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Author(s): Elizabeth B. Silva and David Wright

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## **Displaying desire and distinction in housing**

Elizabeth Silva and David Wright

### **Abstract**

The paper discusses the significance of cultural capital for the understanding of the field of housing in contemporary Britain. It explores the relationship between housing and the position of individuals in social space mapped out by means of a multiple correspondence analysis. It considers the material aspects of housing and the changing contexts that are linked to the creation and display of desire for social position and distinction expressed in talk about home decoration as personal expression and individuals' ideas of a 'dream house'. It is based on an empirical investigation of taste and lifestyle using nationally representative survey data and qualitative interviews. The paper shows that personal resources and the imagination of home are linked to levels of cultural capital, and rich methods of investigation are required to grasp the significance of these normally invisible assets to broaden the academic understanding of the field of housing in contemporary culture.

**Keywords:** Bourdieu, culture, cultural capital, house, housing, domestic space, distinction, 'dream house'

### **Introduction**

[The house is] a material good which (like clothing) is exposed to the general gaze, and is so *on a lasting basis*, this form of property expresses or betrays, in a more decisive way than many other goods, the social being of its owners, the extent of their 'means', as we say; but it also reveals their taste, the classification system they deploy in their acts of appropriation and which, in assuming objective form in visible goods, provides a purchase for the symbolic appropriation of others, who are thereby enabled to situate the owners in social space by situating them within the space of tastes (Bourdieu, 2005:19).

'House' has a meaning that goes far beyond mere physical structure. It encompasses many economic, social, historical and cultural concerns. As in most western societies, in contemporary Britain houses are durable implying that those built for one particular social order will later have to fit different social conditions because the social structure of housing is inherited from earlier generations. While some people experience new housing, and some design and build their own houses, it is mostly in already existing material dwelling spaces – converted, renovated, modified or conserved - that human everyday life is experienced. Nearly 40 percent of current accommodation in Britain was built before the Second World War, which is a large number considering the damage the war created on the housing stock. Only 16 per cent was built in the last two decades (*Social Trends* 2005: table 10.2), although this varies by region, with London having the oldest stock. Past actions thus mark the social contexts of the considerable economic and affective investments found in contemporary housing.

Chris Hamnett (1995) suggests that the housing consumption of an individual or household is primarily a product of their purchasing power, and hence of their past and present position in the labour market, inherited wealth and other forms of finance, but that the size, quality and cost of housing are a key element of household consumption, social inequality and household life-chances. Housing choices are, therefore, reflective and constitutive of the broader economic context in which they are made, a point of considerable importance in the early years of the twenty-first century where house prices are used as indicators of more general economic and social well-being. For instance, in 2006 the average dwelling price was over three and a half times the average annual income for first time buyers compared with two and a

half times in 1996 (*Social Trends*, 2008: 136). These factors affect living conditions including housing tenure, the type of home and maintenance quality, satisfaction with the area lived and so on.

Shifts in type of tenure, for example from private renting, which predominated in Britain at the turn of the twentieth century, to owner occupation, which predominates nowadays, have been historically coterminous with changing conceptions of class (Saunders 1999). In the UK, in particular, such changes have been driven by shifts in the field of politics as much as in economics. The passing of the Housing Act by the first Thatcher government in 1980 began a process of ‘privatisation’ of housing in which the assets and risks of managing housing stock have been passed from the state to the individual home-owner mediated by financial markets. The survey data we draw from in this paper reflects this prevalence of owner-occupation of housing provision as 72 percent of the survey sample live in owner occupied accommodation: 29 percent own their homes outright, 43 percent own with a mortgage, 16 percent live in some form of socially provided housing and only 9 percent rent privately. This distribution closely follows official national level data (ONS, 2007, *Social Trends*, 2008: Table 10.5), which also show that ethnicity and type of household have a great impact upon this form of ownership.

When a house is purchased it is expected to outlive its owners and become a transmissible heritage. As lived in it is expected to afford immediate comfort and satisfaction. House is not synonymous with home, yet there is a close counterpoint between them, and they are often used interchangeably. The introductory quote by Pierre Bourdieu identifies the imbrications of the two concepts. In *The Social*

*Structures of the Economy*, focused on the field of housing, Bourdieu refers to the house as a site of the ‘mythopoetic’ (cf. Cassirer, 1968). It is the object of a whole set of verbal exchanges, of delighted comments on improvements accomplished or to be accomplished, or practical activities, such as do-it-yourself which, as ‘... demiurgic interventions contribute to transmuting the mere technical object, which is always neutral and impersonal, and often disappointing and inadequate, into a kind of irreplaceable, sacred reality’ (Bourdieu, 2005: 24). Yet, ‘... in this field as elsewhere, experiences and expectations are differentiated, and are so according to a principle which is simply that of the position occupied in social space.’ (Bourdieu, 2005: 25). Bourdieu’s exploration of the ways in which housing policies are shaped by the interests of developers, banks and policy makers, has particular resonance in the contemporary British context,<sup>1</sup> as we discuss. Alongside these, though, we consider how the assumptions he makes about the field of housing are reflected in people’s imagination and desire in relation to their own dwelling and the presumed homology between social space and housing experience.

We base our reflections upon an extensive investigation of ‘Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion’ (CCSE), which considered actual housing (location of dwelling, type of ownership, conditions of presentation, decoration) and the housing imagination as one element of a broader study of contemporary tastes.<sup>2</sup> The data used in this paper refer to questions explored in a quantitative survey questionnaire applied to a main sample of 1564 individuals, representative of the British population, and an ethnic boost of 227 respondents, added to the exploration of 30 households, involving 44 qualitative interviews carried out with a theoretically designed sample, selected mainly from among the survey respondents, designed to explore in detail particular

aspects covered in the original survey questionnaire.<sup>3</sup> From the main sample we interviewed 22 individuals in their own homes, and some of their partners. We use these interviews to explore - by means of a multiple correspondence analysis (MCA), which we describe below, showing how individuals are positioned in the 'space of lifestyles' - 'housing' position both in terms of material conditions and the 'dream home'. The paper also draws from observation notes made by interviewers about aspects of location of dwelling, housing and decoration.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper we begin by exploring how tenure, regarding forms of ownership and type of accommodation, relates to social position. In the second section we present our methods of investigation, relating position in social space to the position of specific research participants, using these positions to consider the relative importance of cultural capital in shaping attitudes to the home as aesthetic or functional space, in the light of discussions with participants about home decoration (third section) and the idea of a 'dream house' (fourth section). To conclude, we consider how processes of social distinction and lifestyles relate to houses and homes, and we also look at the ways in which idealizations – supposedly unconstrained – are affected by the individual's position in social space, stressing the contribution that these considerations have for sociology's engagement with housing as a cultural product.

### **Social Positions and Housing**

As part of his sketch of the sociology of everyday practices Michel DeCerteau, echoing Bourdieu, but from a perspective of an investigator of the material aspects of houses rather than of social stratification, reflects on the strong link between social

position and housing that characterises the home as an indiscreet symbol of both income and aspiration:

Everything about it always speaks too much: its location in the city, the building's architecture, the layout of the rooms, the creature comforts, the good or bad taken care of it. Here then is the faithful and talkative indicator about which all inquisitors dream (DeCerteau et al., 1998: 146).

The current dominance of home ownership in Britain appears to have been 'normalised' (Gurney 1999). Owning a home has become a norm, the classificatory power of ownership per se diminished accordingly. Yet, home, as acquisition and as lived space, remains an important variable in class analysis. The material and the symbolic positions of the price of houses as socio-economic indicators reflect the conception of the house as not simply an investment for the future, or for future generations but, through the role of equity, a source of actual wealth in the present, necessitating particular forms of care, maintenance and display. Bourdieu (2005) refers to the notion of 'technical capital' as a particular kind of cultural capital applied to house ownership. He conceptualises it as 'the capital of the DIYer' specifically located within skilled workers with technical qualifications. This is presented as a predominantly male possession. However, in the context of care, maintenance and display of houses more than the activities predominantly associated with building or male expertise are involved. As one of us has argued previously, Bourdieu has numerous limitations in his understanding of home and the domestic (Silva 2005b). His theory is more salient for public activities than private ones. This is reflected in the presumed gendered nature of his concept of technical capital. Nevertheless, the

ability to build or maintain the physical stock of a house defined as a form of capital is not exclusively male. Moreover, skills involved in domestic maintenance (possessed by both men and women, but predominantly by women), as well as forms of creativity and aesthetic judgements that add value to a property and to the living experience in the home, not recognized as ‘capital’, constitute a form of asset that can be cashed in. Clearly, the décor of the home is significant as a means of ‘adding value’, which in turn affects the ability to accumulate capital (economic and cultural). In our interviews, the tendency across social classes was for decisions on home decoration and design to be made almost exclusively by women, and we elaborate further on this later.

The class contours of home ownership are predictable. The higher the occupational class the higher is the proportion of individuals who own their houses (Table 1). The decrease from 94 percent ownership among employers and those in higher managerial occupations to 50 percent among routine workers is gradual and nearly perfect. ‘Social rent’ presents a near perfect reverse trend with those in lower level of occupations – semi-routine and routine workers – making up the majority in this form of tenure. These trends are corroborated in the analysis of form of tenure and educational levels showing a significant correlation at the extremes of the scale (Table 2). Those who are ‘social tenants’ mainly have an educational level below GCSE or ‘other’, mainly ‘foreign’, qualifications for which equivalents were not classified. Conversely, those with formal education are more likely to be owners in greater numbers and constitute a larger proportion of mortgagees, being logically more likely to fit the criteria of mortgage lenders. Beneficiaries of ‘rent free’ accommodation are more common among the higher educated, and significant among higher



professionals. Some of these are probably young people in transition from the parental home, or a parent-owned property, to a place of their own.

Table 1  
**Tenancy and educational level**

Education	Own			Rent private (%)	Rent social (%)	Rent free (%)	Total 100% (n)(**)
	Outright (%)	Mortgage (%)	Sub-total (%) (*)				
None	37.9	22.7	61.6	8.4	27.9	0.7	(418)
GCSE	21.4	51.2	77.4	7.0	17.7	0.8	(373)
A level	24.2	51.7	76.4	10.1	11.4	1.9	(211)
Higher diploma	36.1	45.6	81.7	8.9	8.3		(169)
High education	25.8	54.0	80.3	12.9	4.7	2.2	(365)
Other	32.1	14.3	50.	10.7	32.1	3.6	(28)
Total	29.0	43.0	72.6	9.4	15.8	1.2	100.0 (1564)

(\*) includes 0.6% with shared ownership.

(\*\*) includes 1.0% of 'other'.

Table 2  
**Tenancy and occupational class**

<b>Occupational class</b>	<b>Own</b>			<b>Rent private (%)</b>	<b>Rent social (%)</b>	<b>Rent free (%)</b>	<b>Total 100% (n)(**)</b>
	<b>Outright (%)</b>	<b>Mortgage (%)</b>	<b>Sub-total (%) (*)</b>				
Employers/ Highmanagerial	32.1	61.3	93.5	3.2	3.2	-	(31)
Higher professionals	26.0	57.3	83.3	11.5	1.0	4.2	(96)
Lower professionals	29.1	52.3	82.7	9.7	6.3	0.8	(237)
Lower Managerial	25.0	57.5	85.0	3.8	11.3	-	(80)
Higher Supervisory	38.0	46.5	84.5	4.2	9.9	1.4	(71)
Intermediate	36.9	44.4	81.8	6.4	9.1	1.1	(187)
Employers small organizations	29.2	52.2	81.4	6.2	9.7	-	(113)
Lower supervisory	33.6	40.8	75.2	8.0	16.0	0.8	(125)
Lower technical	36.5	28.6	68.3	11.1	17.5	3.2	(63)
Semi-routine	26.0	36.8	62.8	11.8	21.7	1.9	(320)
Routine	23.4	25.9	50.0	13.4	35.8	0.5	(201)
Never worked	15.0	32.5	47.5	15.0	32.5	5.0	(40)
<b>Total</b>	<b>29.0</b>	<b>43.0</b>	<b>72.6</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>15.8</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>100.0 (1564)</b>

(\*) includes 0.6% with shared ownership.

(\*\*) includes 1.0% of 'other'.

As Figure 1 shows, three occupational subgroups are identified with particular types of house ownership:<sup>5</sup> (1) the first three highest occupations, (2) the second group of three, and (3) the following six lower levels. Within each subgroup a very similar trend of housing consumption takes place, in which those in higher occupations in the subgroups occupy a larger proportion of detached housing. Employers or managers are more likely to live in detached houses. Terraced housing is more prominent among the lower occupational classes. There is also a nearly perfect correspondence between more upmarket types of accommodation and higher education (Figure 2).

Figure 1

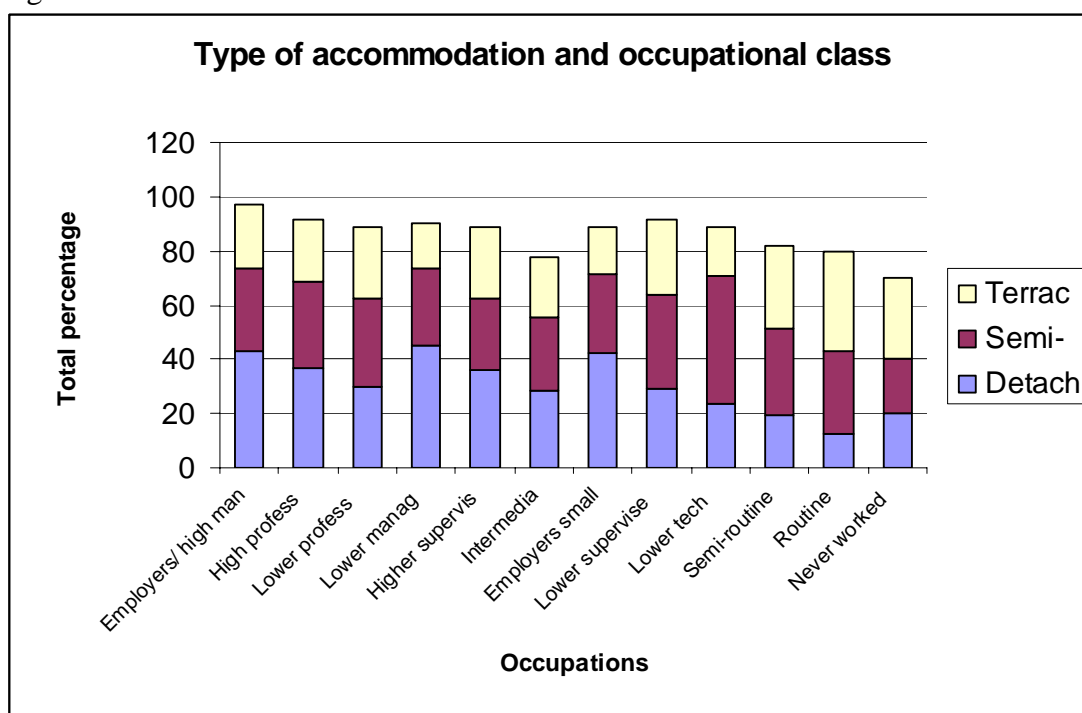
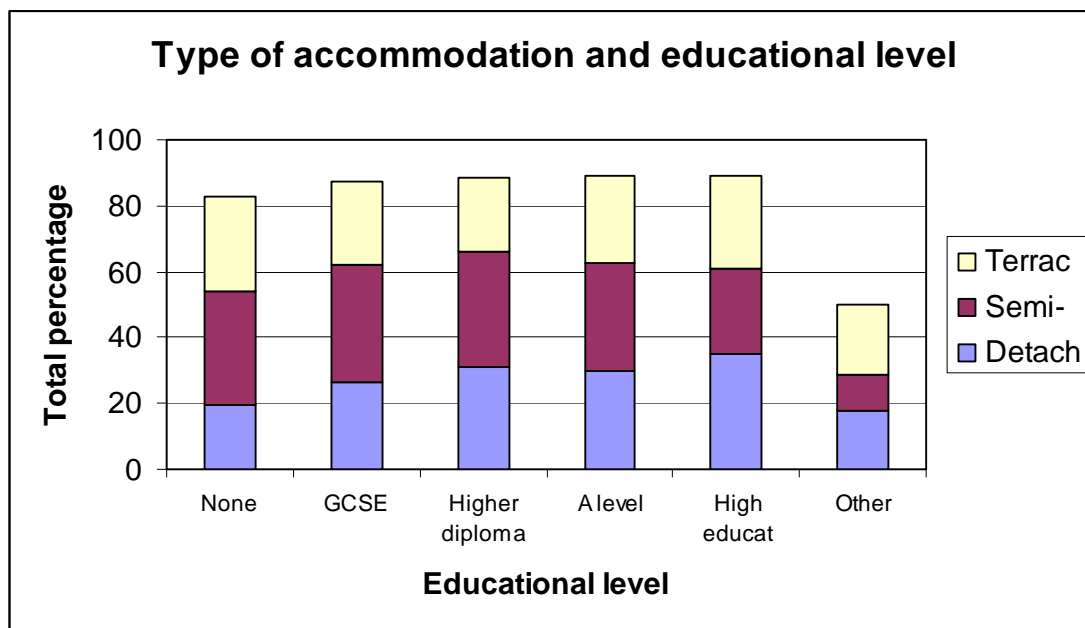


Figure2



In the qualitative part of our study, we find that among the 30 households selected to fit a theoretical sample for which housing was not a variable, 7 are tenants, and, among the owners, 5 have built their own homes. The tenants tend to be poorer in both economic and cultural capital, though there are significant gradations in the group. Those who have built their houses live in rural areas or suburban areas close to towns, in Wales, Northern Ireland and the Scottish Border. On the whole they appear to constitute a group of medium to high economic and cultural capital with, as Bourdieu would have predicted, technical skills accrued through educational and work experiences which enabled them to invest in self constructing their homes.

Our findings illustrate here a clear, and largely predictable, relationship between housing tenure and type with class indicators in contemporary Britain. We build on, and complicate this in the following sections by revealing the shared and disparate attitudes to housing, as asset, or as functional space, revealed by our household

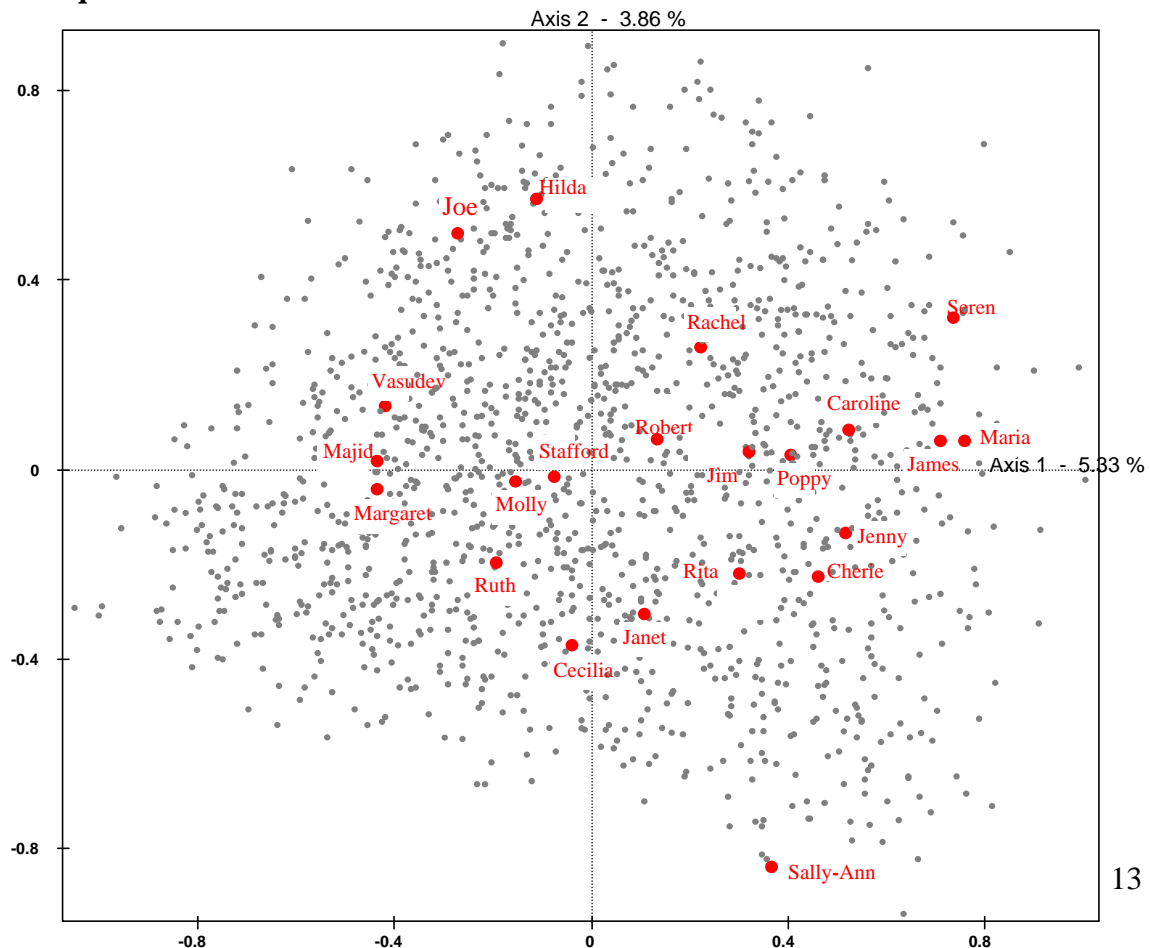
interviews. We begin by outlining our methodological approach to these qualitative interviews regarding the survey indicators of social position in the space of lifestyles.

### **Exploring the Social Space of Housing**

Our survey on ‘Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion’ was designed to provide evidence about cultural taste, participation and knowledge across the fields of music, reading, visual art, media, and sport and eating out (as ‘embodiment’) in relation to a range of socio-economic variables. One way of analysing the relationship between individual choices in these various fields is by means of a multiple correspondence analysis, a method that Bourdieu (1984) used in *Distinction*. This is a form of principal components analysis which allows the plotting of people’s cultural preferences in Euclidian space.<sup>6</sup> Figure 3 locates 1529 individuals selected by means of a representative sample of the UK population plotted according to their levels of engagement in selected cultural activities. These are respondents from the main sample of our survey, positioned according to their responses to 168 questions on cultural taste and participation, spread across the five cultural fields. We refer to this as a ‘cloud of individuals’. It shows how respondents are positioned in relation to one another: who goes together with whom because they do and like the same things. To summarise briefly, on the right hand-side are survey respondents who are more connected to forms of publicly organised cultural participation (theatre, museums, galleries, the traditional venues of legitimate culture), whilst on the left are those whose cultural tastes are centred on the home itself, predominantly through television.

The superimposition of socio-demographic characteristics upon this space indicates, predictably, that those who are highly educated and who occupy higher social class positions are further to the right. Those positioned on the left have, generally, lower occupational and educational levels. Younger individuals are concentrated at the top of the ‘cloud’ and older ones at the bottom. We found that age is a powerful indicator of position in social space. Figure 3 also shows the positions of the 22 survey respondents we followed up with interviews in their own homes. We also interviewed their partners, when relevant. Considering housing tenure in figure 3, the vertical axis divides between the larger concentration of individuals we interviewed who own their own houses, mostly with mortgages (8 out of 10), on the right, and a predominance of renters (4 out of 6) on the left. This is reassuring, and a further indication that the position of individuals in this space of lifestyles, drawn quantitatively, is corroborated and qualified by qualitative evidence.

Figure 3  
**MCA: social position of survey respondents in cultural space and identification of qualitative interviewees<sup>7</sup>**



A key benefit of the visualisation approach permitted by the MCA is that it allows us to identify individuals and explore the types of social distance that might be revealed by their differences in taste and lifestyle. To take an example: in the MCA cloud James Foot is in a diametrically opposite section of the social space to Ruth Richards. The former is in a household consisting of two professionals (a university lecturer and a hospital consultant) and their young family. They own their own home, with a mortgage, and have an annual household income over £80,000. The latter is a pensioner who had lived all her life in a variety of social housing in various regions of Glasgow, and had lived in her current flat, due to be demolished, for 14 years. In the former case the house is a source of particular pride and satisfaction while for the latter it is a thing to be endured, without much sense of agency through which to change things. While Susan Mirza, James's partner, displays her satisfaction saying 'I can't imagine wanting anything more than this, really', Ruth, by contrast, tells of a host of problems with her house and her estate:

These ones are quite damp.... I think it was lying empty when they rewired all the other houses and we came along and got this one, it had been rewired, they've all got central heating and everything. It's crap! ...I've only got one heater because the people before me took all the heaters out and dumped them.

Next, we further explore social position in relation to the ways in which taste, distinction and the imagination of the place of the home are presented across the 'cloud of individuals'. We firstly explore notions of style within the home, and secondly the idea of 'the dream house'.

## **‘Style’ In The Home**

Home decoration and style is big business in the contemporary UK. The shift from social housing to private (often mortgaged) ownership as the dominant mode of tenure in Britain has been accompanied by a thriving retail industry dedicated to the provision of stylish and affordable home décor. The cultural imagination of the contemporary British home owner has also been shaped by the rise of the notion of ‘lifestyle’ in current print and broadcast media. Public service broadcasting in particular, in the nineties and noughties, has, via such make-over programmes as the BBC’s *Changing Rooms* and *Ground Force* and property-investment advice programmes such as Channel 4’s *Property Ladder*, colluded in its traditional Reithian inspired desire to ‘improve’ its audience, with a practical imperative for them to improve their homes (Brunsdon, 2003; Moseley, 2000). These provided the cultural context in which our survey questions about ideal styles or forms of home decoration were asked.

The most commonly selected characteristic of an ideal home, being chosen by some 37 percent of the sample was ‘cleanliness’, followed by ‘comfortable’, chosen by 24 percent. Characteristics which might point to an aesthetic orientation, such as ‘well-designed’ or ‘elegant’, were chosen by only 5 percent and 2 percent respectively. Researching qualitatively we were also granted access to people’s homes, getting an insider’s view, however partial, of styles of accommodation and a clearer sense of orientations to home and house. From across the range of social backgrounds, when individuals were asked in the interviews about what mattered in their homes they privileged questions of cleanliness and tidiness over questions of style, echoing the



survey findings. However, the interviews allowed us to probe these orientations and explore subtle distinctions in relation to questions of display where the home as a thing to be viewed emerges with great importance. Two clear forms of relationship are evident: the home as an 'evolving' asset (expressing the 'person', her/his aspirations for mobility), and the notion of home as a 'functional' space. The notion of house as 'evolving' is limited to interviewees within professional groups who are owner occupiers (mainly with mortgages), and whose place is on the right of the space of lifestyles in figure 3.

Caroline Alcock, a recent graduate who has recently taken a mortgage out with her partner on a house in need of considerable renovation, and a keen follower of the home improvement television programmes that abound in Britain at the beginning of the twenty-first century, expresses the importance and enjoyment of working on the interior of the house.

Caroline: Well, in terms of home, I think it's quite important, you know? For example, decoration and furnishing... Yes, that's something I'm looking forward to once all the structural work is done. It's, it's sort of having more of the say in, in the décor side of things.

Interviewer: What does it mean to you, do you think? Why is it important to you?

Caroline: I think, it's sort of part of expressing your personality. Possibly it's sort of nice and welcoming for visitors to come into.

This notion contrasts sharply with ideas about ‘taking us as they find us’ which is found among a number of interviewees, mostly poorer in cultural capital, and sometimes also in economic capital. On a slightly diagonal opposite to Caroline, towards the south of figure 3, replicating the relationship from those on the right to those on the left which we discussed above, Cecilia O’Conner, a social housing tenant in South Wales says:

Oh, I think as long as it’s comfortable, it’s clean, then it’s okay. I’m not up to all this ‘You’ve got have it because next door got have it or Joe Bloggs got it so, you’ve got to have it’ and I’m not up to that. And as long as my house is clean, don’t smell, it’s tidy, it’s lived in then my deco’s fine with me. And anybody that comes in through the door, if they likes me, they likes me. If they don’t likes me, they knows where my front door is.

The case of Joe Smith, placed also on the left of the space of lifestyles, but on the north side where the younger prevail, is similarly instructive. Joe is an electrician and site manager, Edie, his wife, is a reconciliations clerk. They both left school at sixteen. They have recently bought their house in the village in the south of England where Joe was born and brought up, and where Joe’s parents and sister also live. Edie explores the tension between a vision of the home as an aesthetic object and a functional space, suggesting ‘...a home should be a home as well, something nice to look at but I don’t want people to come and be scared to sit on the sofa. Yeah, something comfy, to snuggle up and watch a good film on’. She views her home as functional and Joe agrees: ‘As a home thing, it’s trying to keep it clean, but if anyone comes round, they take us as they find us. It’s our home. We enjoy it as it is.’

The different visions of the home here expressed are for James and Susan, as well as for Caroline, an evolving and accumulating resource whereas, for Cecilia, Joe and Edie, it is a functional and practical one. These do not map onto tenure type per se, but they reflect different levels of cultural capital. The evolving position, typical among those on the right of the MCA signals the home as a setting for signs of life lived elsewhere, whereas for those positioned on the left, mainly working class, the home appears as a place to be and do in, rather than as a stage prepared to support a set of performances directed to audiences outside the immediate network of kith and kin (Bennett et al. 1999).

In broad terms, we see a tension emerging between, on the one hand, those who see their homes as functional space (and who are likely to have much of their cultural lives centred around their homes) and those whose cultural life is more likely to involve pursuits outside the home, for whom the home itself is viewed both aesthetically and as an asset to be worked on and improved. These cases also point to some tension between ownership, conceptualised as the ‘normal’ mode of tenure, to which we referred above, and different understandings of what goes along with other forms of tenure. For some, such as Edie and Joe, young, working class and rooted in a rural location, home is connected, as Bourdieu has it, with fertility strategies – ‘putting down roots’ within networks of support, without much thought given to the house itself as an economic resource. They own their home but, although happier with the quality of their dwelling, they have a similar relation to it as Cecilia, a social tenant in an estate, similarly surrounded by her family. For others such as Caroline, a recent graduate and aspirational young professional setting up home with her partner,

the house is a thing to be owned and moulded. James and Susan, older and considerably better off, have a more relaxed attitude regarding improvements on their property asset. An interesting tension emerges here between the characteristics required of contemporary professional life, particularly for younger professionals like Caroline, notably flexibility and mobility, and the long-term financial commitment associated with the ownership of a home. Decoration as expression of personality is caught up with home-improvement as providing the means for a more easily transferable and convertible capital asset.

In our exploration of the space of lifestyles we take issue with Bourdieu's association of the Kantian aesthetic notion of disinterestedness and the detached gaze of the bourgeoisie, contrasted to the culture of the necessary and the presumed conformism of the working class. This is because we found when mapping the cultural engagements of Britons in 2003 that the structure of the cultural order is different from that described in *Distinction* for 1960s France. British class divisions are delineated less by the selection of cultural content (appreciation of legitimate, traditional, established items rather than attachment to the functional and necessary) and more by the orientation towards cultural consumption (the engagement with publicly supported activities rather than the more local and home based orientation and practice). In relation to housing these orientations take shape as two opposing identifications of the home and the self: on the one hand, as a source of investment (to be cashed in but to reflect and enhance assets of social position), and on the other hand, functioning as an enabler of an orientation towards local and private cultural engagement (socializing with family, friends and work colleagues, viewing television, or attending local and community oriented events and activities).

Working-class individuals tend towards the local/private and functional orientation, aligned with their local and home-based engagements, whereas middle-class householders lean towards the idea of the house as ‘evolving’ and expressing their own aspiring mobility. This distinction is particularly relevant in contemporary Britain in light of the emphasis on a ‘gentrification’ aesthetic that prevails in the housing market (Butler 2003), where home appears as an active instrument for changing social position. This is couched in the language and expressions of consumer choice or of personal style. We find similar patterns entrenched in the imaginary expressed as the desire for a ‘dream house’.

### **The ‘Dream House’**

In a comprehensive overview of the ‘home literature’, Shelley Mallett (2004) argues that the idea of home is often nostalgic and sentimental. The notion of the ideal home or house is, however, shaped by material factors, including the interests of corporate developers (one of Bourdieu’s (2005) concerns), the state, patterns of employment and the organization and location of work, ideas about community and family, as well as personal experiences, subjectivity and ideals about ‘quality of life’. While the former issues have been explored in the literature on housing, subjective attachments linked to social position have largely been neglected although studies of material culture (Miller, 1998 and Dant, 2004) have tapped on this theme. Yet, although they argue that objects and the material are important for cultural order and note that groups differ in their criteria for what matters, no discernable pattern is identified. In

this paper we have both countered the Bourdieusian tendency to attribute all patterns to the same order derived from the determining effects of a presumed class habitus, and also the tendency found in material studies of denying patterns in the diversity of engagements in materiality. We are able to further explore these issues in relation to the patterning of cultural capital because we invited our interviewees to fantasize about what house they would have if money were not a concern. This had the potential to tap into disappointments and inadequacies with current housing while transmuting the house into a space of desire for something new.

Bourdieu (2005:185) refers to petit-bourgeois home-owners 'embarking on projects that are often too large for them, because they are measured against their aspirations rather than their possibilities', giving them 'no option but to content themselves with the judgement reality has made on their expectations'. A corroboration of this is found in the work of Pauline Hunt (1989) who investigated relatively poor families in Swindon, for whom home ownership at times of economic difficulty led to a shrinking of spatial and social worlds, such that they found themselves trapped inside their homes, not able to economically afford engagements in the public arena. Relations between class and home life are combined and differently accented at times of financial stress. This acts as a corollary to the vision of home-owning as a dream of aspiring workers, altering conceptions of class and stratification. While our work substantiates these connections between social class and position in the field of housing, both materially and subjectively, we found a more diverse array of involvement with house and home, in which differences of social class are implicated in non-predictive ways. Orientations to home cuts across divisions aligned more

closely to types of cultural capital, as expressed in the nature of the aspirations of our interviewees.

Some home-owners tended to 'dream' of practical improvements like a slight increase in size, the addition of a room for a particular function, all to fit with everyday domestic life needs. Gerry, husband of Jane Taggart and a police officer from the North-West of England, describes this.

Gerry: Probably just slightly bigger than the house we've got now and probably just away from this main road. If I could move this house 50 yards...

Interviewer: ...is it important for you to be out in the country?

Gerry: I think what's lucky here is once you go down the garden you're just in the tree-line ...

Interviewer: You wouldn't really aspire to moving to a big house?

Gerry: No

Interviewer: And the house is big enough for you

Gerry: This is perfectly good, this is a nice size lounge, perhaps if anything we'd probably have our bedroom's a good size, but the other two bedrooms are quite small so probably for the lads I'd say we'd get some biggest bedrooms for them.

Similarly Jenny Hammett, a creative writing tutor from the West of Scotland, 'dreams' of practical additions even though her dream is differently qualified, aligned with her position on the space of lifestyles closer to the right of the field where the high professionals and executive class concentrates:

Jenny: Ok. Well, more room. Lots more room. To store the clutter!

Interviewer: So it would be a purely kind of pragmatic, practical change if you...

Jenny: I quite like the *Grand Designs*<sup>8</sup> as well, if someone would do it for me, minimalism is one, yeah. Some wood and steel and glass, yeah...

Interviewer: But if it was on a plate, and - somebody paid for it

Jenny: Yeah, somebody to do the garden, I'd have to have a big garden. But not if it was left to me to do it. Main thing is extra room, extra bathroom, because we've just got the one.

Perhaps because they were less invested in the immediate space of their homes, or perhaps because they were actually confined inside them, as Hunt (1989) noted, renters were, by contrast, more inclined to engage with the 'fantasy' aspect of the question, conjuring up images of Caribbean islands, hot weather or country living. Tony Bryant, from our ethnic boost sample (not mapped on the MCA), a carpet warehouse manager from London lives in a small flat with his wife and two sons. He says: 'What sort of house and what style it would be? It would probably be a nice mansion, self completely contained on a nice island out in the Caribbean.'

Poppy Farrimond, a residential care-worker who lives with her teenaged son in a rented semi-detached house on an estate near a northern market town, describes her dream house as: 'It would be a farmhouse, I want a swimming pool, and I want an outside jacuzzi and I want a... and probably abroad,... I'd like a big old house.'



Some interviewees rich in both cultural capital and economic capital already have the house of their dreams, but there is more to be wanted. This is the case of James, the academic referred to above, who expresses how his desire goes in this direction.

Yes, I suppose, yes, I suppose I'd like a mixture of things, I mean, I like paintings and artwork so, it would be nice to have those kind of things around. And I also like quite sort of traditional looks, classical looks, you know? Somehow I feel this house is Edwardian...I think, yes, it would be nice, you know? Maybe, with this room, to get it looking like that, have a sort of Edwardian feel to it...?

Other interviewees, rich in cultural capital but relatively poor in economic capital would move on, wishing for more space, purpose-designed areas, character and location. Maria Derrick, a language teacher from West Yorkshire offers an illustration.

To dream. I'd want a library because we're both avid readers and we've nowhere to put the books. We've got the study but its' teeming at the seams with books and they're spilling into the bedroom and I don't want books in the bedroom... I'd want somewhere for the PCs to be put side by side... I'd like a huge kitchen... I'd have a huge garden... Three or four bedrooms...

Cherie Campbell, from NorthYorkshire, a professional working in the heritage industry, living in a city-centre flat which she owns with her partner, Ian, suggests a desire for character: 'I would love to have a really really old house, not out in the

countryside, in the town, a town house, a really really old house you know, about fourteenth century, that's what I would like...'. Referring to a recent re-development of a listed building into executive flats in the historic centre of the city where she lives, she continues: 'I'm not normally an envious person, but I'd sell my granny to buy one of those flats.' Cherie uses her knowledge of heritage and attachment to this area to dream of housing, while Maria uses her voracious engagement with books and reading to a similar purpose.

Very consistently, people with lower levels of cultural capital, regardless of their form of tenure, imagined a house with lots of space around, where other people would not invade them. Privacy is a great concern. There was also the preference, expressed mainly by those younger and engaged with the local and commercial items in the cultural fields to choose 'dream houses' characterised by 'modern' and new equipment and gadgets. Joe, the electrician mentioned above suggests: 'It would have to be a brand new house, I suppose with lots of gadgets, not necessarily a big house but a comfortable house, as long as it's got a swimming pool!'. A similarly aspirant social tenant from East Lancashire, Rachel Griffiths, a 26 year old council clerical worker and lone parent living in a council owned property that she plans to buy, states:

... I'd like something fairly new. And I wouldn't really be bothered where it was as long as it was a nice area and it wasn't - or I'd like somewhere..., live out in the country even.

Interviewer: What sort of things would you put in it? Would you have a sense of ...

Rachel: What, furniture wise? It would be all really modern, expensive. It would be practical though.

This emphasis on modern practicality contrasts with the tendency of those, richer in cultural capital, but usually older, to emphasize notions of ‘character’ or the aesthetic benefits of older properties or historical styles of architecture or decoration, as in the case of Sally-Ann Lewis, a retired nurse living in a Northern Ireland village, who, along with her recently deceased husband, a doctor, had their house built some fifty years ago. While satisfied with her house, she dreams of having her favourite period decoration:

Sally-Ann: I love the Georgian rooms, I think the size of the rooms... are wonderful, they’re not too big and they’re not small. The proportions of the real Georgian houses, I think, are gorgeous...The front door would be, a typical Georgian house would be... a nice simple door.

Interviewer: And the windows..?

Sally-Ann: ..would be typical Georgian windows, 3 by 4, 3 panes by 4 panes. Light, now plenty of light and the old Georgian did have light, ... I like light and I like space.

Such classifications, and the resources drawn on to make them, relate somewhat to the distinction Bourdieu (2005) makes between concerns with the authentic on one hand, and the contemporary and functional on the other, in thinking about home-ownership and style. It again points to different forms of cultural capital that inform different narratives in understanding living space, as a thing to allow comfort, shelter or

convenience, or a thing to be appreciated and aesthetically valued in and of itself. Yet, while we do not have systematic data about the field of housing to forcefully counter Bourdieu's links of functionality and the necessary with working class and aesthetics with the bourgeois, our evidence suggests these connections are destabilized by age and engagements with housing that mix tenure, location and types of cultural capital.

### **Conclusion: Distinctions in Housing**

Cultural capital, identified through institutionalised educational experiences, engagements in cultural activities and expressed tastes, is important in the variety of orientations to the home. It defines the practices individuals engage with in their homes and the narratives which people draw upon in talking about what their home and their house is, or could be in their imaginations and desires. These narratives carry references to uses of 'technical capitals' of various sorts, linked with particular ideals of family and home living (as propellers of 'emotional capitals'). No doubt the cultural capital of an individual is a resource linked to social position and social mobility in the field of housing. Home provides a purchase for the symbolic appropriation of other goods, and the position of individuals in the space of lifestyles appears linked to orientation to house/home: character, modernity, space, decoration, cleanliness, privacy, location and so on.

Our analysis correlating the position of the individual on the space of the MCA, form of tenure, styles and the nature of the 'dream house' in the narratives of interviewees, shows a contrast between a 'functional' approach to housing by some versus a self-referenced aesthetic or value-adding approach by others, which resonates with some

of the Bourdieusian claims. Yet, our findings also destabilize some of these claims. We find that while our survey confirms well known social divisions, some patterns linked to significant cultural capital differences are notable.

We find that a lower class position is not straightforwardly or exclusively linked to type of housing tenure. Owners and renters may have similar functional, or aesthetic, dispositions in relation to their living spaces. Moreover, other indicators of social position, like ‘technical capital’ (as a type of cultural capital) of different varieties, be it the skill of the manual worker, or the engagement by women in decisions about and the production of a stylish home, appear relevant to indicate how housing can be a mark of distinction. Age is also a significant factor in the choice of house style, with the younger favouring the modern and the older preferring character, while obviously age impacts most powerfully on purchasing power in housing.

Apart from situating individuals in culture in social space, it is also important to conceive of the interrelation between the spaces of the private, constitutive of home, and that of the public, defined by the corporate, financial and political concerns of the housing market, to properly grasp the salience of home and house for identity of social position and the self. While we corroborate the view that cultural capital is statistically linked to purchasing power and forms of tenancy, and that houses relate to economic and cultural systems of classification, we suggest that apparently less tangible aspects of living are also deeply implicated in individuals’ engagement in housing. It is from needs and desires, as well as economic, social and cultural resources, that physical spaces are adapted to users. Usage and behaviour involve decisions about which rooms to use, decoration, furnishing and housework

investments, all of which refer to issues of social status, intimate relationships, and intense internal and subjective experiences. This is why the detailed exploration of the qualitative material, which was captured in expressions of display and desire, offers strong indicators of links between social position and cultural disposition related to housing. The combination of the mapping of social position and the rich interview and participant observation material in our project unveils the significance of normally invisible resources in our understanding of the nuanced operation of cultural capital within the field of housing.

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## **Addendum**

The data upon which this paper is based was generated from March 2003-2006 at a time when the field of housing was generally buoyant. We first presented this paper at a *Housing Studies/CRESC* workshop in 2005. Preparing for publication in 2007 the terms ‘credit crunch’ and ‘sub-prime’ began to enter the public lexicon and in early 2009, following a period of sustained decline in the value of houses, these terms have come to define a crisis of significance beyond the original concerns of this paper. We are not the first researchers to have the social world moving faster than our attempts to analyse it, and we gratefully accept the invitation by the editors to speculate briefly on what these changes might mean for our findings and approach.

Notably we see that recent events give considerable weight to the Bourdieusian account of the inter-relationships between the field of housing and the field of power. Solutions to the current crisis involve a claim for the regulatory powers of the national economy in terms of policy levers based around both building new homes and providing finance for home-buyers. For individuals and households, mortgages have gone from being a predominantly sensible and attainable investment linking economic action with a personal narrative of aspiration to being a difficult and ‘risky’ endeavour, revealing, rather than calming, anxieties for the future.

Home ownership, rhetorically at least, allows for the conversion of capitals within the field of housing, from cultural to economic and back again in the strategies of distinction here described. In the context of a stagnant housing market this convertibility might be less evident, raising the value of the ‘technical capitals’

required to make and maintain one's abode as a habitable place, at the expense of those cultural and economic forms of capital which allow the home to be a real, or imagined resource. It is too early to say whether, for example, ownership or rental trends are reversing but the current crisis will inevitably alter the ways in which the home is imagined and narrativised. For this, the methods here described might provide a means to productively chart these changes.

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<sup>1</sup> See Addendum.

<sup>2</sup> This paper draws on data produced by the research team for the ESRC project *Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion: A Critical Investigation* (Award no R000239801). The team comprised Tony Bennett (Principal Applicant), Mike Savage, Elizabeth Silva, Alan Warde (Co-Applicants), David Wright and Modesto Gayo-Cal (Research Fellows). The applicants were jointly responsible for the design of the national survey and the focus groups and household interviews that generated the quantitative and qualitative data for the project. Elizabeth Silva, assisted by David Wright, coordinated the analyses of the qualitative data from the focus groups and household interviews. Mike Savage and Alan Warde, assisted by Modesto Gayo-Cal, co-ordinated the analyses of the quantitative data produced by the survey. Tony Bennett was responsible for the overall coordination of the project.

<sup>3</sup> The qualitative sample was determined on the basis of a theoretical frame which identified individuals according to household type, ethnicity, and 'cultural capital'.

<sup>4</sup> The survey was administered from November 2003 to March 2004 by the National Centre for Social Research (Thomson 2004). Qualitative interviews were conducted during late 2004 (Silva 2005a). The Multiple Correspondence Analysis was led by Brigitte Leroux and the late Henry Rouanet, and we gratefully acknowledge their work.

<sup>5</sup> Occupational classes based on the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification.

<sup>6</sup> See comprehensive account of the MCA in the CCSE project in Bennett et al. (2009), Gayo-Cal et al., 2006, and Le Roux et al., 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Includes only respondents from the main sample (N=1564). The individuals interviewed qualitatively who do not belong to the main sample (ethnic minority boost and focus groups samples) are not identified on this MCA.

<sup>8</sup> Television programme in which unusual or difficult architectural buildings or renovation projects undertaken by members of the public are followed.