernization, forward flight" (1993, p. 76). Latour argues that the perceived threat to the moderns of an amodern non-linear concept of the time passing (such as a spiral) is the undermining of its protective ideas of archaism and irrationality that support the onward trajectory of progress. To lose the trajectory would be to lose the constructed enemy of the antimodern. And vice versa; the two positions relying on the intransigent positioning of the other. (This is another example of symmetrical inversion set out in chapter four in relation to the binaries of traditional and modern relying on the opposite for their self-definition).

The modernist and historicist positions on architectural taste could be thought of in these Latourian terms of 'moderns' and 'antimoderns', standing at the two poles of the ideological construction of *the past*, seemingly separate but connected by a common (mis)conception of time as an entity that can be escaped from or returned to. Both segment the passage of time and separate *the past* as something that is complete and standing a clear distance behind us. Latour's point is that they are both modern constructions, conceptualising the past as a place to move away from, in progressive advancement, or to move back to, in protective salvation. (And the postmodernists merely taunt both in grabbing symbols of the past in the creation of new hybrid forms for the future). But the idea of a possibility of return, however illusory, is intrinsic to both their positions. In extremis, the modernist construct could be framed as seeking to deny the relationship of the past to the present by cutting off the past, and the historicist construct to deny the relationship of the present to the past by ignoring the present.

For Latour, *the past* is a model of invention. It therefore follows that the details ascribed to its construction are idiosyncratic and partial – chosen to suit particular positions. This flexible

slipperiness can be used at the convenience of both moderns and antimoderns, fuelling their disagreements on detail but supporting their shared (mis)conception of principle on time. This is apparent in the modernist (modern) and historicist (antimodern) positions, that cast *the past* prescriptively, not just that which has gone before in time. It has a date attached to it not dissimilar to the mechanism of the Gregorian calendar, from which point time was divided and *the past* was sanctioned. The clock was reset sometime between the wars, with the birth of Modernism. This disconnection of the past with the passage of time enables, from the modernist, anti-historicist perspective, the products of traditional, rule-based thinking to be cast as belonging to another time; out-of-date and obsolete whatever their temporal age, whilst protecting the products of modern, invention-based thinking as new and valid, whenever they happened in the last hundred years.

In Latour's model, the notion of the dramatic disruption of revolution is built into the modern construction of time, being necessary to retain the narrative order that underpins the linear concept of progress. Revolutions constitute breaks from which the flow of time can coherently (re)start and from which the chaos of *the past* can be put conveniently behind. The preservation of objects of the past, dated and kept on display as trophies of a time conquered, is a symptom of the modern conception of the past as done with and separate to the present: "[The moderns] want to keep everything, date everything, because they think they have definitively broken with their past. The more they accumulate revolutions, the more they save; the more they capitalize, the more they put on display in museums. Maniacal destruction is counterbalanced by equally maniacal conservation" (1993, p. 69). But this is futile, he argues, as the past cannot be either separated or banished from the present. The idea of a revival of the past, he declares, "is incomprehensible to the moderns. Thus they treat it as the return of the repressed. They view it as archaism. 'If we aren't careful' they think, 'we're going to return to the past; we're going to fall back into the Dark Ages.'" (1993, p. 69). For the moderns, clarity lies in the future, and confusion in the past. This illusive clarity fuels the optimistic drive forward. And the imagined confusion invigorates the fear of standing still or going backwards.

The antimodern counter to this would be rebuilding those objects of the past as if they were as replicable and context-less as rubber ducks on a production line. And from the historicist stance, the inexorable maturing of modernism, that retains a Peter Pan-like status, is conveniently glossed over. This construction supports the fiction that modern buildings, in their iconographic break with *the past*, effectively have no history, despite now spanning a century of genealogy. It also illuminates the partiality of *the past* in historicism – it is as if modernism never aged. This blurred distinction between *modern* and *old* is illustrated in fig 5.1 below.



Figure 5.1 In the early twentieth century, early Modernist buildings pre-date late Arts and Crafts buildings, blurring the distinction of modern and old. For example: *High and Over*, Amersham, by Amyas Cornell, 1929 (left), and *The Leys*, Hampstead Garden Suburbs, by Cecil George Butler, 1933 (right).

A further expedience enabled by the dissociation of *the past* from *history* is the separation of buildings from the social, economic, political and cultural historic contexts of their creation. This is the antimodern, traditionalist manoeuvre for collapsing time, to assume an equivalence of historic and contemporary buildings that is purely based on style, material and method. This model of *the past* lies behind why-can't-we-build-like-we-used-to? questions directed against modernist architecture, that imply it is just a question of will and style (see for example, Wagner, 2019, in reponse to such laments).

From the Latourian perspective I have set out in which *the past* in architecture is approaching its first centenary, it begs the question of how old the modern can get and how different the socio-political context of centuries past can become until the convenience of this ideological fabrication strains at the seams and starts unravelling. Will *the past* then be exposed as a euphemism for style? A convenient stand-in that averts discussion on the seemingly subjective matter of style, and taste.

5.2.2 The Grip of Zeitgeist

The character of an epoch is epitomized in its buildings. In them, its spiritual and material resources find concrete expression (Walter Gropius in Gropius, Gropius, & Bayer, 1972, p. 22 [1923]).

To understand differing ideas of how the past is brought into the present it is important to be aware of different attitudes to the concept of Zeitgeist, ie spirit of the age. The word *Zeitgeist* was introduced into German in the eighteenth century, but was developed conceptually by Hegel in *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807) - in which he also uses the terms *Weltgeist* (world spirit) and *Volkgeist* (national spirit). With *Zeitgeist*, Hegel encompassed the theory that art (including architecture) is, inescapably, an expression of the cultural age in which it is produced; it both emerges from and reflects the context from which it is born. The consciousness that the architecture of an age created future generations' understanding of that age was a preoccupation of the nineteenth century (Forty, 2004), but it was fervently embraced as an idea

in the Modern Movement. The notion of *Zeitgeist* provided both a conceptual legitimization of the rally to find a new aesthetic expression for the rapidly changing times and a means to endorse the tenet that the movement was about something all-encompassing and bigger than the style or tectonics of an individual building.

Moral relativism is implicit in the *Zeitgeist* concept. If each epoch has its own expression - that reflects the culture, and thereby morality, of that age - it is implicit that there will be a succession of values that constitute and define the passing of each epoch. To continue with Latour's thesis of a joint misconception by the moderns and antimoderns that is revealed in their symmetrical inversion and interdependence, the modernists and historicists can also be understood in their use the construct of *Zeitgeist* to support their own positions. For the moderns it stands as the indisputable firm ground for designing with the latest thinking, innovations, and methods as a rightful, and necessary, expression of the age in which the buildings are created. It has a similar sense of duty and respect that is associated with tradition (discussed in the last chapter); something righteous, beyond rationale (Giedion, 1967; Pevsner, 1984). For the Modern Movement, the defining characteristic of the age at the turn of the twentieth century was technology, which was seen as an essential part of the new architectural approach (Sharr, 2018).

On the face of it, traditionalists would appear not to subscribe to the *Zeitgeist* concept, given their favouring of the use of erstwhile styles for contemporary buildings, and the praise of the timeless qualities of classicism. But the coupling of style to values that lies at the heart of the concept is an ethos shared by traditionalists (Traditional Architecture Group, 2018), for which, much like the modern construct of time, it is only the direction the two positions face that differs. This is necessary to condemn the 'death of our culture' from Modernism (Terry, 2015, p. 3) and commend values associated with *the* (pre-modern) *past* (Traditional Architecture Group, 2018).

A conviction in *Zeitgeist* has remained a bedrock of mainstream architectural ideology (argued for example by Richard Rogers in "Defending Modern Architecture", 2013). The corollary of this belief that buildings should be of their time is that contemporary architecture should be modernist and not historicist (Latour's metaphor of historicism as an illness of the moderns is striking here – positioning it as a requisite but distressing condition of modernism); if buildings must be of their time they cannot be a repeat of what has gone and been done before. And the upshot of the directly opposing belief in a true, timeless pre-modern architecture is that new buildings should repeat the success of old ones, following the formal rules from which they were created. Given the irreducibility of these positions on *Zeitgeist*, this judgement forms a critical component in the form of the modernist-traditional taste divide.

But these polarised views on *Zeitgeist* operate within the field of architectural experts and aficionados who know and care enough about it to take an ideological position. (The impact of salience and expertise will be explored in chapter seven). The modernist-traditional binary should not be confused with the elite-popular divide just because it is another binary – whilst it may be commonly thought that the two directly coincide, they do not necessarily. Breaking out of binary vision, there are more than the two possible positions of pro-*Zeitgeist* and anti-*Zeitgeist* outlined above to consider; of thinking that architecture either should be representative of the present age or that it should not. There is also what could be called a post-*Zeitgeist* stance of thinking that architecture need not have to be representative of the present age, especially if the styles and associations of a previous age appeal more - especially sensitive with domestic architecture that has the factor of projection of the occupiers' identity at play. And there is also

the unZeitgeist standpoint of not thinking that style and the era are a relevant, or meaningful correlation in architecture. A tolerance, or embrace, of historicist-based styles, including the housebuilder-vernacular typical of volume-built housing, by the lay public may be explained by all but the first, pro-Zeitgeist, of these possibilities, summarised in the diagram in fig. 5.2 below:

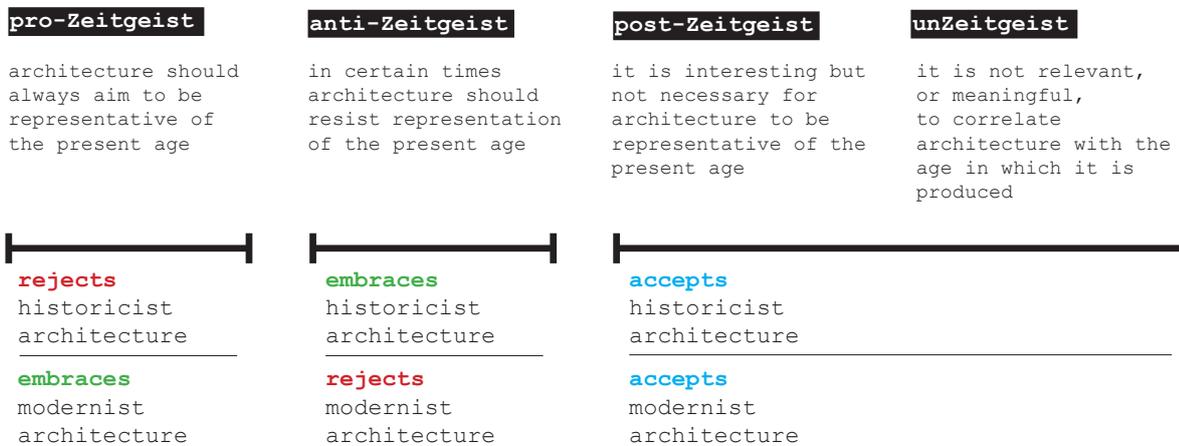


Figure 5.2 Zeitgeist diagram showing my suggested positions on Zeitgeist relative to stances towards historicist and modernist architecture.

Latour’s framing of both the modern and antimodern conception of time as linear and something that can progress forward or be returned back to sets a useful context for understanding the modernist mindset and the co-dependency he describes between modernism and historicism. The concept of Zeitgeist, and the imperative to recognisably express the defining characteristics of an age, was central to the ideology of the Modern Movement. This illuminates the categorical rejection of historicism by the Modernist influenced architectural establishment that take a pro-Zeitgeist position. It also reveals how historicist architecture could be embraced or accepted depending on an alternative Zeitgeist position.

5.3 Progress and originality

One of the key beliefs of the moderns is the forward trajectory of progress (Latour, 1993). This relates to the issues around conceptions of the past and Zeitgeist discussed above but also has further implications on Modernist ideology, namely the emphasis, to the point of necessity, of originality and the need to be new. In ‘Progress and the fear of stagnation’, I first consider the implications of the need for advancement in art and technology that has been inherited by the architectural establishment, including a consequent fear of stasis. In ‘Originality and the sin of imitation’, I then look at the question of originality and the consequential veneration of authorship and disdain of imitation that this sets up. These principles, held by the modernist architectural establishment, undoubtedly affect elite taste judgements and so will be a

contributing factor in the elite-popular taste divide if the establishment ideologies and values are not more widely shared. I reference the philosopher Walter Benjamin's Marxist analysis of mass-produced art, "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" as it is an influential text within modernist architectural culture and resonant with the mass produced aspect of volume housebuilding. From the other end of the political spectrum, I also reference Friedrich Nietzsche whose philosophical ideas are associated with Modernism (in its broadest rather than just architectural sense), especially his challenge to traditional European values, advocacy of cultural renewal and emphasis on individuality (Anderson, 2017).

5.3.1 Progress and a fear of stagnation

I love him who worketh and inventeth to build a house for beyond-man and make ready for him earth, animal, and plant; for thus he willeth his own destruction.

And thus Zarathustra spake unto the folk: "It is time for man to mark out his goal. It is time for man to plant the germ of his highest hope". (F. W. Nietzsche, 1899, pp. 9, 11)

Behind the Modernist zeal for being true to the *Zeitgeist* lies an unyielding belief in progress. The idea of progress is inextricably tied into the moderns' ideology (that Latour calls the modern Constitution) and the rigidly linear conception of time (as discussed earlier in this chapter). Although Latour detects the seeds of doubt (in addition to postmodern scepticism) that can be seen sprouting from the modern promise of progress, they are not yet sufficient to have toppled the structural ideology that needs to believe in continual, perpetual advancement and improvement (1993). There is an implicit morality in this position: that *stagnation equals death* (morally weak and corrupt) and *progress equals life* (morally strong and true). This resonates with Nietzsche's concept of 'beyond-man' (*übermensch*, also later translated and commonly now referred to as 'superman' after George Bernard Shaw's 1903 play *Man and Superman*, and 'overman') – a symbol of striving humanity modelled on the ideals of aspirational effort, taking risk and acting with strong will, and its counter paradigm, 'the last man' (*der letzte mensch*) (1899, p. 11) – a symbol of empty self-satisfaction.

The legacy of this ideology holds fast in mainstream architectural culture that remains committed to the idea that well-designed buildings and places can improve the environments and outcomes for those who experience them, enabled by advances of efficiency and effectiveness through technology and the pursuit of progress; that architecture is more than just a capitalist tool for wealth creation. But such faith is not universal, and there is a widespread view that buildings being constructed today are not a positive addition to the environment (for example in Nimbyism as noted in Henderson, 2017; PropertyWire, 2018; Rudgard, 2017). In any case, not all moderns have espoused improvement as the purpose of change. T.S. Eliot, referred to in the last chapter for his inspiration to numerous key modernist architects, challenges the sanctity of the link between new and improved, questioning the idea of necessary progress with change and instead framing the change of new art as no more, or less, than accrued development:

[The poet] must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same. He must be aware that the mind of Europe ... is a mind which changes, and that this change is a

development which abandons nothing en route, which does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsmen. That this development, refinement perhaps, complication certainly, is not, from the point of view of the artist, any improvement (Eliot, 1932, p. 16).

Latour infers that it is not just optimism and faith in the brighter world of the future that spurs on the modern project, but that there is fear upholding this vision; the demon of the counter vision that keeps it on track (1993). The constructed enemy of the antimodern, and what it represents, is essential for the security of the modern. Stereotype moderns are brave and fearless in contrast to their fearful, reactionary antimodern counterparts afraid of change and progress (1993). But the inverse fears of stasis and stagnation cannot be ignored as hidden motivations gripping the moderns. Meaning and identity are intricately bound to advancement and improvement, that like the *übermensch* are associated with will and strength, such that a lack of progress signifies paralysis and failure, associated with the complacency and weakness of *der letzte mensch* (1899).

The bright light of confidence and passion in *the new* could also be seen then as a need to be new, that protects from a dread of falling back into the shadows of the past (1993). From this perspective, it suggests that prowling behind the conviction that historicism cannot be good, is the bigger, latent fear of a threat of cultural collapse. This is matched, in another occasion of inverted symmetry (chapter four), by traditionalists' converse faith in the qualities of tradition (of inheritance and certainty), and the consequent fear that a blind faith in progress and embrace of the new will also lead to cultural collapse through the discontinuity of time-honoured, tried-and-tested traditions (as expressed, for example, by Terry, 2015).

5.3.2 Originality and the sin of imitation

The Modernist reverence for originality emerges from a belief in progress and a forward trajectory of advancement. The moderns' faith in the new is served by the pursuit of invention and imagination. This in turn has the effect of holding authorship in esteem. The notion of individual authorship appears to originate from around the fourteenth century, before which time the design and execution of buildings was anonymous and collective (Saint, 1983). The ascribing of authorship to works of architecture then became more and more widespread until in the modern period, good architecture itself became inseparable from individual authorship and the idealisation of creative genius. This holds to the extent that the designs of a practice of 1500 staff designing a multitude of buildings around the world will still be thought of and referred to as the founding partner's own work, not the practice's (for example, MacGregor, 2018 with reference to Norman Foster).

I posit that there are two key aspects of originality to consider in the Modernist ideological legacy inherited by the architectural establishment: the originality of the creative process and the originality of production. The former is directly linked to the ideal of progress, the latter is more connected to the ideal of authenticity which I explore in the next section. There are also two angles on tradition that arise from these considerations: valuing the originality of the new and inventiveness of the creator above the convention of tradition that follows from the moderns' belief in progress; and the break in the generational handing-down of tradition in mass reproduction such as that of volume housebuilding. A corollary of the importance attached to originality and authorship is that imitation is derided by the modernist elite. (Imitation is

referred to as pastiche in the arts (Dyer, 2006), but as this term has pejorative connotations in architecture, I am using the more generalist and neutral *imitation*). The conviction of the superiority of the new and original over the inadequacy of the copy is captured by Neville Ward's architectural rewriting of part of T.S. Eliot's *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* with the lines: "The novelty of a work of imagination which is only popular and has nothing really new in it, soon wears off: for a later generation will prefer the original to the copy, when both belong to the past" (cited in Laurence, 2006, p. 55).

The intention in imitation is to copy; to take from the original and reproduce. This is different from working in a genre (which both historicism and modernism could be described as), for which the imitation of the original is not the purpose (Dyer, 2006). Imitation infers stasis, the *bête-noir* of the moderns, as its emphasis is on reproduction not invention. The potential of imitation as a means to an original, artistic end sits outside the common connotation of the word. Though we may imitate to learn, rather than just reproduce, using the knowledge gained in copying to go on to create something new, this sense of it as a tool that assists in nurturing or development is not implicit in the use of the word. Unlike tradition whose nature is to be active, as discussed in the last chapter, imitation is fixed and passive, with no implicit sense of evolution or progression. Furthermore, the inferred trajectory of imitation is towards the past; the emphasis being on looking back to what has already been done or made, more than forward towards what is to come – another red alert to the moderns whose trajectory is resolutely onward.

In his 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Walter Benjamin explores the distinctions and differences between original and reproduced works of art, that are germane to this enquiry into the ideal of artistic originality and anonymous reproduction with respect to housebuilding. He brings the question of tradition directly into the issue of mass reproduction when he says "reproductive technology ... removes the thing reproduced from the realm of tradition" (p.7):

In making many copies of the reproduction, it substitutes for its unique incidence a multiplicity of incidences. And in allowing the reproduction to come closer to whatever situation the person apprehending it is in, it actualizes what is reproduced. These two processes usher in a mighty upheaval of what is passed on - an upheaval of tradition that is the verso of the current crisis and renewal of mankind. (p.7).

The 'upheaval of tradition' that he refers to is the shift from an active lineage of the continuity of tradition in which things are manually repeated to one in which they are atemporally, technologically mass reproduced.

Concomitant with the primacy of originality and authorship for the architectural establishment is the loss of formal historical continuity of a commonly understood language of architectural form and expression (primarily classicism and vernacular) (Habracken, 1997). Habracken considers this to have resulted in excluding all but the initiated, expert elite from ready access to meaning in modern architecture (1998). At the end of the nineteenth century there was great concern, however, that the preoccupation with the architectural languages of antiquity since the Renaissance was empty and had already become meaningless (Habracken, 1998). In the impassioned words of Viollet-le-Duc: "Our monuments seem to be bodies without souls, the fragments of some departed civilization, a language incomprehensible even to those who employ it" (1875, p. 472). The accessibility of design originality could certainly be a significant

factor in the popular-elite taste schism. I will explore this issue further in the following two chapters, looking at the role of connection and continuity in architectural appreciation chapter six and the impact of expertise on evaluation in chapter seven.

I have argued that there is an implicit morality in the promise of progress believed in by the moderns, and embedded in the ideology of Modernism. Stasis, or retreat backwards, is cast as immoral in its complacency, whereas progress is pitched as true in its striving aspiration. But this striving is also motivated by fear of the perceived consequences of stasis. This further illuminates the modernist aversion of historicism, as a potential cultural threat through its disregard for the ideal of advancement. This belief in progress generates a veneration of originality. With respect to the creative process this beholds the pursuit of invention and an esteem for authorship. Additionally, this gives rise to an antipathy for imitation (commonly referred to pejoratively as pastiche in architecture), that carries a sense of looking backwards, to what has already been made, rather than forwards, towards the potential of what is to come. In the next section I look at another aspect of originality, with respect to production, that sees the veneration of the authentic and genuine.

5.4

Authenticity and the antagonism of ornament

The third of Modernism's core beliefs I am going to explore is that of truthfulness and honesty, which gives rise to an ideology of authenticity and value placed in integrity that continues to underlie modernist attitudes. I consider two different aspects of authenticity: one about something *being* original and not mass produced and one about expression. For the first strand of authenticity, 'Genuineness and the morality of fake', I follow Benjamin's notion of genuineness and aura – of being in time and place, with a sense of being grounded rather than parachuted in – to explore the questions of morality in the fake. The Modernist dogma against decoration and ornament overturned a long history of meaning, expression and appreciation of architecture. In this second strand of authenticity, 'Truth and ornament', I follow the thread of modernist attitudes to ornamentation from Pugin's declaration for truthfulness of expression to the striking response of Post-Modernism against the anti-ornament stance of Modernism and today's return to an interest in surface. I understand that there is also a gender dimension to attitudes towards ornamentation but have not been able to tackle it in the scope of this enquiry.

The morality of authenticity also reverberates in other attitudes evident in the architectural establishment that will be explored in chapter seven, namely, the downgrading of reactive pleasure in visual response, subliminally considered as inferior to engaged intellectual fulfilment; and the prioritising of the authenticity of the object over the experience of that object.

5.4.1 Genuineness and the morality of fake

'Genuine' was something a medieval Madonna was not at the time of its making - not yet; that was something it became over the course of ensuing centuries, most plentifully, perhaps, in the last [nineteenth century].
(Benjamin, 2008, p. 39)

The architectural establishment's rejection of imitation is concomitant with the Modernist belief in originality and progress, discussed above; that to imitate is, effectively, to give up and give in, to stagnate and die. But there is another moral dimension to the derision of imitation, that has become implicit in the use of the word pastiche - that of truthfulness and genuineness.

Benjamin notes that the idea of the genuineness of art was a particular preoccupation of the nineteenth century; that it was something art *became* but was not considered to be at the original time of its making. He locates the genuineness of the original in what he called its 'aura' (p.6), which he defines as "a unique manifestation of remoteness, no matter how near it may be" (p.39) and it is the aura, he asserts, that diminishes through reproduction:

Even with the most perfect reproduction, *one thing* stands out: the here and now of the work of art - its unique existence in the place where it is at this moment...The here and now of the original constitute the abstract idea of its genuineness. (Benjamin, 2008, p. 5)

In architectural discourse, the concern for authenticity also took off in the nineteenth century, with Pugin declaring "It will be readily admitted that the great test of Architectural beauty is the fitness of the design to the purpose for which it is intended ..." (1836, p. 1) and Viollet-le-Duc prescribing that "there are two ways of expressing truth in architecture: it must be true according to the programme of requirements, and true according to the methods and means of construction" (1875, pp. x, 474–475). Truth was one of Ruskin's seven 'Lamps' of architecture (1849), which he expanded on in *The Stones of Venice* (1851). Ruskin's writing was of significant influence on Morris, and the morality of honesty was central to the approach of the Arts and Crafts movement. This became a key tenet in twentieth century Modernism, evident for example in the theory of functionalism and the conviction in truth to materials. This latter aspect of truth of expression I will explore later in this chapter.

There is inherent deception in making one thing to look like another, such as the reproduction of European buildings and villages in China (Bosker, 2013), that brings a clear moral dimension to the question of authenticity. There is some evidence for architects' continued discomfort with dishonesty and deceit in design. A study of architects' and nonarchitects' judgements of street scenes (Gjerde, 2011) found general consensus on preferences but one of the tested scenes in the survey was much more negatively judged by architects. It transpired that the principal reason for this was the considered 'dishonest' (2011, p. 159) use of traditional elements in the design of a large retail building dominating the particular street scene, and additionally, the 'visual trickery' (2011, p. 159) employed to try and reduce the sense of scale of the building. The authors concluded that "the professionals clearly spotted a fraud" (2011, p. 159), which was not of concern to the lay respondents, some of whom cited the scene as positive due to its association with shopping.

Why would someone choose something fake over something original? Benjamin observes that the reproduction, which one may also read as the fake, "can also place the copy of the original in situations beyond the reach of the original itself. Above all, it makes it possible for the original to come closer to the person taking it in..." (Benjamin, 2008, p. 6). Just as a "cathedral quits its site to find a welcome in the studio of an art lover" (p.6), an old cottage from the village green is received in a new suburban estate and a Prada handbag from a catwalk is carried by a teenager to school. The reproduction brings proximity and accessibility, and can also bring new meaning in a new context. Mass reproduction has enabled the products of design to extend, through a whole variety of alternative formats, beyond the privileged few to the ordinary many. The

importance of authenticity is not just an ideology in architecture but is generally associated with having high cultural capital – valuing the artisanal over the mass produced (Holt, 1998).

There could an unlimited number of reasons for someone to choose a mass reproduction over an authentic original. As an illustration, these may include:

- they may not value the worth of the original (such as buying a mock designer handbag just because it is a nice bag);
- there may be no material difference from the original (such as buying a replica designer handbag because it looks and feels as good as the genuine bag);
- they may value the worth of the original but not be able to afford it (such as buying an imitation designer handbag because they cannot afford the genuine one that they prefer);
- they may be thinking they could pass it off for an original (such as a buying a copy of a designer handbag to pretend that it is an original);
- they may like the idea of having a kitsch fake (such as buying a rip-off designer handbag because it looks cool to carry a rip-off bag); or,
- they may not realise that it is a fake (such as buying a sham designer handbag thinking it was the real thing).

As for positions on Zeitgeist discussed earlier in this chapter, breaking down the simple binary of accepting or rejecting an *inauthentic*, mass reproduced design, is helpful in understanding the scope and root of attitudes that lie outside the legitimate cultural position that values the genuine and dismisses the fake. The range of responses to the fake I have discussed are summarised in the diagram in figure 5.3 below. This equates attitudes towards the fake with those towards mass reproduction. It proposes the rejection of the fake as rooted in the importance of the authenticity of the thing, and the embrace or acceptance of the fake as taking into consideration other criteria such as financial, relative quality, available choice and the celebration of the thing as a mass reproduction. Duplicity, disdained by the architectural establishment, is only one of the possibilities I have linked to the acceptance of the fake.

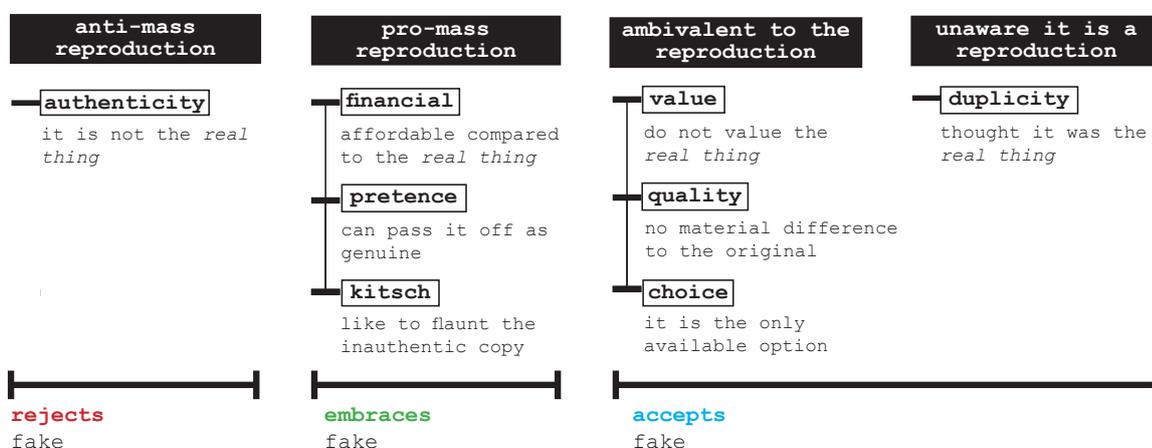


Figure 5.3 Attitudes to fake diagram, showing the nuance of possible reasons in the choice (knowing or unwitting) of a mass reproduced design.

Like many of the Modernist ideologies, the idea of architecture being true to its purpose and construction originated in the nineteenth century. In addition to being un-original as discussed in the last section, imitation is also derided because of its perceived dishonesty, and not respecting this principle of being true to purpose. Evidence-based studies have indicated that this is still a concern of architects in their visual evaluation of buildings. Mass reproduction is associated with the inauthentic and the fake as well as with popular culture, but the reasons for choosing something fake over something original may be due to many considerations, and not necessarily concerned with or motivated by duplicity.

5.4.2 Truth and ornament

The morality of truthful expression in modernism may be Pugin's lasting legacy (Brittain-Catlin, 2016). He began his second book, *The True Principles of Pointed Or Christian Architecture*, 1841, with the following emphatic statement on ornament:

The two great rules for design are these : 1st, that there should be no features about a building which are not necessary for convenience, construction, or propriety; 2nd, that all ornament should consist of enrichment of the essential construction of the building. The neglect of these two rules is the cause of all the bad architecture of the present time. Architectural features are continually tacked on buildings with which they have no connexion, merely for the sake of what is termed effect; and ornaments are actually constructed, instead of forming the decoration of construction, to which in good taste they should be always subservient.

In pure architecture the smallest detail should have a meaning or serve a purpose; and even the construction itself should vary with the material employed, and the designs should be adapted to the material in which they are executed. (Pugin, 1841, p. 1)

This anticipated architect Louis Sullivan's famous maxim, "form ever follows function" (1922 [1896]) and the Modernist dogma against decoration and ornament, epitomised in architect and critic Adolf Loos's 1908 inflammatory essay "Ornament and Crime", that though mocked and rejected at the time of writing, when lavish decoration was the cultural norm, has had an enduring influence (Adolf Opel Introduction to Loos, 1998). The principle of truthful expression of design was manifest in the axiom of truth to materials, that was central to the Arts and Crafts movement, as a reaction to ostentatious ornamentation of the nineteenth century and decoration for its own sake that hid the natural properties of materials (Woodham, 2005). Truthful expression went on to be a tenet of Modernism and is still very much alive in the culture of architecture schools, strikingly illustrated by the UK's second oldest school of architecture, the Architectural Association, which has the motto, *Design with Beauty, Build in Truth* (Architectural Association, 2019).

The role and status of ornament in architecture has dramatically changed from Antiquity to the modern period. For centuries, ornament was redolent with meaning and central to the expression and appreciation of architecture. The origins of the word ornament lie in the Greek idea of *Kosmos*, that conjoins ideas of adornment and order (C. L. Guest, 2015). This apparent contradiction of being both intrinsic and supplemental resonated in the idea of ornamentation through to its wholesale rejection by the Modern Movement in the twentieth century. In Imperial Rome ornament was a legal classification of things that could be removed from a

building; bigger than furniture but not structural (Picon, 2013). Although in the case of a column that was fundamental to both ornamental order and structure it straddled categorisations. Architectural historian, Antoine Picon argues that ornament was for centuries understood as “the result of a series of operations of differentiation between supported fixtures and their supports” (2013, p. 38) rather than a fixed assortment of elements, noting that many parts in a building could be seen as both supported and supporting. “Through its capacity to be both added and indispensable”, he writes, “ornament challenged such hierarchy [of the structural and non-structural].” (2013, p. 38) Up to the Renaissance period, ornament indicated wholeness and completion, and the relationship of the added to the adorned was central to its discussion (C. Guest, 2009). It represented a bridge between nature and culture (Picon, 2013). By the nineteenth century, the concern over ornament shifted to it as decorating structure and its debate centred around the role of decoration with respect to industrialisation (C. Guest, 2009). This was addressed in different ways by writers such as John Ruskin (1851), Owen Jones (1856) and Christopher Dresser (1873). Jones and Dresser also tried to set out universal laws for ornamental design, extracted from laws of nature (C. Guest, 2009).

Picon argues that before Modernism, ornament rather than space was fundamental to the practice and appreciation of architecture. He identifies three key aspects to it: pleasure and beauty; social rank and prestige; and communication and knowledge (Picon, 2013). In addition to visual adornment and articulation it was used as an expression of status, and the meanings of its language were also commonly understood. Allegorical themes were utilised for example, which merged into the political (Picon, 2013). Modernism then broke the association between ornament and social hierarchy and reversed the positions of ornament and space relative to architecture. As architectural historian Clare Guest notes, for the “polemicists of the Modern Movement...ornament represented the oppressive weight of mediation with history.” (C. Guest, 2009, p. 188). But though the language and references of ornament abruptly changed, what Picon calls a ‘neo-ornamental vocabulary’ (Picon, 2013, p. 21) – manifested itself through Modernism, revealed for example in the traces left by concrete formwork, the patterns across marble and onyx surfaces, or the articulation of column details.

Architects Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown, took issue with reductive modernism, Venturi declaring: “Where simplification cannot work, simpleness results. Blatant simplification means bland architecture. Less is a bore.” (1966, p. 25). The subsequent response to ornament in what came to be called Post-Modernism was as iconographic tropes, disconnected from their original grammar and meaning¹². Whilst the heyday of Post-Modernism had passed by the end of the last century, its iconoclastic embrace of ornament was taken up by practices such as FAT (Fashion Architecture Taste) who, inspired by Venturi and Scott-Brown amongst others, railed against modernist ideologies, such as truth to materials and construction, in their work (FAT, 2019). (Ref fig.5.4). Then partner Charles Holland said of their approach:

We regard ornament less as a guilty pleasure and more as a communicative tool. There is traditionally a kind of puritanism in the UK, a rather macho approach in which engineering and high-tech appliqué is OK. It can all be justified in practical terms but I think we can look more critically now at a modernism in which the motifs of industry were applied to architecture to

¹² Jencks also argues that Neo-Vernacular architecture, that he calls ‘the sign of an instant community’ (1988, p. 150), popular in housing projects in the 1970s, was no more meaningful than Post-Modernism in its choice of referential language, maintaining that the conditions of the true vernacular had disappeared and so this language was an imposition by architects; ‘the sign of a lost community’ (p. 150).

make it look modern, which in itself is a kind of ornamentation. (Heathcote, 2008, para. 7).



Figure 5.4 .Islington Square housing, by FAT – a twenty-first century example of architectural ornamentation using historical tropes.

The end of the twentieth century saw a change in importance from structure to surface as the envelope became more disconnected from the interior, that corresponds with technical advances in response to the environment and regulatory demands of construction that necessitate the separation of facade from the structure of a building, that Modernism was unfettered by. This is manifest in a trend for the ‘wallpaperization’ of the surface (Picon, 2013, p. 29). (Ref fig. 5.5).



Figure 5.5 .John Lewis Department Store, Leicester by Foreign Office Architects, 2007, an example of twenty-first century wallpaperization of a building's surface.

Architect, theorist, and former Professor of Composition at the Barcelona School of Architecture, Ignasi de Sola-Morales, revitalises some of the ambiguous and supplementary qualities of ornament in situating decoration as:

that which presents itself not as substance but as accident: something complementary that will even lend itself, in Walter Benjamin's terms, to a reading that is not attentive but distracted, and which thus offers itself to us as something that enhances and embellishes reality, making it more tolerable, without presuming to impose itself, to be central, to claim for itself that deference demanded by totality. (Sola-Morales, 1997, p. 70).

But whilst the interest in pleasure and social prestige have returned, the shared collective meaning of ornament has remained absent, with no attempt to assign symbolic meaning to this new ornamentalism (Picon, 2013). Contemporary writers as various as architect NJ Habraken, architectural theorist Mark Wigley and philosopher Roger Scruton have commented on the problem of the ordering of architecture without ornament and its codes, and the void in meaning left from Modernism's categoric break with its language (Habraken, 1998; Scruton, 2013; Wigley, 2001), with Scruton, a critic of modernism, arguing that its failure "lies in the absence of any reliable patterns or types, which spontaneously harmonise with the existing urban décor, and retain the essence of the street as a common home." (2013, p. xv). Picon correspondingly asks, "how can architecture be a medium without carrying any clear message?" (2013, p. 50).

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have identified and explored three of the significant architectural ideologies that are attached to the stance of the moderns (and so too by implication, antimoderns, in Latour's lexicon) and form part of the ideological legacy of Modernism held by the architectural elite.

In looking at morality and ideology in architecture, I set out the roots of the association of morality with architecture that stood out in Modernism and, I subsequently argue, remains part of the ideology of today's architectural elite.

In looking at conceptions of the past, I investigated the distorted, and slippery, view of the past from modern and anti-modern positions, using Latour's framing of the conception of linear time as a context for understanding the modernist mindset. This also suggested the mutually dependent positions of modernism and historicism. The concept of *Zeitgeist*, that was central to Modernism, and I argue, is part of its legacy to the architectural establishment, offers an explanation of the dismissal of historicism.

In looking at the moderns' belief in progress and originality that was embedded in the moral ideology of Modernism, and I argue also tacit in the attitude of today's architectural elite, I offered a further cause behind modernist aversion of historicism – as a potential cultural threat through its disregard for the ideal of advancement. I argued that the pursuit of invention and an esteem for authorship consequent of a belief in originality also gives rise to an antipathy for imitation or pastiche.

In looking at the ideology of authenticity, that I posit is also inherited from Modernism, I suggested that imitation is also scorned by the architectural elite because of its perceived pretence. But I set out many reasons that may lie behind a choice of the inauthentic fake over

the genuine original, only one of which connected to duplicity. I also argued that the Modernist belief in integrity, that allied with its antagonism towards ornamentation, engendered an antipathy to superficiality which still lingers in modernism today. Though in tracing historic attitudes to ornamentation I described a current re-emergent interest in surface and envelope, albeit without a reconnection of commonly understood codes of visual meaning.

These explorations have thrown up a number of potential factors that may be at play in architectural taste judgements. These may also be key contributors to the divide between the architectural elite and the lay public, given the attachment of architectural ideologies to those connected with or interested in the field. Latour's characterisation of the divide in America in the 2016 US presidential vote as 'two bubbles of unrealism': a 'Utopia of the future' and a 'Utopia of the past' (2016, para. 8), has clear resonance with the schism over the past identified here in taste attitudes. But it would be mistaken to assume that there are two equivalent ideological bubbles, of intellectual elite and 'the others' (2016, para. 6), with respect to architectural attitudes as it cannot be assumed that the lay public have ideologically based views about architecture. (The impact of salience and expertise on taste judgements will be explored in chapter seven). It would be more accurate as regards the taste divide to consider an ideological bubble of specialists, split along traditionalist and modernist lines, as floating in a non-ideological sea of lay public perception; two utopias perhaps, but only one bubble, as illustrated in fig. 5.5 below. The isolation of the ideological bubble has the impact of the phenomenon of 'groupthink' (Janis, 1972) within its niche groups, through which the ideologies and values attached to them become accepted, unchallenged norms.

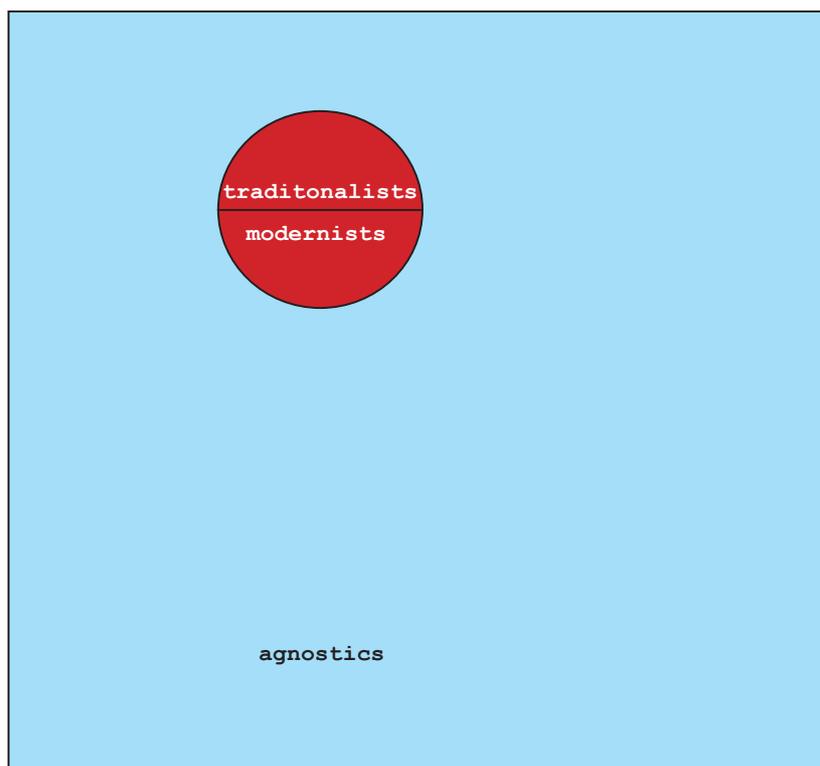


Figure 5.6 Diagram of an ideological bubble of specialists separated from the agnostic perceptual field of the lay public.

I would argue that the strength of the ideologies held by the architectural establishment lies in preconditioning elite taste through a set of values that define its parameters. Belief in *Zeitgeist*, in progress and advancement, and in the authenticity of purpose and execution, create a set of positions and values: the role of the past that precludes using pre-modernist architectural languages; the valuing of originality and the new that eclipses the qualities of tradition (of continuity, evolution and stability); and the integrity of expression that scorns add-on ornamentation and placeless cookie-cutter replicas. After art historian, E. H. Gombrich's observation that classicism and subsequent rules of art are "most easily formulated negatively as a catalogue of sins to be avoided" (1966, p. 89), the results of these positions and values can be thought of as architectural sins to be avoided. These are, respectively, historicism (using historical motifs and iconography); imitation (pastiche); pretence (dishonesty); and ornamentation (meaningless expression). This can be summarised in the diagram in figure 5.6, below:

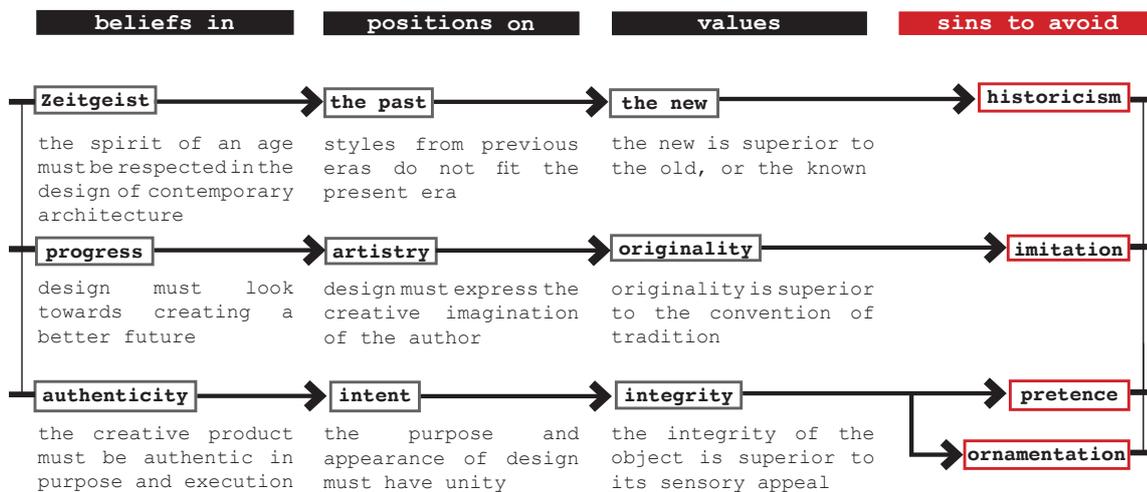


Figure 5.7 Summary of what I propose are three key ideologies that are the legacy of Modernism and prevail in the architectural elite, shown with their consequent positions, values and sins to avoid with respect to taste.

In this chapter I have looked at some of the significant ideologies promulgated in architectural education and culture, that I have argued form the basis of learnt values held by the modernist architectural mainstream, and influence their attitudes to visual appearance. In the next chapter I look to inherited values that are informally acquired through socio-cultural environments and consider the tacit influence of security and risk on taste preferences.

6

Inherited Values: The Tacit Influence of Security and Risk

The focus of investigation in this chapter is on the part of the knowledge structure of taste (set out in the introduction) that primarily addresses the people visually evaluating the building. The last chapter explored aesthetic values arising in the context of architectural education, looked at through the lens of cultural and architectural theory. This chapter will examine what I call inherited values, arising in the context of people's socio-cultural environments, looked at mainly through the lens of the social sciences. I consider the tacit influence of subconscious, felt responses on taste judgements – particularly in respect of security and risk and the balance between them. There are both internal human conditions, and external social conditions to be considered. For the former I draw on the work of behaviour psychologists, in particular the work of Daniel Kahneman on internal processes, whose findings about the mental processes that influence decision-making are germane to an enquiry on architectural taste judgements. For the latter, the external social conditions, I draw on disciplines of sociology and social anthropology in looking at issues of risk and security, through the formative work on risk in modern society of Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Mary Douglas. This provides a critical framework to situate the cultural dynamics of security and risk in the context of contemporary modern society. I also draw on the work of art historian Leo Steinberg for his observations on responses to radical avant-garde art, and the subsequent normalisation process of its assimilation into the mainstream.

In the previous chapter, the importance of progress, originality and *the new* were shown to be fundamental to the ideology of the moderns and core beliefs for modernists that the architectural elite represents. In this chapter I consider some of the consequences of this position and explore issues around embracing the alternative of *the familiar*. In 'Security and the risk of the new', I look at the desire for stability and security that the new threatens: the emotional disruption that the differentness of the genuinely new can bring and the process of normalisation that can assimilate the new into the customary; and the issue of risk involved in embracing the new. In 'Coherence and the comfort of the familiar', I then look at the role the familiar has to play in decision-making, that will apply irrespective of the presence of modernist ideology. For this I explore ideas of association, coherence and the positive bias of recognition, and consider their impact on taste judgements. My aim is to investigate some of the key tacit factors at play in aesthetic judgements about housing, that are informally received within socio-cultural environments. I contend that these will have a particularly strong influence on the lay public whose values are not led by the architectural ideologies I discussed in the last chapter.

6.1

The risk of the new

Modernism has been characterised as ‘a mania for the new’ (Ross, 2011). As discussed in the previous chapter, the moderns’ faith in the new is founded on the conviction that with inspiration and commitment the new will be an improvement on the existing. This is the path of progress. Originality, invention and experimentation are the means of getting there. A crucial implication of the principle of invention, allied with modernity, is the necessity of risk-taking (Beck, 1992). Which means that originality comes at a price; the risk of failure. The certainty that can be found in the commonplace is the flip side of this risk. But I maintain this also comes with risks; of banality and stagnation.

There is a path to be trodden in contemporary modern society, termed the ‘risk society’ by sociologist Ulrich Beck in his influential book of the same name (1992, p. 9), which he defines as being a new, ‘reflexive second modernity’ (Beck, Bonss, & Lau, 2003, p. 2), that manages the risks that he calls the ‘latent side effects’ (1992, p. 13) of modernity. Beck and Giddens are valuable references in the context of this enquiry as their ground-breaking work considers the impact of contemporary modernity on behaviour, looking at the culture of risk, and the anxiety and self-identification associated with it.

While I will be mainly looking at the new from the lens of social sciences, I start, in ‘The disruption and normalisation of the new’, with the insights of art historian, Leo Steinberg on the emotional threat that radically new art can provoke and the potential cultural consequences of playing safe and never pushing beyond the bounds of the familiar. In ‘Balancing the risks of the new’ I then look at issues of risk in the balance between stability and the anxiety of change.

6.1.1 The disruption and normalisation of the new

There is risk in the new – of failure in the unproven and of anxiety in managing the uncertainty. But what is the direct impact of experiencing the new? To consider this I draw on the work of art historian and critic, Leo Steinberg, recognised for challenging reigning orthodoxies in the art world (K. Johnson, 2011). In 1962 Steinberg published the essay “Contemporary Art and the Plight of its Public,” in response to an influential essay by art critic Clement Greenberg on Kitsch and art (1939) that pitched the avant-garde in diametric opposition to the kitsch, the term he used to refer to popular culture. Steinberg appealed for a more nuanced take, that did not idolise the creative artist and demonise “the other side—a sullen, anonymous, uncomprehending mass, whom we call the public” (2007, p. 4), making the point that the art establishment could also be cantankerous and conservative, observing: “Whenever there appears an art that is truly new and original, the men who denounce it first and loudest are artists” (2007, p. 4).

Steinberg asserts that the introduction of the new is anything but impartial, maintaining that contemporary art “is constantly inviting us to applaud the destruction of values which we still cherish” (2007, p. 10). He paints a powerful, visceral picture of personal rejection in the face of the radically new and unfamiliar, describing the experience of encountering it in terms of exclusion, loss and diminishment; a potent and complex emotional response that is readily overlooked and dismissed as a lack of sensibility or character flaw:

...they may feel excluded from something they thought they were a part of- a sense of being thwarted, or deprived of something...There is a sense of loss, of sudden exile, of something wilfully denied- sometimes a feeling that one's accumulated culture or experience is hopelessly devalued, leaving one exposed to spiritual destitution...This sense of bewilderment is too often described simply as a failure of esthetic appreciation or an inability to perceive the positive values in a novel experience (Steinberg, 2007, pp. 6–7).

The aversion arising from the shock of such an encounter, Steinberg argues, is fuelled by a protection of values attached to a sense of self and belonging, that feel threatened. As such, the familiar can be seen to be invested with a sense of identity and the radically unfamiliar as an assault that undermines it. (I explore familiarity further in the following section where I also cite psychologists who set out the protective evolutionary advantage of resisting novelty in the first instance, only accepting it after experience of its safe repetition). To assimilate the intrusion of the novel, Steinberg says, requires sacrifice. But he cautions that without the positives of such upheaval being clear, “the sacrifices appear as acts of demolition, or of dismantling, without any motive” (2007, p. 10).

This feeling of discomfort and unease, however, is necessary and ever-present for Steinberg. It is, he argues ‘both chronic and endemic’ (p.6) and moreover, ‘our normal condition’ (p.6); what he calls ‘The Plight of the Public’ (p.6). Indeed, without it, he asserts, is only to be ‘half alive’ (p.6), as he describes twentieth century Soviet Russia with the stifling of modern art.

Notwithstanding the risk of oversimplifying the issues at stake in domestic architecture relative to art, Steinberg’s thesis opens up two vital viewpoints that may nevertheless be at play in the taste divide. From the view on the ground, it discloses the depth and complexity of emotion that may arise in facing what looks new and unfamiliar; that when exposed to the new without choice or clear reason, it can seem wilfully, insubordinately different. Moreover, the replacing of the familiar with the unfamiliar may feel destructive and threatening; a personal attack that disregards accrued experiences as if they have no value. From the view in the helicopter however, it alerts us to the risks of playing safe. From this distance an aesthetic monoculture could be seen to be squeezing the joy out of life and denying the rewards of bearing a little aesthetic unease. And from here the dangers of reducing aesthetic choice to suit a theoretical, lowest-common-denominator, notional individual that is erroneously considered to stand for all, come into sight. (It is akin to what Grayson Perry terms ‘Default Man’, the white middle-class, generally middle-aged, men who although constitute a minority of the population, culturally stand in for the rest: “the reference point from which all other values and cultures are judged ... the zero longitude of identities” (2014, para. 15)). The risk of a seemingly low-risk approach of appeasement is of regularising variety and difference (cultural, education, ethnicity, to name but a few) into a homogenous mainstream, creating an un-representational, insipid and exclusive persona of the public, with none of the nuance Steinberg urged for.

Although radical change may start as feeling offensively alien, with exposure it will become assimilated and lose its shocking edge. Steinberg estimated that it took seven to 10 years for radical, new art to become appropriated, and effectively normalised, into the art market, describing the process as the “rapid domestication of the outrageous” (2007, p. 5), observing that “before long, the new looks familiar, then normal and handsome, finally authoritative” (2007, p. 6). In fig. 6.1 below, I try to capture the process he describes of the disruption of the new to the continuity of the familiar, and the ensuing period of normalisation before a subsequent connection.

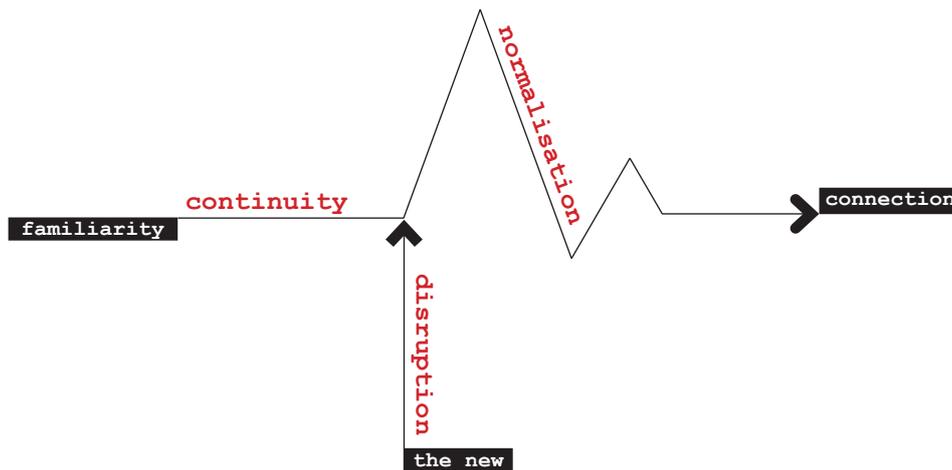


Figure 6.1 Diagram illustrating the impact of the new, showing the disruption to the connective continuity of familiarity that is later stabilised.

6.1.2 Balancing security and risk

...with the new *paradigm of risk society*... how can the risks and hazards systematically produced as part of modernization be prevented, minimized, dramatized or channelled? ... how can they be limited and distributed away so that they neither hamper the modernization process nor exceed the limits of that which is 'tolerable' - ecologically, medically, psychologically and socially? (Beck, 1992, p. 19)

The comfort of security is the counterbalance to the thrill of the new. A level of stability and security are basic, universal conditions necessary to be able to flourish (Maslow, 2013 [1943]). The concept of ontological security is that of a state of mental stability, created, in the view of sociologist Anthony Giddens, by a sense of order and continuity of experience (1991). Giddens and Beck link the heightened awareness of risk, in the current condition they call reflexive modernity, with a state of anxiety (1992; 1991), that Giddens argues stems from the liberty that results from the passing of traditions which created “ a sense of firmness of things” to give the sense that “the world is as it is because it is as it should be” (1991, p. 48). Anxiety, he says, “is diffuse, it is free-floating: lacking a specific object, it can come to be pinned to items, traits or situations which have an oblique (although unconsciously precise) reaction to whatever originally provoked it” (1991, p. 44). And it is managed through identification and projection and the rituals of everyday routines (1991).

Veblen recognised the security-satisfying aspect of possession, writing: “The desire for added comfort and security from want is present as a motive at every stage of the process of accumulation in a modern industrial community” (Veblen, 1899, p. 21). Consumption, he saw, not only denoted status and personal worth, but also gave a sense of both psychological and material security. And this desire for security through acquisition feeds the compulsion to consume.

Henry Ford’s apocryphal¹³ quip: “If I had asked my customers what they wanted they would have said a faster horse” captures the measure of public perception to innovation, clearly positioning desire for change in relation to what is already known and familiar. This captures the paradox of risk in the modern condition; the necessary risk-taking embedded in the trajectory of modernity that sits alongside the rise of an ever-present consciousness and aversion to risk (Giddens, 1991). Giddens situates this when he says “risk concerns future happenings – as related to present practices- and the colonizing of the future therefore opens up new settings of risk” (1991, p. 117). This has spawned a culture of heightened risk awareness, risk assessment and risk management. Social anthropologist, Mary Douglas, conceived the cultural theory of risk, and developed a theory of risk perception (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1992). The perception of risk, she argues, “is a social process” (1992, p. 6) maintaining that it is neither objectively independent, nor individually rationalised. Behaviour psychologists also contend that “losses loom larger than gains” (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979, p. 279), finding that the fear of losses is commonly stronger than the hope of gains.

Our relationship to home is intimate and strong; we inhabit our homes, we step inside their realm as if into a suit or a second skin that both protects and projects us. A sense of stability and security are fundamental attributes of the idea of home as a sanctuary, heightened in the milieu described by Beck and Giddens. The adoption of processes of identification and projection used to negotiate anxiety and risk would suggest that these values are also attached to the look of home as well as to its role; for a wish for a sense of security and stability to be evoked in the architecture of the home. This raises the potential of a perceived conflict between cultural ideals of newness and a longing for stability that is particularly relevant in relation to the house, and the question of the styles that infer these qualities. Giddens links traditions with ontological security. The link of the old with the past in architecture is also associated with a feeling of stability, especially in rapidly changing times (Ballantyne & Law, 2011, p. 18). Traditional styles are familiar, by dint of having become a normalised part of the built environment, which is inevitable given the longevity of building construction that means historic styles remain visible for hundreds of years. They may therefore be thought of as lying on the certainty end of the comfort-in-stability: anxiety-in-the-new spectrum. But the conflation of a traditional aesthetic with traditional values of stability and certainty is not given and fixed, as the process of normalisation shows.

I summarise the positive and negative pull of some of the characteristics associated with security and risk in figure 6.2 below.

¹³ Whilst similar sentiments have been sourced to Ford, a credit for the actual quote has not been identified (O’Toole, 2011). It has now become popular in business literature, first appearing in Marketing Week in 2001.

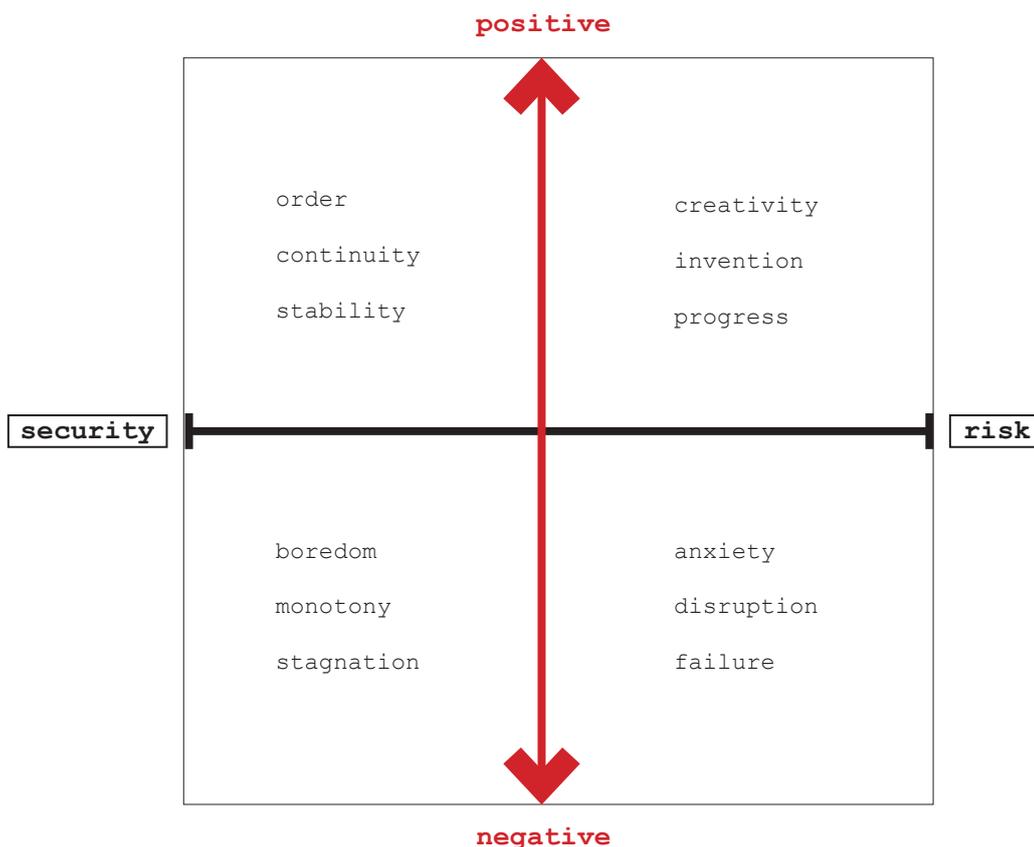


Figure 6.2 Diagram illustrating some of the characteristics associated with security and risk.

6.2 The security of the familiar

In looking at the impact of the new in the last section, the contrast with the familiar begins to become apparent. If the new is associated with change and anxiety, the familiar is concomitant with stability and security. The familiarity in point here has been that of the housebuilder-vernacular, that is coupled with popular taste. But Bourdieu reminds us that familiarity is at play at every cultural level, describing how bourgeois culture, like popular religion is “acquired, preverbally, by early immersion in a world of cultivated people, practices and objects.” (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 67). His ground-breaking anthropological field work and analysis of the 1960s and 70s (1977, 2010) exposed that immersion in a context – physical, social, cultural-impacts on preferences across both high and low cultural capital groups. In this section I look at

the work of psychologists since this time, who have conducted experiments around the idea of familiarity to gain understanding of its impact in decision-making. I make particular reference to the work of psychologist, Daniel Kahneman, who is prominent for his work on judgment, decision-making and behavioural economics, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2002. His, and other psychologists' work discussed here, reveals the unconscious mental processes that make associations, form stories and create expected norms that fill in the gaps of received information in order to provide a sense of coherence to our mental frameworks. Memory and familiarity work within these processes, contributing to feelings of ease that we attach to ideals of goodness and truth. These behind-the-scenes operations could have a significant influence on architectural appreciation and taste judgements.

I start the section by looking at the power of association in mental processing, and the inherent mental affinity for coherence and then consider the positive bias of recognition that familiarity has been shown to generate.

6.2.1 Associations and coherent stories

Anything that makes the associative machine run smoothly will also bias beliefs (Kahneman, 2012, p. 62).

Judgements based on architectural aesthetics extend beyond the formalist evaluation of the aesthetics. As Bourdieu made clear, taste judgements are made in a conditioned socio-cultural context and they cannot be objectively separated from it (2010). One of the ways in which this manifests is in the inference of residents' character and status from the look and style of the home they live in. This is supported by a number of environmental psychology evidence-based studies investigating the identity symbolism of houses (Nasar, 1989; E. K. Sadalla, Vershure, & Burroughs, 1987; E. Sadalla & Sheets, 1993). The Sadalla and Sheets research study of material symbolic value indicated that this was only the case if the occupiers were thought to have had a choice, substantiating the presumption that we choose homes in our image (which also has an implication for social housing through the absence of choice). Environmental behaviour researcher, Jack Nasar exposed such a projection of personality into dwelling styles, set out in the paper, "The Symbolic Meaning of Houses" (Nasar, 1989). This study of desirability and perception of friendliness and status in housing in the USA compared preferences for six large American house styles that he termed: Tudor, Mediterranean, Contemporary, Salt Box, Colonial and Farm. It found that Tudor and Farm styles were the most popular, Farm the most friendly and Colonial the least friendly and assuming the highest status occupants amongst the lay public. The findings of this study highlights two key issues: firstly, that a degree of anthropomorphism is at play in domestic architecture, with different values associated with different styles; and in addition, that inhabitants in turn embody the perceived characteristics of those styles.

This process of projection and identification could be described as affective association – whereby aesthetic attributes are linked with affective responses. It would be easy to dismiss or ridicule the affective associations made with regard to houses and inhabitants, but the experimental work of behaviour psychologists has shown that associative connections are an ordinary and important brain function. Kahneman refers to the three principles of association set out by eighteenth century philosopher, David Hume, in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) as a good basis to understand the association of ideas. They are: resemblance, contiguity in time and place, and causality (Kahneman, 2012, p. 52). Based on this,

he describes what he calls an ‘associative activation’ (p. 51) process that operates in the mind. This is a complex, ripple-effect of connected, associative ideas that flow in the brain, to establish a sense of coherence:

Each element is connected, and each supports and strengthens the others....All this happens quickly and all at once, yielding a self-reinforcing pattern of cognitive, emotional, and physical responses that is both diverse and integrated – it has been called associatively coherent.(Kahneman, 2012, p. 51).

An inherent, automatic search for causality, and ‘impressions’ of causality (2012, p. 76), lie at the heart of the associative coherence process, that seeks to understand a story (2012). Story-making is a mode of ascribing causality and connection to information, events, experiences and memories. (I also touch on the importance of stories in designing experiences in the next chapter).

Kahneman describes two systems that the mind operates: System 1 is the part that thinks fast, that covers the automatic, intuitive functioning aspects; System 2 is the part that thinks slow, that covers the analytical and logical aspects (2012). System 1, he says “excels at constructing the best possible story that incorporates ideas currently activated, but it does not (cannot) allow for information it does not have” (2012, p. 85). This creates a ‘causal story’ (p.75) with the linking of each idea, to bring a sense of coherence. Indeed, so strong is the desire for a coherent story that our minds will jump over missing links in information in order to construct one, leading Kahneman to assert that “when information is scarce, which is a common occurrence, System 1 operates as a machine for jumping to conclusions” (2012, p. 85).

Kahneman describes the main function of System 1 as maintaining and updating a model of our personal world, which represents what is normal in it. The model is constructed by associations that link ideas of circumstances, events, actions, and outcomes that co-occur with some regularity, either at the same time or within a relatively short interval. As these links are formed and strengthened, the pattern of associated ideas comes to represent the structure of events in our life, and it determines your interpretation of the present as well as your expectations of the future (2012). These patterns create vast reservoirs of ‘norms’ (p. 71) in our minds, accumulated through our life experiences. Unconsciously built into these immeasurable categories of norms are ‘passive expectations’ (p.72) that can quickly turn active (2012). In this way, the causal stories that we make can be seen as being forged through associations that we have built up and stored as personal norms over a period of time and from experiences¹⁴. Memory and familiarity will therefore have a key parts in what these stories are for each of us, which I consider next.

¹⁴ The early twentieth century psychology theory of Gestalt, that formed the foundation for the subsequent study of perception (Britannica, 2008) is relevant in this context of relational understanding. It was centred on the observation that we perceive things in pattern and configuration, not in isolation, through themes of proximity, similarity, continuity. This theory also extended to spatial and temporal connections as well as to education and problem solving (Craighead & Nemeroff, 2004). Despite its emphasis on perception, the Gestalt view is firmly rooted in objectivity and “its profound respect for the ‘givenness’ of the world as an objectively existing cosmos” (Rudolf Arnheim in Craighead & Nemeroff, 2004, p. 402).

The issues of subjectivity and objectivity that relate to associational meaning will be explored in the next chapter with a focus on the disparity of their interpretation between experts and nonexperts.

6.2.2 Familiarity and the positive bias of recognition

The experience of familiarity has a simple but powerful quality of 'pastness' that seems to indicate that it is a direct reflection of prior experience. (Whittlesea, Jacoby, & Girard, 1990)

Familiarity is a reference to something we already know, or think we know. It brings a recognition response, even if we're not sure where that response came from. We tend to believe what we remember, which can lead to unreliable *truths* in our minds (Whittlesea et al., 1990). Frequent repetition of a false statement will likely make it more believed, because, asserts Kahneman "familiarity is not easily distinguished from truth" (2012, p. 62).

Psychologists have found that people are generally more positively predisposed towards the familiar, which is connected to processes of mental recognition and ease (Kahneman, 2012). For example, psychologist Robert Zajonc ran a series of experiments that demonstrate a link between repetition and affection for an arbitrary thing. Random Turkish words that had arbitrarily appeared on the front page of an American student newspaper over a number of weeks were, in later questionnaires, more likely to be thought of as meaning something good than words that had not appeared in the paper. The outcome, which highlights the comfort of familiarity, he called the 'mere-repeated-exposure paradigm' (2001, p. 224). He argued that such a mechanism is a protective, biological imperative in all animals: "Survival prospects are poor for an animal that is not suspicious of novelty. However it is also adaptive for the initial caution to fade if the stimulus is actually safe" (2001, p. 227). Researchers have also found that familiarity with just one phrase in a statement will make the whole feel more familiar (Kahneman, 2012). These experiments used words, but should the unconscious link between familiarity and thinking something is good apply to other visual stimulus, it would suggest that the recognisable and familiar have an influence in taste preferences.

The positive impact of familiarity is related to the idea of cognitive ease. Ease, Kahneman says "is a sign that things are going well – no threats, no major news, no need to redirect attention or mobilize effort. Strain indicates that a problem exists" (2012, p. 59). What he calls our System 1 function of the mind, that serves as an automatic processor of information and experience, is predisposed to ease. Psychologists have found that there is a range of causes and effects of cognitive ease (and by inverse corollary, strain) that effectively show that certain positive conditions lead to certain positive mental outcomes. Repetition, clarity, priming (introducing something in a different context in advance) and being in a good mood can each result in something feeling familiar, true, good and/or effortless. This is summarised in the following diagram:

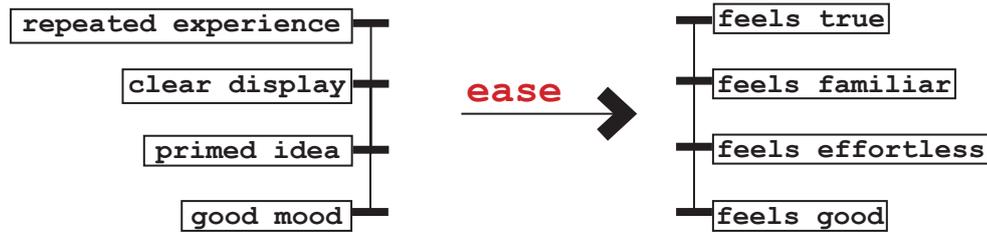


Figure 6.3 Diagram of cognitive ease
(Kahneman, 2012, p. 60, fig 5)

The causes, on the left hand column, and the consequences, on the right are interchangeable and the exact source of ease amongst them is indeterminate. So something that feels good may be the result of seeing it in a good mood or may be due to one of the other ease triggers – it will not be clear to the person what the link is. This can readily lead to illusions of remembering. Larry Jacoby was the first psychologist to demonstrate the memory illusion (Kahneman, 2012) through a study that showed that previous exposure to names made them more likely to be thought of as famous. His resulting paper was titled "Becoming Famous Overnight" (1989).

Familiarity makes things clearer and easier to see again, which not only makes them preferable, but also imputes qualities to them - to be *good*, as shown in the Zajonc experiments, or *true* as in the Jacoby tests - that are not necessarily there. Kahneman also points to a general 'confirmation bias' (2012, p. 81) resulting from associative memory, that unconsciously weights a statement, which biases responses towards it. This could be significant with respect to the values attached to the familiar in architecture that may go deeper than subjective, superficial visual preferences.

6.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at some of the tacit factors of influence on people in making taste judgements, that lie outside of the intellectual ideology considered in the last chapter. Whilst the cited research indicates that these issues affect us all, I contend they could have particular influence on the architectural judgements of the lay public who have not had the same exposure to the architectural ideologies that I have argued lie behind the learnt values discussed in the last chapter.

In looking at the risk of the new, I first explored the disruption and normalisation of the new. I discussed the potential threat to a sense of identity that the radically new can pose, which could be felt as a sense of loss - destructive, excluding and diminishing. Also, that whilst, with exposure, the new can become normalised, it is not without upheaval and sacrifice. But, I argue that is not to negate the important cultural role for the new. Indeed the discomfort and unease

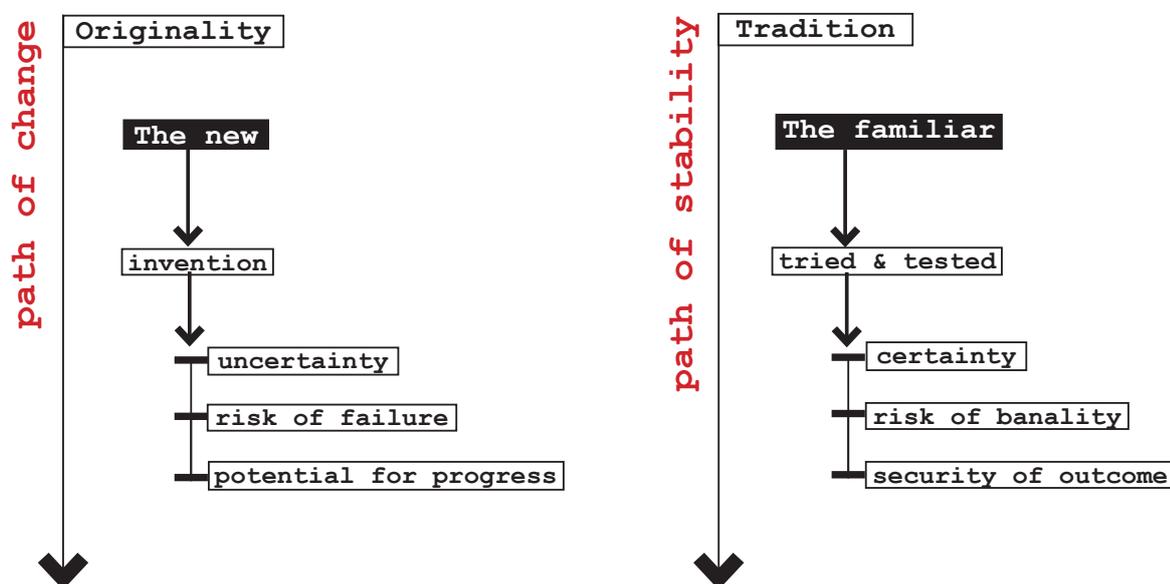
associated with it may be a necessary, and normal condition. And without elements of (temporarily disruptive) aesthetic difference, the risk of a monotonous, unrepresentative monoculture is high.

I then explored the balancing of risk and security. I discussed the paradox of risk in the modern condition - of its cultural entrenchment as a social process, along with a rising aversion towards it. I looked at the concept of ontological security, created by a sense of order and continuity of experience, and linked to traditions. This is in contrast with the anxiety associated with risk, that is managed through identification and projection, as well as the rituals of everyday routines that bring a sense of order and purpose. I argued that a sense of stability and security is fundamental to the idea of home and that these values may be projected onto the home aesthetic. But whilst the traditional aesthetic may be associated with this, it is not a given.

In looking at the comfort of the familiar, I first explored associations and coherent stories. I cited evidence of what I described as affective association, in which people associate different values with different house styles and in turn ascribe those characteristics to the inhabitants. I then discussed how ripple effects of associative ideas have been shown to operate in the mind, creating a sense of narrative coherence. In this process, leaps can be made over missing information. Mental norms are created from the associative links created in this way through life experiences.

I then looked at the positive bias of recognition and the concept of mental ease, which psychologists have found is linked with feelings of familiarity and the perception of something being true, and good. This highlighted memory as a potentially important influence in visual judgements.

Values of stability and security resonate with characteristics of tradition that develop from provenness rather than experimentation. They also share qualities of familiarity and continuity. These ideals would appear to be in direct conflict with the risk-taking and invention that are



intrinsic to the values of originality and newness in being modern. The risk of the new is the risk of the uncertainty in the unknown; the risk of the familiar is the risk of boredom in the known. This is weighed-up in decision-making: the attraction in the uncertainty of inspiration from the unknown on the one side and the draw of familiar security of the known on the other. Change, in the form of the new, can threaten our sense of security and identity by disrupting a sense of continuity and connection to what seems familiar. This can operate both spatially and temporally. I attempt to summarise the two different paths: of change deriving from the originality of the new; and of stability, deriving from the familiarity that is essential to tradition, in the following diagram (fig. 6.4):

The research findings presented in this chapter indicate that differences in what is familiar to people will bring different ideas of what feels right and comfortable. On the surface it may appear that attitudes towards change and risk are central to a modernist-historicist taste divide, with the assumption that those who prefer modernism embrace change and countenance risk whereas those who prefer historicism retreat from change and reject risk. But the widely recognised attitude-behaviour gap shows that values and actions do not necessarily correspond (see for example, Antonetti & Maklan, 2015; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). The architectural establishment, for example, may well deride the apparent safe, conservative taste habits of suburban Middle Englanders from a position of familiarity with a modernist aesthetic, but that does not necessarily reflect a greater appetite for change or risk, nor a lesser need for a feeling of comfort and security.

In a symbolic context, houses can be seen as a projection and protection of ourselves, and a means to evaluate, and judge, others. Taste preferences cannot be disentangled from this complex web of associations. The process of associative activation and the collection of mental norms we store mean that our aesthetic judgements will be influenced by the associative connections we have made from our life experiences, which will be affected by our general socio-cultural environment as well as our individual lives. The socio-cultural field of architecture creates a divide that will undoubtedly impact on taste attitudes. In the next chapter I go on to look at the specific influence of the divide of expertise on processes of aesthetic evaluation and on subsequent taste judgements.

Figure 6.4 Diagram showing the proposed contrasting paths of change and stability associated with the originality of the new, and the tradition of the familiar respectively.

7

Expertise and Processes of Evaluation

The last two chapters looked at the influences of learnt and inherited values on taste, through the lenses of architectural theory, art criticism and social sciences - in particular psychology, sociology and social anthropology. In this, the last of the *Investigation* chapters on themes of influence on taste, I am going to consider the impact of the phenomenon of expertise on the taste schism, looking at it through the literature of expert evaluation. My investigation engages a number of disciplines, from psychologists and neurologists, to sociologists, historians, architectural theorists and business strategists.

I showed, in chapter five, that being an expert group with specialist education and knowledge, can generate a groupthink mentality that plays a part in creating a reinforcing differentness of aesthetic values for the architectural elite compared to the lay public. Here, I look less at the different beliefs that the cultural and educational context of the elite may bring and more at the impact of expertise itself on evaluation processes and the values attached to them.

I start, in 'Expertise and evaluation', by considering the effect of interest and engagement in the subject of architecture that is an intrinsic characteristic of architectural experts, though not limited to them. I then look at research, investigated by psychologists and neurologists, on evaluation processes, that reveals marked differences between experts and nonexperts in the balance of aesthetic evaluation modes.

In 'Knowledge and reason', with particular reference to Bourdieu, I go on to consider the alignment of a cultural hierarchy of taste with distinctions in evaluation, in which expertise is ranked higher than everyday experience. I also explore the impact of ideals of intellectual effort and fulfilment on the values attached to appreciation. I then look at the rise of the status of the expert in the twentieth century and the more recent twenty-first century challenge to the authority of expertise, and consider the perceived value of *expert* taste.

I end the chapter, in 'Different loci of appreciation', by looking at the impact of expertise on different ways of appreciating architecture – as an object and as an experience, considering the different values at play when making an evaluation from a position as an observer or as a projected participant. I explore the rise of the experience economy and experience design, looking at examples of creating settings for experience.

7.1

The impact of salience and expertise on evaluation processes

Salience and expertise together play a major part in judgements of all kinds, not just aesthetic. Here I look at the impact of interest and mastery on modes of evaluation that challenge any presumption that the taste schism is symmetrical or even binary. I first take a market research perspective on salience, and consider the inevitable imbalance that interest and indifference will bring to visual attitudes. I then investigate evaluation processes through the research of psychologists and neurologists, exploring the different aspects of an aesthetic experience and the external contributory factors to it, in particular that of expert knowledge.

7.1.1 The imbalance of salience

In October 2018 a referendum was held in Mexico on whether to build a major new airport on the outskirts of Mexico City. The plan was rejected, but only one percent of the electorate voted (Sieff, 2018). From the result one could say that the people of Mexico did not want a new airport, but from the turnout one could say that the people of Mexico were neither vexed nor impassioned about it – to borrow from market research speak (Romaniuk & Sharp, 2004), it appears to be a low salience issue for the public. The interest and significance of a topic in someone's mind are linked to expertise but not exclusive to experts. This cannot be ignored in an investigation of the elite-popular taste divide, as a difference in interest has a marked impact on how the schism operates and is best understood.

In casting the elite-popular disparity in taste as a schism, there is a risk in interpreting it as an oppositional divide of strongly held beliefs on both sides (reinforced by a cultural tendency to dualities as discussed in the chapter two). But such a neat dualism suggests a parity of engagement and interest in the subject in question. Such connection comes with expertise but is not limited to it. Salience is a quality of importance or prominence in the mind, and to the general public architecture is not a high salience issue. It is not much thought about, nor at the front of most people's minds outside the built environment industry (and even then probably only for those engaged in design aspects), or currently involved in an architectural commission. Housing is a different matter. Ipsos MORI chief executive, Ben Page says that mentions of housing have recently been the highest the market research company has ever recorded, with more people citing it as an issue than the EU, inequality, poverty or crime (Page, 2015). But this is about the provision of housing, not its design. On matters of design there is a discernible split between it being of high or low prominence, which sets up the contrast across this taste gulf between having a strong position and not having a particular position, rather than an equal but opposing stance.

Evidence-based studies have confirmed that architects tend to have stronger views than other professionals, such as planners, and the lay public, in aesthetic evaluations and judgements, being both more critical and more appreciative (Gjerde, 2011). This asymmetry of view may be connected with the asymmetry of salience between the groups, that have different levels of personal interest, as well as what may be a difference in levels of confidence about knowledge. It has also been suggested that a process of 'Einfühlung' (translated as empathy) put forward by

Lipps in the nineteenth century, lies at the base of the understanding of art, which may explain why art appreciation is enhanced when viewers are made aware of technique, style and composition (Leder & Nadal, 2014). It may also be that enhanced salience is also connected to the engagement of 'Einführung' and knowledge.

7.1.2 How experts evaluate

Expertise has been shown to affect judgements in numerous ways. Social science studies of expert and nonexpert judgements reveal differences in evaluative processing (Augustin & Leder, 2006; Leder et al., 2004; Winston & Cupchik, 1992). This is also reflected in neurological studies that show that expertise not only impacts on cognitive processing, but also neurological response in reward-related brain areas (Huang, Huang, Luo, & Mo, 2016; Kirk, Skov, Christensen, & Nygaard, 2009). In their work on the aesthetic experience of art, psychologists Helmut Leder and Marcos Nadal describe a process of feedback and feedforward loops of perception, cognition and emotion interactions that make what they call an 'aesthetic episode' (Leder & Nadal, 2014, p. 449). This can usefully be applied to the aesthetic experience of architecture, both in terms of the three different processes they describe - involving sensory perception, knowledge and interpretation of meaning, and emotional response - and in the idea that they work collectively in the aggregated experience.

One of the ways in which expert knowledge has been found to affect appreciation is in the evaluative process of classification. An experiment on classification by psychologists using the responses of commercial fishermen and undergraduate students (with no experience of commercial fishing or college level biology), found that the experts classified the given selection of assorted marine creatures by means of commercial, ecological, and behaviour categories whereas the nonexperts largely sorted the fish by way of appearance (Shafto & Coley, 2003). The expert evaluation was only possible with their specialist knowledge; the novices could not categorise what they did not know. In their study on art expertise, psychologists M. Dorothee Augustin and Helmut Leder built on the findings of this study, testing categorising and sorting differences between expert and nonexpert respondents in relation to art (2006). Their results also found a difference in classification. This is supported by other findings of experts' style-related processing of art, especially modern and contemporary (for more examples see Hekkert & Van Wieringen, 1996).

Psychologists have identified that an aesthetic experience has an evaluative, affective and semantic dimension -in that it involves an object being assessed and subjectively felt with some level of meaning (Leder & Nadal, 2014), but that it does not need to have all three aspects (Bergeron & Lopes, 2011). So some aesthetic experiences could draw more on sensory perception, some on cognitive evaluation and others on associated meaning. Expertise - that is, learnt skill or knowledge in a particular area - offers a dimension of understanding and interpretation that is absent for nonexperts. It primarily affects the evaluative part of appreciation that Leder et al call 'cognitive mastering' (2004, p. 492, fig 1). Whilst both experts and nonexperts will employ all dimensions of evaluation, Leder et al's model of an aesthetic experience that I have adapted and simplified in fig.7.1, shows how expert knowledge and

interest affect the deliberative part of the experience process, that follows the automatic perceptual and memory aspects which are influenced by previous experience.

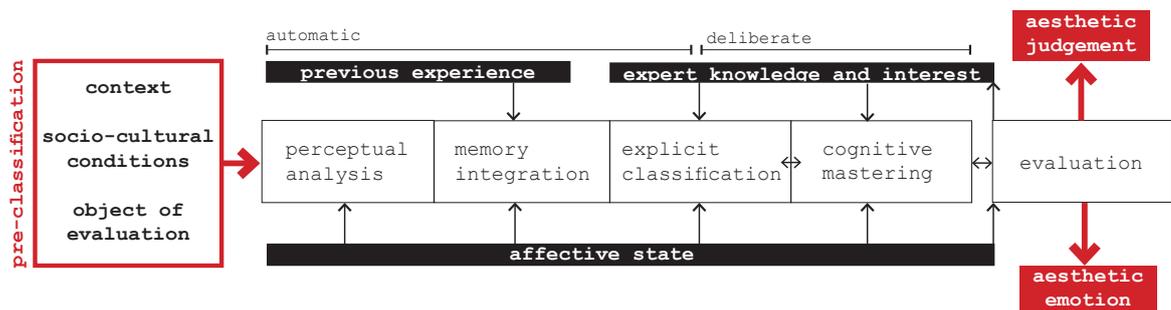


Figure 7.1 Diagram of an aesthetic experience adapted and simplified from Leder et al's model (2004, p. 492, fig 1).

The difference in evaluation and expression between experts and nonexperts is manifest in the contrast between aesthetic qualities of detachment (such as, *it looks cool*), expressed by experts and affective qualities of engagement (such as, *it feels warm*), expressed by nonexperts. Winston and Cupchik's study of expert and nonexpert reactions to high art and popular art (1992) found a difference of emphasis in evaluations, with experts giving reasons for their preferences in terms of stylistic approach (such as 'more dynamic' (1992, p. 4, fig 1)) and nonexperts referring more to personal feelings (such as 'makes me feel happier' (1992, p. 5)). Environmental psychologist, Kimberly Devlin found similar differences in a study comparing architects', users' and observers' perceptions of office buildings in which the architects gave more abstract and conceptual evaluations than the non-architects, who gave more descriptive appraisals based on their affective response to the buildings (Devlin, 1994). This argument is also supported by CABA's research, *The Way We Live Now*, in which one of the key findings was that "emotional considerations can overrule practical considerations when people are choosing a home", with 'feel' and 'character' identified as important considerations (Ipsos MORI, 2012, p. 11,12). This difference in emphasis is not a simple matter of the presence or absence of pleasure for nonexperts and experts respectively, but where the root of the pleasure lies, be it in perceived beauty or insight. There is also the possibility of contradictory emotions, such as being moved by something we don't understand and being indifferent towards something we do understand and judge highly (Leder & Nadal, 2014).

This fundamentally different locus of evaluation and expression for experts and nonexperts prepares the ground for the difference in taste judgements between the two groups. Hekkert & Van Wieringen describe this for the expert in terms of autonomy: "[Experienced observers] treat an artwork as an autonomous entity, and the way they perceive artworks 'for their own sake', often referred to as aesthetic perception, is deemed different from ordinary perception in daily life." (Hekkert & Van Wieringen, 1996, p. 391). In the last section of this chapter, I will go on to look at the implications of the contrast between expert treatment of the object as something autonomous and a nonexpert interest in the object for its role as an actor in a scene that generates an experience, on the different values that are prioritised in evaluation.

Leder et al's model of aesthetic appreciation and judgement considers the temporal aspect of an aesthetic experience, noting that it has a duration as an episode, but also that it begins *before* the actual act of perception (Leder et al., 2004). An aesthetic response is not an isolated, independent event, but a contextual one. Specialist knowledge is one context for preconditioned aesthetic evaluation, but it is not the only one. There are also the socio-cultural conditions in which taste operates. With respect to my enquiry, these could be the social context that shapes expectation and preconceptions about what good domestic architecture should be, and the environmental context that can heighten or degrade the perceived desirability of a particular home. These conditions could be thought of as the concealed roots of judgement that lie out of sight, below the surface; the peripheral experiences and knowledge that influence the direct engagement of specialist knowledge. For example, a prior awareness of the low construction costs for volume-built houses and the knowledge that architects have little involvement in their design could affect the aesthetic judgement of an expert looking at a volume-built house even though these factors might not be visually apparent.

Preconditioning clearly also affects nonexpert appreciation. It could perhaps even be argued that it has a stronger influence on nonexpert evaluation as it is not tempered by the specificity and objectivity of expert knowledge. Through the evaluative mechanism of associational meaning this could significantly shape taste judgements. The broad notion of familiarity, raised in the previous chapter, is very much connected to this. The process of pre-conditioning bridges between behaviour psychologists' notion of priming, discussed in the last chapter, and Bourdieu's sociological concept of habitus, discussed further in the next section.

The diagram below (fig. 7.2), is an attempt to summarise the process of aesthetic appreciation formed by the psychological processes that are involved in an aesthetic experience that will operate in making a taste judgement. The diagram is a synthesis of the research findings cited in this section. It reveals how an aesthetic response, shown on the left, can tend towards being autonomous - detached and abstract, or contingent - engaged and descriptive, depending upon the substance and weight of the evaluative, semantic and affective aspects of the response. The balance of these aspects will be informed by the primary pre-conditions of experience and expertise, the key factors of influence that relate to knowledge and associations and the evaluation modes employed, based on perceptual, cognitive and emotional aspects. The diagram highlights two important aspects of this enquiry into evaluation processes with respect to the elite-popular taste schism. Firstly, that certain pre-conditions, namely specialist expertise and previous experience, have a significant impact on taste judgements, as they bring different knowledge and associations to bear on an evaluation. And secondly, that different modes of evaluation can emphasise different types of aesthetic engagement: from the cool detachment of a connoisseur viewing the aesthetic object as autonomous, that is separate from their everyday life; to the situated engagement of a lay person viewing the aesthetic object as a contingent part of their everyday life.

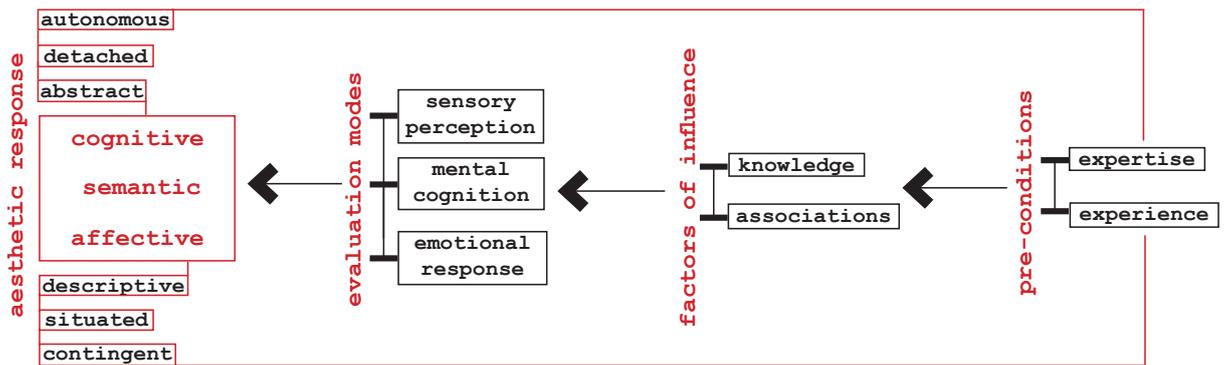


Figure 7.2 Diagram summarising my understanding of the process of aesthetic appreciation that operates in making a taste judgement.

7.2

Knowledge and reason- intellectual engagement as a virtue

The differences psychologists and neurologists have found in expert and nonexpert evaluative processes suggest the rationale for an expert-nonexpert architectural taste divide. Here I explore the ramifications of this division as the basis of the assumption that expert taste is as deserving of high rank as expert knowledge and skills. In 'A hierarchy of taste judgements', I use the knowledge structure of taste disciplines of sociology and philosophy, through the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Immanuel Kant, to consider: the influence of cultural capital on taste discrimination; the idea of connoisseurship implicit in the expertise of the architectural profession; the distinctions between types of appreciation – from pleasing, to esteemed and gratifying; and the placing of higher cultural value on intellectual engagement and effort than on the pleasures of sensory gratification. In 'The role of the expert', I look at the historical context of expert culture; the value placed on experts in twentieth century modern democracies; the distancing expertise brings between the professional and the laity; and the architectural profession's perception of *expert* taste .

7.2.1 A hierarchy of taste judgements

Even to suggest ... that an artwork might be good because it is pleasurable, as opposed to cognitively, morally or politically beneficial, is to court derision. The 20th century was not kind to the notions of beauty or the aesthetic (Zangwill, 2014)

Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital, habitus, fields and symbolic violence set out in chapter two, are all relevant in the consideration of the hierarchy of taste with respect to the

judgements of expert professional architects on the one hand and the nonexpert laity on the other. This is because they set out a domain in which the socio-cultural conditions in which someone is immersed lead to formal and informal educations from which values are learnt and inherited and used to reinforce the socio-cultural structure from which they emerged. Although he doesn't explicitly talk in terms of experts and nonexperts, connoisseurship associated with the refined taste of those with high cultural capital is central to his thesis (Bourdieu, 2010). Cultural capital is linked with occupation, education and class. Sociologist Douglas B. Holt has, using survey fieldwork, studied the relevance of Bourdieu's theory of the impact of cultural capital in American consumer culture (1998), and notes how in the decades since Bourdieu's survey research, economic capital and social class are less rigidly linked to cultural capital, citing the examples of people brought up in a working class background who have gained economic capital in their work or are the first to go into higher education may not have high cultural capital just as, artists, for example, from wealthy and educated backgrounds working in low paid jobs will not likely have low cultural capital. Although in *Distinction* (2010), Bourdieu commonly refers to class in distinguishing the 'popular' taste (p. 8) of the working classes ('the taste of necessity' (p. xxix)) from the 'legitimate' taste (p. 8) of the dominant class ('the taste of liberty' (p. xxix)), I take Holt's cue of using cultural capital as a more useful current expression of differentiator in taste than class, and take architectural experts to fall into the high cultural capital band.

Bourdieu bluntly lays out the adopted cultural hierarchy of taste when he says: "the denial of the lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile - in a word, natural - enjoyment which constitutes the sacred sphere of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasures forever closed to the profane" (p. xxx). He also makes clear the distinction in the nature of appreciation between the 'sacred' and 'profane' cultural realms of elite and popular culture he describes; legitimate, refined taste is detached, and disconnected from pleasure. This suggests that the inherent difference in the evaluative process of experts and nonexperts discussed above, impacts on the value hierarchy of taste before any object is even judged. The difference in the ascribed value of the evaluation process is reinforced by habitus and the status attributed to the judgement of the connoisseur.

For Bourdieu, education sits at the heart of the discriminatory distinctions between elite and popular taste. Cultural practices he points out, are linked to educational levels and many are directly informed in the education system, declaring "the eye is a product of history reproduced by education" (2010, p. xxvi). But as previously noted in the last chapter, the education he refers to is not just formal, but is also informally acquired within social classes. For Bourdieu habitus socially frames both subjective and objective judgments such that the subjective is not incidental, and the objective is not unmediated (1977). Habitus also brings the distinction, and authority of elite taste, as well as an aura of truth and authenticity to the connoisseur purveyors of legitimate taste, as their expertise cannot be prescribed or imitated (Klasson, Ulver, Johannason, Egan-Wyer, & Bertilsson, 2014). This tacit aspect of expert judgement that is hard to explicitly identify, has also been associated with the developed experience of professional peers that underpins connoisseurship (Orr, 2010; Sadler, 1989). Education researcher, D.R. Sadler refers to the idea of 'guild knowledge' (1989, p. 126) for this learnt judgement located in communities of practice, which evokes the qualities of handed down traditions discussed in chapter four.

Holt notes the important distinguishing role of connoisseurship for those with high cultural capital, suggesting that it is used to assert individuality when contact with mass culture is

unavoidable, and that “while authenticity involves avoiding contact with mass culture, connoisseurship involves reconfiguring mass cultural objects” (1998, p. 15). This involves, he says, 'a vocabulary of appreciation' (p.17) that is the preserve of those with high cultural capital and is not used by those with low cultural capital even if they are collectors with a special interest. This is in line with Bourdieu’s insight that the possession of a ‘code’ (2010, p. xxv) is needed to be able to decode the meaning and interest of art to someone.

This ascribed hierarchy of taste that differentiates between cognitive mastering used by experts over semantic and affective responses used more by nonexperts has the consequence that the evaluation processes that are more likely to be adopted by nonexperts in the absence of expert knowledge are devalued. The nonexpert opinions that do not centre on cognitive evaluation are then, by corollary, also devalued. Expertise grants access to a realm of objectivity, collectively presumed to be based on reason, that is the basis of cognitive evaluation. This is not available to the individual nonexpert, effectively outside of the guild of knowledge, whose judgements are less bound to shared, albeit tacit principles, and so remain in the realm of isolated subjectivity. This gives rise to the notion of *good* and *bad* taste as the poles between cultivated, refined discernment and involuntary, coarse reaction. Good taste is associated with the cultivated virtues of erudition and detachment; and bad taste is associated with the ignobility of ignorance and sentimentality.

Bourdieu describes different modes of acquisition of cultural capital as stemming from experience and knowledge or just knowledge. In describing this, he quotes from *Image, Music, Text*, by Roland Barthes who also uses the trope of code in invoking the ‘coded emotion’ of the expert that ‘inoculates pleasure’. The ‘*average*’ (2010, p. 69) culture of listeners (not practitioners), he asserts:

wants art, wants music, provided they be clear, that they ‘translate’ an emotion and represent a signified (the ‘meaning’ of a poem): an art that inoculates pleasure (by reducing it to a known, coded emotion) and reconciles the subject to what in music *can be said*: what is said about it by Institution, Criticism, Opinion (Barthes, 1977, p. 185).

In this model, emotion is not so much absent, as contained and brought to order by the expert – detached from the capriciousness of pleasure and assimilated into the codified realm of the guardian authority of expertise. The attachment of virtue and the notion of a higher order of pleasure to intellectual effort over that of somatic gratification goes back to Plato and Aristotle, but was comprehensively revived and expanded by Kant in the late eighteenth century, with the idea of a distinction between three types of aesthetic pleasure that were differently evaluated and experienced (1790). They are:

- the beautiful is that which ‘**pleases**’ (p.95) – judged through ‘subjective universality’ (p.97) and connected with reflection, disinterest (that produces interest) and the judgment of taste: “The beautiful is that which, without concepts, is represented as the object of a *universal satisfaction*” (p.96)
- the good is that which is ‘**esteemed**’ (p.95) – it is objective and connected with a concept: “That is **good** which pleases by means of reason alone through mere concept...the concept of an end” (p.92-3)
- the agreeable is that which ‘**gratifies**’ (p.95) – it is subjective and connected with the senses: “**The agreeable is that which pleases the senses in sensation**... Hence one says of the

agreeable not merely that it **pleases** but that it gratifies” (p. 91-2 [emphasis in original, in all cited quotes]).

There is also another classification, the sublime, which like the beautiful, is subjectively universal, and is to nature what beautiful is to art.

In the twentieth century, modernism took a puritanical turn against the idea of pleasure (Zangwill, 2014), which became associated with more of an involuntary gratification rooted in inclination rather something one freely chooses. Instead of pleasure, the idea of *unpleasure* took on value and approval (Frost, 2013, p. 6), which Freud described as “pleasure that cannot be felt as such” (Freud, 1950, p. 7). It is associated with effort and with the reward of fulfilment rather than gratification. This sets up a clear value split between the pleasure of delight and the unpleasure of fulfilment; and thereby also a division between the instinctive needs of the body and the choice of the mind. (This is exemplified by the late twentieth century notion of *guilty pleasure* as easy enjoyment devoid of improvement value; thought of, and conveyed, as being shameful. This quality of knowingness has been argued as marking an end phase in the war of high and low culture (Szalai, 2013)).

Bourdieu delights in arguing against the moral hierarchy defined by Kant, of the opposition between “pure pleasure, purified of pleasure” and “facile pleasure” that he claims is brought to an end in finding correspondence in the coupling of seemingly ‘incommensurable’ (p. xxix) everyday spheres of cultural consumption, such as literature and hairstyle, or music and food:

The barbarous reintegration of aesthetic consumption into the world of ordinary consumption abolishes the opposition, which has been the basis of high aesthetics since Kant, between the 'taste of sense' and the 'taste of reflection', and between facile pleasure, pleasure reduced to a pleasure of the senses, and pure pleasure, pleasure purified of pleasure, which is predisposed to become a symbol of moral excellence and a measure of the capacity for sublimation which defines the truly human man (Bourdieu, 2010, p. xxix).

It has been argued (for example by John Carey, in *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992)) that the rejection of pleasure and the demand for effort was a dismissal of popular culture and a means of dividing the elite from the masses, through the necessity for education and exposure to the high arts, needed to have the requisite intellectual engagement. But others (such as Andreas Huyssen in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (1986) and, more recently, John Xiros Cooper in *Modernism and the Culture of Market Society* (2004)) argue in opposition that this is just an (entrenched) myth. For the purposes of this thesis my interest is in the process and impact of attitudes to pleasure and engagement, rather than the socio-political cause.

7.2.2 The role of experts

I have set out how experts evaluate differently from nonexperts, and their judgements are also valued higher than those of nonexperts. Whilst this has its roots in early western philosophical thinking, the status and role of the expert is linked to the rise of twentieth century modern democracy that saw a major socio-political promotion and embrace of the expert across many spheres, from science and medicine to architecture and politics. This was part of a shift away from a generally unquestioning, partly fear-based obedience of the authority of inherited codes and tradition, to an ideal of authority legitimized by reason in the context of the consolidation of

democracy (Furedi, 2018). Expertise lent objectivity and credibility to processes and systems, and with its banner of reason was considered independent and transparent, offering political safeguard against cronyism and corruption. The application of reason and logic is a characteristic of the moderns, which is underpinned by a faith in the rationality of science and technology (Latour, 1993). And objective reason is the hallmark of the expert that has provided the foundation for their validity. Experts, not limited to architects, played a central role in the planning and administration of many welfare state regimes' spatial policies, formulating as well as designing welfare services (Swenarton, Avermaete, Heuvel, & Blau, 2015, p. 14). They were considered distinguished on the basis of expertise not connections, and given due authority. For example, the 1918 Tudor Walters Committee, tasked with creating post war housing policy and design standards was referred to, respectfully, as 'the experts' committee' (Swenarton, 1981, p. 93).

Politically, at least, this faith in the expert now appears to be on the wane, with the experts' reliance on the sanctity of reason exposed as insufficient for the electorate. Michael Gove, when secretary of State for Education famously derided the privileged position of the expert and questioning their established authority: "people in this country have had enough of experts from organisations with acronyms saying that they know what is best and getting it consistently wrong" (Sky News, 2016) ¹⁵.

Professional expertise evidently puts distance between experts and the lay public. Habraken argues that like many professions, architects have lost touch with the layperson, but unlike most others, who have distanced themselves with increasingly specialised technical knowledge, architects have done so by what he describes as 'excessive formalization' (1997, p. 270). And it is from this, he says, that architects claim 'the right to pass judgement' ((1997, p. 270). So is the taste of the architectural elite *expert* taste or simply the taste of experts? Habraken suggests that the Bourdieusian hierarchy does operate in the profession's eyes:

We tend to claim that we are hired, not just to make good buildings, but to decide what is good and bad, expecting that, at the same time, our clients will suspend their own opinion on this score. The client is necessarily reduced to arguments about costs and functionality (Habraken, 1997, p. 270).

In "A Black Box: The Secret Profession of Architecture", his last essay, written before he died in 1988, architectural critic Reyner Banham tackles the question of the mystique of architecture, the 'black box' of the title, that he reflected "appears as the exercise of an arcane and privileged aesthetic code" (1996, p. 297). He concluded the essay speculating on the outcome of a threat to the enigmatic cloak of artistry that protects the profession from the grasp of the public:

...the bafflement of the general public in the face of the behaviour of architects might provoke some psychologist or anthropologist to try to break through the glass wall of inscrutability that surrounds the topic... But the tribe [of architecture] would almost certainly have to resist the intrusion of its privacy if it were to preserve its integrity as a social grouping. It might well decide to defend the contents of the black box at whatever cost, as if it were the ark of its covenant. What else could architects do?... It could permit itself to be opened up to the understanding of the profane and the vulgar, at the risk of destroying itself as an art in the process. Or it could close ranks and continue

¹⁵ Although a recent study (Dommett & Pearce, 2019) has reported that there is insufficient evidence to conclude that the public have actually had enough of experts, and urged more research on the topic.

as a conspiracy of secrecy, immune from scrutiny, but perpetually open to the suspicion, among the general public, that there may be nothing at all inside the black box except a mystery for its own sake (Banham, 1996, p. 299).

The elusive element in Banham's black box could be interpreted as the skill of aesthetic judgement and the motivation to keep it closed, the belief of the profession in the superiority of their taste. That to open it up would be to open the profession to the 'profane and vulgar' tastes of the nonexpert lay public. The distinction between *expert* taste and the taste of experts is an important one that I will return to consider in the thesis conclusion.

7.3

Different loci of appreciation – form vs experience

Those who evoke experience against knowledge have a basis for their prejudice in the real opposition between the domestic learning and the scholastic learning of culture (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 67).

The first two parts of this chapter largely concentrated on the difference in evaluation processes of experts and nonexperts and the respective values attached to them. This final section explores the impact of the different emphasis that experts and non-experts place on the object and on the experience of looking at the object. I first try to situate the place of meaning for expert and nonexpert evaluators – whether it is seen to lie within the form of the object they are appraising, or in their perceived impact of the object. I then consider attitudes to the fake, introduced in chapter five with respect to originality and ornamentation. I explore how differently fake can be interpreted from these two stances – focusing on the object itself or the projected experience of engaging with it. I end by considering the implications of this on looking at architecture as part of a narrative and as a setting for experience, picking up themes of familiarity and coherent stories raised in relation to mental processes discussed in the last chapter.

7.3.1 Situating meaning between cause and effect

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu highlights the different locus of meaning and value in art relative to the appraiser's social class and thereby the extent of what he calls their cultural capital. As part of his attitudes survey, on which analysis his thesis is based, people were asked to respond to different images that they were shown. He cites the qualifying judgements used by the working classes, with low cultural capital, that would attribute possible uses of the images for different audiences, noting how "the image is judged by reference to the function it fulfils for the person who looks at it or which he thinks it could fulfil for other classes of beholders" (p. 34). The categorisations used are of different types of social uses, such as: 'it's a publicity photo', 'it's a pure document', 'it's a laboratory photo'" (p. 34). And the judgement is based on the content, not the expression – style and technique – of the image, performing, in his words, "a systematic reduction of the things of art to the things of life" (p. xxviii). This 'popular aesthetic' (quotation marks used by Bourdieu to denote an aesthetic 'in itself', not 'for itself' (p. xxvii)), Bourdieu writes "which subordinates the form and the very existence of the image to its function, is necessarily pluralistic and conditional" (p. 34), as it is judged contextually and functionally. He

notes how this presents as a 'negative opposite' (p. 33) of Kant's disinterested beauty and contradicts his theory (set out in the last section), by using the senses or references to morality in all aesthetic judgement.

The divisions between considering the autonomy over the usefulness of art, looking at technique over content, and applying referential over critical appreciation all become relevant distinctions between experts and nonexpert aesthetic evaluation in architecture. Experts will focus their specialist expertise on the form of the piece they are assessing and what loosely could be called the causes that make it what it is – they will be aware, for example, of how it is made, what it is made of, and how well it is made – of the quality and the integrity of its design and production in the context of its field of production. For architects, this will be the about the building, or space; for a musician, the piece of music; for a writer, the novel. Nonexperts will be limited in such an assessment of cause, without the specialist skill and knowledge to know either the object, or the context of its field of production in much depth or detail. Their interest and attention will be more in the anticipated effects in use of the piece in question, and how it relates to them; whether it is what the director of *Create Streets*, Nicholas Boys Smith calls 'psychologically credible' (2016, p. 94). Can they imagine, for example, living in the building? Will the music be cheerful to listen to on a run? Will the novel be a good bedtime read? I suggest the distinctive appeal within each can be thought of as pulling in the different directions of *cause* and *effect*.

One consequence of this different emphasis and focus of attention to be considered is that two different sources of meaning attach to the two perspectives. For experts who concentrate on the form of the piece and invest that with primary significance, the meaning and validity of the piece will also likely lie in its form. Whereas for nonexperts interested more in the effect of the piece, it would follow that the meaning of the piece to them is more associational and narrative – lying in the grip and coherence of the story being told, not the authenticity of the elements used in the telling of that story. Holt's study of cultural capital and consumption (1998) supports this thesis, finding a notable difference between referential and critical appreciation of cultural pieces. He found that those with lower cultural capital were interested in the relevance of the piece to their own lives, that he calls 'referential appreciation' (p.9) as opposed to the more distanced 'critical appreciation' (p.9) of those with high cultural capital.

7.3.2 Positions of separateness and identification - fakery from observer and participant perspectives

The different target of attention and meaning for experts and nonexperts sheds further light on the elite dislike of fake that was raised in chapter five with respect to the ideology of authenticity. Extending that argument, I contend that for experts the morality of fake will revolve around the authenticity of a piece - the integrity of the object- and for nonexperts around the authenticity of its use - the projected experience of the object.

The moral heat and friction of fakery can perhaps be better understood in considering its operation as a disconnection of meaning and outcomes. The dishonesty of a fake causes a break in the continuity of meaning between the object and how it is presented or how it is perceived. For both scenarios, the disconnection acts as an interruption to the interpretive story – much like Kahneman's cognitive coherence, discussed in the last chapter. Take for example different attitudes taken towards a recognisable example of fake that divides opinions, the spray tan. I would argue that rejecters of the spray tan as fake will focus on the cause of the tan and take against the disruption of its accustomed meaning, which is from the sun not a bottle. The

continuity of narrative of a suntan offers the potential for interpretation of the cause of the tan – perhaps an indication of a holiday or of time lazing in the garden or working outdoors. In so doing it invites a level of engagement beyond the surface, with the potential for construal and with that, connection. A spray tan dislocates this interpretive thread and is judged as an unacceptable deceit in this causal context. It is pretending to be a suntan, with its attendant interpretive baggage, but disrupts the meaning of the tan because it is not a *real* suntan. The embracers of the spray tan, on the other hand will focus on the output, or effect, of the tan and the advantages it brings, such as its perceived attractiveness, or a holiday sun-kissed look, that does not require having to spend time in the sun, or go on holiday. From this perspective, the deceit is judged as a justifiable means to an end for the benefits it brings. The focus in this context moves away from the authenticity of the tan in itself to the what the tan enables.

The different opinions of the rejecters and embracers in this example of the spray tan, are divided through their different emphasis on the importance of the cause, or meaning of the tan, and the importance on the effect, or outcome of the tan. These two outlooks derive from the different positions taken by the judges of the tan. The rejecters judge from the position of observer whereas the embracers judge from the position of participant. One is outside, the other within. This echoes Bourdieu's distinction between judging art from a position of separateness (for those with high cultural capital) or as it is seen in relation to one's own life (for those with low cultural capital) (2010).

7.3.3 Creating settings for experience - the impact of the experience economy

The importance of experience is recognized by branding experts who promote themselves on creating brand experiences and talk about 'experience design' (Diller, Shedroff, & Rhea, 2008, p. 3; Yu, 2009, para. 1). But experience design is not a common term in architecture. This can be understood in terms of seeing the experience of a building as resulting from the meaning and value of it as an object of architecture, rather than seeing a building as a the result of a set of constructed, designed experiences. The difference not being in the importance of experience but of means and ends, considered in terms of integrity versus superficiality.

In *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want*, business strategists James H. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine II who coined the term 'the experience economy' (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) explore notions of authenticity in economic markets. They put forward a theory of the rise of the experience economy, attributing it with a growing desire for the 'real' and 'genuine' (p. 1). They identify four key consumer trends that have emerged from the scarcity of the agrarian economy to the abundance of the current experience economy (2007, p. 5). Each focuses on key different market aspects, driven by different needs and conditions. This can be summarised in the following diagram:

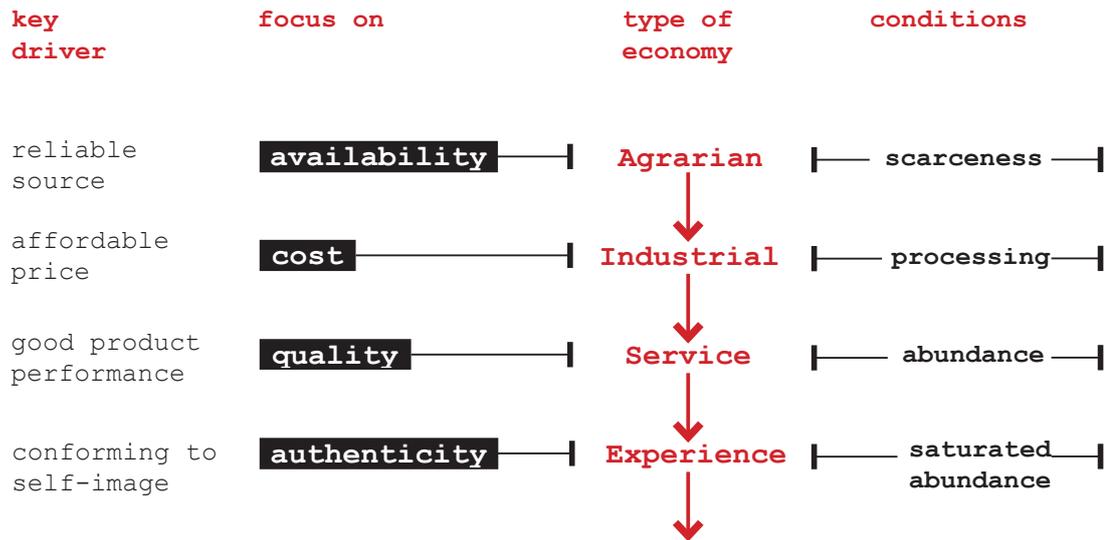


Figure 7.3 Diagram charting the rise of the experience economy (Gilmore & Pine, 2007).

Gilmore and Pine maintain that all commercial offerings can be classified into one of five progressive types: commodities, goods, services, experiences and transformations. Two dynamics, they say, work in opposite directions against these offerings: commoditisation that focuses on price and drives down the economic offering; and customisation that focuses on the individual and pushes up the economic offering. They introduce the idea of ‘genres of perceived authenticity’ (2007, p. 49), that correspond with each of these consumer categories (whilst also applicable to all), summarised in fig. 7.4 below. The progression closely parallels Maslow’s hierarchy of need formulated in his “A Theory of Human Motivation” (Maslow, 2013 [1943]) that builds up from basic or physiological needs to safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs and at the peak, self-actualisation.

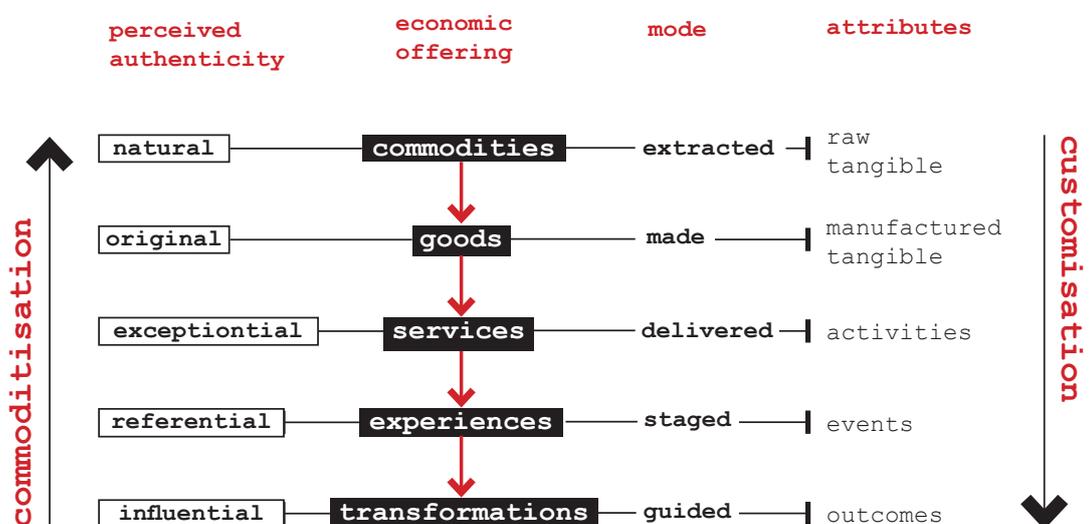


Figure 7.4 Diagram of the progression of economic value (Gilmore & Pine, 2007).

The perceived authenticity of experiences, they assert, is in the reference to another context. There is a strong link to memory here, both in connecting with past ‘shared memories and longings’ (p. 50), and in making new memorable events. This resonates with both the contextual nature of the popular aesthetic and the referential appreciation of those with low cultural capital described earlier as well as the mechanisms of ease associated with memory and familiarity, set out in the last chapter.

One of the ways in which buildings are imagined, and consequently judged, is through the extent to which a person can imagine themselves taking part in the activities that take place in them, as well as the type of activities themselves (Gjerde, 2011). In the vocabulary of aesthetic experience research, this is an aspect of *associational meaning*, which can be significant to an understanding and evaluation of a building, especially for a nonexpert (Cuthbert, 2006).

The popular interest in seeking experiences is attested to by the continuing growth of global theme park industry that saw nearly half a billion visitors in the major operators in 2017 - more than double attendance at all of the major sport leagues around the world and with the top 25 theme parks attracting more than more than double the top 20 museums attendance (TEA & Aecom, 2018, p. 7,11,19). The theme park, and the giant behind the most successful of them all, Walt Disney Attractions (TEA & Aecom, 2018), offers a useful insight into the phenomenon of *designed* experiences, being the proven experts in creating immersive settings for memorable experiences. Like branding experts, the Disney ‘imagineers’¹⁶ (Disney, 2019b) design experiences over and above designing places or architecture. All of the place-making and architectural tools they use are directed towards the management of an experience within which the creators decide what emphasis and outcome are desired (Horn, 1994). This relies heavily on stories – stories that we have heard, stories that we tell ourselves and stories that we would like to hear. Kantar Added Value, a global marketing agency with the strap line ‘We inspire brands to create experiences’ (Kantar, 2018), advises that the first principle to understand in outstanding experience design is that it is about the ‘art of the story’ (Yu, 2009, para. 2), which plays a key part in the imaginative, experience-based escape from everyday routines:

Given that everything we design, whether it be a mobile device to a spray bottle, is part of our everyday lives, and our everyday lives are made up of multiple storylines, understanding design in the context of stories can help us think more about the experiences we seek to create (Yu, 2009, para. 2).

Seeing, and judging, architecture as part of an everyday life story perhaps lies at the heart of evaluating it as a setting for experience. I contend that architects are generally unversed in this way of seeing architecture and as such this likely contributes to the elite-popular taste schism.

¹⁶ The term is coined from combining ‘imagination’ with ‘engineering’: “Imagineers bring art and science together to turn fantasy into reality and dreams into magic” (Disney, 2019a, para. 2).

7.4 Conclusion

The taste divide is perhaps a schism that springs as much from the different grounds of interest and indifference as from the expertise that demarcates the elite from the lay public. There is a vast range of emotional engagement around the subject of architecture, from apathy to passion. And the two ends of the spectrum cannot be weighed as if balanced. This not only skews the picture of the divide but may also, in itself, produce different attitudes and responses. The popular-elite taste schism cannot then be taken to be either a symmetrical or bi-polar divide.

In looking at processes of evaluation, I evidenced a difference between expert and nonexpert mental processes in classification and cognitive evaluation. And whilst the influence of preconditioning affects both groups, its influence will be different, affecting nonexpert evaluation more through associational meaning and familiarity than the knowledge of expertise.

In looking at the status of knowledge and reason in expertise, I have argued that the architectural judgement of experts, that stems from differences in evaluation processes, is elevated through the mechanisms of cultural hierarchies identified by Bourdieu. In consequence, the views of nonexperts are effectively eschewed in expert assessment of aesthetic merit, and the merit in other ways of knowing and judging is disregarded. I have raised the potential societal questioning of the role of the expert and the sanctity of reason, after its ascendancy in the last century, and the distinction between *expert* taste and the taste of experts.

In looking at different loci of appreciation I argued that an expert's interest in the integrity of an object as a *work* placed them in the position of observer to that object, interested in what I termed the causes that made it what it is (method of production, mode of expression etc). This is in contrast with a nonexpert's interest in what the object means to them in the way that they imagine experiencing it, that I termed the effect of the object, which positions them as a participant in relation to it. I considered attitudes to fakery from these positions and went on to posit that lay interest may be more in the effectiveness of design as a setting for experience, than in the integrity of the ideas behind it. In the context of the experience economy and experience design this begs the question of the extent that architectural taste has also become an experience in an economy of abundance.

In Part II of this thesis I have investigated four key themes for their potential influence of taste judgements that may contribute to the schism in taste between the architectural elite and the lay public. These are: the perceived value of a traditional aesthetic, explored in chapter four; the learnt values of the elite associated with the ideological legacy of Modernism, examined in chapter five; the inherited values from socio-cultural settings with particular reference to security and risk, investigated in chapter six; and the factors associated with expertise explored in this chapter. I will return to this material in Part IV. But first, in Part III, I go on to test attitudes to the typical volume-built house aesthetic to get a picture of architect and lay preferences and the reasons that people cite for them.

Part III
TEST

8

Visual Preference Survey

In parallel with the investigations in Part II, I conducted primary research to gather data on taste preferences with respect to volume-built housing, that could inform my research enquiry into the nature of taste preferences. This is set out in the next two chapters. As previously noted, how we perceive our environment affects how we feel about ourselves and the communities we live in, yet we have little evidence about the general public's aesthetic preferences about buildings. The current new-build housing market in the UK offers a narrow range of aesthetic choice. As noted in chapter one, it is dominated by housebuilder-vernacular styled properties, that I estimate represents 85-90% of the new-build market. With price and location dominating house purchasing choices in a market where demand outstrips new supply by a ratio of up to three to one, sales and increasing prices are not a necessary indication of buying choice (OFT, 2008). In such a sellers' market, choice is limited and design preferences cannot be assumed to be a major part of buyers' purchasing considerations.

That the British house-buying public like a traditional, vernacular aesthetic is a little challenged doxa. "...British people have tended to show a marked preference for the old-fashioned when it comes to buildings..." remark Ballantyne and Law in their study of the Tudoresque (2011, p. 18). "Ask a Briton to describe their ideal home, and the chances are their reply will include the adjective 'period'" quips a BBC news piece on 'which era of house do people like best?' (Kelly, 2013). cursory preference polls and surveys that have not probed the attributes or characteristics that elicit positive responses may tend to the reinforcement of this commonly held belief. Such simplistic division of architectural style may miss complexities present in taste judgements.

To test public opinion about attitudes towards the typical volume-built house aesthetic, and the influences that were acting on the respondent's aesthetic choices, I conducted a visual preference survey, run from December 2015 to February 2016. At this time in my research enquiry, I had not yet established all of the themes set out in the last four chapters, which do not form the basis of the survey. Rather, the survey sought responses to the style and key features of volume-built houses, for which I offered choices between images of typical volume-built house façades and images of carefully controlled, modified versions that were designed to test different aspects of the façade treatment: style – in terms of decorative embellishments; windows – in terms of proportions and size; and roof – in terms of flat or pitched form.

In the first section, 'Research context', I review the characteristics of key previous evidence-based architectural preference studies relevant to defining the focus and method of my survey. In the second section, 'Method' I discuss the design and implementation of the survey. In its method and material, this survey critically engages with and tackles shortcomings observed in previous architectural preference research. I aimed to gather sufficient survey data to be able to test responses across a number of demographic variables, including occupation, age, location type and gender, as most previous architectural preference studies have been hindered by relatively small sample sizes and loose definition of variables that limit demographic analysis and the conclusions that can be drawn from the data. I also intended to gather both quantitative

and qualitative data from the survey. This was to be able to get an indication of trends relative to key demographics, and to gain an insight into why preference choices were made that could inform my research.

8.1 Research context

Whilst research into attitudes towards the visual appearance of housing in the UK is scarce, the advent of environment behaviour studies in the 1960s generated various international studies exploring architecture preferences more generally, including several on housing. These do not, however represent a coherent body of work, rather, as Rapoport, one of founders of the field regretfully observed on the development of the discipline: "...instead of cumulativeness, one has accumulation – a heterogeneous collection of fragmented studies, a heap, not a structure. These piles of data cannot be used, may be contradictory, and lack explicit and clear definition of terms and concepts, essential in view of the lack of agreement about them." (2008, p. 278). He goes on to add how it is "especially relevant to the case of EBS [environmental behaviour studies], which began and continues with a very large sea of ignorance with many very diverse, highly specialized, and widely scattered islands of knowledge." (2008, p. 280).

Given this challenging context in which there is little established ground on which to base research, this survey addressed preferences for some key architectural object attributes that I considered to merit testing, namely: preferences for external embellishment, window proportion and relative size, and roof type in ordinary domestic buildings. Through purposefully chosen methods and materials the survey also aimed to tackle some of the pitfalls and shortcomings observed in previous architectural preference research, in particular: sample size and diversity; demographic factors; and material accuracy; responses to object attributes; and influences on choices. I discuss these five key aspects, below.

8.1.1 Sample size and diversity

Past, well-cited preference studies have tended to use very small sample sizes, for example 10 architects and 10 lay people in Kimberly Devlin and Jack Nasar's study (1989), 20 architects and 20 accountants in Linda Groat's (1982), 15 architects and 15 lay people in A. T. Purcell and Nasar's (1992), (max) 9 architects and 27 lay people in Gifford et al's (2000), 25 architects and 27 lay people in Graham Brown and Robert Gifford's (2001). Even larger studies have not had significant sample sizes from which large enough sub-groups can be drawn for comparative data, for example 31 architects and 93 others in William Fawcett's study (2008), 65 architects and 200 lay people in Nasar's (1989) and 200 designers and 200 lay people in M. Ghomeshi and M. M. Jusan's (2013).

Many studies have also used respondent groups with limited demographic variability, often using students, either wholly or in majority, such as Ghomeshi and Jusan (2013), Imamoglu (2000), Purcell (1986) and Sadalla and Sheets (1993); and most either having a gender imbalance or unknown gender split. Whilst Bechtel et al (1995) claim that age is not a factor in their study of words participants used to describe happy and depressing places and therefore students can

be assumed to represent the wider population, this cannot be taken as evidence that age is not a factor in aesthetic preferences. There are also insufficient studies to take a view on the impact of gender, which is yet to be comprehensively tested.

The quantitative results from small or restricted sample groups must be interpreted and used with caution and not taken to be representative of general views and preferences.

8.1.2 Demographic evaluation

Many previous aesthetic preference studies have focused on differences between architects' and non-architects' responses to buildings (including: Akalin et al., 2009; Brown & Gifford, 2001; Devlin & Nasar, 1989; Fawcett et al., 2008; Ghomeshi & Jusan, 2013; Groat, 1982; Hershberger, 1988 [1969]; Hubbard, 1996; Imamoglu, 2000; Nasar, 1989; A. T. Purcell & Nasar, 1992). They have consistently found differences between architects and lay people in visual preferences and, when tested, the conceptual appraisal of building façades. Margaret Wilson's study of the socialization of architecture students (1996) found differences emerged through the training period. However, many of these have not used domestic buildings as the object of study and few of them have been based on UK examples.

Other than this comparison of architects' and non-architects' evaluations, there has been very little demographic data analysis in this area. This is likely to be at least in part due to the small sample sizes that do not offer large enough sub-group sizes for analysis.

Arthur Stamps' meta-analysis review of demographic effects in environmental aesthetics (1999) attempted to bring together data from a wide literature review of empirical aesthetic preference studies (40 experiments with 5,301 respondents evaluating 1,001 scenes across 21 countries) to assess the extent of correlations amongst various demographic groups. Such an analysis can only be broad brush given the number of differences across the studies being pooled. The review found consensus in aesthetic judgements for many demographic factors. These include gender and designers' vs non-designers' preferences in respect of 'ordinary architecture' (1999, p. 163) and nature. It was only in evaluations of what Stamps terms 'avant-garde architecture' (1999, p. 163) that divergence was found between designers and non-designers. However, both groups had relatively small data sets for analysis, with only three out of the 40 pooled studies identifying gender groups (totalling 233 respondents) and five testing responses to avant-garde architecture (totalling 580 respondents). Age (apart from children under 12), education and habitual environment were not covered in the review.

8.1.3 Accuracy of material

In his critical review of environmental aesthetics research, Joachim Wohlwill wrote:

One of the most difficult problems to be resolved in this field concerns the specification and measurement of the properties or attributes of the environment that are chosen for investigation. A large amount of research on so-called environmental perception has completely side-stepped this problem, by the expedient selecting of environmental sites, views, structures, paths, or verbally designated locales or regions, without any attempt to assess these with respect to specified variables of the stimulus (Altman & Wohlwill, 1976, p. 60).

David Canter echoed these concerns (1977) and over a decade later Groat continued to argue that one of the major shortcomings in environmental aesthetics research is the inaccuracy in specifying the physical attributes being studied (1988). From my review of architectural preference studies on visual appearance I would maintain that this problem has continued to affect the efficacy of research in this field.

Ensuring reasonable precision of the independent variable is the central challenge in research studies in architectural aesthetics, given the potential for many uncontrolled, extraneous variables to be present in the settings being evaluated. Building façades contain complex, interconnected sets of conditions, the balance of which changes from one building to another in a myriad ways. It is difficult, if not impossible, to isolate a single, independent variable condition in a comparison of existing building façades (in situ or in photographs), removing all other factors that may influence a preference evaluation. To a greater or lesser extent this limitation is a problem for all preference studies in the pre-digital era, ie before digital image manipulation offered a far easier way than previously to put up images with precisely identifiable differences that respondents could easily compare. Previously such precision would require comparing drawings or models, and these are themselves problematic because of the abstract and artificial characteristics of the material. Furthermore, whilst computer-aided photo manipulation is now commonly used in architectural communication and shown to be an effective tool in community participation in planning, for realistically showing the impact of different design options (Al-Kodmany, 1999), I am not aware of relevant architectural preference studies that have deployed this technique to control variables.

The problem of controlling variables can be illustrated by an example. Aysu Akalin et al used photographs from five different sites in their study evaluating Turkish house façades, assessing the impact of alterations to façades (2009). They acknowledge that this method did not afford the systematic control of their testing material, as they were not able to control the specifics of either the alterations or of other building features across the options being assessed in the material. Consequently, it cannot be concluded that it was the alterations per se that were the reason for the differences in evaluations.

Akalin et al rightly note that drawings could do this better, but the increased abstraction of drawings relative to photographs would introduce a different set of problematics in the evaluation. If a building façade is reduced to its simplest form and elements, shown in the form of drawings to mitigate the influence of uncontrolled variables and to bring some uniformity to the visuals being judged, there is a risk that the visuals are too abstracted from real world references and equivalents to allow a confident application of the test results to building façades in general. Given that the Akalin et al study was comparing architect and non-architect judgements, this barrier of representation would be greater in view of architects' better ability to process more abstract representations of buildings than lay persons. The use of black-and-white line drawings for the evaluations is a shortcoming in a number of studies including Çağrı Imamoglu's study of assessments of traditional and modern Turkish house façades (2000), Nasar's study of symbolic meaning in houses (1989) and Edward Sadalla and Virgil Sheets' study of symbolism in building materials (1993).

A further problem for accuracy in the control of the independent variables in the material being tested is the extent and complexity of judgements the researcher may need to make in the selection process of the visuals for participants to evaluate. For example, in the studies by Fawcett et al (2008) and Devlin and Nasar (1989), photographic images were selected and categorised as representative of different styles of architecture that were being compared in the

studies. The imprecision of such classifying judgements, along with the inevitable extraneous variables contained within them lead to ambiguity and potential misinterpretation in the survey results.

8.1.4 Testing responses to object attributes

Preference studies commonly lack an emphasis on the relationship between specific physical characteristics and respondents' judgements, which may be a consequence of the limitations in test material accuracy described above. By focusing on inter-group correlations in preferences, such studies sidestep the issue of not being able to accurately define different object characteristics for testing. As a result, the value of the findings are limited, relating to differences of opinion, rather than the root of the differences; the specific stimuli to which those judgements respond. Wohlwill highlighted this problematic tendency in the field, questioning the usefulness of outcomes of tests in which subjects are asked to verbally rate arbitrarily chosen stimuli on semantic differential scales, yielding correlation matrices and subsequent factor analyses of limited value. He astutely observed of this method: "The information derived from such analysis is, however, purely descriptive; moreover, it describes the manner in which subjects use the verbal scales in response to environmental stimuli of a given type, without telling us anything about the role played in these judgements by any specific environmental characteristics." (1976, p. 61).

Several preference studies have tested responses to different architectural styles, but have not addressed the nature of the differences in features, characteristics or design approach of the styles. For example, Nasar's study of desirability and perception of friendliness and status in housing in the USA (1989) compared preferences amongst six styles of large American houses (cited in chapter six), but did not define or analyse the differentiating characteristics between the different styles. Consequently, whilst the findings indicate that some styles have different associations to others, they do not expose the attribute characteristics that form those respondents' judgements. The results therefore do not contribute to the development of an understanding of the nature of architectural preferences and the contributing physical attributes.

Fawcett et al's Ordered Preference Model study (2008) tested eight different style combinations across the attributes of roof shape, material and architectural character of office buildings in the UK. Whilst there was more analysis of individual components here than in Nasar's study, a clear definition of the judgement characteristics was not made. Accordingly, conclusions of preferences for what the authors term 'complex' and 'basic' attributes cannot be corroborated. The comparison of flat and pitch roof types was clear, however, with a preference found for pitch roofs, and this aspect was taken forward for further validation in this study.

8.1.5 Influences on choices

Statistics on visual preferences do not provide the root characteristics and attributes that form the basis for responses, unless they are specifically and precisely tested. Quantitative surveys and opinion polls can often be limited in this respect. For example, a poll of 1000 participants conducted in 2015 by Ipsos Mori for Create Streets to gauge public opinion on building new homes on local brownfield sites found that a traditional-vernacular style and two modern-vernacular styles were the only images that had majority support for development - 86%, 85%

and 62% respectively. The other two images were of taller, three and four storey modern-styled houses – with respectively 39% and 26% support for development. (See figure 8.1 below for images (Ipsos MORI, 2015)). The evidence is insufficient to conclude that it is a preference for traditional style that is shown by the difference in responses. It may be generally assumed that people prefer traditional house styles, and so this is the reason for the choices, but it is not directly evident from the survey. There are so many variables in an architectural image and a multitude of potential meanings and associations for respondents to react to, that it is risky to draw conclusions on style preference beyond the fact that they are varied. The underlying reasons for the responses may arise from factors influencing decisions beyond the differential of style; such as the height of the less popular houses and the relative proportion of wall to window, or the balance of a number of physical attributes that constitute a style. These would need to be isolated and tested in order to draw any conclusions about the characteristics that underlie visual preferences.



Figure 8.1
 Images from Ipsos MORI
 survey for Create Streets, 2015

Many architectural aesthetic preference studies address the limitations of binary choices by adopting an abstract testing system of eliciting responses on Likert-type scales¹⁷ of factors such as complexity, novelty, coherence, order, pleasantness (or similar (such as Brown & Gifford, 2001; Devlin & Nasar, 1989; Herzog, Kaplan, & Kaplan, 1976; Imamoglu, 2000)). These commonly used test descriptors are rooted in a body of enquiry often referred to in this field, that stems from the work of D. E. Berlyne on experimental aesthetics, and his physiobiology theories. Berlyne believed that objects impact on three levels: psychophysical; environmental;

¹⁷ Likert scales are commonly used in psychometric testing. They generally feature a range of five or seven points in a numeric or descriptive range, eg 1 to 7, or strongly disagree to strongly agree. They are often used in questionnaire formats to text attitudes. They use closed-ended questions but offer more nuance than a binary yes/no response.

and what he termed ‘collative’ (Altman & Wohlwill, 1976, p. 40) to describe hedonic arousal, in response to the stimuli such as novelty, complexity, the element of surprise and incongruity. He considered arousal was most effective when it was moderate (rather than high or low) and linked this to the relative complexity and novelty of the object. He revived the study of experimental aesthetics (introduced by Gustav Fechner's *Vorschule der Asthetik* [Introduction to Aesthetics] in 1876), believing in an ‘objective psychology of aesthetic appreciation’ to quote the subtitle of his book *Studies in New Experimental Aesthetics* (1974). Many subsequent findings support his thesis of general preference for moderate object complexity and novelty, but others diverge from this conclusion (see Nadal, Munar, Marty, & Cela-Conde, 2010 for a comprehensive review). Given the inconclusiveness of this thesis, I purposely chose to ask an open-ended question about influences on preference choices to avoid any assumptions of the categories that may be in play and directing respondent’ answers towards them. The themes can instead emerge through the text analysis of the responses without any bias.

In conclusion of my review of relevant studies in the field, I wanted the survey to avoid the limitations observed in previous studies discussed here of: a small sample size that would not allow for adequate demographic evaluation; imprecise test images that would not enable an accurate analysis of the characteristics eliciting the tested preference responses; and closed questions that would restrict the scope of participants’ responses on the factors that influenced their preference choices.

8.2 Method

As raised in chapter four, the starting point for my investigation into the themes that may influence architectural taste in housing was a traditional aesthetic, which is a distinct characteristic of typical volume-built housing. I had thought, when embarking on this research, that this would likely be the primary point of aversion to the aesthetic of volume-built housing for the architectural elite. And as I have previously noted, it is also commonly assumed that the lay public prefer a traditional aesthetic to a modernist one. I therefore wanted to test this assumption in the survey, to gauge attitudes to these two aesthetic approaches. I also wanted to test responses to the other two prominent features of a house façade: the windows and the roof. I was interested in attitudes to window size, observing that relatively small windows are also a characteristic of the housebuilder-vernacular style, and to window proportion, observing the typically restricted proportions of volume-built house windows that tend to be square, or just off square. Previous studies have found a preference in the lay public for pitched roofs, which I also wanted to test with respect to housing.

In this section I first outline the form of the survey and then each of the three survey tests.

8.2.1 Form of the survey

I aimed to address the issues outlined in the previous section, in the design of the survey. It was intended to: have a large sample size; to test various demographic factors; to use precisely

manipulated test images; to test specific architectural aspects; and to have an open-ended qualitative aspect as well as a controlled quantitative aspect.

This gave rise to five key features of the survey:

1. It uses a large, diverse sample of 690 valid responses for more reliable results and the ability to confidently analyse demographic sub-groups;
2. It evaluates the possible demographic influences of age, gender, occupation and respondents' dwelling environment on visual preference judgements;
3. It applies digital manipulation of photo-realistic, colour images for precise control of variables and accuracy of representation, mitigating the drawback of imprecise or abstract independent variables;
4. It focuses on responses to controlled variation of architectural attributes to better understand their impact in visual evaluations;
5. It asks respondents to say what influences their choices enabling an unprescribed qualitative analysis of factors affecting preferences.

The survey took the form of an on-line questionnaire (Computer Aided Web Interviewing (CAWI) format) and respondents were self-selected by way of non-probability snowball sampling, through social media networks and email circulation. This format has the advantages of: the capacity for collecting a substantial sample size; offering the potential of a higher response rate and wider reach than other formats; and avoiding any interview effect bias. One of the limitations of this CAWI format is that the survey sample risks bias in not being random and therefore not precisely representative of the target population (although this risk is common to all the studies cited in this paper). And although the internet is now has wide availability, it is not universally accessible in British households (ONS, 2016), which also contributes to the risk of unrepresentative bias. Another risk in this format is that participants can easily stop before completing the questionnaire. To mitigate this risk, the survey was designed to be short and easy to complete.

The target population for the survey was adults living in England for five years or more. Research suggests that familiarity could be a factor in aesthetic preference choices (Cook & Furnham, 2012; Imamoglu, 2000; A. T. Purcell & Nasar, 1992) so a qualifying criteria of having lived in England for five years or more was introduced to ensure a minimum level of exposure to the English built environment context and thereby help mitigate any significant enviro-cultural biases that may be at play in architectural preference judgements. This study was not directly testing familiarity as a factor for preference, though a follow-on study would be a valuable research contribution.

Responses were collected over a period of three months, between December 2015 and February 2016. Respondents were anonymous and volunteered to undertake the survey without incentives.

The introductory demographic questions of respondents' gender, age, occupation, education and own dwelling location and tenure, established the independent variables. Age was split into six bands from 18 to over 65 years. Occupation was split into three categories: architect or architecture student; work or study in a design-related field; and other. Respondents' education

level was split into five bands: no formal qualifications; GCSE equivalent; A levels; graduate qualification; and postgraduate or professional qualification. Respondents' dwelling location was split into three categories: living in a town or urban centre; living in a suburban area; living in a rural area. Tenure was split into five categories: private rented; social rented; owner occupier; institution; and other.

The main survey was in three sections: Your Preferred Style, Your Preferred Windows, and Your Preferred Roof, each of which tested respondent preferences to pairs of digitally manipulated images. Photo realistic colour images were used, set up from a passer-by's eye-level for accuracy of real life, as-built representations of the buildings being evaluated. The use of digitally manipulated images brings numerous advantages: the ability to precisely control the variables being tested; the consistency, for respondents, of view point and information received; and the ease of reaching a wide geographical participant sample. The image choices were all based on front views of new build, three-bedroom suburban family houses currently being offered by three of the highest output volume housebuilders in the UK.

The survey had a quantitative and a qualitative element in each section. For the quantitative part, questions required a tick-box preference for one of a pair of images. The questions could not be skipped so that respondents had to make a preference in all cases. For the qualitative part, at the end of each the section participants were asked to write what influenced their choices. This was to gather commentary on the taste preferences in the words of respondents and without leading questions. A response to this question was not mandatory.

Ref. Appendix 3 for the full survey questionnaire, Appendix 4 for test images and Appendix 8 for ethics approval.

8.2.2 Test 1 - Preferred Style: embellished vs stripped

In this test I was aiming to gauge respondents' preferences and attitudes to the traditional allusions in the decorative style of typical volume-built housing, in comparison with a modernist approach stripped of supplementary decorative features.

There were four questions in this section, each featuring a pair of images. One of each image pair was a view as shown in recent marketing brochures, the other was the same image, digitally manipulated to strip the façade of traditional-styled embellishments and decorative features including: window sub-divisions, decorative roof and gable trims, decorative brick courses and features, pitches on the roofs of porches and dormers and front door panelling. The window frames in the stripped images were grey in lieu of the original white. The form, position and size of all the elements was the same for both images in a pair. Respondents were asked to choose their preferred façade in four pairs of images. No explanation of the stripping was given to respondents and no titles were given to the images, only to the section of the survey: 'Your Preferred Style'. To mitigate against order bias, the pair order was purposely inconsistent.



House 1



House 2



House 3



House 4

Figure 8.2
Test 1 image pairs on
Preferred Style, as presented
in the survey.

8.2.3 Test 2 - Preferred Windows: size and proportion

In this test I was aiming to see if there were any consistent patterns in preferences towards window proportions and window sizes, and whether these were influenced by the style of the façade.

The test was in two parts. The first of two sets of questions tested proportion. The base image for the test was the same front view of the last house pair that was chosen as preferred in section 1 (ie if respondents chose the original traditionally styled façade in the last image pair of test 1, the window image tests were of house 4 (white rendered semi-detached with a half gable), in the same style and vice versa if they chose the stripped façade). The other image was digitally manipulated to create different window proportions, all with the same window area. The original image was square (as in the housebuilder's design), the alternatives were vertical and horizontal.

The second set of questions tested window size. The manipulated alternative images for each of the three tested proportions had windows 30% larger than the original. Examples are shown in fig. 8.3 below, ref Appendix 4 for all of the survey the images.



*Figure 8.3
Example of Test 2 images for window proportions (above) for stripped image test option, and window size (below) for embellished image test option.*

8.2.4 Test 3 - Preferred Roof: pitched vs flat

In this test I was aiming to see if respondents’ preferences for house roof form corroborated previous studies that found a general preference for pitched roofs over flat, and to gain an insight into the reasons for this preference.

Fawcett et al’s preference study (2008) found that user preferences were dominated by roof shape, with a predominant preference for pitched over flat, whereas architects’ responses were attributable more to what the authors called ‘strong or weak character’ (2008, p. 602). This section of the survey sought to substantiate this preference finding by testing responses to the original pitch roof with façade gables and a flat roof with parapet for the three window proportion configurations shown in Section 2, all with the original sized windows. As for test 2, the base image for the test was the same front view of the last house pair that was chosen as preferred in section 1. All other aspects of the images were kept constant for precise control of the variables. Examples are shown in fig. 8.4 below, ref Appendix 4 for all of the survey the images.





*Figure 8.4
Example of two Test 3, roof
form preference image pairs
used in the survey.*

8.3 Conclusion

I successfully conducted an online preference survey that addressed many of the format shortcomings that I had identified in previous studies in this field. I collected a total of 690 valid quantitative responses and 546 qualitative responses. This gave me sufficient data to be able to analyse the results across a number of demographic factors and to elicit some of the key influences on taste preferences through respondents' commentaries on why they made their choices. The aim of this survey was to gather primary research on visual attitudes to volume-built housing, to understand more precisely the commonalities and differences within taste preferences, and to use these findings to inform my research into the elite-popular taste schism.

In the next chapter I present the survey findings and analysis.

9

Survey Findings

In this chapter I present and analyse the findings of the survey, that I set out the research context and method for in the last chapter. It is divided into four sections: the quantitative results for the three tests; the qualitative results for the preferred style test; the qualitative results for the preferred roof test; and a summary of the key findings. Although each of the three tests in the survey had an open-ended question at the end asking what influenced the choices made, I am only presenting the analysis for the tests on style and roof form here, as the responses to these questions offers rich insights into influences on taste preferences, but which was not forthcoming in the responses to window proportions and size.

I reference a number of appendices in the text:

- Appendix 5 for demographic representation analysis of the survey;
- Appendix 6 for the quantitative findings charts and tables;
- Appendix 7 for a summary of the descriptive categories and their uses; and for the qualitative findings charts and tables.
- The full survey data is also available for digital reference on the accompanying CD.

9.1

Quantitative Survey Results

This section presents the survey findings for the quantitative parts of the three tests on style, windows and roofs. I analysed the results across the demographic factors of age, occupation, location type and gender using the statistical software, SPSS using cross-tabulation and regression tables which are detailed in Appendix 6. In Appendix 5 I set out a demographic representation analysis of the survey that shows that the sample was reasonably aligned with national population statistics for gender and age (with the exception of an overrepresentation in the 18-24 year old band and slight underrepresentation in the over 65 years of age band). Respondents living in urban locations were overrepresented and those in suburban locations were correspondingly underrepresented, but the numbers were sufficient in all bands for valid statistical analysis. There were sufficient numbers of respondents in all of the occupation categories to be able to make a valid statistical analysis of this data. The representation of education level and housing tenure were not sufficiently representational in all bands to warrant statistical analysis of these demographic factors.

9.1.1 Quantitative results for Test 1-Preferred Style: preferences about façade embellishments

In the following results analysis, reference to ‘embellished’ refers to the original house and ‘stripped’ to the alternative stripped of embellishments. Also ref Appendix 6, tables 1-7, as indicated below.

Of 811 total responses, 690 qualifying, completed surveys were collected for the first test on extent of façade decoration. In aggregate, 65% of all respondents preferred the original, embellished style to the stripped alternative and correspondingly 35% of respondents preferred the stripped style. The preferences, from a total of none to four houses with embellished façades, are not normally distributed (ref table 2), being inverted and weighted towards a preference for all four embellished houses. This is also the case within each independent variable distribution (ref tables 3-6).

The results show differences in the mean preference for the embellished house façade in all categories of the tested independent variables of respondent Gender, Age, Occupation and Location Type (ref table 1), suggesting a possible impact for each of these demographic factors on preference choice. The crosstabulation tables and charts (3-6), used to show the direct relationship between multiple variables, and the summary table of frequencies and means (1), indicate greater preference for the embellished house for respondents who are female, younger (18-24 years old) or older (65+ years), not working in architecture or design and living in suburban or rural environments. Notably a preference for none of the houses in the embellished style (ie all stripped) was the majority condition only in the categories of the middle age bands (35-44 and 45-54 years of age) and for architects or architecture students. For all other variable categories, all four houses in the embellished style was the majority preference, to varying degree (table 1). This is summarised in fig. 9.1, below.



Figure 9.1 Charts showing breakdown of the preference for the embellished house image for the bands within the four demographic factors tested, highlighted in red hatch when less than 50%. Average of 65% shown in yellow. (Ref Appendix 6, tables 3-6 for data).

Whilst the mean comparisons suggest correlations between each of the independent variables and façade style preference, they do not account for the impact of the other variables on the outcome. It could be for example, that a disproportionate number of 35-44 year old male respondents live in urban areas, thus skewing the results of a simple cross-tabulation comparison. Statistical regression analysis examines the relationship between a dependent variable (which is the thing being measured – in this case, façade preference) and several independent variables (the potential reasons for the variation in the dependent variable – in this case the various demographic categories), allowing for the influence of each. Putting the survey data into a linear regression model revealed that the observed differences in variables still hold with the impact of the other variables taken into account (ref table 7). The correlation coefficient (B) is calculated for each of the demographic variables against the dependent variable of the embellished façade preference. This is the measure of the extent of correlation between the two variables, measured between -1 and +1, ranging from a negative to a positive correlation with 0 indicating none.

The regression table (7) sets out the differences in association of the demographic variables to a preference for the embellished façade in relation to the reference categories of: 18-24 year olds; working or studying outside architecture and design; living in an urban area; male. This gives a correlation coefficient for this particular set of demographic variables, called a reference model constant. In this case it is 0.732. Alternative sums of coefficients can be calculated by adding or subtracting the corresponding profile coefficients in the table to compare aggregate associations for different combinations of demographic variables. By example, the sum of coefficients for a 48-year-old male architect living in an urban area is 0.166 compared to that of 0.965 for a 21-year-old female working in a non-design related field, living in a suburban area. This indicates a very wide range of association between the demographic variables and façade preferences, suggesting that there are significantly different impacts on preference for different demographics. R-squared is the percentage of the variance of the dependent variable (the preference for embellished façades), collectively explained by the independent variables (the recorded demographic factors), with 1 indicating a perfect fit of data to the model. It is a useful indicator of the strength of the relationship between the variables in a regression model. In this case R-squared is 0.262 indicating a strong relationship for the types of variables involved (in comparison say to the tolerance of machine parts for which a much higher number would be anticipated).

All Age categories show a negative association compared to 18-24 year olds, who are the most likely to prefer the original, embellished house façade. 35-54 year olds are the least likely, with larger coefficient differences across these middle age bands.

As expected, architects and architecture students show a negative association compared to other occupations (-0.335) and would be the least likely to prefer the embellished option. This is the strongest association of all the variable categories. Notably, those working or studying in a design-related field are also less likely to prefer the embellished house compared to Other occupations, though the association is not as strong as for Architects (-0.128). This suggests that it is not just architectural training that influences aesthetic preferences.

Respondents' own dwelling environments reveal a positive association for suburban and rural settings, indicating that respondents in these settings are more likely to prefer the embellished house than their urban counterparts. But the impact of respondents' location type is not as

great as that of the 35-64 years age bands. For example, the regression table results suggest that a 40-year-old male working outside of design fields, living in a suburban area is less likely to prefer the embellished option compared to a 20-year-old male working outside of design fields, living in an urban area (sum of coefficients (B) 0.483 and 0.732 respectively).

Gender shows a moderate positive association, suggesting that women are more likely to prefer embellished façades than men. The association (0.071) is not as great as that for the other variables, but is apparent.

9.1.2 Quantitative results for Test 2- Preferred Windows: preferences about proportion and size

Also ref Appendix 6, tables 8-10.

9.1.2.1 Proportion

The window proportions frequencies and means table (8), shows large divergences in proportion preferences relative to façade style preferences. For respondents who chose two, three or four houses with stripped façades, the vertical proportion was most preferred (means 1.08, 1.34 and 1.29 respectively) whereas for those who chose all four houses embellished, the vertical proportion was least preferred (mean 0.61). For respondents who chose three or four houses with embellished façades the horizontal proportion was most preferred (means 1.03 and 1.18 respectively). The original, square window proportion was not preferred for either of the façade styles and was the least preferred proportion for respondents who chose none, two and three houses with embellished façades.

Given the discrepancy on proportions relative to façade style preferences, a linear regression model was run on the preference for vertical proportion (table 9) to reveal any demographic associations. It highlights three key categories of variance: architects or architecture students, who show the strongest association ($B=0.555$), respondents working or studying in a design-related field and those aged 45-54 years who also show significant likelihood ($B= 0.318$ and 0.315 respectively) for a vertical preference. Other variable categories do not suggest any significant impact. R-squared of 0.095 indicates the moderate strength of this association.

9.1.2.2 Window Size

The results in table 10 show a preference for large windows for all but vertical window proportions in the embellished options. The preference is greater for the stripped options (mean 0.64) compared to the embellished options (mean 0.56). The preference for larger windows is with consistent with the findings of research undertaken by Mulholland Research and Consulting for CABE, on consumers attitudes to new homes, *What Home Buyers Want* (CABE, 2005)¹⁸.

9.1.3 Quantitative results for Test 3- Preferred Roof – preferences about form

Also ref Appendix 6, tables 11 and 12.

¹⁸ The research evidence presented in this report is based on a review of 25 consumer surveys by special interest bodies, six focus groups with intended home buyers and 900 online quantitative interviews.

The results in Table 6 show a preference for the pitched roof with all window proportions and both façade styles. The preference was greater in the embellished options (88%) than the stripped (55%). The breakdown of means in accordance with occupation (table 11) shows a significant difference between architects and architecture students (mean 1.73) and laypeople (mean 2.37). The results for respondents working or studying in a design-related field (mean 2.03) sit between the extremes of the groups, Architects and Others.

The linear regression model (table 12) shows similar trends of demographic impacts on preferences to that for façade style preferences. That is, that occupation, age and respondent location type each indicate a statistically relevant impact in this study with a consistent direction of influence away from the pitched roof option (and towards the flat roof) for all age and occupation bands in relation to the model constant tested of an 18-24 year old, female not working or studying in fields of design or architecture and living in an urban location. I.e. the greatest preference for a pitched roof is for nonarchitects under 25 years of age, living in a suburban location. The degree of impact differs for the variables, with the 54-65-year age band showing the greatest impact away from a preference for the pitched roof option - slightly greater in this test than architectural occupation. The 35-44 and 55-64 age bands also show significance in comparison with the reference age band for the model of 18-24 years. Unlike the façade style, gender shows no statistical impact on roof type preference.

Whilst the aggregated results show an overall preference for the original, volume-built house façade in terms of its embellishment and roof form, the statistical demographic analysis of the data indicates a significant influence of respondent occupation, age and location type on preference. In terms of style preference, architects and the middle-aged bands (35-54 years of age) preferred the stripped style option, counter to the other demographic bands. In terms of roof form, the preference for a pitched roof was strongest in the 18-24 year old age band, in non-architectural occupation and a suburban location. It was weakest in the 45-54 year old age band, in architectural occupation and an urban location. These results highlight the importance of demographic analysis of preferences and the risks of aggregating the lay public into a single group with a shared preferred aesthetic.

9.2

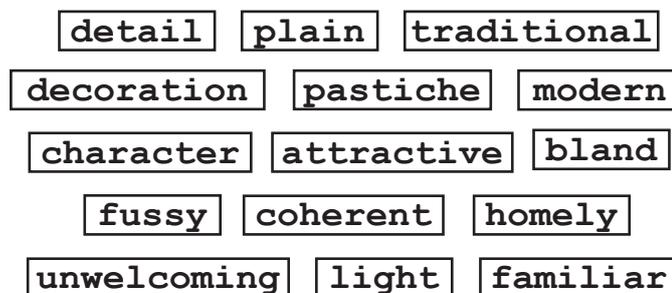
Qualitative Survey Results and Analysis of responses to Test 1 - Preferred Style

In this section I present the findings of the qualitative analysis of the 546 responses to the question at the end of Test 1 on preferred style that asked, 'what influenced your choices?' My interest in analysing the comments is in the kinds of expressions people made about the two façade options: what aspects of the house they were focused on; the types of adjectives they used to describe them; and any references they made to why they preferred one façade over the other. In order to better understand the elite-popular taste schism that I am researching, my comparative analysis concentrates on the differences and similarities between the responses of architects (and architecture students) and nonarchitects (those identified as working or studying in design-related or other occupations). I do not analyse the data for any other demographic factors in this section.

I first analysed the words used by respondents and grouped them into 15 descriptive categories, set out in 'Descriptive categories used to describe style preferences'. I then analysed how the categories were used, whether positively or negatively towards the two façade styles in the test, and compared the different uses between architects and nonarchitects, set out in 'Trends in the use of categories'. I then grouped the 15 descriptive categories into four broad types and analysed their comparative use set out in 'Comparison of category types'. Lastly, I analysed the comments made on different architectural elements. Also ref Appendix 5 for demographic representation analysis of the survey; and Appendix 7 for a summary of the descriptive categories and their uses and for the qualitative findings charts and tables.

9.2.1 Descriptive categories used to describe style preferences

There were 546 qualifying written responses to the question "What factors influenced your choices?" for the first test on façade style. I analysed the text responses in detail to gain an understanding of respondents' reactions to the two style options. I identified a range of 15 descriptive categories of words used in the responses, which are set out in order of frequency in fig. 9.2 below. *Detail* was by far the most commonly used descriptive category. This is consistent with previous CABE research (2005). The second largest category was *plain*. For a full description of the category list, with example quotes from the survey responses ref Appendix 7. For a list of the words used within each category a summary of the category uses ref table 1 in Appendix 7.



detail	plain	traditional
decoration	pastiche	modern
character	attractive	bland
fussy	coherent	homely
unwelcoming	light	familiar

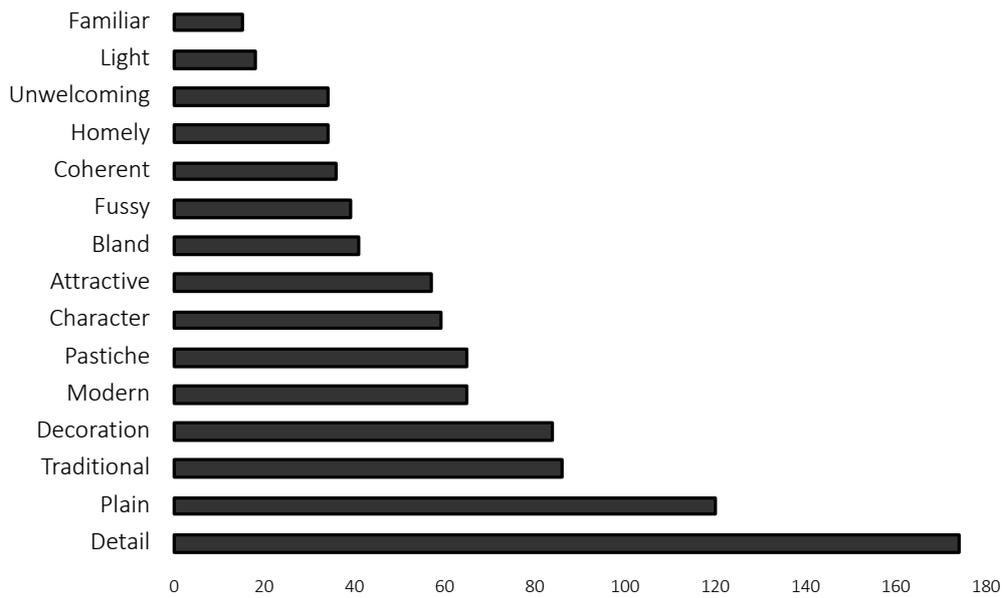


Figure 9.2 The top 15 descriptive word categories identified in responses to the question 'what influenced your choices?' for Test 1- Preferred Style, and chart showing number of times the categories were used.

9.2.2 Trends in the use of the categories in Test 1 on preferred style

I analysed whether the category words were used positively, pejoratively, or neutrally to establish the balance of use in favour of the two style options and also compared the extent of category word use for architects and non-architects.

There were marked differences in the words (expressed here in categories – the words within each category are listed in table 1, Appendix 7) used in favour of, or critically against each of the two styles in the survey questionnaire:

- Categories used more in expression of favour for the embellished houses were *detail* (69% of 174), *character* (85% of 59), *decoration* (58% of 84), *attractive* (82% of 57), *homely* (100% of 34), *coherent* (53% of 36) and *familiar* (87% of 15).
- Categories used more in expression of favour for the stripped houses were *plain* (64% of 115), *modern* (65% of 65) and *light* (100% of 18).
- Categories used more in expression *against* the embellished houses were *pastiche* (100% of 65), *fussy* (100% of 39) and *traditional* (40% of 86).
- Categories used more in expression *against* the stripped houses were *bland* (93% of 41) and *unwelcoming* (100% of 34).

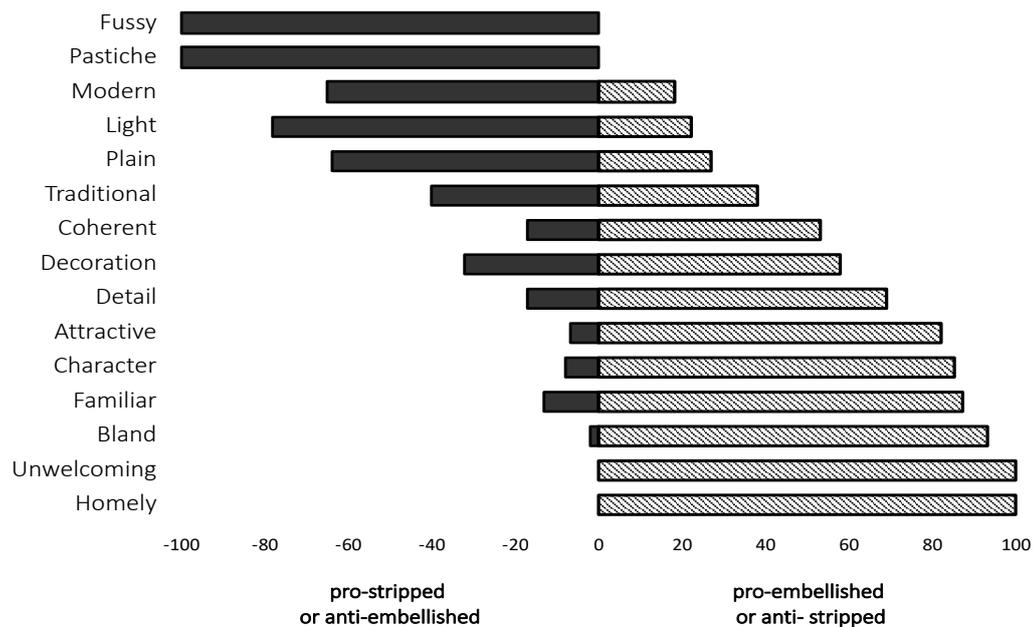


Figure 9.3 Chart showing how the descriptive categories were used with respect to the two style options, measured in percentage of category use in favour of each style.

The chart in fig. 9.3 above, highlights that some categories were used exclusively in favour of one of the façade options (*fussy* and *pastiche* against the embellished; *unwelcoming* and *homely* in favour of the embellished), others predominantly in response to one façade option (*plain*, *modern* and *light* in favour of the stripped; *detail*, *character*, *attractive*, *bland* and *familiar* in favour of the decorated) and a few used more equally for both styles (*decoration*, *traditional* and *coherent*). Also, some categories were used pejoratively, in expression against the alternative style (*fussy*, *pastiche*, *bland* and *unwelcoming*); some positively in favour of the preferred style (*light*, *coherent*, *homely*, *character*); and some used both ways (*modern*, *familiar*, *traditional*, *decoration*, *plain* and *detail*).

These uses suggest different values can be attached to the same façade attributes, for example, the stripped façades are appreciated by some for their simplicity and lack of detail whilst criticized by others for being too plain and unwelcoming lacking in character. Similarly, some cite the character and homeliness in the detail of the decorated façades whilst others condemn them for being old-fashioned, fussy and pastiche. It is interesting to note that some categories can equally conjure both positive and negative connotations; *traditional* in this case being used almost equally in support of and in dismissal of the embellished houses.

Not all category words were used to the same extent by architects and nonarchitects, but some notably were. The chart in fig. 9.4 shows the differences.

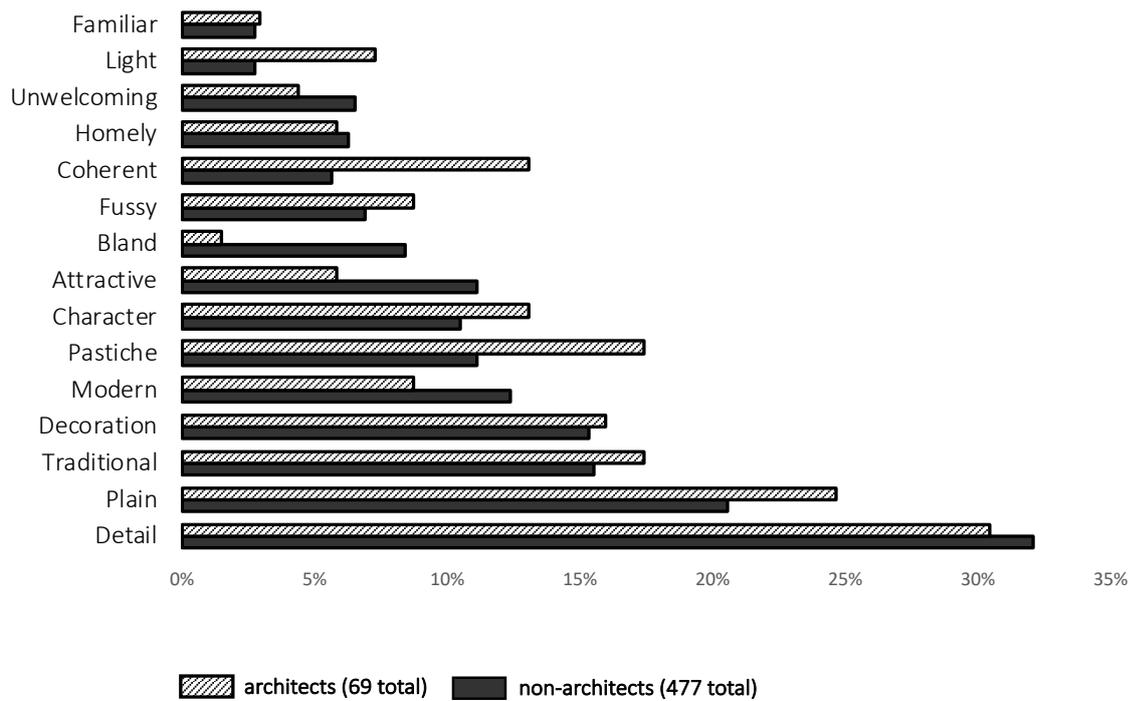


Figure 9.4 Chart comparing architects and nonarchitects use of the descriptive categories shown as a percentage of the number of respondents in each occupation group.

Detail, decoration, familiar and homely were used in equal or near equal proportion by each occupation group, although the chart in fig. 9.5 below shows that *detail* and *decoration* were used more in favour of the embellished façade for nonarchitects, with *Decoration* being used more in favour of the stripped façade by architects (through its noted absence). Architects used categories *light* and *coherent* much more than non-architects and also referenced the categories *pastiche* and *fussy* more. Nonarchitects used the category *bland* much more than architects and also referenced *modern, unwelcoming and attractive* more than architects. As well as the greater use of the category *modern* by nonarchitects, they also used it much more positively towards the stripped façade, whereas it was used more pejoratively to the stripped façade by architects.

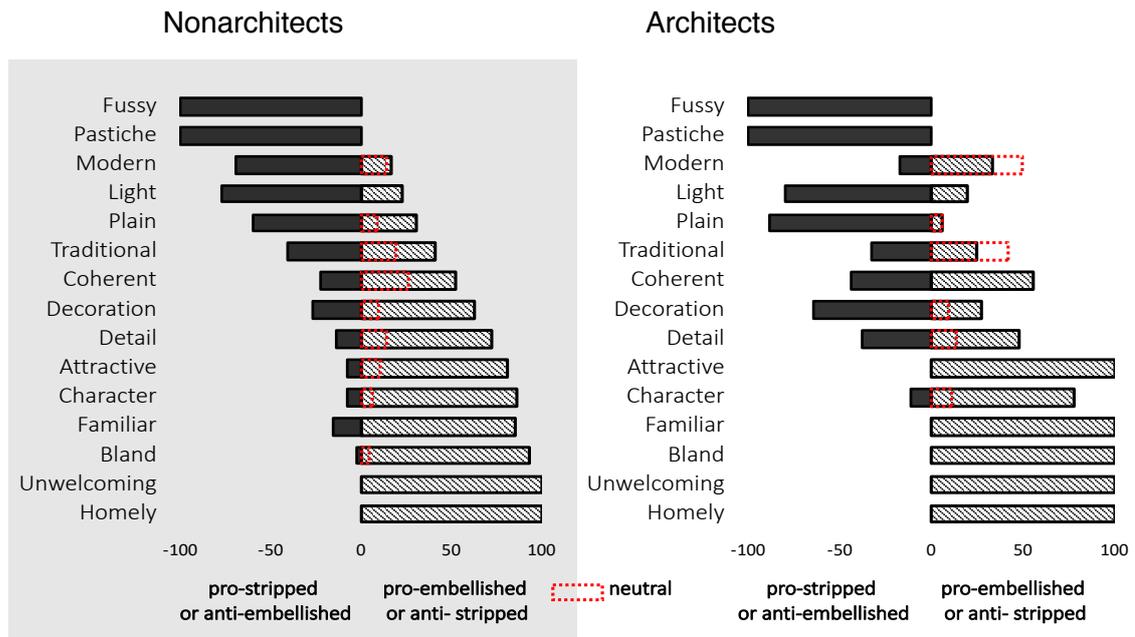


Figure 9.5 Chart showing how the descriptive categories were used with respect to the two style options, compared for architects and nonarchitects. Expressed as a percentage of the number of respondents in each occupation group.

9.2.3 Comparison of category types in Test 1 on preferred style

I sorted the 15 descriptive categories into four types: a style; a physical design attribute; a judgement on design approach; and an emotional response to a style or design approach. The categories within each type were then split into polar groups to make a broad analysis of the dominant issues expressed in the qualitative text responses. (Ref Table 3, and Charts 1 and 2 in Appendix 7 for data).

I identified that the 15 categories broadly sit in four types of response:

- A reference to style - *traditional, modern*;
- A reference to physical design attribute - *detail, decoration, plain, light*;
- A descriptive judgement on the design approach - *pastiche, fussy, bland, character, attractive, coherent*;
- An emotional response to a style attribute or design approach - *homely, unwelcoming, familiar*.

These types can be split into approximate polar groups for the four types:

- **Style:** *traditional vs modern*
- **Attribute:** *detail and decoration vs plain and light*
- **Judgement:** *character, attractive, coherent and bland vs pastiche and fussy*

- **Emotion:** *homely and familiar vs unwelcoming*

Analysing the responses in this way gives an indication of the type of issues that dominate the responses:

9.2.3.1 Style: traditional vs modern

The second smallest type with a total of 151 occurrences. A 59% majority used these categories in overall favour of the stripped façade: “I am aware that I chose the contemporary styles for the smaller looking houses and the more traditional styles for the larger looking houses. I think the finishes I chose suited the size of house better.”

9.2.3.2 Attributes: detail and decoration vs plain and light

The largest type with a total of nearly 400 occurrences. A 58% majority used detail and decoration categories in overall favour of the embellished façade: “The added prettiness of the extra details leaving the houses looking less plain and more characterful”.

9.2.3.3 Judgement: character, attractive, coherent and bland vs pastiche and fussy

The second largest type with a total of nearly 300 occurrences. A 65% majority used these categories in overall favour of the qualities of the embellished façade: “The clear embellishments on the houses I chose. The ones I didn't looked like Sims stock houses before they gave the user the opportunity to personalise them.”

9.2.3.4 Emotional: homely and familiar vs unwelcoming

The smallest type with a total of 83 occurrences. A 98% majority used these categories in overall favour of the embellished façade: “Aesthetically I don't like either of them but the ones with more decoration seem friendlier and more inviting. The stripped back ones seem stark and ‘unloved’”.

9.2.4 Comments on architectural elements in Test 1 on preferred style

I analysed the word count for uses of architectural elements to gain a picture of the most common architectural feature preoccupations. (Ref Chart 3 in Appendix 7). Windows were by far the most cited architectural element, with 165 occurrences. 43 of these referred to the subdivisions, just over half of which were positive about them, and 20 referred to the frames, again split equally between positive reference to the existing white frames and to the darker frameless look of the stripped facade. Most of the comments were about the look of the windows, some favouring the simplicity of the plain windows: “Windows with maximum glazing and without framing and bars”, others preferring the subdivisions: “Look more homely with the crossed window panes”. There were a small number of practical-based comments, such as how you would open the windows when they are not subdivided, and a fair number referring to size; several respondents writing that they preferred the ‘larger’ plain windows (they were in fact the same area).

There were 19 references to ‘white’, generally favourable, and three uses of the word ‘grey’ or ‘dark’ with respect to the windows. Other elements that were noted were ‘door’ with 42 counts, ‘roof’ with 33, ‘gable’ 19, ‘porch’ 16, ‘brick’ 14 and ‘render’ 3.

Some of the comments were functional, especially regarding ‘porch’ as one of the stripped facades removed the porch overhang which was flagged up as a negative by some participants.

Most of the references to doors were in connection to the extra detail in the embellished option: “additional aesthetic features around the doors”. References to bricks also often highlighted their decoration or detail. A number also referred to the brick colour as an influence on preference: “The houses with brighter coloured bricks generally suited a more modern feel with less features”.

The results of the Test 1 commentary highlight some of the common characteristics in both styles that influenced taste preferences – most significantly, detail – and some of the different attributes of each style that affected respondents. They also show that different types of response, such as physical or emotional, were used to describe the two styles; some being used more in favour of and some more against each of the two styles. Whilst there were some differences in the emphasis of words used by architects to describe the styles the similarities in descriptive categories used was significant.

9.3

Qualitative analysis of responses to Test 3 – Preferred Roof

There were a total of 482 qualifying written responses to the question ‘what factors influenced your choices?’ for the test on roof form, 308 of which were for the embellished image test and 174 for the stripped image test. (As described in the last chapter, the respondents were tested on images in the style of their last house preference choice in Test 1 on preferred style, with the aim of testing roof form for a style that respondents were most favourable towards). Below, I set out the main 15 descriptive categories identified from a text analysis of the responses, and summarise the results. For a full description of the category list, with example quotes from the survey responses ref Appendix 7.

9.3.1 Descriptive categories used to describe roof preferences

I analysed the text responses in detail to gain an understanding of respondents’ reactions to the two roof form options. I identified a range of 15 descriptive categories used in the responses, shown in order of frequency in fig. 9.6 below.

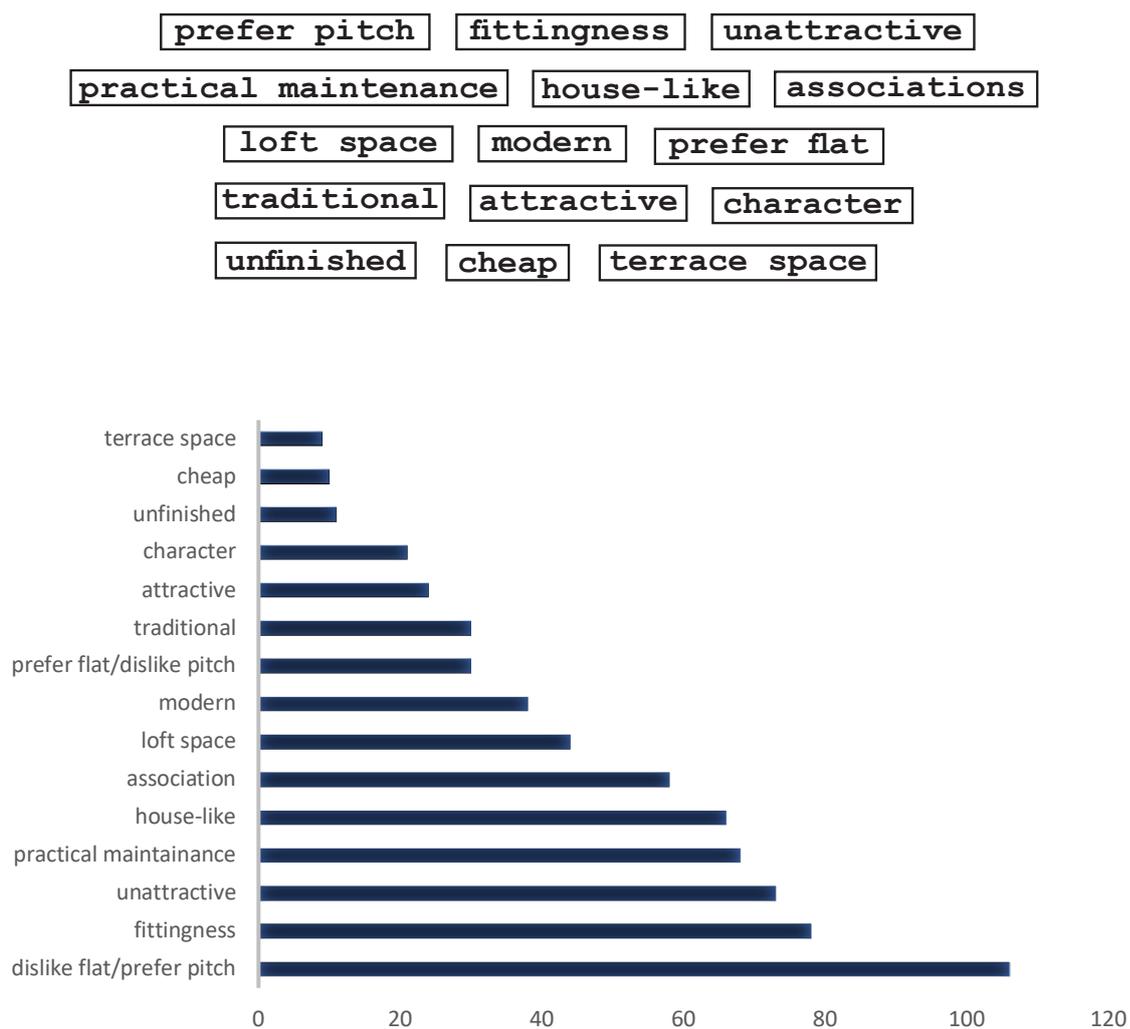


Figure 9.6 The top 15 descriptive word categories identified in responses to the question 'what influenced your choices?' for Test 3- Preferred Roof, and chart showing number of times the categories were used.

Whilst the same 15 categories arose across the two test groups of embellished and stripped style base images, the proportion of occurrences varied, sometimes considerably, across the two groups, as shown in fig. 9.7 below.

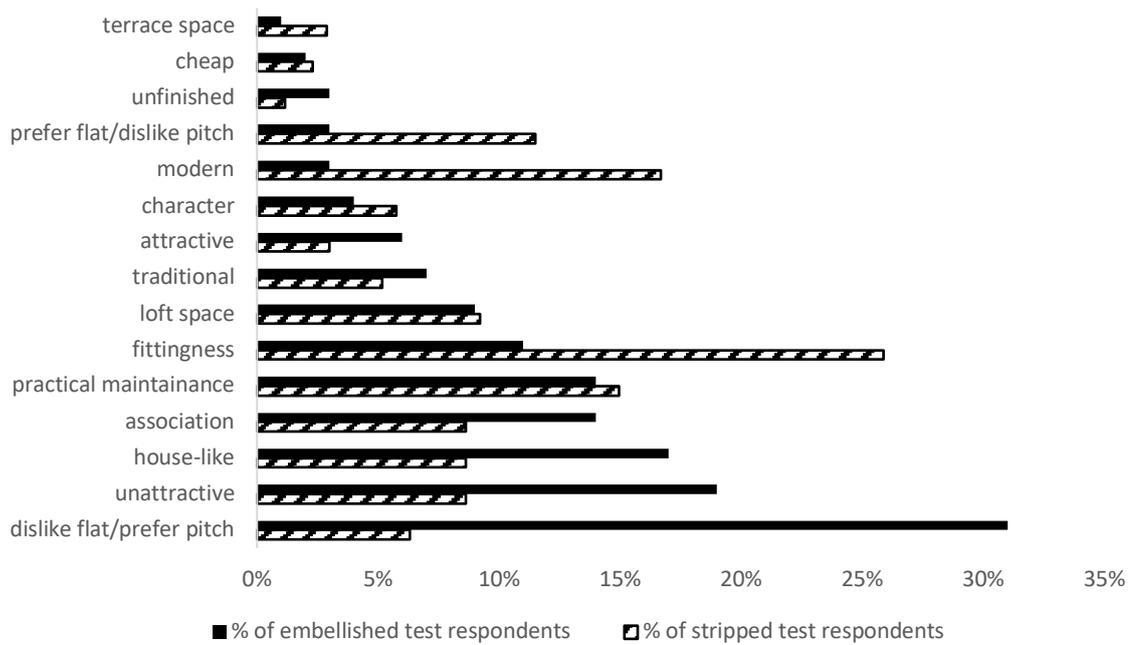


Figure 9.7 Use of descriptive categories compared for the embellished and the stripped image test respondents, expressed as a percentage of the total category use in the respective groups.

There was a much greater expression of dislike for the flat roof and preference for the pitched roof in the embellished test group. This may be because of a sense of appropriateness with the style (although fittingness was a larger category in the stripped test group), or an indication that respondents who tended to prefer the conventional aesthetic of the volume-built house also preferred a conventional domestic roof form. Significantly, comments about being house-like and associational references were also greater for the embellished test group, suggesting that respondents who preferred a conventional aesthetic did so at least in part because of its homely associations.

9.4 Summary of key survey findings

In this section I set out a summary of the key findings from the survey results set out in the previous sections and the general preferences they may suggest. I have divided this into four areas: demographic preferences on style; the modern-traditional style divide; factors that influence preferences; and preferences around the specific architectural elements of windows and roofs.

9.4.1 On style and demographics

The results show a marked demographic influence (for occupation, age, residence environment and gender) on preferences for façade style:

- Architects' preferences are significantly different to non-architects' (which is in line with previous research). These are also reflected in different word use tendencies for the two groups that suggests that different things are important to each group.
- The preference choices of the non-architect, designer group sit between those of architects and other occupations.
- Architects and designers have in aggregate an almost equal preference for the two styles.
- The association between respondents' own dwelling environment and style preference judgements supports previous research findings indicating that familiarity is a factor in aesthetic preferences.
- Tastes appear to be less conservative in the middle age bands, to the extent that the 45-54-year age band consistently bucked the trend of the majority preference for the housebuilder-vernacular style, horizontal windows and pitched roof.

9.4.2 On traditional-modern style

The survey results indicate less importance of style type than other factors in preference choices:

- The modern-traditional style dichotomy plays a small part in preference influences. From the quantitative evidence it would be easy to deduce that there is an underlying public preference in the UK for traditional-looking, vernacular-style homes compared to modern-looking, contemporary-styled homes, but the *traditional* style of the generally preferred volume-built house façade was not cited as the reason for a preference for it any more often than it was used as a judgement against it.
- It is not the style per-se that is the primary issue influencing aesthetic judgements, but nuanced reasons, reflected in comments such as: "sometimes the simpler designs look more modern and fresh, rather than being a new house trying to look traditional. Although sometimes more detail can make it look more interesting/elegant"; and "additional detailing and texture/depth on the ones I've chosen. Prefer if it was "modern" rather than imitating older styles, though". This is echoed in roof form preferences in which 'Traditional' was relatively little cited as a reason for preference.

9.4.3 On factors of influence on taste

The survey results highlight a number of factors that influence style preference choices:

- A level of detail in domestic façades has general appeal, for both architects and non-architects, considered to enhance character and convey a homely sense. Non-architects seem to be more influenced by the façade feeling welcoming and attractive than architects.

- Yet also, a significant minority prefer the simplicity and clarity of a less detailed façade, recalling the important adage that you-can't-please-all-of-the-people-all-of-the-time. Architects would appear to be less concerned about a lack of detail being bland and more critical of fussiness and pastiche than non-architects.
- The general preference for the embellished façade may be as much a reaction *against* the stripped façade as a preference *for* the embellished one, given the extent of reaction against it as cold, stark and unwelcoming (although there were also positive judgements and emotions expressed towards the embellished façade).
- Similarly, choices for the stripped façade could be interpreted as more of a negative reaction against the embellished option than a positive one towards the stripped - in this study, emotional type responses were all but one case in favour of the embellished façade and very few positive judgements were made towards the stripped façade.
- Responses to particular physical attributes in a façade are more important in preference judgements than the general style of the façade –in this study, *attributes* were a more commonly used category type than *style*.

9.4.4 On architectural elements

The results show different preferences on proportion and size of windows:

- There is a predominant preoccupation with windows in the evaluation of the house façade – cited in this study as frequently as detail in respondent comments.
- Square proportioned windows are favoured less than vertical or horizontal proportions.
- There is divergence in window proportion preferences between the stripped and embellished façade styles – vertical is preferred on the stripped and horizontal on the embellished. As to why is speculation at this stage. It could be interpreted that a preference for vertical proportions correlates with a preference for simpler, modern designs. Alternatively, it could be that the embellished and stripped styles are considered to each suit different window proportions, perhaps through style references, such as Arts and Crafts and cottage-style associations of the embellished option with more horizontal window proportions.
- There is a preference for larger windows than is offered in the typical volume-built house. This is more marked for stripped façades than embellished ones.

The results indicate a general preference for pitched roofs:

- There is a much stronger preference for pitched roofs with an embellished, vernacular-styled façade than with a stripped, more modern-styled façade. That could be because of the appropriateness of the style or the general preferences of the different groups who evaluated the embellished and stripped options (given that the base house image followed the preference given for the last of the housing pairs shown in the style test).
- Associations, of pitched roofs with a house and of flat roofs with institutions or commercial facilities have a marked impact on preference choices.

- A sense of appropriateness, or fittingness, of the roof to the style of the house and to the immediate and wider surroundings of the house has an influence of preference choices. This may be counter to personal aesthetic preferences.
- Preference for a pitched roof is in part aesthetic, but also practical. A concern for the maintenance of flat roofs is significant and the potential for storage space, conversion or extension also feature as reasons for visual preference choices. (Together *practical maintenance, loft space* and *terrace space*, were cited by over a quarter of respondents).

9.5

Conclusion

Although the style survey results showed a marked overall preference for the original embellished housebuilder-vernacular façade, the influences for this choice challenge the presumption of a British love of the old-fashioned. The comments indicate that the general preference for housebuilder-vernacular did not tend to be for the traditional style but for the extent of the detail this style option had compared to the plainer alternative. It could be argued that this might be expected given that it was the decorative detail that was stripped in the image manipulation and therefore represented the difference but a number of factors still point to the relevance of this finding: the test was presented as a style difference, not as a comparison of detail, but detail was nevertheless commented on more than style; the loss of detail was frequently cited as being missed; and it was more favourably referred to as ‘detail’ than as ‘traditional detail’. Furthermore, as previously noted, the findings corroborate previous research on attitudes to appearance (CABE, 2005).

The results indicate that it is not a clear-cut schism, with a significant minority preferring the stripped style overall and a majority in the middle-aged bands. Given the findings I set out in chapter one that indicate 85-90% of the new housing market is in the housebuilder-vernacular style, this reveals a significant misrepresentation of tastes in the market, especially in the biggest housebuying age group. This highlights the importance of diversity in aesthetic choices. That one style does not fit all, be they the architectural establishment or the lay public.

In the following chapter in Part IV, *Formulate*, I go on to assess some of the key survey findings set out here, with respect to themes that emerged in my investigation into the nature of the taste schism and the influences that may be at play in Part II, chapters four to seven. I then also consider how these themes reflect in attitudes to the typical volume-built house aesthetic.

Part IV

FORMULATE

10

Assessing the Investigation Themes

In Part II, 'Investigate', I explored four broad topics that I identified as potentially influencing architectural taste judgements: the value of traditions and how they may be perceived to be manifested in Traditional Architecture; the role of ideology and the legacy of Modernist doctrine in the architectural establishment; attributes and responses towards the new and the familiar; and the impact of expertise on evaluation processes. In Part III, 'Test', I set out the research context, method and results of an evidence-based preference survey with reference to visual aspects of typical volume-built house façades. Now, in Part IV, 'Formulate', I aim to bring the various threads of my research investigation together. In this chapter I first consider the tally between the ideas I put forward in Part II and the survey responses and then consider the implications of the investigation themes with the aesthetic of the volume-built house, described in Part I.

10.1

Correspondence between survey findings and themes of potential influence on taste

As noted in the chapter eight, when I designed and conducted the survey in 2015 and early 2016, I set out to look at visual preferences centred around the typical volume-built house style in parallel with investigating the themes of influence on taste set out in Part II, so that the survey findings could inform my research rather than act as a concluding test of a hypotheses on the taste schism. Although the survey does not (and could not) cover the full extent, and nuances of the issues I have raised, the data it has produced has value in revealing correspondence with my findings from secondary sources. To do this I set out, below, a summary of the key points raised in each of the four investigation chapters and a commentary on the potentially relevant survey findings that may support or challenge the issues I have put forward. I then go on to consider other factors that were raised in the survey but not discussed in Part II, and survey findings that suggest a contraindication of a strong schism in elite-popular taste.

10.1.1 On a traditional aesthetic

The aim of chapter four was to explore the connotations of tradition in semantic and stylistic terms, given the clear references to a traditional aesthetic that is characteristic of volume-built housing. In it I explored the characteristics of traditions, the associations of the adjectives traditional and modern, and the attributes of traditional and modernist styles. Key points raised in the chapter were:

- The characteristics of traditions are: ritual and belonging; continuity with the past; commanding duty and respect. These also link to cultural markers for community and belonging.
- Traditions can be active, stagnant or invented. The draw of invented tradition, such as the use of GRP chimneys in the example of the housebuilder-vernacular, is likely to be of symbolic rather than practical value.
- The use of historic motifs and iconography appears to be the main distinguishing factor in the style classification of Traditional Architecture in binary contrast to modernist architecture.

The survey findings highlighted two key issues raised with regard to traditions and Traditional Architecture. The first relates to referential meaning and the importance of symbolic value in invented traditions in housebuilding that may operate in the housebuilder-vernacular style. In the written comments of the Roof section of the survey, being *house-like* was the third most cited category for the embellished image group and sixth for the stripped image group, and the *associations* category was fourth and seventh respectively. Comments such as: “pitched roofs feel like a ‘home’” (Designer), “the flat roof option just doesn’t look like a house to me. Buildings with flat roofs are apartment blocks, not houses” (Other occupation) and “traditional style roof looks more homely - flat roof looks institutional and characterless like a prison or school” (Other) capture the tenor of responses in these categories, that express a need for houses to have pitched roofs in order to symbolically look like homes. Similar sentiments were expressed in the *homely* category of the Style section, which notably was only used towards the housebuilder-vernacular façade, for example: “I preferred the traditional facade on the houses, I feel it gives them character, a nice hark back to facades of past homes. This is as opposed to the minimalist styles, which while effective and in some case look “modern” I just feel come off as being bland, overstating the buildings function as though it is just meant to be a house not a home” (Designer). This could be interpreted as valuing a link to continuity with the past, through traditional house forms and details, highlighting the symbolic value of the image of a home as an important cultural marker for community and belonging.

Tradition (comprising the words ‘traditional’, ‘old(er)’, ‘period’, ‘old-fashioned’, ‘classic’, ‘historic’ and ‘vernacular’) was the third most used category in the Style section responses. In terms of associations with Traditional Architecture, there were some references to traditional as looking older, such as: “historic character. General appearance, eg having wooden beams, and triangular roof over attic extension and doorway. Prefer houses which look older in style and less modern. Makes them look more homely” (Other). The only references to other characteristics related to the style being termed *traditional* was homeliness and a level of visual detail and interest. *Traditional* was much less used in the Roof section, (tenth overall), suggesting that the pitch roof is associated more innately with a house than with a the idea of age or tradition.

That style labels were not the most common categories in the survey responses and that *traditional* was used more negatively towards the house-builder vernacular façade than positively suggests that it is not traditional style that is of the highest importance in taste preferences. It would appear from the survey findings that visual interest is more important in aesthetic judgement than a particular architectural style. This is indicated by the findings that the most frequent comments in the Style section were about detail and features. It is also supported by the negative reactions to the stripped façade option captured in the *bland* category (that includes the words ‘flat’, ‘boring’, ‘blank’, ‘bare’, ‘dull’, ‘naked’ and ‘monotony’)

and the *unwelcoming* category (that includes the words ‘stark’, ‘austere’ and ‘sterile’) and the positive use of the *character* category that was solely used towards the more embellished façade.

Although the survey found positive associations of the traditional aspect of the volume-built house aesthetic in terms of symbolic value, a sense of homeliness and continuity with the past, visual interest was more important to respondents and is arguably nothing to do with a taste for traditional architecture.

10.1.2 On learnt values and the role of ideology

The aim of chapter five was to investigate the influence on architectural taste of learnt values, received through formal education. In it I explored the legacy of Modernist ideology in current mainstream architectural culture and considered the implications of this on elite aesthetic attitudes. Key points raised in the chapter were:

- The aesthetic preferences of the architectural establishment are guided by ideologies that stem from Modernism of: fitting the *Zeitgeist*; advancing through progress; and the superiority of the authentic work.
- These lead to positions against historicism, imitation, pretence, and superficial ornamentation.
- This is in contrast with not minding about new buildings expressing the age, not being concerned for originality and artistic authorship and either enjoying the kitsch flaunting of inauthentic work, being happy with the pretence of trying to pass off for what it’s not, or not caring about the genuineness of the original (which in this case would be a historic vernacular house), and enjoying the visual detail in architectural expression.

The main aspects of ideology that arose in the survey were around ideas of imitation and authenticity in comments in the Style section. Historicism and pastiche were not differentiated in the responses in the way that I have set them apart; the term ‘historicist’ was not used by any respondents whereas ‘pastiche’ was frequently used. This may be because historicist is not a common term (certainly outside of the architectural profession) and perhaps also because the housebuilder-vernacular style that I showed references vernacular architecture, not the classical architecture that is more associated with the term. Comments against the use of historic styles were incorporated into the *pastiche* category. *Pastiche* (which includes the words ‘imitate’, ‘copy’, ‘mock tudor’ and ‘Tudorbethan’) was the third biggest category for architects, after *detail* and *plain* (and sixth for non-architects), evidencing that it was a bigger concern for them than for non-architects. This supports the position I posited that the architectural mainstream is hostile to what it sees as imitation. Attitudes to progress and originality that I have argued lie behind this stance were not evident in the survey responses. This is likely due to these aspects not featuring in the image options, as the alternative to the typical housebuilder-vernacular façade was not original or indicative of any new advance in architectural expression.

The idea of authenticity was only directly raised by one respondent (a Designer), with the comment “I have nothing against traditional decoration, but it looks inauthentic on a new build house”. The word ‘honesty’, that was part of the wider *character* category, was used by a small number of respondents to describe their preference for the stripped style, but more so by Other occupations than Architects (this is consistent however with the position raised in the discussion

on fakery, that authenticity is highly valued by those with high cultural capital (Holt, 1998), which was not assessed in the survey demographics). Direct references to truth were not used at all. But the words 'fake', 'faux', 'false', 'pseudo', 'artificial', and 'pretend' were used (incorporated in the *pastiche* category), and there were many comments that gave a strong indication against superficial ornamentation, a position that I have linked to an ideology of authenticity. Coherence was sometimes expressed in terms of the house being a more authentic aesthetic object, with styling matching composition, for example: "love simplicity, but style has to match character and architecture of the house to work" (Designer). This sometimes was the reason given by architects for choosing the housebuilder-vernacular option, such as in this example: "it's about what window and gable aesthetics fit with which overall house form/style" (Architect). As a category, *coherence* was proportionately used twice as much by architects as non-architects. This supports the importance of integrity that I put forward as part of the architectural ideology of authenticity.

Architects used the *decoration* category (that includes the words 'ornament(ation)', 'embellishment' and 'ornate') more negatively towards the more embellished, housebuilder-vernacular façade (63%), whereas non-architects tended to use it positively towards that façade (64%). And proportionately, architects also used the *detail* category (comprised of the words 'detail(ing)' and 'features') more than twice as much against the embellished façade than non-architects. Architects tended to use the *detail* and *decoration* categories in terms of them as gratuitous additions, with adjectives such as 'stuck-on', 'add-ons', 'unnecessary', 'applied', 'irrelevant', 'needless', 'extraneous' and 'superfluous' used to describe both. This supports my proposition that architectural culture is opposed to features, details and decoration that are seen as unnecessary, something which could work against the general desire for visual interest mentioned above.

Architects were more critical of fussiness than non-architects, that included the words 'unnecessary', 'needless', 'gratuitous', 'busy', 'twiddly' and 'kitsch' in the category. Also only one architect made a comment fitting the *bland* category, which was mainly used by non-architects. This could be thought of as the negative aspect of plain or simple. Whilst the *plain* category was not used much more by architects compared to non-architects (25% and 21% respectively), architects used it almost exclusively in favour of the stripped façade (88% pro stripped, 6% against) whereas non-architects also used it critically against this façade (60% pro stripped, 31% against). This evidences that Architects are more drawn to the qualities of the stripped aesthetic than non-architects who often perceived it as harsh. It also supports the common observation that the architectural establishment is less predisposed to ornate expression than plain, especially if it is seen as superficial.

Attitudes around the *Zeitgeist* were not directly apparent in the survey responses. There were a small number of oblique references from Architects to buildings looking of their time, such as: "I actually do not 'like' any. They are all too mock pastiche, but the ones I prefer are less so, simpler, not pretending to be built 100+ years ago!", but there were more comments on this from non-architects that I will discuss later. However, there were only three positive uses of the *traditional* category by Architects – one in reference to the 'classic' window, one citing "level of interest, comforting vernacular features and sense of homeliness", and the other in response to being more appropriate in this climate. This is in significant contrast to non-architects who made repeated positive responses such as "I like traditional styles". The lack of architect respondents' use of the word traditional or its equivalent does not necessarily mean that they are neutral about it. Their highlighting of positive attributes of the more modernist stripped design option

can be read as an implicit critique of the using traditional features considered inappropriate in lieu, without articulating an ideology against using old styles.

Despite Architects' evident distaste for unnecessary, derivative embellishment, concomitant with beliefs in the importance of originality and authenticity, this was sometimes surpassed by a desire for the integrity and coherence of the whole. This reveals the reach of ideologies and the balance of factors being weighed up in a taste judgement.

10.1.3 On inherited values and the influence of security and risk

The aim of chapter six was to investigate the influence on taste preferences of tacit, inherited values, received informally from people's socio-cultural environments. In it I examined the importance a sense of security and the anxiety of risk associated with the familiar and the new respectively. Key points raised in the chapter were:

- Attitudes to the new, originality, change and risk contrast with those of the familiar, tradition, stability and security. These affect a sense of disconnection contrasted with a sense of continuity.
- With exposure and time, the new becomes the familiar.
- Association and a search for coherence operate as part of mental processing.
- Familiarity has a positive bias of recognition that is associated with ease and being good and true.

The issues raised in this chapter are hard to directly identify in the survey responses as they mainly address unconscious processes that would unlikely be directly articulated by respondents as reasons for their preference choices. Many of the factors raised would require a series of behaviour psychology-type experiments to test in the context of architectural preferences. For example, the overall results that showed a majority preference for the unaltered housebuilder-vernacular façade could be interpreted as affirmation of the normalisation process I put forward as a potential reason for the sustained predominance of the housebuilder-vernacular aesthetic, as it is the recognised norm. But that would be mere conjecture on the basis of this survey and would need a different experiment designed to test this point to substantiate the theory. This would also be the case for testing three other factors raised in this chapter: the cognitive impact of ease with respect to architectural familiarity; the relationship of identity and sense of belonging to different aesthetics; and attitudes towards risk and certainty in relation to the external aesthetic of *home*.

With regard to the attitudes towards the new vs the familiar, the binary choices presented to respondents were of a familiar conventional house design, embellished with domestic vernacular features and the same design, stripped of domestic vernacular features. The alternative, in other words was not *new*, just different from the prevalent style. So again, to directly test this would require an experiment that compared the genuinely new with the familiar whilst also controlling the other variables that could be at play in the response, such as approach to detail, proportion, materials. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to be able to design and conduct these tests but it points towards a rich seam of further research that could be conducted to apply some of the findings of behavioural psychology into architectural preferences.

Two factors raised in this chapter that did arise in the survey responses were associations and coherence. In the written responses to the Style section of the survey, there were numerous associations of homeliness made with the housebuilder-vernacular option (in the *homely* category) and some references to past associations of house type (in the *familiarity* category), such as of the stripped façade to council houses. For example: “associations with low cost council housing style are off putting” (Designer). In the Roof section there were many associations made of the flat roof to institutional buildings ranging from offices to prisons, and a strong association made between houses and pitched roofs. There were also comments made about the desire for a sense of coherence and completeness above the preference for individual features in the both façade styles, with an example given of a face without eyebrows not feeling right. This extended to the idea of fittingness in the roof options, about how either the design seemed to work as a whole or how it was thought to fit into its setting. These findings support the idea that the innate mental processes of finding associations and looking for coherence also operate in architectural visual judgements.

There were some explicit references to memories and to familiarity affecting preferences, such as “memories of houses in my childhood town” (Other) and “I am more familiar with the more decorative style of facade, therefore I find it more attractive at the moment” (Other). This supports the arguments made in this chapter on the positive bias of recognition.

Associations play an important part in an aesthetic judgement, both positively and negatively. The ideal of a recognisable, homely looking house comes across strongly in the survey. The positive associations of familiarity currently stack in favour of a conventional aesthetic with a pitched roof in fulfilment of this ideal.

10.1.4 On expertise and processes of evaluation

In chapter seven I aimed to investigate the influence of expertise on taste preferences, in particular, the part it plays in evaluation processes. I examined the different factors that inform an aesthetic experience and the mental processes involved in an aesthetic evaluation. I also looked at the different loci of appreciation that will likely be taken by architectural experts and nonexperts, and the impact that could have on taste judgements. Key points raised in the chapter were:

- Experts evaluate differently and the accepted cultural hierarchy of taste is aligned with distinctions in evaluation, with the cognitive emphasis of experts ranked higher than the everyday experience of nonexperts.
- Processes of sensory perception, memory integration, classification and cognitive mastering operate in making an aesthetic evaluation, which is also affected by context, socio-cultural factors and affective state.
- The meaning, and appreciation, of something can lie in the object itself, or the experience of the object – an abstract, or referential emphasis. These relate to the perspective of the evaluator as either observer or participant.

The survey findings correspond to a number of the issues raised in this chapter. That experts evaluate differently is indicated by the different use of categories between Architects and nonarchitects. Whilst the category lists that I derived encompass all respondents’ comments, there are differences in the extent and use of some of the categories. For example, in the Style

section written responses, Architects used the category *modern* (comprising the words 'modern' and 'contemporary') proportionately 30% less than nonarchitects, with only six occurrences (one of which was in quotation marks), and more often used in describing elements rather than the whole. Non-architects used the *modern* category more in favour of the stripped facade than architects, who used it more neutrally rather than as a positive or negative judgement of either style. This suggests either that the Architects didn't think of the stripped facade as modern; that they don't categorise architecture, and their preferences, in such broad stylistic terms; or that modern is so much the norm that it is not spoken of. Either way, this could be interpreted as architects tending to give more specific reasons for their choices than the generic tag of 'modern', understood through their knowledge and expertise. For example, the categories *coherence* and *light* were proportionately used more by architects, as were *pastiche*, *character* and *plain*. Also, that the overall preference of those working in Design-related occupations was mid-way between Architects and Others suggests there is a link between the evaluation of those exposed to and engaged with design thinking and aesthetic preferences.

The distinction between the more detached, cognitive-based assessments of experts in contrast to the more engaged, emotion-based assessments of non-experts is given some weight in the findings. Emotional judgements were all but one in favour of the housebuilder-vernacular façade option, that was the majority preference of nonarchitects, and there were very few positive emotional responses to the stripped façade that was the majority preference of Architects. In the responses to Style, Architects used the aesthetically descriptive category *plain* (that included the words 'clean lines/look', 'simple', 'cleaner', 'minimal(ist)' and 'sleek') more than non-architects and used it almost totally in a positive sense, in favour of the stripped aesthetic, in contrast to the more charged category *bland*, (that includes the words 'boring', 'bare', 'dull', 'naked' and 'monotony') that was only used by one Architect. Nonarchitects used the categories *attractive* (that included the words 'appealing', 'prettier/ness', 'beautiful', 'aesthetically pleasant' and 'cute') and *unwelcoming* (that included the words 'stark', 'unfriendly', uninviting', 'sterile', soulless', 'harsh', 'threatening', 'impersonal', 'unhomely', 'mean' and 'forbidding') more than Architects. As well as supporting the proposition that expert architects' evaluation is different from the nonexpert lay public's, these findings could also be interpreted as an indication of more emphasis being placed on the experiential appreciation of the façade by non-architects and on the object qualities of the façade by architects. That would be consistent with the arguments I put forward in the expertise chapter.

A difference in emphasis between abstract and referential meaning could also be interpreted from the survey results. As noted above, Architects used the more abstract *plain* category in the Style section more than non-architects and in the Roof section, Architects used the referential categories *house-like* only three times – proportionately five times less than non-architects, and *association* only four times - proportionately three times less than non-architects.

That architects categorise and evaluate differently to nonarchitects, with more specificity, different qualitative emphasis and more abstract language used in their evaluation, is apparent from my research. Understanding this difference and learning to understand the referential language more comfortably spoken by nonexperts seems key to reach across the taste divide. I take this up in the conclusion.

10.1.5 On contrary indications *against* a strong elite-lay taste schism

Whilst I have set out above, many instances in which the survey results supported the assumption behind my research question that there is a strong schism in taste between the architectural elite and the lay public, not all of the survey findings corroborate this. Below I look at the evidence that alludes to closer taste alliance across these two groups. This is important to consider in understanding the complexity of the question of taste, to avoid the mire of reductionist polar classification discussed in chapter two and to look towards a means of bridging the divide.

I have previously noted the significance of the finding that *detail* was the most commonly used category in the Style section of the survey, suggesting this could be the most important aspect in influencing taste preferences. Whilst this was a little more commonly used by nonarchitects, who used it more positively towards the embellished façade than Architects, it was still the biggest category for Architects, and used more in favour of the embellished façade than against it. This suggests that there isn't necessarily a great divergence on the importance of detail in bringing a sense of character and homeliness to a domestic façade – that it is not a binary of architects against detail and the lay public for it, but that there could be a mutually appealing approach that is neither fussy nor stark.

It is also important to recognise that although *detail* was the biggest overall category, *plain* was the second biggest, used in almost a quarter of the Style section comments. In this case, the category was slightly more commonly used by Architects who also used it more positively towards the stripped façade than non-architects, but it was still used positively in the majority of comments by non-architects. In total, 22% of all respondents used the detail category positively (towards the embellished façade), and 14% used the plain category positively (towards the stripped façade). This suggests that a cleaner, simpler, aesthetic to the current housebuilder-vernacular style holds substantial appeal that should not be overlooked solely looking for a winning majority.

Architects didn't all fully fit the disengaged expert stereotype, such as this comment that expresses both an aesthetic and emotional evaluation: "I was somewhat surprised to find I tended to prefer the volume housebuilder style. I think in this instance what swung it was the level of visual interest in the details. Although not necessarily better looking, they softened the facade and provided a more welcoming front", and the evaluation from this respondent on the basis of experiential rather than purely aesthetic qualities: "the ones I chose appeared more welcoming due to having a bit more character and detail". Architect responses also revealed less modernist dogmatism in their preferences than might be expected from projecting the polarities of a schism as I have set them out. A number of Architects for example articulated weighing up their normal preferences, that I have argued are typical of the elite, in response to the particularities of the given choices, such as expressed in these comments: "would normally prefer the less ornamented houses unless it looks dull or incoherent as is my feeling in relation with the last two", and "although the classic 'house builder' style is definitely not my favourite, I found that the austerity of the other options tended to be less attractive. The ones with the additionally frilly bits looked more tactile, which regardless of style/architectural merit, is something I feel important in a home".

In a similar vein of bucking stereotypes, there were numerous references to the abstract aesthetic qualities of the stripped façade made by non-architects, who frequently cited the 'clean' lines and detailing as a reason for their choices, in preference to what was often called

out as false, unnecessary detail. This is highlighted in these comments that would fit the expected responses of ideologically ingrained Architects, but come from respondents with Other occupations: “the modern, clean lines. Simplicity rather than faux traditional”; “I prefer plain, modern looks. Do not like any of the styles shown - although because they are available I live in something like them. Would ban old fashioned rural lookalike”, and “Clean lines. No unnecessary ornamentation. Bigger Windows. Not trying to hark back to old fashioned ingrained views of what a house should look like. Using design rather than sentimental memories”. I noted earlier that many of the comments around authenticity were from non-architects. Likewise, the few comments relating to buildings looking of their time, an ideology that I have argued underlies the architectural elite taste position, were from non-architects, such as: “modern houses should not have period features that do not match their construction period”. This was often coupled with views on authenticity and pastiche, such as: “I hate modern houses with period windows and ornate porches - looks fussy and pastiche”, so may also be explained as a wider high cultural capital set of values rather than an exclusively architectural establishment set.

10.1.6 On other factors raised in survey findings

An area that I did not address in Part II but that arose in the survey comments was that of perceived practicality. This was particularly manifest in relation to the roof, for which *practical maintenance* was the fourth most cited category. There were a number of comments in the Style section regarding the usefulness of a porch roof that was omitted in one of the stripped image pairs as well as a handful of comments regarding opening and cleaning windows and the durability of the façade. Notably only four of the 68 practical roof maintenance comments were from Architects – proportionately nearly four times fewer. This suggests that the *perception* of practicality and maintenance issues is a factor in taste preferences, quite distinct from any objective evidence on these matters.

The focus on my enquiry into themes influencing taste in Part II centred around the elite-lay taste schism. But in the survey I tested a number of other demographics in addition to occupation. It is beyond the remit of this present study to address them, but a number of the findings warrant further future investigation. The first is around the impact of residents’ local built environment on taste preferences. A greater preference for the housebuilder-vernacular from respondents living in suburban and rural locations could suggest a place-based personality model has some merit. Valuing traditions, for example, which are historically place and community based, and more aligned with both Settler and Somewhere attributes of the personality models discussed in chapter two, may have a higher correlation to living in a suburban or rural location; valuing security over change and preferring conventional aesthetic styles. And correspondingly, inclinations towards innovation, the new, unconventional and challenging that are aligned with Prospector, and Anywhere traits may be more prevalent in those living in urban areas and correlate with a rejection of the conventional housebuilder-vernacular aesthetic. The other significant demographic divergence in the survey results was the pattern of responses to façade style across different age groups. That the 35-54 age group were overall in favour of the stripped façade, approximately equal to the aggregate preference of Architects and Designers, compared to a strong preference for the embellished façade in younger and older age groups is striking and invites further enquiry.

These demographic findings suggest that there are two further taste schisms that could be investigated in future research studies: that between metropolitan and suburban residents; and that between the middle-aged band and those younger and older. The balance of the numbers

of people in the opposing group categorisations of the three schism is markedly different. If one takes all of those working in the UK design industry relative to the rest of the total adult population, the ratio of the divide is approximately 1:31 (Benton & Mille, 2018). If one takes all of those living in urban areas in the UK compared to those living in suburban and rural areas, the ratio of the divide is approximately 1:4 (DCLG, 2014). If one takes the 35-54 year old UK population relative to the rest of the adult population the ratio is approximately 1:2 (ONS, 2018). These two alternative demographic schisms therefore point to a preference for a stripped aesthetic by a much larger number of people than by architects and designers. I have summarised these schisms in fig. 10.1 below.

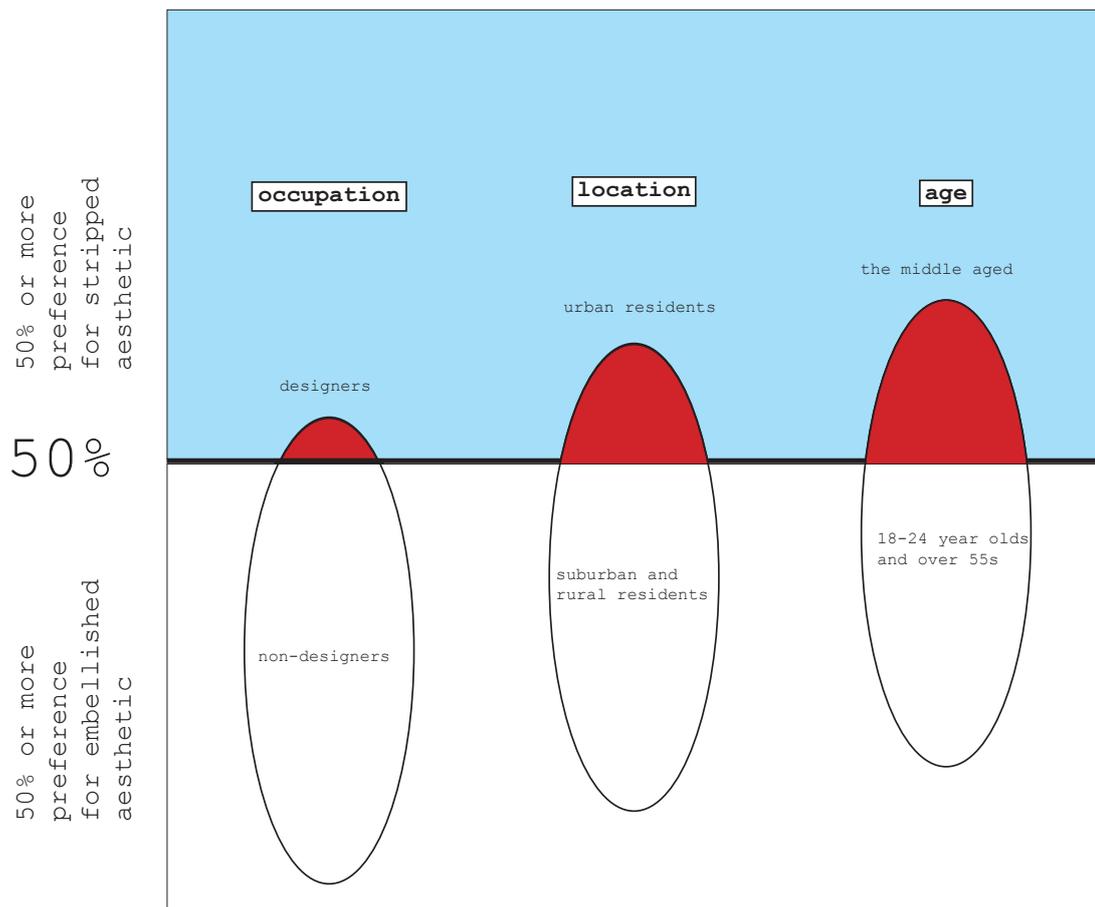


Figure 10.1 Diagram showing three possible schisms based on the demographic results of the survey, divided in approximate proportion to their respective group sizes.

Assessing the survey findings against the themes investigated in Part II of this thesis has revealed a significant degree of correspondence between the potential influences that have been raised and attitudes revealed in the preference survey analysis. There are signs in the survey results that the elite-popular taste divide might not be as binary as it is cast, and that there may be other taste divides meriting investigation. The survey also highlighted areas of influence on

taste judgements that I have not investigated in this thesis. These last two issues point to the importance of further research on this topic, which I discuss in the next section.

10.2

Recommendations for future research

The observations informing the key survey findings cited above have a number of limitations. They are based on the findings of just one survey; they cannot account for factors that were untested; and they did not have a true randomised participant sample. For example, it could be argued that comments on both *Detail* and *Windows* predominated in the written responses because they were the primary alterations made to the original façade and therefore constituted the main difference between the two options. Form and composition were not tested and so could not feature as a reason for differentiating preference. Nevertheless this does not diminish the value of the findings on style, embellishment, window proportion and size, roof form and demographic differences in preferences. For example, it does not detract from the outcome that found a relatively limited use of style to describe preferences compared to a level of detail, and the ambivalent use of the category *Traditional* in the evaluations.

More survey work exploring these factors would be needed to be more conclusive.

Recommendations for further research include:

- Further preference studies comparing levels of façade detail with complexity levels of façade composition. This could help extend an understanding of the relationship between detail, formal composition and complexity in visual appeal. Perhaps a minimally detailed but more formally complex façade than the subject of this study would also yield positive reactions. This could build on some of the theories and findings of Berlyne and his adherents.
- Further qualitative research into the emotional responses to façade treatments, especially in the level of detail and articulation, to fill the gaps I have identified above.
- A further survey including the option of a non-traditional style with detailing (that is not currently offered in the market and was not an option for respondents to choose from in this study), and a testing of extent of preference with rating of options from really like, like, to don't mind, dislike and really dislike. This would be to reveal preferences beyond the two limited options and ask respondents if they positively liked their chosen option.
- A further similar survey based on architect designed suburban housing in lieu of volume-built housing, with examples that have different levels of detail and roof profiles that could be modified in the controlled and testable way using the method of this survey. This would fill the gap that a purpose designed modern house was not offered as a choice. Respondent comments such as: "I think the older styled buildings looked better generally, but only because the style works as a whole. The more modern doors and window sills didn't work with the traditional red roof and white walls, but a house designed around modern, minimalist aspects would look better as a whole", suggest that alternative designs for the stripped house type may yield different results when compared to the standard, housebuilder design. A well-designed modern style house is likely to be more appealing to more people than a stripped version of the housebuilder-

vernacular style and may perhaps even be equal or preferred to the embellished housebuilder-vernacular style. The Mulholland Research and Consulting research on attitudes to housing for CABE, for example found that a majority of respondents said they would like to live in a modernist or modern-vernacular (in my terminology) house (CABE, 2005).

- A further survey that tests other façade differences such as form and composition and compares these aspects with those of detail and decoration. This could also fill the gap that there was no option to choose a well composed classical façade.
- A further survey with a larger random sample of participants, to substantiate the findings in demographic difference. This would increase the robustness of evidence. Further demographic variables could also be added, including level of education and ethnicity.
- The findings on preference differences of age groups contradicts the findings of the Mulholland Research and Consulting research on attitudes to housing for CABE, that found young people more in favour of modernist external appearance than other age groups (CABE, 2005). Further qualitative study on the impact of age on preferences would therefore be important to test these findings and whether the trend identified in this survey is consistent enough to consider as another schism in taste.
- Further research on the connections between place, personality, values and taste that could investigate a potential place/personality schism in taste. This would expand the scope of the enquiry in this field to address potential wider influences that my research has signalled as likely contributors to taste preferences.
- A study of the effect of familiarity on preferences which could include the influence of personality type on both choice of dwelling environment and aesthetic preferences. This could build on and further test the findings of Cook and Furnham's study (2012) that indicated up to a 22 % prediction of variance in preference attributable to familiarity with certain architectural styles. It would be instructive to run a similar survey in a context where contemporary modernist housing is more of the norm, such as in the Netherlands, and to compare the results with this study.
- Further study on window proportions and size, including tests with different architectural styles, as the evidence gathered in this study is inconclusive.
- Behaviour psychology based research experiments, testing: the impact of cognitive ease with respect to architectural familiarity; the relationship of identity and sense of belonging to different aesthetics; attitudes towards risk and certainty in relation to the external aesthetic of *home*; and the influence of association and coherence in aesthetic judgements. Such experiments would directly test themes that I have raised as likely influences but have not been able to assess through the survey.

10.3

The investigation themes with respect to volume-built housing

In this section I aim to consider attitudes towards the volume-built house aesthetic in the light of some of the key issues that arose out of the investigating themes I explored in Part II. I first compare the learnt values discussed in chapter five, that I have proposed are held by the elite, with the inherited values discussed in chapter six, and that emerged in chapter seven, that I have proposed are likely to influence the lay public in the absence of a strong ideological aesthetic position. I then go on to look at on how these values could be seen to be upheld or negated in the volume-built house aesthetic. I end the section reflecting on the process of normalisation, discussed in chapter five, in the housing market.

10.3.1 A balance of values

In chapter five, I presented a set of ideologies that I suggest prevail in the architectural establishment, which are the legacy of Modernism in architectural culture. For each belief I proposed a resultant *sin* to be avoided. These were beliefs in the *Zeitgeist*, in originality and in authenticity and the corresponding sins to avoid of historicism, imitation and superficiality. These represent what I call learnt values that are received in architectural education (though they are not exclusive to it). In addition to these ideological values is the aesthetic value of abstract expression, stripped of supplementary ornament, also received from Modernism. This connects to the three ideologies but is an important value to be recorded separately, as the findings of the preference survey highlight.

In chapter six, I presented what I suggest are some of the key socio-cultural factors that could influence taste judgements. These represent what I call inherited values, informally received in people's social lives. I proposed that the familiar, which gives a sense of security, is valued for the sense of order, continuity and stability it brings. In the absence of an ideological drive in its favour, any attraction of the new, whatever its inherent creativity, invention and progress, is outweighed by the draw of the familiar. I also described the value of symbolic association, whereby mental connections are made between things, drawing on memory in particular, to bring a sense of mental coherence to experiences.

In investigating expertise and processes of evaluation in chapter seven, I also described the value of experiencing the setting a building creates, that without architectural expertise, I posited the lay public may appreciate more than the autonomy of it as an object. In addition, the survey findings also revealed the aesthetic value of detail and embellishment in architectural expression in housing.

Taken together these values can be diagrammatically summarised as two opposing sets associated with the pull of the learnt ideologies of the elite on one side and the inherited socio-cultural factors that influence the lay public on the other, as shown in fig. 10.2. It is notable that the learnt values of the elite correspond with the negative associations of the inherited values that I have posited as being important to the lay public. And similarly, these positive inherited values correspond with the negative counterparts to the elite's learnt values.

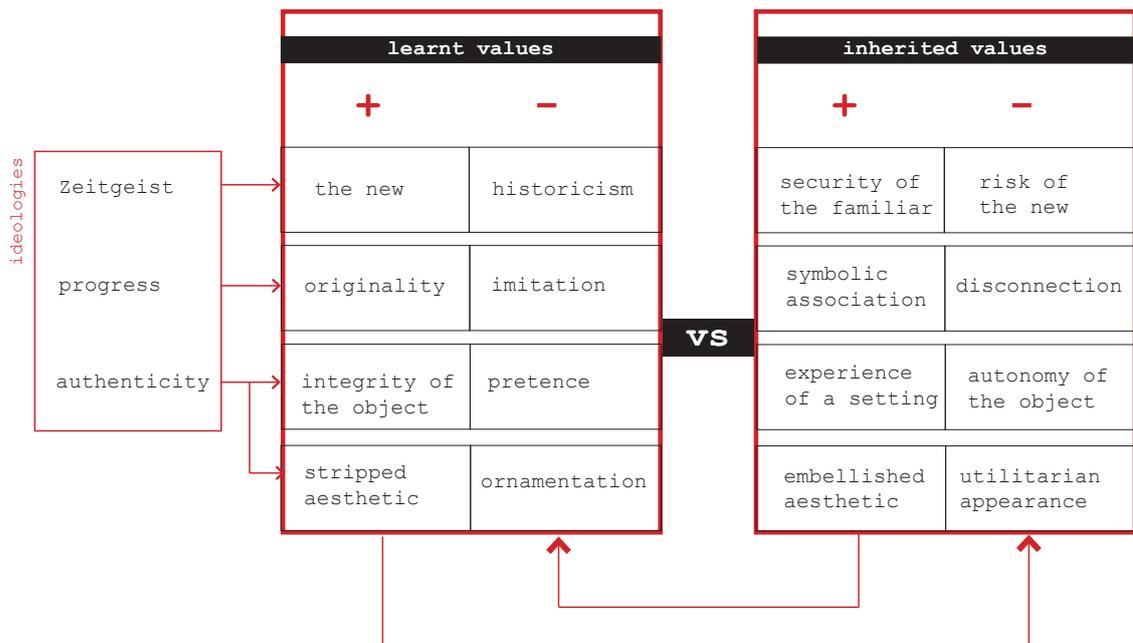


Figure 10.2 Diagram summarising the key taste attitudes associated with learnt values and inherited values.

10.3.2 Contrasting attitudes to the volume-built house aesthetic

In ideological terms, the typical volume-built house aesthetic appears to embody the popular-elite schism in taste. It can be seen to be counter to the learnt elite values and breach all of their sins. It can also be seen to represent a number of what I have proposed are inherited lay values.

Whilst volume-built houses are clearly a product and symptom of the present era, they do not offer a bold new aesthetic that represents either the technological advances nor the diverse social conditions of our time. Hence they run counter to the ideal of Zeitgeist and the valuing of the new. Moreover, the allusions to the past that are central to the architectural vocabulary of the housebuilder-vernacular style are a kind of historicism. Though they may be ill-considered, low grade and eclectic, they nonetheless tap into an historic iconographic vein, thereby committing the first of the sins from the elite position. But the familiarity of the volume-built house aesthetic may be associated with a sense of security and comfort for the laity who are not pulled by ideological aesthetic values. This is supported by the findings of a volume housebuilder focus group that revealed that whilst participants found images of Grand Designs type homes exciting and inspiring, they preferred the idea of living in the typical housebuilder offer. This was because it was more associated with security, both as a home (by fitting-in and belonging), and as an investment to be able to resell (author housebuilder interviews, 2018).

Architectural historian Adrian Forty asserts that Modernism rejected memory as it lay outside the innateness of the object and the immediacy of encounter with it that were so valued (2004).

Furthermore, Habraken argues that in neglecting the key function and role of memory, thereby severing links to previous typologies, forms, styles and iconography that provided associations and connections to the past, Modernism compelled an abrupt end to the personal and collective narratives of individuals and communities held within the fabric of the built environment (1997). In such a context, the new could be seen to represent a disconnection not simply to the past but to a collective identity that lodges in an idea of the past. With that the new may come to symbolize an unknown, and thereby insecure future more than it does a secure present.

In terms of originality and artistry, volume-built houses have no identifiable authors; they are a mass-produced speculative company product. It is hard to even spot the difference between the various housebuilders – branding through style does not appear to be a feature of this market in which sales competition within an area is primarily with existing housing stock, not with other housebuilders (OFT, 2008). I suggest this homogeneity reinforces the perception of their lack of artistry and so puts into question the extent to which they are considered *architecture* rather than just *buildings* by the elite¹⁹. Additionally, architectural imitation as demonstrated in the mass applied vernacular motifs evident in volume-built housing could be seen to represent an upheaval of tradition, raised in chapter five, and a removal from the realm of the genuine tradition of crafts²⁰.

This imitative aspect of the typical volume-built house aesthetic disturbs the elite ideal of authenticity with its stuck-on ornamental details that pretend to be something that they're not, such as the GRP chimneys cited in chapter five that neither serve the functional purpose of a chimney, nor are built of the materials that they appear to be. Indeed, the supplementary, feature detailing appears to revel in the sin of pretence. But what if the purpose served by the inauthentic detailing in the standard housebuilder-vernacular is simply as a symbolic reference that taps into a shared memory or story about home? In which case it is not judged in terms of its authenticity as an object, but by the associations and meanings it conjures and the resulting experience of living in and around it as a setting?

In chapter seven I set out a theory about the authenticity of spray tanning, and what the attitudes towards it revealed. Volume-built housing leads to a parallel speculation with regard to responses to imitation, or pastiche. The rejecters, who label pastiche as inauthentic because it pretends to be something that it's not –old, vernacular, classical - do not see beyond the fakery, and thus define such houses by it. They remain detached observers, considering the house as an object, as a work. The accepters, who doubtless also recognise the lack of originality in the style treatment, do not however define the house by this characteristic. They look beyond

¹⁹ Pevsner famously distinguished architecture and building in his comparison of Lincoln Cathedral and a bicycle shed (Pevsner, 2009 [1947]).

²⁰ In the contemporary housebuilding industry, there is an evident drop in building quality that may be interpreted as a result of the demise of many craft and construction traditional practices and materials. This brings a distinction and increased currency to periods in which traditional skills and practices are evident. There is a risk of simply conflating the passing of craft traditions with the fakery of construction that moved into its wake, and ignoring the considerable impact of economics. It is easy to spot the decline in quality in cheap modern alternatives to traditional, natural building materials and methods. But the overriding driving factor of the demand for lower costs (in an era when labour costs are far higher than previously) along with high outputs cannot be overlooked in this trend. It has been beyond the purview of this thesis to look the changing economic conditions in the last two centuries and the impacts on the construction industry, manufacturing and building, but that is not to dismiss it as a major dynamic in construction outputs.

its inauthenticity as an object, concerned more with the setting it makes and what they imagine their experience might be as participants within that setting.

The home is a very real, everyday and personal setting. Further to the discussion on experience in chapter seven, it follows that the desire for the appropriate scenes and backdrops for experiences and events (even transformational outcomes for ourselves), may be an important factor in nonexpert housing taste judgements, that overrides the simple evaluation of the house as an artefact. Does the housebuilder-vernacular style perhaps tell a more popular story than a modern, stripped style? Does it operate like Disney's Main Street USA, fitting into a narrative that a nonexpert can imagine and want to be a part of, in the absence of one centred around expert knowledge? The house may be inauthentic as a piece of historic or vernacular architecture, but the imagined narrative to which it serves as a setting may be the priority for a nonexpert more interested in the experience outcome than the object per se.

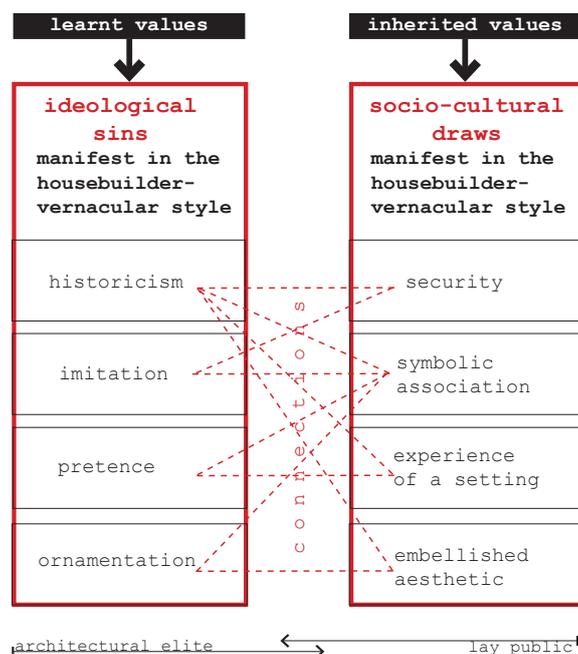


Figure 10.3 Diagram summarising suggested ideological sins and socio-cultural draws manifest in the housebuilder-vernacular style.

I attempt to summarise what I call the ideological sins and the socio-cultural draws that are manifest in the volume-built house aesthetic, which I have described above, in fig. 10.3. I have also indicated the various connections of these issues across the divide, as they do not just have binary alignments. In marking the positions of the architectural elite and the lay public with arrows moving from the columns of learnt and inherited values respectively, I am inferring that the positions I set out are representative tendencies of the two groups, not absolute positions.

10.3.3 Normalisation and the assimilation of the new

In chapter five I discussed the process of the normalisation of the new with reference to the work of Steinberg. The flourishing of modern, luxury, developments of flats in major metropolitan centres over the last two decades could be seen as a demonstration of the effect that Steinberg describes. Suburban domestic architecture in which development remains dominated by the standard housebuilder-vernacular remains insulated from this cycle of assimilation of the new.

A catch-22 condition is apparent in the suburban housing market, that serves to reinforce the dominance of traditional styles and the impression that they are the unquestioned upholders of the values of stability and security, that the consumer desires. Modernist styles are rare in housing outside high density metropolitan areas and so would feel new to many homeowners in low density suburban and rural areas. In metropolitan areas apartments, rather than houses predominate typologically, compounding the difference between the metropolis and the rest. This means that in addition to the slow introduction rate of new houses, and therefore also house styles (with less than one percent of new stock being added to the total each year (DCLG, 2014; MHCLG, 2018b)), in a mono-aesthetic market dominated by the housebuilder-vernacular, there is little opportunity for modernist styles to gain the exposure required to become appropriated and challenge the monopoly of *normal*, currently held by the traditional aesthetic. This also means that modernist styles do not get the chance of becoming familiar and the association with stability that brings.

One clear difference in the housing market compared to the art market and most other retail markets is the rate of introduction and churn in the market. For example, the high turnover of fashion (as an indication, an average of over 65 clothing garments bought per person in the US in 2017 (American Apparel and Footwear Association, 2018)) means that new trends can take off and die back in a season. Property portal Zoopla's research suggests that homeowners move on average every 23 years (White, 2017) making homes in the order of 1,500 times less frequently bought than an item of clothing by the statistics referred to above. Consequently, the slow turnover of house sales and the principally second-hand nature of the housing market allows for only generational waves of fashion in domestic architecture, with the knock-on effect of a very slow normalisation rate relative to other everyday products.

Modern interior fittings appear to have become, over the last decade, acceptable norms, in contrast to exteriors. This is evident in the typical volume housebuilder offer of a modern-looking kitchen and bathroom behind a traditional-looking façade (Barratt Homes, 2019; Persimmon Homes, 2019; Taylor Wimpey, 2019b). This is illustrated in the marketing material from a volume housebuilder in fig. 10.4 below.



Figure 10.4 Typical kitchen and house exterior marketed by volume housebuilders

This fits the normalisation argument. Rates for domestic remodelling are much more frequent than rebuilding or moving (a recent study indicates that 53% of homeowners have carried out a renovation project over the last ten years, with an increase in the last few years of homeowners improving their home in 2017 to an estimated four million UK households (Hiscox, 2018)).

Housebuilders follow the trends of the DIY superstores (author housebuilder interviews, 2018) in which modern interior fittings have, over the last decade become acceptable norms. B&Q for example list only six 'traditional' bathroom basin mixer taps on their website out of their range of 54 taps. All of the others are modern looking - split between the category choices of 'contemporary' (37 products), 'modern' (4 products) and 'waterfall' (7 products) (B&Q, 2019 - ref figure 9.5). And whilst at least one of the top volume housebuilders includes a 'free' traditional carriage lamp with all new house purchases (author housebuilder interviews, 2018), the trends of the DIY superstores suggest that perhaps there is the beginnings of a creep away from the traditional aesthetic on the exterior as well; of 158 external wall lights on B&Q's website only 30 are of a traditional style (but unlike basin taps, this is not a distinct search category)(B&Q, 2018).

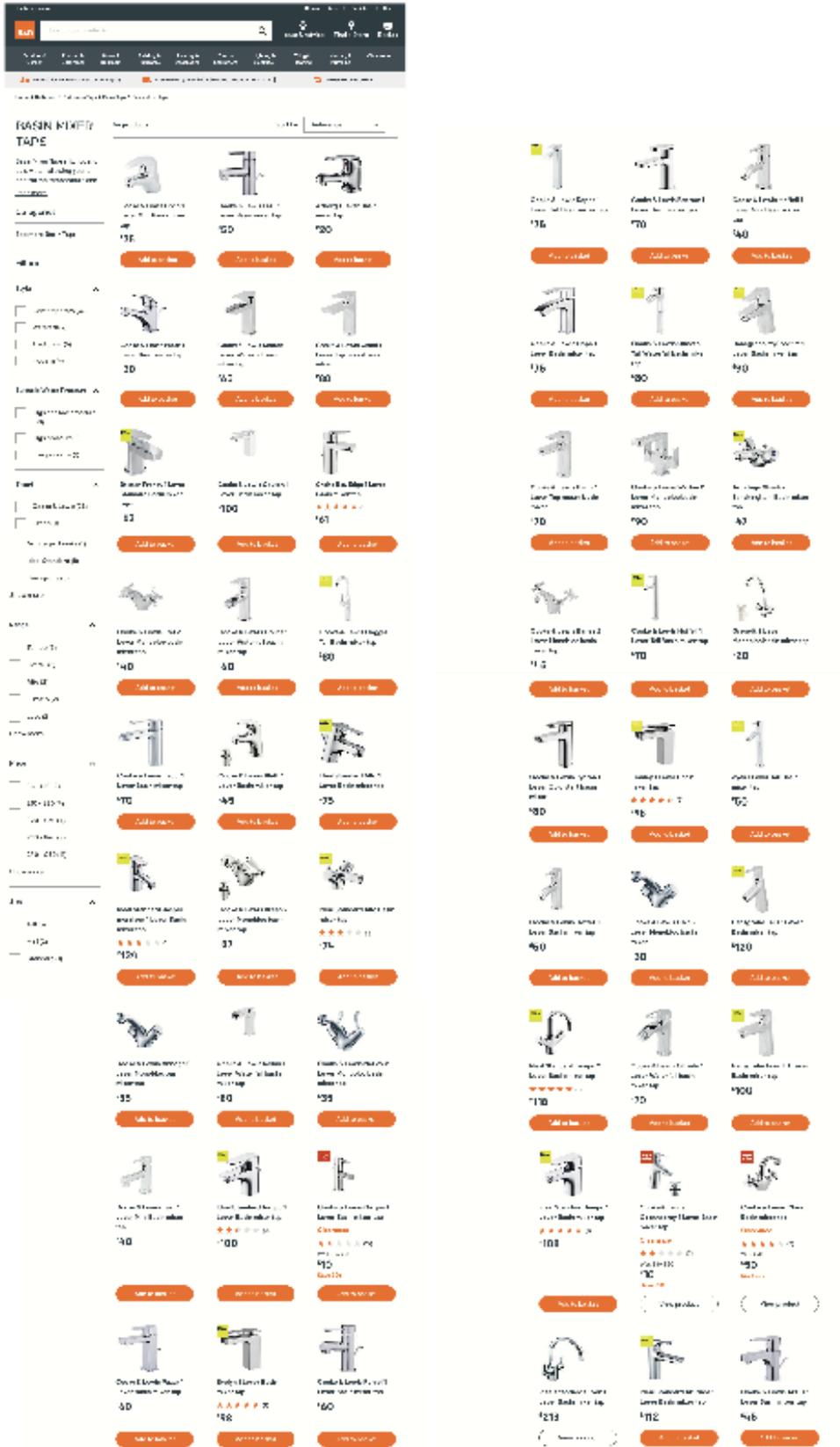


Figure 10.5 Pasted screenshot of B&Q basin mixer taps showing the predominance of contemporary styles (B&Q, 2019).

10.4 Conclusion

Although attitudes to *traditional* as a style were ambivalent, associations with characteristics of tradition were apparent in the survey results, with an evident worth given to referential meaning, familiarity and a sense of continuity.

Architects' responses in the survey supported the influence of the learnt values that I proposed in chapter five. In particular, an antipathy for: historicism; imitation (both expressed as pastiche by respondents); and pretence, along with a general disposition towards a plainer aesthetic. This is consistent with ideologies that have faith in the *Zeitgeist*, originality and authenticity, which I have argued are a legacy of Modernism in architectural culture.

Nonarchitects' responses in the survey supported a number of factors raised in chapter six on inherited values. Associational references were frequently made, especially in relation to roof form, and to ideas of a homely-looking house. The positive bias of familiarity and the influence of memory preferences was suggested by some of the responses but would need to be specifically tested to get a sense of the extent of this influence.

The contention put forward in chapter seven, that architects and nonarchitects evaluate differently, was evidenced in the survey responses. Architects tended to use more specific categories to describe their responses than the general 'modern' or 'traditional' used more by nonarchitects. Additionally, Architects used more detached, aesthetic language and nonarchitects more situated, emotional language in their comments.

However, the survey results did not all point to a clear, clean divide in taste, or in the designations I have set out as being associated with either the architectural elite or the lay public. For example, views characteristic of the learnt values that I ascribed to architectural education were not limited to Architects. This indicates a cross-over with cultural values associated with having high cultural capital that I have previously noted, shown to include, for example, the importance of authenticity. Furthermore, *detail* was the most commonly cited descriptive category for Architects, and *plain* was the second most used category overall, intimating a blurred edge to the taste divide. This ambiguity extended to the types of expression used by respondents, with nonarchitects often positively citing the clean lines of the stripped façade and Architects combining affective qualities with aesthetic ones in their responses.

The survey raised some issues that I did not cover in my investigation of themes, namely practical maintenance and the impact of demographic factors. I have suggested future research in relation to these influences as well as on other factors.

Notwithstanding the anomalies in evidence noted above, having assessed the survey findings against the themes of my investigation, I still contend that there is a demonstrable taste divide between the architectural elite and the lay public, albeit with blurred rather than sharp edges. Furthermore I posit that it can be helpfully understood as opposing pulls of influence of learnt values in the case of the elite, and inherited values, in the case of the lay public. The aesthetic of the volume-built house epitomises the ideological *sins* I set out as representative of the learnt values of the elite: of historicism, imitation, superficiality and ornamentation. These values all have a counter (as well as cross-connections), to the socio-cultural draws of: a feeling of

security; symbolic associations; the situated experience of a setting; and an embellished aesthetic, that I have reasoned to be held by the lay public to greater or lesser extent, in the absence of an ideological position. I am not arguing that they are either absolute or fixed, but represent typical inclinations that are manifest in different visual attitudes and preferences.

Conclusion

In this concluding chapter I open the field up to consider what my investigations and findings can bring to a wider discussion of taste issues in housing. There are two leading aspects to this thesis enquiry that originates from a practitioner's point of view. One is the nature of the palpable schism in taste between the architectural elite and the lay public, with an emphasis on what it is that makes elite taste unpopular outside of its niche group. The other is the formulation of a framework for discussing taste informed by my investigation into this schism with reference to contemporary volume-built housing.

In the first section I examine the implications of my investigations and consider an alternative take on the elite-popular divide that has been central to my investigation. In the second section I formulate the beginnings of a generic framework for discussing housing design going forward. This is my contribution to the field.

11.1

An alternative take on the divide

In this section I summarise what I understand to be the nature of the elite-popular taste divide based on what I have learnt through this thesis research. I do this in four stages. In the first, 'An overlay of two schisms', I map out a field of taste on the basis of two sub-schisms I have identified that seem to underlie the taste divide: traditional-modernist; and expert-nonexpert. In 'The essence of the taste schism' I summarise what I conclude to be three instrumental aspects of the divide, identifying the key point of difference in each of the them. In 'Closing the gap' I go on to consider how the taste schism could be reduced through potential shifts in certain attitudes. I end by looking at the possibility of a taste-bridging style to close the gap I have identified based on the responses to my survey findings. I call this style *homely amodern*, which breaks out of the reductivist binary classification of traditional-modernist.

11.1.1 An overlay of two schisms

Through my research I have confirmed the premise underlying this thesis, that there is a current schism in taste between the architectural elite and the lay public. I first thought that it was primarily a traditional-modernist divide, the nature of which I explored in chapters four and five. I then realised that there was another axis on which to draw a discernible and significant divide – that between experts and nonexperts, as discussed in chapter seven. One way of understanding the parameters of the overall elite-popular taste schism (the sum of the two) is to look at the overlay of these two related, but distinct taste schisms. In figure 11.1 below, I attempt to map out the key actors in the taste schism across the field created by the intersection of the two axial

divides of traditional-modernist and expert-nonexpert. It shows a number of polarities. At the opposite extremes of the two expert quadrants are the architectural establishment and traditionalist architects, with architectural aficionados occupying the less expert but more modernist territory between them. At the opposite extremes of the nonexpert quadrants are the lay public who explicitly reject Traditional Architecture and those who explicitly reject modernism. I propose however that a larger group of the lay public do not have a fixed position on style and judge it without the rigidity of such labels.

Seeing the elite-popular taste schism in this way helps to simultaneously disaggregate and connect the essential elements that I see as forming its key parameters. It also usefully situates the various actors in the schism, showing that there are significant divisions of opinion both within the architectural profession and the lay public, but – as the survey in chapters eight and nine shows - that the majority of popular opinion does not occupy the extremes.

In ‘A homely amodern’ below, I will go on to further interrogate the nature of the schism and the critical aspects that divide preferences on the modernist-traditional axis I show here.

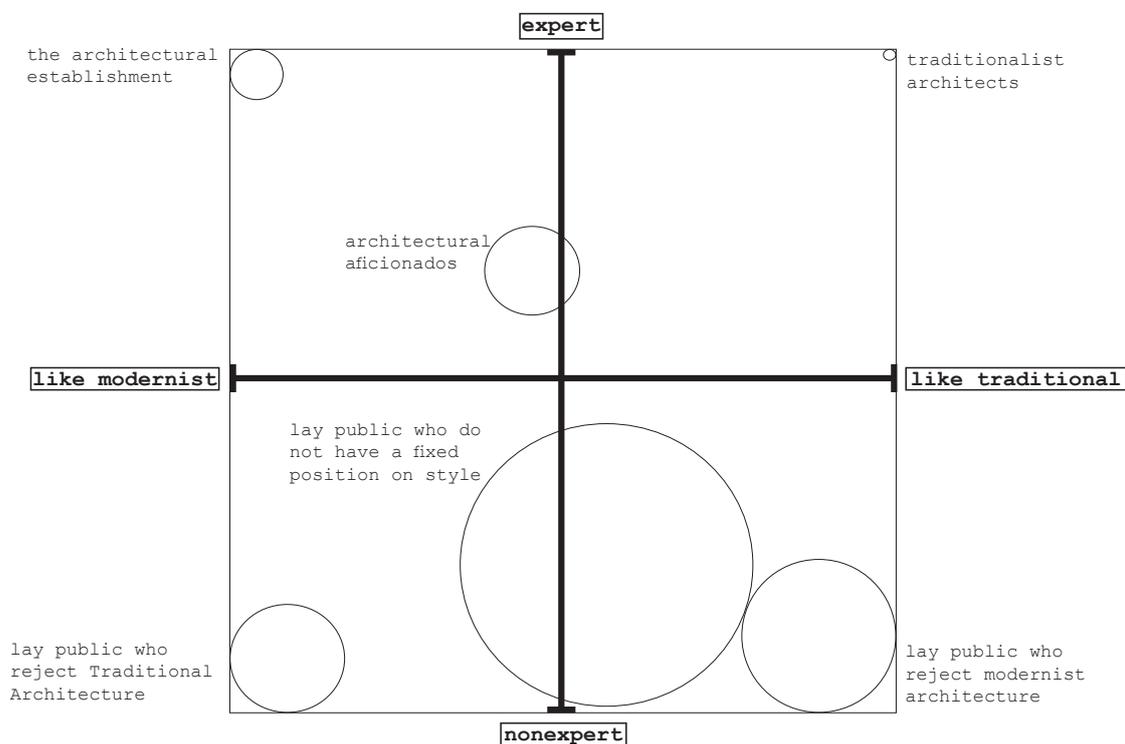


Figure 11.1 Diagram of proposed overlay of taste schisms: of the expert-nonexpert divide; and the preference for modernist and traditional styles in contemporary housing divide. (Bubbles are my personal approximate evaluation, not data driven - to be suggestive of relative scale rather than direct proportion).

11.1.2 The essence of the taste schism

Through the research I have set out in this thesis, I have concluded that the schism in taste is essentially due to three key factors: a difference in expert knowledge of architecture; a difference in values associated with architecture, primarily due to the impact of ideologies in the

architectural establishment that are not shared by the lay public; and a difference in evaluation processes that hinge on expertise. These can be described as broad divisions of:

- knowledge based vs experience based modes of categorising and subsequently assessing architecture that originate in the different levels of expertise acquired by the elite and the lay public (explored in chapter seven);
- ideological based orthodoxies that are shared by the niche elite group, learnt through architectural education and the prevailing architectural culture vs the experience based perceptions of the lay public (explored in chapter five, six and seven); and
- detached vs engaged modes of appreciation that stem from cognitive based evaluation processes to which experts are more predisposed and associative and affective based processes to which nonexperts are more predisposed (explored in chapter seven).

I summarise this in figure 11.2 below. To distil the schism into such simple terms is, as discussed in chapter two, necessarily to generalise. It is to inscribe tendencies, recognising that reality will be less rigid. I discuss the implications of the schism as I have described it here, and possible ways to reduce it, in the next section.

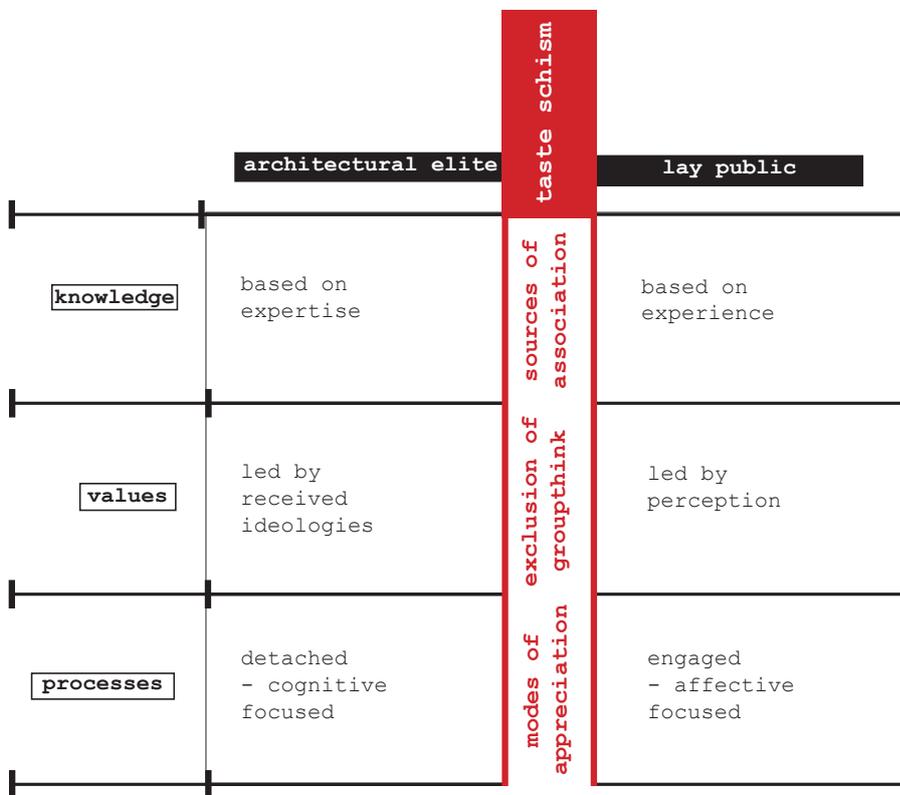


Figure 11.2 Diagram of proposed key aspects of the elite-popular taste schism showing the respective attitudes and primary points of contention

11.1.3 Closing the gap

[The] lack of widespread acceptance of Modernism in Britain since its inception cannot simply be ignored or dismissed as the stupidity of the unenlightened (Powers, 2007, p. 7).

I have explained, above, the factors I have found to lie at the heart of the taste schism. This immediately begs the question, is it unavoidable? Is the taste of the architectural establishment necessarily unpopular? Or could the recognised and demonstrable divide in taste be bridged? The premise that the schism is directly related to expertise suggests that there will always be some degree of difference in taste between architectural experts and the lay public given this inescapable structural difference. But I contend that prevailing ideological orthodoxies in the architectural elite, that are part of the legacy of Modernism, exacerbate the inevitable taste divide and alienate the lay public from much contemporary, modernist architecture. This is compounded by implicit value judgements attached to taste that elevate elite taste above that of the lay public.

As discussed in chapter seven, one critical question the schism raises is whether the elite possesses *expert* taste or simply the taste of experts. Whether, in addition to the value of their expert architectural knowledge, they have elite taste with a higher value than lay taste. This fits with the cultural hierarchy of taste that Bourdieu identified (2010). Experts can certainly claim to be more practiced in architectural evaluation, and to have honed their powers of judgement and discrimination as a result. But the investigations I have set out in this thesis suggest that although the taste of experts tends to differ from the taste of nonexperts, it is not inherently *better*. I contend that taste-based value judgements (good, better, bad, lacking etc.), are an obstacle to bridging the gap between the architectural elite and the lay public. To recognise the value in the aesthetic appreciation of the nonexpert is not to equate it with the aesthetic appreciation of the expert. It is simply to be interested in the difference.

The implications of a major schism in taste between the architectural elite and the lay public is the disconnection of the laity from contemporary architecture. The resultant risk of this is a deeper disconnection between people and their surroundings, impacting on the sense of belonging, community and pride in place. I argue that although a difference in taste may be inevitable, the current gap could be reduced. But there can only be a will to close the gap and positively reconnect people with the built environment if it is accepted that the taste of the architectural establishment is not superior taste. This is because I maintain that it is in the hands of the elite to reduce the gap²¹. This is not a question of educating the public to be able to match the practiced judgement of the experts. Building on the sentiment captured by Powers, above, I suggest that it is not a matter of enlightening the unenlightened but of educating the experts to understand the aesthetic values and consequent tastes of the nonexpert public.

The first area that I propose can be targeted to reduce the taste gap is in evaluation processes. In chapter seven I set out how inherent differences in evaluation processing of experts and nonexperts were attached to a cultural hierarchy of judgement. This gives higher regard to the

²¹ I have talked about volume-built housing as a reference for the schism but that is not to confuse it with being the outcome of the schism. As previously noted, architects are very little involved in volume-built housing outside of complex urban sites. My proposals on closing the taste gap therefore do not directly impact on the aesthetics of volume-built housing.

detached, cognitive-based processes used by experts and those with high cultural capital (the wider, cultural elite) than the more engaged, associative and affective-based processes used by nonexperts. A first step in breaking down the barrier between expert elite and nonexpert lay taste judgements would be for the elite to be more open to what the lay public appreciate through understanding and respecting how they appreciate it. The principles and accomplishments of co-creation are relevant here, such as in ideas of ‘collaborative expert patients’ proposed in the health service (Cottam & Leadbeater, 2004, p. 20) and ‘resourcing of experience’ (Christensen, Ball, & Halskov, 2017, p. 59) in the design of social processes. This would allow the design expertise of the elite to be applied to meeting the tastes of the lay public, not just judging them.

The second area that I propose can be targeted to reduce the taste gap is in relation to the groupthink of the elite. I argue that the architectural ideologies held by the architectural elite are in many respects a barrier to the appreciation of contemporary architecture. The results of my survey, set out in chapter nine, highlight this disjunction with regard to visual detail. In chapter five I proposed that one of the three key sins of the elite affecting taste judgements, inherited from Modernism, is pretence. The abhorrence of the superficial arises from a belief in authenticity which leads to the ideal of integrity of the architectural work and its expression in construction. The implications of it has been decades of resistance to ornamentation by the architectural establishment²². An opening up towards what appears from my research to be a general public preference for visual interest and detail in domestic façades, could narrow the taste gap. I explore the implications of this in the next section. Figure 11.3 below attempts to summarise these proposals for reducing the taste gap between the architectural elite and the lay public.

²² This is not to say that embellishment is totally absent, as discussed in chapter four, nor that it is a fixed attitude, as discussed in chapter five, but that it is still a prevailing orthodoxy with deep ideological roots.

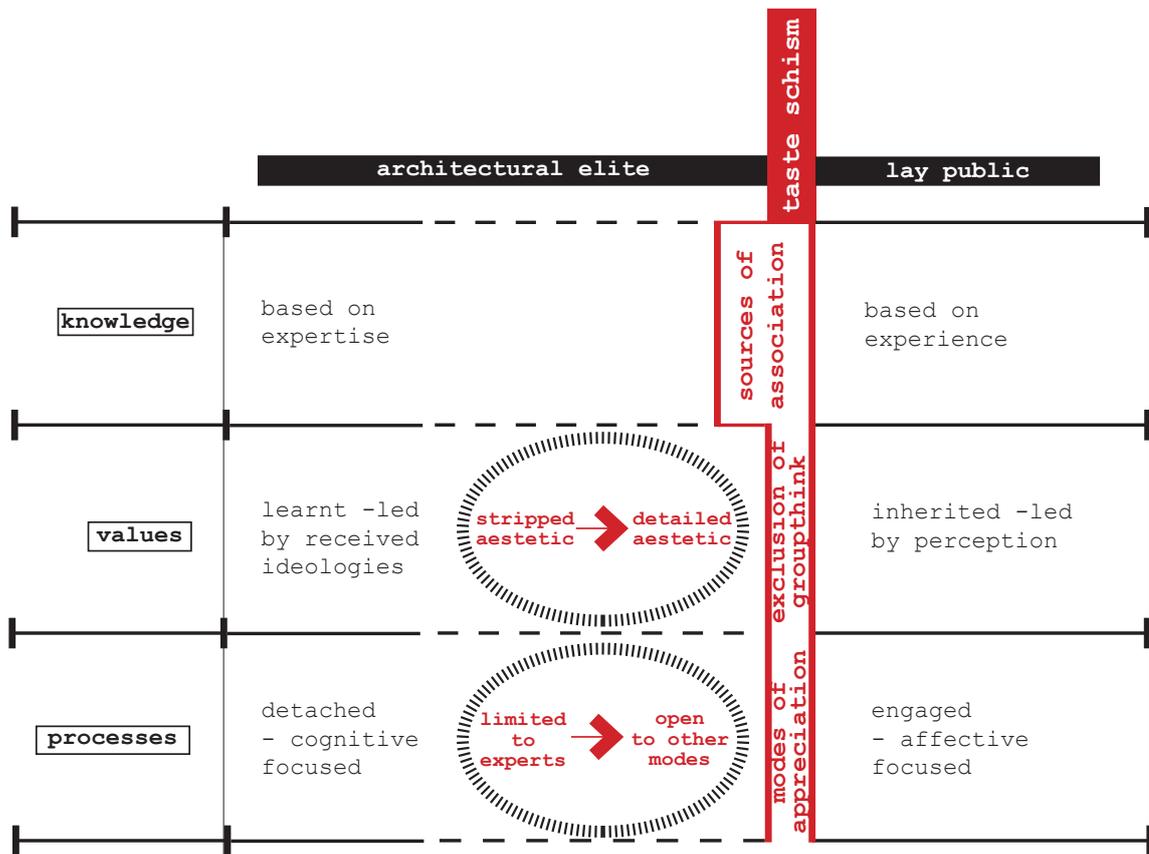


Figure 11.3 Diagram of closing the taste gap, showing how I propose the current taste divide could be reduced through the architectural elite embracing a more detailed aesthetic and opening up to other modes of appreciation.

11.1.4 Homely amodern - a challenge to traditional-modernist duality

Is there an aesthetic then, that mediates these differences and reduces the impact of the schism? Anecdotally architects' taste is thought to be out of touch with the tastes of *ordinary* people, whereas volume-built housing is thought to represent them. My research has shown that there are elements of truth as well as misconstruction in both assumptions. The general perception that the taste divide between the two falls along a traditional-modernist line is simplistic and misleading. My survey findings lead to the conclusion that opinions on the two styles do not appear to be balanced - a modernist stripping away of detail in domestic architecture appears to many lay people to be stark and uninviting; but the supposedly traditional garb of the typical housebuilder-vernacular style is not commonly desired. It would therefore be inaccurate to think of popular architectural taste as simply pro-traditional styling and against modernist styling.

The differences in taste between the architectural elite and the lay public could be thought of in terms of trajectories along different axes. I suggest that the architectural elite's axis is structured around its architectural ideologies that direct towards modernist styles, away from traditional ones. The lay public's axis on the other hand is structured around the perceptual experience of architecture, generally directed away from plain façade treatments towards more detailed articulation. This is summarised in figure 11.4 below.

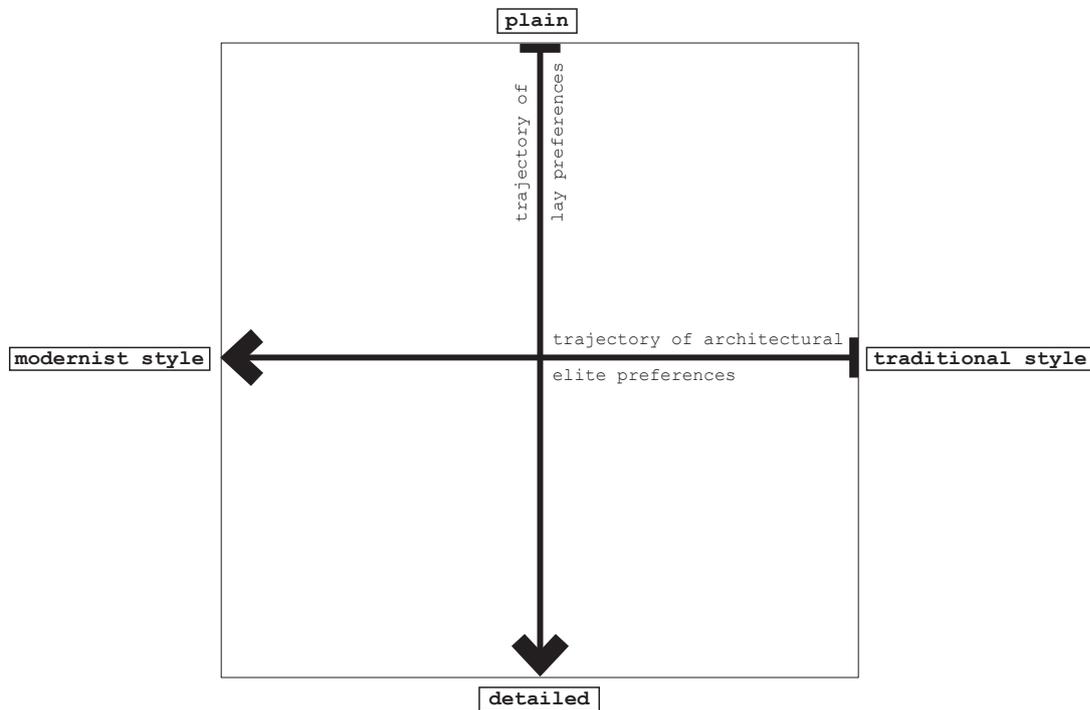


Figure 11.4 Diagram showing the intersection of my proposed trajectories of taste for the architectural elite and the lay public.

This intersection of the two axes creates a more expansive field than the polar schisms of either individual axis that do not sufficiently capture the nuances in the differences. Within this field, key style types can be mapped, as I attempt to show in figure 11.5 below. I have identified six very broad style classifications, all but one (stripped classicism) discussed in this thesis. They are each represented by circles, and indicate, through dashed satellite ellipses shown around them, the approximate extent of the territory in this modernist-traditional / plain-detailed field, that they operate within. Individual examples could be found to fall outside of these generalisations, and beyond the demarcation of the satellites I have shown, such as highly wrought modernist houses commissioned for individual private clients. However, here I am intending to capture broad, recognisable trends.

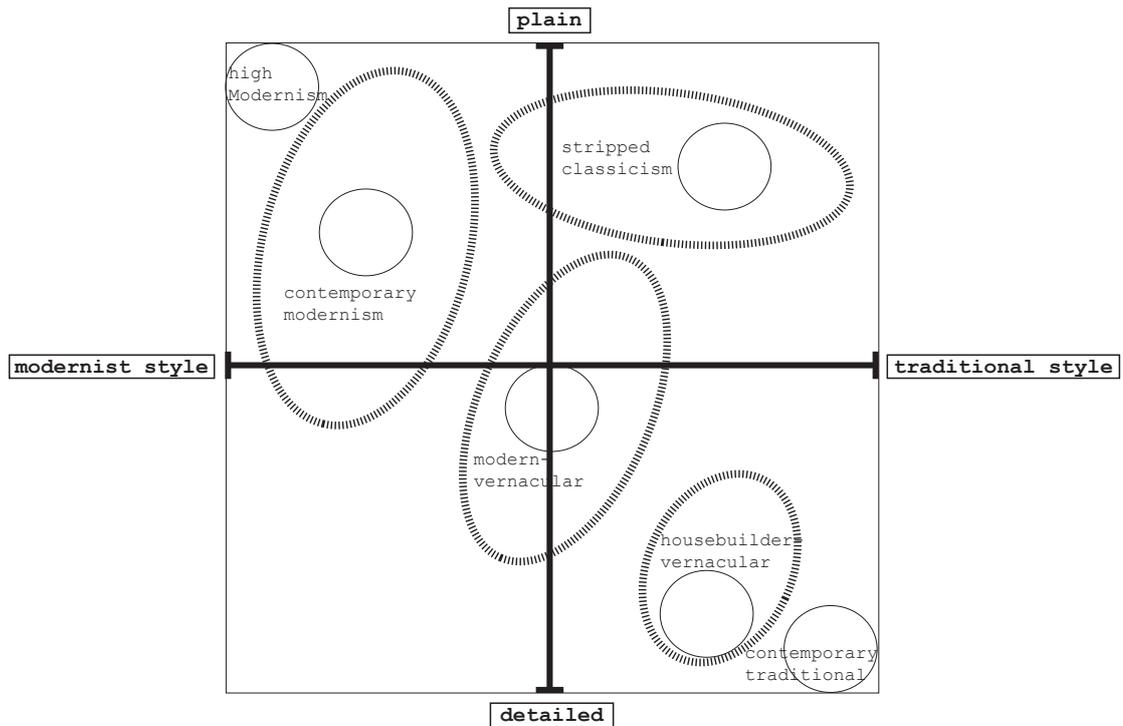


Figure 11.5 Diagram showing a suggested mapping of architectural styles in a style field created by the intersection of the plain-detailed and modernist-traditional taste preference axes.

High Modernism and contemporary traditional architecture occupy two cross-axial extremes. Contemporary modernism and housebuilder-vernacular occupy the opposing quadrants set up by these two poles. Modern-vernacular crosses the intersection of the axes, ranging in levels of detail and modernist approach. The relative emptiness of the modernist-detailed quadrant is revealing – notably, it is the quadrant that is contained by the elite and lay preferences, as illustrated by the trajectories of preferences in fig. 11.4. Moreover, it is to here that my preference survey findings point - towards homely, welcoming qualities in domestic façades along with an unfussy aesthetic of clean lines that does not mimic past styles. I propose that there is a taste-bridging style which could occupy this quadrant that has the strongest overlay of preferences of the architectural elite and lay public. I am calling this the *homely amodern* style, after Latour.

Just as Gombrich talks of ‘unclassical’ (1966, p. 90) for artistic traditions that neither chose nor rejected classicism and ‘anti-classical’ (1966, p. 90) for the rejection of classic values – in this case the modern avant-garde, Latour talks of ‘unmoderns’ and ‘antimoderns’ in the same terms, along with ‘premoderns’ (1993, p. 41). As discussed in chapter five, these are all defined in relation to the same root; of classicism in Gombrich’s case and moderns in Latour’s. As a reference to an alternative framework altogether, without either a modern or antimodern ideological motivation, Latour also introduces the term ‘amodern’ (1993, p. 47). It seems fitting to name a taste-bridging style outside of the reference field that has, in part, created the schism.

In figure 11.6 below, I locate this homely amodern style in the style field shown in figure 10.5. It could be argued to overlap with the modern-vernacular which brings a modernist sensibility to familiar vernacular forms, but for clarity I have kept them apart.

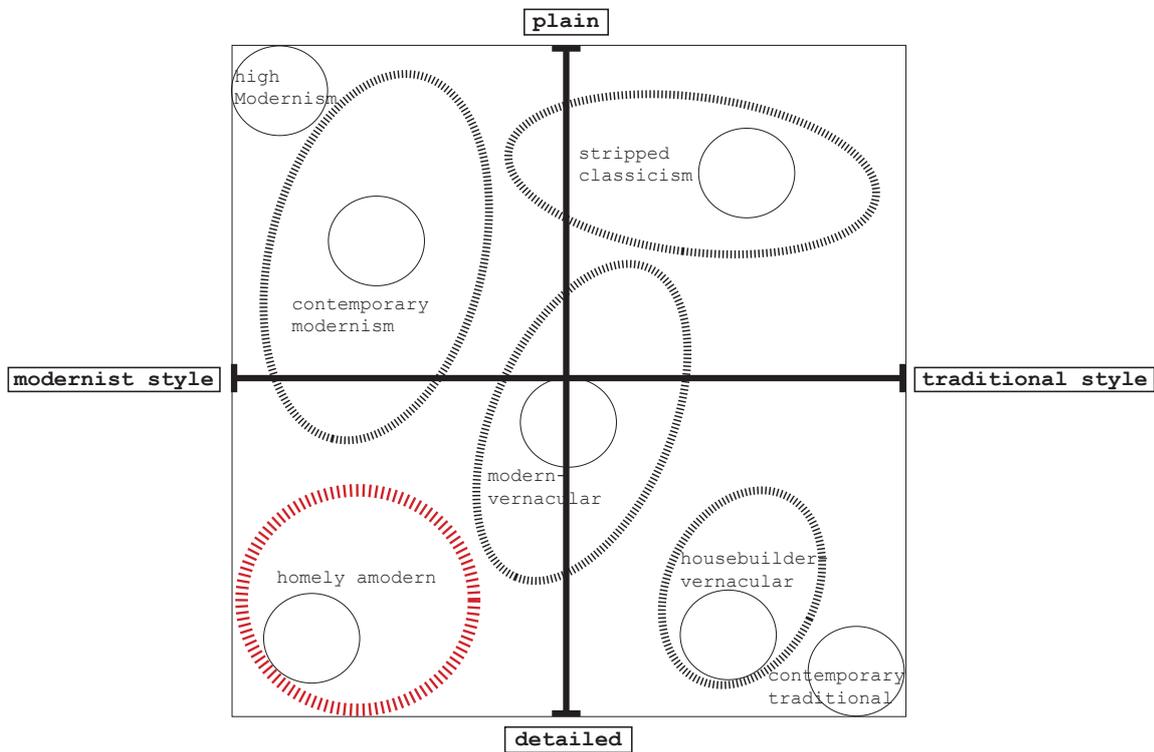


Figure 11.6 Diagram situating a proposed homely modern style in a field of the overlaid divides of detailed-plain and modernist style-traditional style.

As I raised in chapter four, I think that some architects have already started the journey towards such homely amodern domestic architecture, with a noticeable increase in playfulness, texture and detail in the best of new contemporary housing. Examples of this can be seen in the recent publications *Distinctively Local* (Pollard Thomas Edwards, PRP, HTA, & Proctor and Matthews, 2019) and *Ten Characteristics of Places Where People Want to Live* (RIBA, 2018a).



Figure 11.7 Examples of contemporary housing capturing the qualities of a homely amodern style by Proctor and Matthews at Horsted Park, left and, by Studio Partington at Derwenthorpe, right.

11.2

A framework for the discussion of taste

This thesis began with an unwillingness to accept that taste can never really be discussed in architectural circles due to its complexity. However imperfect, finding a language with which to discuss taste seems to me a vital first step in creating homes that people want and an inclusive built environment in which people feel a sense of pride and belonging. I contend that taste has become unmentionable in the architectural establishment primarily because of a problem of language, consequent of the collapse of a dominant architectural doctrine to serve as a benchmark for judgement. Pluralism flourished following the disgrace of much of the legacy of the Modernist project in the 1970s, with an abundance of different styles and approaches filling the canonical void (Jencks, 1988). One consequence of this divergence has been the loss both of a common ground of legitimacy, and a common, universal language for talking about appearance, style, beauty, aesthetics— what Habraken calls ‘forms of understanding’ (1997, p. 286). Such a plurality in architectural expression could not support a clear, clean, claim on objectivity in its variety of expressions. I see a framework for the discussion of taste as a step to being able to re-find a language to talk about what people like about buildings and how the tastes of more than just the elite can be met with the design expertise and judgement of the architectural profession.

The form of my proposed framework is to set out a structure in which to order the web of interconnecting factors that could have an impact on a taste judgement. I have formulated this framework through the synthesis of the research set out in this thesis. I have arranged it under

three distinct areas: the object of evaluation; the people making the evaluation; and the process of evaluation. The evolution of these areas is described above. Within each of these primary categories are a set of issues for consideration, each of which could influence or moderate a taste judgement to a greater or lesser extent. I set these out below and summarise the framework in figure 11.8 at the end of this section.

11.2.1 The object of evaluation

My first area for consideration of influences on taste judgements is the built form itself, that I call the object of evaluation. What it looks like – its directly perceived, visual attributes - will clearly impact on aesthetic judgements about it. Indirect judgements can also be made about its aesthetics in connection to aspects that relate to perceptions of performance, use and worth.

11.2.1.1 Direct attributes - visual

The visual characteristics of a building are what may commonly be thought of as constituting either the sole, or principal consideration of a taste judgement. They are certainly central to a taste judgement in that all of the other factors that I list take effect in relation to them. A building's visible attributes fall into two primary areas. On the one hand is composition of form, including: size and disposition of openings; their balance with extent of wall; and overall mass as perceived. On the other hand is treatment of surfaces, elements and features: their materials; colour; the use (or not) of decoration; and treatment of major elements such as windows, roof, porches.

11.2.1.2 Indirect attributes - practical

The perceived performance and function of a building as expressed in its visual appearance have been indicated in my survey analysis (chapter nine) to have some bearing on visual preferences. For example, the thought of likelihood of leaks can make a flat roof look unappealing and the usefulness of an overhanging porch can make an entrance look pleasing. The relevant functional aspects raised in the survey are: construction performance; maintenance implications; durability of a material or detail, and the use value of an element. This could include: roof form – with respect to performance, maintenance and use; window treatment – with respect to performance (daylight, thermal), use (ability to open) and maintenance; material – with respect to performance, durability and maintenance; and details and features – with respect to durability, maintenance and use.

A further aspect in this indirect attributes category that could be a factor of consideration, especially to homeowners, is the perceived effect of a particular aesthetic on the financial value of the property being judged. In his book on the semi-detached house, for example, Finn Jensen takes the view that a traditional style is a safe investment, “with little to recommend it other than its ordinariness” (2007, p. 224). As previously noted, there were some references in the survey responses to the styles either looking cheap or expensive, though less than other themes raised by respondents, and none directly about relative financial value.

11.2.2 The people evaluating

The second area for consideration on influences on taste judgements is the nature of the people who are evaluating the object: their preconditioned attitudes and demographic and psychological characteristics that will come to bear on their assessment of the visual and

practical attributes of the object/building under evaluation. I divide this area into four sub-categories: expert knowledge; learnt values; inherited values; and demographic and psychographic factors.

11.2.2.1 Expert knowledge

The specialist architectural knowledge and interest of an evaluator will have a bearing on their taste judgement. This will be held by but not limited to architects. It will not be the only factor, and may not be the overriding factor, of the judgement, but the research evidence that I set out in chapter seven indicates that expertise has a marked impact on evaluation. The details of the different mental evaluation processes that come into this, I discuss in the next section on the process.

11.2.2.2 Learnt values

Separate from the knowledge of expertise and its specific impact on judgements are the received values of the evaluator that can bring to bear a predetermined position about architectural aesthetics. This is linked to education and to interest. I have previously cited research that indicates a change in taste through the educational process of an architect. The results of my preference survey suggest that the impact of education on taste preferences is not limited to the study of architecture but extends to those working in design-related fields. These studies do not test the idea of values received through a design education. But education is instrumental in developing cultural capital, according to Bourdieu's thesis on elite and popular taste differences, discussed in chapter seven. Salience can impact on judgements as a level of engagement and interest in architecture can prime opinions. Expert knowledge is often associated with salience but they are not interdependent.

In chapter five, I argued that there are learnt values in architectural education and culture that amount to an ideology that prevails in the architectural establishment. I identified three key beliefs which inform the current orthodox position on taste. These centre around the ideas of *Zeitgeist*, progress through originality, and authenticity. As I set out in the last chapter, my preference survey did not directly reveal attitudes towards expressing the spirit of the age in contemporary design, nor the importance of progress in design. But responses indicated some antagonism towards imitative architectural styling exhibited in the traditional detail references of the housebuilder-vernacular example being tested, that I have argued stem from these root beliefs in the *Zeitgeist* and progress. Survey responses did explicitly support the argument that a belief in the superiority of authenticity strongly influences taste judgements, an interest that is not limited to architects.

11.2.2.3 Inherited values

In addition to formally received values are those that are informally received from an individual's socio-cultural milieu. This is captured by Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus described in chapter two. I call them inherited values for the sense that they are imbibed through a social sphere in contrast to those directly related to the aesthetic values learnt in formal education described above.

In chapter six I set out how values of continuity, stability and certainty connected to tradition (discussed in chapter four), contrast with those of originality, change and risk connected to modernity (discussed in chapter five). These are all affected by the interplay of familiarity, memory and associations. Survey responses did not address the intangible values of stability and change or certainty and risk, but did bring up themes of continuity and breaking with the

past, familiarity, memory and associations as influences of preference choices. These will visually mean different things to different people, as will a sense of connection, identity and belonging, and be dependent, in part, upon socio-culturally received values.

11.2.2.4 Demographic and psychographic factors

Demographic factors have been shown to have an impact on taste preferences. Some are linked to the formally and informally received values set out above as they have aspects directly connected to socio-economic conditions, for example education and location. In the preference survey I analysed age, gender, occupation and location and found statistically significant differences for each, though quite small for gender. Education, tenure, ethnicity and income could all also affect taste preferences, through their links with cultural capital, salience and habitus.

In addition to demographic factors are psychological criteria that affect attitudes which could predispose aesthetic judgements. In chapter two I set out a number of psychographic profiling models that classify people in accordance with certain core attitudes, noting that some of them were place oriented in their description. I did not explore this avenue further in this thesis but researchers on the impact of psychological dispositions on art preferences have found a correlation between personality trait and artistic preferences (for an overview and Big Five-based study, see Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2009) that suggests this could also be a factor in architectural taste preference.

11.2.3 The process of evaluation

The last area for consideration in the making of a framework is the impact of the evaluation process itself on taste judgements. This is linked to some of the factors that characterise the people making the evaluation, set out above. For example, in chapter seven I cited research in the fields of psychology and neuroscience that indicates that experts evaluate differently to nonexperts. Drawing on research into the mental process of an aesthetic experience described in chapter seven, and into processes of decision-making described in chapter six, I put forward four aspects of mental processing to consider: cognitive; perceptual; associative; and affective.

11.2.3.1 Cognitive

Cognitive mastering, described in chapter seven, is centred around knowledge and associated with expertise. Cognitive based evaluation puts a distance between the evaluator and the object of their evaluation. I have described this as an observer position (chapter seven). This puts emphasis on the qualities of the object in relation to the field of production in which it sits, and consequently has a significant impact on the resultant taste judgements. This type of evaluation is evident in expressions such as “level of detail. Balance of the elevation. Ratio of solid to transparent. Perceived weight of façade”, made here by an Architect in response to the question of what influenced the choice in façade style in my preference survey (chapter eight). Cognitive judgement could work in combination with the other three processing aspects.

11.2.3.2 Perceptual

The perceptual evaluation of an object is based on the direct response of the senses –the perception of its visual, aural, olfactory and tactile qualities. These can trigger cognitive, associative and/or affective processes and subsequent responses. The results of my preference survey (chapter eight) highlight the prevalence of perceptual evaluation in taste judgements.

Comments such as “the overall look, entrance door frame, window frame” and “colour of front of house; general visual appeal on first look; appearance of windows and frames” made here by non-architects on what influenced their choice in façade style in my preference survey (chapter eight) capture this type of evaluation.

11.2.3.3 Associative

Associative processes are semantic – they find referential meaning between the object being evaluated and previous memories, experiences and knowledge of other objects. I described research in chapter six that shows that the mind innately seeks associative coherence, often by attributing causal links to things with little evidence to do so. The results of my preference survey support the role of association in taste judgements (analysed in chapter ten). Without expert knowledge to draw on in an evaluation, associative meanings are more likely to have a stronger influence on a taste judgement. Comments such as “my mind associates flat roofed houses with grim 60s flats” and “memories of other houses, like my grandmother's” made here by non-architects denote this associative type of evaluation.

11.2.3.4 Affective

Evaluations can also be, to greater or lesser extent, affective – based on an emotional response to the object of evaluation. This may be connected to an associative, perceptual or cognitive understanding of it. For example, if the memory of being bought up in a similar looking house triggered a negative association and with that an aversion towards that aesthetic. I described in chapter seven the participant position that is associated with affective responses, that requires a level of emotional engagement with the object. This type of response is evident in my preference survey findings, which I identified as one of four response types (chapter eight) and is reflected in comments such as “I hate flat roofs they are nothing but trouble” and “framed windows makes the house more inviting”, made here by non-architects on the influences for their choice of roof and façade style respectively.

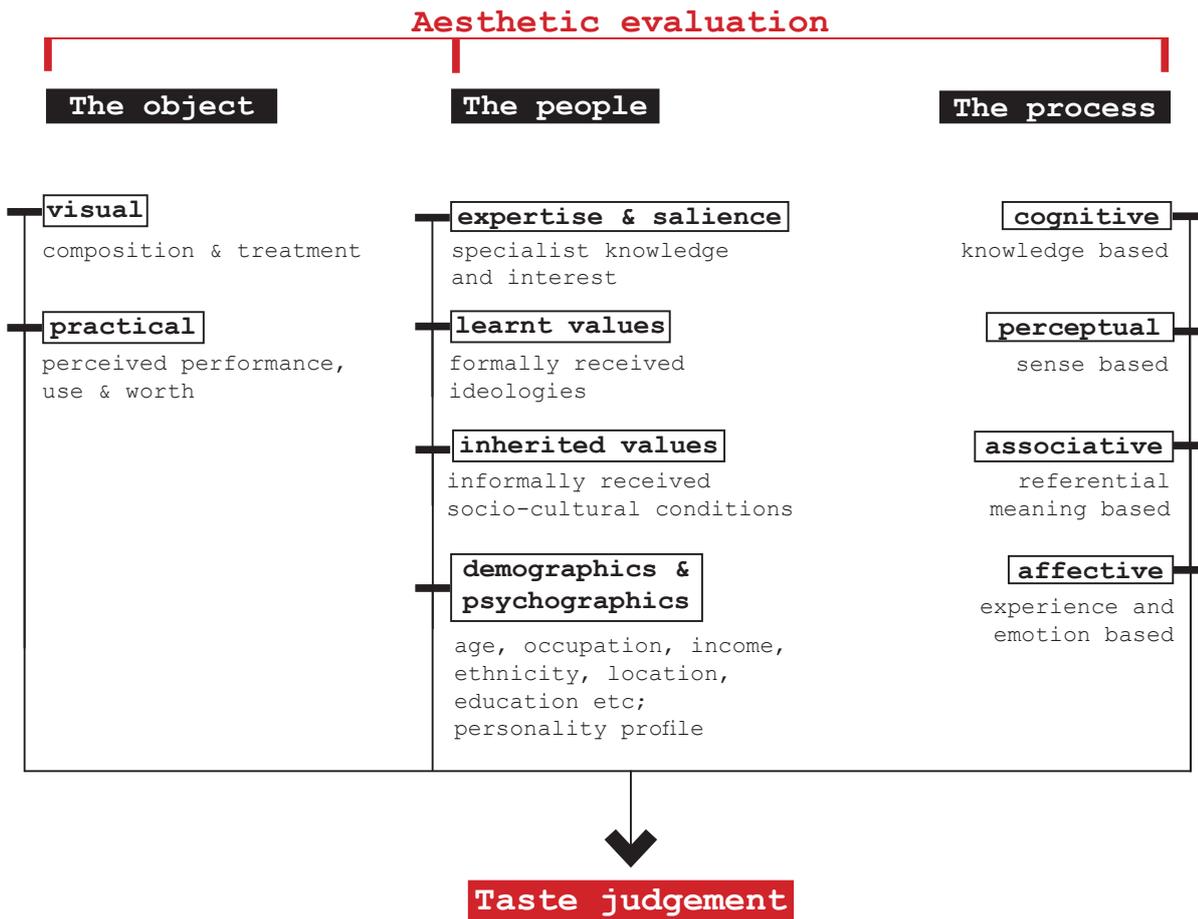


Figure 11.8 Diagram of proposed framework for discussing taste.

11.3 Reflections on the research

There has been a demonstrable impasse in the consideration of taste by the architectural establishment, especially in the housing debate, but there are signs that this is now changing. The Building Better Building Beautiful commission, established in November 2018, is currently endeavouring to define what beauty means in housing and how to deliver it in new developments. Communities Secretary James Brokenshire has linked building beautifully with building more - “the biggest idea in a generation” (MHCLG & Brokenshire, 2018) in the view of Dean Godson, director of Policy Exchange, which has been promoting a debate about beauty in events and publications since the Government announcement. That remains to be seen. More

significant, in my view, is the stated ambition of this commission to “raise the level of debate regarding the importance of beauty in the built environment” (MHCLG & Brokenshire, 2018). This research is timely in contributing something to this emerging discussion. Moreover, the framework I have formulated forms a useful means of structuring the enquiry into what beautiful housing means to people – the first step in creating new homes that people *want* to live in and housing developments that people would be happy to see in their communities.

I hope that this research aides constructive self-reflection in the profession, free of anxiety about status; that it sparks an interest in the tastes, and the yearnings that inform them, of those outside of the resilient ideological bubble that the profession inhabits. Despite the passing of the dogmatic days of Modernism, and the rich spectrum of expression in contemporary architectural practice (that I have crudely corralled together here under the banner of modernism) there is still a strong ideological undercurrent that is so normalised in architectural culture that it is little challenged, other than by the traditionalist outliers. This is a recognised characteristic of groupthink. It is not so much the opening of Banham’s black box (discussed in chapter seven) that I would like to see, but more stepping outside of it and looking beyond its confines. Whilst I have proposed the exploration of a new homely amodern style, I have also noted that the characteristics I describe for it are much present in some of the new housing designed in recent years. More important in what I am proposing is a new way of thinking about style, that comes out of a more situated awareness of the learnt and inherited values that come to bear on aesthetic judgement.

My research journey has not been linear, or straightforward. It has been a challenge as well as a joy traversing such a varied terrain of specialist disciplines as diverse as environmental psychology and cultural theory, grappling with the intricacies of statistical analysis alongside the complexities of aesthetic theories. This breadth is, I hope the strength of the research, but it also represents its limitations. I have chanced skating on the surface of the deep pools of others’ knowledge and wisdom, with the risk of misunderstanding or misrepresenting them from my vantage point of just-passing-through. But I am not sure that I would do much differently if given my time again. The survey became a bigger part of my research than I had anticipated. Knowing that I would have considered more options for getting a randomised sample, though it is a perennial issue for individual researchers without access to expensive market research databases. I would also have asked slightly different questions. For example, asking if respondents liked either of the options in addition to their preferences; omitting the windows section; and instead running a reverse test based on manipulated images of a modernist designed house as the control option to see if that affected the results. But I hope to address both of these issues in follow-on research.

Epilogue

I set out to explore the nature of the difference between elite and popular preferences in visual attitudes driven by a curiosity about how different taste can be for people. I wanted to better understand popular taste that seemed to be epitomised by the characteristic style of the volume-built house that is a standard feature of the British suburban landscape, acutely conscious that it is a taste I do not share. I wanted to understand why. The perspectives of experts and lay people are fundamentally different – experts filter things through a detaching lens of expertise and lose the aptitude of just feeling. I have realised through the course of this research that it is us, the architectural elite that we need to understand first before we can consider how our preferences differ from the lay public. My perspective shifted from looking at the lay public with bemused interest to looking more at my own elite coterie with that same inquisitiveness and wonder. And so it was that the title of this thesis switched from a study of *popular* taste to one of *unpopular* taste.

In the process of researching, reflecting and writing this thesis my eyes have been opened once more; once again looking beyond the surface of things as I have become used to seeing them, and sending relentless, seemingly simplistic questions to my adult brain that had become immune to the way things were both inside and outside of my protective professional bubble. It has been a challenge, in the way that self-enquiry is, and in the way of challenges it has left its mark. It has introduced an element of personal conflict. I am a practiced aesthete with strong views on beauty. My aesthetic pleasures I do not think have changed - my eye still thrills to compositional play - but my judgements have. Kant's discerning observation that we do not just judge for ourselves, but for all, as if beauty "were a property of things" (Kant, 1790, p. 98) *demanding* others' agreement and delivering censure if they judge differently, holds me and duly niggles at my sense of surety. I feel the strength of this belief in my architectural taste, but have become very conscious that it is a conditioned me that holds the judgements, and therefore demanding the agreement of others feels somewhat short-sighted and arrogant. But it is liberating to recognise this process - the tacit insistence we make that others should agree with our own, implicitly *good*, taste. So rather than endlessly debate the value issue of taste, I have come to see that it is more constructive to think in different terms - to instead conceptualise a sea of tastes with various shoals of influence that can fluidly move from place to place, unattached to a single territory.

This research feels like the beginning of an investigation and thought journey. As such, there are many questions still left unanswered and ample work to do to understand taste better. But the questions this thesis has raised continue to push against my comfort zone, keeping my eyes open.

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Figure 10.1 Three possible schisms diagram, by author.

Figure 10..2

Taste attitudes associated with learnt values and inherited values diagram, by author.

Figure 10.3

Ideological sins and socio-cultural draws of the housebuilder-vernacular style diagram, by author.

Figure 10.4

Website marketing material for new homes (Taylor Wimpey, 2019).

Figure 10.5

Pasted screenshot of B&Q basin mixer taps (B&Q, 2019), by author.

Conclusion

Figure 11.1

Overlay of two taste schisms diagram, by author.

Figure 11.2

Understanding the elite-popular taste schism diagram, by author.

Figure 11.3

Closing the taste gap diagram, by author.

Figure 11.4

Trajectories of elite and popular taste diagram, by author.

Figure 11.5

Mapping of architectural styles diagram, by author.

Figure 11.6

Situating a homely amodern style diagram, by author.

Figure 11.7

Studio Partington at Derwenthorpe, photograph © Tim Crocker; Proctor and Matthews at Horsted Park, photograph © Tim Crocker.

Figure 11.8

A framework for discussing taste diagram, by author.

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