THE RECENT PAST & THE QUESTION OF AUTHENTICITY

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to undertake a theoretical discourse on preservation and adaptation of recent past built heritage through an analysis of two case study projects. This involves challenging the current ideological separation between recent built heritage and “classical” conservation with particular focus on their diverging relationships to authenticity and appraisal. The paper will discuss two case studies, the first, a 1930s carpark, “Palægaragerne”, in Copenhagen (Elgaard Architecture) and the second, a 1970s student accommodation building, “The Florey”, in Oxford (Avanti Architects), which reflect the author’s work in practice with recent past heritage.

Furthermore, the paper will compare national regulation in the UK and in Denmark and show how they relate to key international guidelines on the subject matter. Here, a particular focus will be on their interpretation of the Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, 2013) and the Nara Charter of Authenticity (ICOMOS 1994) and how this may have affected the different project outcomes.

The two exploratory case studies contained in the paper will be used to exemplify current regulation and practice in the field and the findings will summarise methodological and legislative shortcomings and recommended updates of these.

General findings of the paper indicate, that heritage bodies tend to emphasise the overall appearance of recent past heritage rather than the originality of the fabric. Appraisals are based on general assumptions that most materials of this era are of a lesser quality (and importance) and therefore replaceable. This touches upon the core ethics of traditional conservation practice: The question of authenticity. Is it acceptable to replace original fabric of a listed building due to improved, technical solutions currently available, that were not possible at the time of construction? Or should we merely preserve/improve what is built?

The paper concludes that there is a need for a more comprehensive understanding of our resent past as a historic and aesthetic periods in its own right. This includes appraisal of typical material uses, maintenance requirements, tectonics and guidance on diagnosing problems and systematically working through repair options as practised in traditional conservation including dedicated training at an international level

Keywords: Authenticity, 20C Heritage, Conservation, Transformation, Tectonics

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to undertake a theoretical discourse on current preservation and adaptation of recent past built heritage through an analysis of two case study projects. This involves challenging the current ideological separation between recent built heritage and classical conservation with particular focus on their diverging relationships to authenticity and appraisal.

Recent past architecture is characterised by great architectural ambitions and tectonic experiments which has resulted in a large fluctuation in the built quality and hence, created a need for renovation and even demolition of buildings, often within a few decades of their erection. The situation has required an early heritage review of the architectural period to ensure that important recent past buildings are not lost (Harwood & Davies, 2015). The urgency has meant, that current listing and conservation of the era is performed alongside ongoing, historical research. The historical context, which is to inform the building appraisal and set the terms for physical preservation, is therefore limited, meaning that appraisals are at risk of being inadequate in their information, in particular on important characteristics of building fabric from the period.

The case studies present two recent past, listed buildings and their proposed conservation works and upgrades: The first, “Palægaragerne”, is a 1930s car park in Copenhagen restored by Elgaard Architecture in 2015. The second, “The Florey Building”, is a 1970s student accommodation building in Oxford which currently faces a refurbishment project proposed by Avanti Architects. Despite the differing nature of the two projects, their building appraisals both give precedence to the overall building design concept rather than the original fabric and detail. Yet, the final proposals present two very different conservation approaches: On “Palægaragerne” retention of original fabric has been prioritised where possible while “The Florey” proposal favours general replacement of most original fabric.

To understand the reasoning behind this difference. The paper explores underlying, national legislation and guidelines in Denmark and in the UK and their respective interpretation of key international guidelines; the Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, 2013) and The Nara Document on authenticity (ICOMOS (1994). The comparison highlights two different, regulatory systems with a divergence in regard to appraisal of original building fabric and authenticity.

The paper concludes, that the preservation of Recent Past built heritage presents a challenge for established conservation practice. Hence, the period may even call for a different architectural approach, if not only to prevent - then to justify, the current disregard for the fabric and architectural details of the period.

Background

The Recent Past defines the architectural period from the late post-war era to the beginning of the 1980s. The architecture of this era developed from the strong ideologies of the early 20thC. Heroic Modernism, a period where humanities for the first time helped shape our buildings with new architectural theory and minimal aesthetics. Therefore, the period is often referred to as the birth of the modern architectural practice (Jencks, 1973).

However, the period was also influenced by a large influx of new materials and construction methods to fulfil the architectural ambition and as a response to the material shortage and housing crisis following WW.2. This created an interesting development within the construction industry as it evolved from craftsmanship into a fully implemented industrialised industry within a few decades.

Like most beginnings, this development included failed experiments and lack of knowledge which lead to
inbuilt tectonic failures such as cold bridging, thermal expansion and fluctuating material performance (Macdonald, 2013). In time, this has formed a general assumption of resent past materials being of a lesser quality (and importance) than traditional building materials and therefore replaceable (Harwood & Davies, 2015).

The combination of the above, and historic research which is still in its infancy, has resulted in architectural appraisals which tend to emphasise the theoretic aspect of the buildings while neglecting the importance of the fabric. This is a heavy deviation from classical conservation practice where fabric retention is seen as crucial when repairing, preserving and upgrading historically significant buildings (Macdonald, 2013). Unfortunately, the change in practice is now proving to have large implications for the architectural approach to recent past built heritage.

Conservation societies such as DOCOMOMO International and Twentieth Century Society in the UK have long advocated the issue of untimely development causing harmful interventions to designated recent past assets. Examples includes the radical alteration of the stage area of the grade I listed Royal Festival Hall auditorium (1948-50) in London, UK. The project was completed with the support of English Heritage and Lambeth Council despite strong objection from 20C Society and DOCOMOMO-UK. (DOCOMOMO-UK, 2017)

The importance to retain original fabric is not only a purist conservationist view but also of scholarly and scientific importance to retain the dual aspect of architectural research (Macdonald, 2013). Removal of original fabric from built heritage of a period still in its historical infancy can potentially prohibit a future comprehensive study of this period. This paper views retention of original fabric as an important aspect of the historic authenticity in order to maintain designated built heritage relevant for future research on the area.

**Case Studies**

The two Case studies presented represent two very different periods of recent past- and Modern heritage:

Palægaragerne (The Mansion Garage) is the first multi-storey car park in Denmark. The Modernist construction and the small, canopied petrol station in front of the entrance were designed in 1932 by architect O. Gundlach-Petersen and the Danish engineering company Højgaard & Schultz. The complex originally contained a car wash and a mechanics workshop. The building style is inspired by the American Modern, and considered to be very radical at the time of construction. The car park is located in Frederiksstaden, the elegant Rococo Quarter of central Copenhagen.

Palægaragerne was designed during the early period of industrialisation, the so called Heroic Modernism, when architectural ambitions far exceeded what the construction industry was able to realise. Occasionally, this would result in haphazard construction methods such as excessive use of reinforcement bars or experimental concrete mixtures (Jencks, 1973).

The Florey (1971) was designed and built by James Stirling as the last of his Red Trilogy, which includes The Engineering Building of Leicester University (1957) and The History Faculty in Cambridge (1968) (Berman, 2010). As its predecessors, The Florey is constructed as a terracotta clad concrete structure with non-structural, transverse partition walls.

The property was designed during the late post war/ early Post-Modern period. The fully-fledged industrialised construction industry was now largely able to correspond with the architectural ambitions. However, the technical know-how was still in its infancy and legal requirements on building performance were minimal (Berman, 2010).
Prior to the restoration, the concrete façades appeared in a light rose coloured, plastic paint, with grey sheet metal doorways, black metal windows and handrails. The eastern façade metal windows had all been replaced by profile glass panes. Decks and façade surfaces were suffering from heavy cracking and fractures due to corrosion of the reinforcement steel. The former car wash and mechanics workshop had been disused for decades and appeared as neglected back of house storage (Harnow, 2018).

The overall building was in heavy disrepair after years of neglect and defective maintenance, yet, being a listed building, the car park had to be retained and the project therefore developed as a necessity.

Two bays on the eastern façade were designated for a pilot project to provide a general indication of the façade condition and to develop a conservation strategy and budget.

**Façade, Concrete**

On the decks, the visibly damaged concrete was cut out and the reinforcement was either replaced or treated for corrosion with the affected areas recast. The façade was treated with cathodic protection (CP). CP is an impressed, direct current applied to the reinforcement by connecting it to a sacrificial anode which eliminates further corrosion and retains the original fabric (Farrell, Davies & McCaig, 2001).

The relief from the in-situ formwork was approximately reconstructed within the finish of the façade renovation. The surface was treated with a water rough render and a broom finish with boards drawn along the surface mimicking the original formwork relief and finished in grey paint to recreate the appearance of in-situ cast concrete. For the façade finishing works, the concrete construction workers were replaced by a team of masons as it became clear, that a finer level of detail was needed for this.

**Façade, Metal Elements**
While most of the original west facing windows were deteriorated and beyond repair, it was possible to salvage enough profiles to reinstate the entire ground floor. The upper floors were replaced with new steel windows based on the original profiles.

**Interiors**

The success of the conservation project inspired a refurbishment and reopening of the old car wash including replacement of an existing 1980s service shopfront at the entrance with a bespoke design inspired by the original shop here.

Today, Palægaragerne, has returned to being a working car centre with a car wash and car rental facility and is furthermore rented out for events and stage sets.

"The Florey", Oxford, UK

![Fig. 2 The Florey Building](image)

The Florey project got planning in 2016 but is currently on hold. The study is therefore based on the preparatory research and design proposal only.

The Florey project was won as a competition to extend the existing building to house all first-year students of the Queens College, Oxford. This includes the addition of en-suite bathrooms and provisions for conference activities. Furthermore, the brief called for a thermal, upgrade of the existing building fabric.

The proposal included the following interventions:

- Demolition of existing GF and design of new floor layout
- Infill of existing double height mezzanine floor creating two floors with single storey bedrooms
- Reorganising all floor layouts and introducing en-suites to bedrooms
- New annexe building with glazed link
- Improvement of the public realm
- Technical upgrade and repair of original building fabric and services (new roof, new service routes, new glazing, improving acoustic- and fire segregation, new tiling to facade where missing, new under floor heating, new mechanical/electrical services and elevator)
The proposed interventions are clearly led by the brief from the college with little questioning on the realistic implementation of this. There is a consistent argument throughout the Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) of interventions to make the Florey comply with current standards both in terms of comfort and thermal performance. Standards, which historic building are not normally expected to meet.

Facade, Glazing and Terracotta

The facade appraisal mainly concerns the overall form and concept. The existing technical detailing such as coping, drips, overhangs and weathering falls have been omitted and under engineered in many areas which has resulted in damaging moisture ingress and subsequent patched up detailing. The document provides little information on the proposed conservation/ reconstruction of these apart from the intent to improve and “conserve the basic “spirit”” of these. (Avanti Architects, 2015 pp. 60).

The terracotta facade has been thermally inspected, “tapped” and analysed by a terracotta specialist and engineer. An overview of de-bonded tiles has been made and a strategy for the replacement of these (approximately 5%-31%) is still under way. The intent is to replace de-bonded tiles with new matched tiles.

All glazing will be replaced by new double-glazed units except the narrow windows of the outer facade, the link bridge and the projecting staircase lanterns, which will have new glazing and -gaskets only. The proposed profiles are approximately 40% wider in plan and 4mm wider in elevation than the original window profiles. Secondary glazing is currently in place for the inner courtyard glazing, but is described as inconvenient in use.

Interiors

The significance of the interiors is mostly rated of a low to medium significance. This includes the bespoke, fitted and loose furniture, plain but in good working condition.

The increase of the number of rooms within the Florey itself requires the subdivision of the top floor mezzanine rooms (Double height spaces with ship ladders originally intended for research fellows). Three mezzanine floors will be “retained” – in modified design due to services and en-suites.

The new distribution of services, none of the original service routes will be reused, is distributed via 11 no. new risers allocated along the centre of the floor plans. New horizontal service routes will further lower the head height along the building corridors.
Comparison of Danish and British Legal Heritage Framework and Implementation of International Guidelines

To understand the proposed interventions of the two projects it is necessary to place them within their respective contexts and to identify the regulatory differences between Denmark and the UK and their interpretation of international guidelines on heritage asset management.

The following will discuss two sets of international guidelines which are particularly relevant in relation to this: The Nara Document of Authenticity and the Burra Charter and their definition of “Appraisal” and “Authenticity” and how these have been implemented in national guidelines and applied to the appraisal of Recent Past heritage. The paper will also briefly address how the difficulty to assess a historic period within our own contemporary might also have an impact on current practice in the area.

National Heritage Legislative and Policy Framework

The UK legislative system designates its listed buildings in three grades: I, II* and II, grade I being the highest designation. The grading indicates the overall national importance of the designated asset. There is a 30-year threshold for listing and the first recent past designation was awarded in 1987 with the listing of “Bracken House” (1955-59). The majority of recent past listings in the UK are currently grade II (Harwood & Davies, 2015).

In Denmark, all designations have been grade I or “A” since 1979 which indicates an equal importance of all listed buildings. Key features of a building are highlighted in the heritage appraisal (discussed under “Appraisal”) which accompanies the individual case file. In 1997 the age for a building eligible for listing was lowered from 100 years to 50 years. Currently, this means that only buildings built prior to 1967 are eligible for listing, unless exceptional circumstances apply (Kulturministeriet & Kulturstyrelsen, 2009)

Authenticity
The question of authenticity has been inherently related to architectural heritage since the rise of the practice in the mid-19th century (Bold, Larkham & Pickard, 2017). However, the theoretic definition and practical application of the concept has continued to be a key area of dispute within the profession. The dispute mainly regards the acceptable level of intervention to historic fabric before an asset is regarded as lost. In 19th century France, the Gothic Revival architect, Eugène Viollet Le Duc, believed authenticity to be a combination of historical fact and aesthetic modification, as:

"means to re-establish [a building] to a finished state, which may in fact never have actually existed at any given time." (Viollet-le-Duc, 1854).

This approach was heavily disputed by the British Arts and Crafts movement led by John Ruskin and William Morris. They regarded any alteration to historic fabric as:

"a destruction out of which no remnants can be gathered: A destruction accompanied with false description of the thing destroyed." (Ruskin, 1880).

**Authenticity, International Guidelines**

In 1964, measures were taken for international guidelines to be put in place as a common reference for national policy makers: The Venice Charter acknowledged the importance of enabling the future scientific and scholarly study of heritage assets as:

“The common responsibility to safeguard them for future generations is recognized. It is our duty to hand them on in the full richness of their authenticity.” (ICOMOS, 1964)

This definition was further elaborated in the 1994 Nara Document which acknowledged authenticity as:

"an essential element in defining, assessing, and monitoring cultural heritage." (ICOMOS, 1994)

But the charter also recognised the relative nature of authenticity within cultural interpretations (Lowenthal, 2008).

The implementation of the Nara Charter allowed for authenticity to be discussed as a social construction: A value associated with a particular object or site rather than being based on fabric alone (Digan, 2015). This allowed for intervention to historical fabric to be argued by principles and theory as well as physical fact.

This ambiguous definition has eventually been adopted into national heritage legislation frameworks which are based on the international guideline of ICOMOS.

**Authenticity, UK Legislation & Guidance**

The 2008 Policy Guidelines (Historic England, 2008 pp.22) states:

“Evidential value, historical values and some aesthetic values, especially artistic ones, are dependent upon a place retaining (to varying degrees) the actual fabric that has been handed down from the past; but authenticity lies in whatever most truthfully reflects and embodies the values attached to the place (Principle 4.3). It can therefore relate to, for example, design or function, as well as fabric.”

The Document continues:

“146 There are limits, however, beyond which loss of inherited fabric compromises the authenticity and integrity of a place. At the extreme, a proposal to retain no more than the façade of a historic building
attached to a modern structure must be considered in the light of an assessment of the existing values of the building, both as a whole and in its elements. The relationship between the façade and the existing and proposed structures behind will be crucial to the decision, but retaining the façade alone will not normally be acceptable.”.

(Historic England 2008, “New Work and Alteration” pp 59.)

However, the 2011 “Listing Selection Guide. Domestic 4; The Modern House and Housing” (Historic England, 2011) states the following on recent past Housing:

“Interiors will be very simple, and only the earliest, or model estates such as the City of London’s Golden Lane Estate or Barbican, will have internal fittings worthy of mention in a description. This should be made clear in the designation documentation.”

The above statement appears to deviate from the baseline document of 2008 by presenting a general assumption of modern interiors as being insignificant. Further on, the guide discusses replacement of original glazing. A general note is made on the facade significance mainly being related to the graphic appearance (horizontal and vertical patterns), rather than relating to the actual fabric.

The otherwise comprehensible “Historic England, Practical Conservation” series on general repairs to historic buildings briefly covers repair and maintenance of metal windows but there are no guidelines on further upgrades or repairs to modern materials (Historic England, 2012).

**Authenticity, Danish Legislation & Guidance**

The “Bygningsbevaring – Rapport fra udvalget om bygningsbevaring” (“Building Preservation – Report from the Committee on Building Preservation” (red.)) states (translated from Danish):

“The architectural edifice equals that of the Classic edifice. The Classical understanding of an edifice is static and clearly defined. The quality and authority of the Classical edifice stands on that nothing should be added or subtracted without affecting the artistic value/.../A change in the notion of the Classical edifice is the dynamic appreciation of the architectural edifice/.../this presents a challenge to the appraisal and management of key heritage assets” (Kulturministeriet & Kulturstyrelsen, 2009 pp. 15)

The Danish Heritage Agency has published a few reports on Modern/ recent past built heritage. Rather than offering guidelines, the publications appear as research papers to assist as analytical tools. The 2006 publication “Modernism and Rationalisation” (Kulturstyrelsen, 2006) highlights the difference between “Idea and Practice”.

The document distinguishes between Modernity and Modernism by looking at practices and how ideas were realised on site. It points to the difference between rationalism (pre-fabrication and production in general) and rationalisation (the ideology of Modernism): The “ordinary” architecture, standardized housing and factories, and the “icons”.

Most important, the document emphasizes the dual aspect of the tectonic (aesthetic) experiment and the craftsmanship as two strains representing different aspects to the same story.

The Welfare State buildings of 1950–1980 (Recent Past) (Sverrild, 2008) further highlights the issue of negative publicity: General assumptions on fabric and architectural quality of the era increase the risk of losing historically important buildings through either demolition or insensitive refurbishment before they can be evaluated on an architectural level.

The information on Building Preservation (‘Information om bygningsbevaring’, 2014) which is a practical guide

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issued by the Heritage Agency currently holds no guidance on repairs and maintenance to Modern materials.

Appraisal

“Appraisal”: “/... ‘assess (someone or something)’, as in a need to appraise existing techniques, or ‘value’/.../ A formal Assessment”. (The Oxford Dictionary “Appraise”, 2017)

Appraisal, International Guidelines

The Heritage appraisal builds on UNESCO’s Statement of Outstanding Universal Value:

“Identifying the criteria under which the property was inscribed, including the assessments of the conditions of integrity or authenticity, and of the protection and management in force and the requirements for protection and management” (World Heritage Centre, 2012, pp.39, III.G, 155.)

The appraisal provides an analysis and valuation of the heritage asset which can be distilled into an elemental hierarchy to assist the valuation of the building as a whole. It serves as an independent publication for assessment of heritage assets and a key document for asset management and proposed development.

The framework for the appraisal is based on “The Burra Charter” which was first adopted in 1979 and periodically updated to reflect the changing understanding of cultural heritage. The current charter was adopted in 2013.


Representing the legislative and the practical aspects of the management and conservation of heritage assets:

“6.1 Cultural significance of a place and other issues affecting its future are best understood by a sequence of collecting and analysing information before making decisions. Understanding cultural significance comes first, then development of policy and finally management of the place in accordance with the policy. This is the Burra Charter Process.”

(ICOMOS, 2013, ”The Burra Charter”, ICOMOS 2013, Article 6, pp.4)

Appraisal, UK Legislation & Appliance

In the UK, the Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) is a legal document required by law when applying for Listed Building Consent (LBC). The document is expected to include an appraisal and description of the designated asset, a project proposal and an assessment of impact to the designated asset. While there is no set format for the appraisal, it can either be covered within a separate “Heritage Statement” (appraisal) or covered solely within the HIA (English Heritage, 2008).

A Heritage Statement was prepared for The Florey in 2013. While the document is generally neutral it still holds a handful of generalisations as seen in the legal guidelines. The HIA is even more loaded in its appraisal of the architecture and aesthetics:

“The space planning of the Caretakers flat sufferers from the formal dictates of the building composition and its shape making abstractions. It typifies Stirling’s prioritising ‘objects’ over a ‘sense of place’ as identified by Girouard in his 1972 review and Kenneth Frampton’s ‘Critical History’/.../the caretaker lacks any sense of place. The bedrooms are awkwardly shaped and lack privacy and/.../ it was denied amenity by the architects who failed to provide it with any dedicated access to its external Terrace.” (Avanti Architects, 2015 pp.18).

This is clearly a statement made in favour of the proposed intervention (to demolish the ground floor) rather
than an informed valuation of a designated heritage asset.

A similar evaluation is made regarding the interiors: These are all to be replaced along with original partitions. Interiors significance are all of low to medium importance and is sparsely described in the appraisal. Yet, the double height bedrooms are in fact highlighted in the 2013 Heritage Statement (Avanti Architects, 2015 pp. 61) as characteristics of the period. Despite this, authorities have willingly accepted their subdivision and replacement by three conceptual “Heritage Rooms”: Reorganised mezzanine spaces containing bits of salvaged furniture to imitate the original layout (Avanti Architects, 2015). Effectively, the proposal currently only retains the tiled facade and the concrete construction and components as original. All other elements are either modified or replaced.

Appraisal, Danish Legislation & Appliance

In Denmark, the Asset Appraisal, was formally adopted in 2010 as a set format issued by the Danish Heritage Agency. It appears as a separate document to be approved by The Heritage Agency prior to any HIA being submitted (Kulturministeriet & Kulturstyrelsen, 2009). The appraisal is filed as a legal document that follows the building case file onwards. The appraisal consists of two sections: A neutral description of the heritage asset and its condition followed by an appraisal and finally recommendations. This is then followed by the actual proposal.

From the set out, the Palægaragerne project concerned itself with the potential of the building rather than its limitations and from this the ambitions grew to revoke the ethos of the old garage. The asset appraisal was throughout the project utilised as a key referencing tool for all decisions made during the design and construction process. The conservation project sparked an interior regeneration project, which helped turn the costly conservation of a car park into a more viable business case.

Conclusion

The above describes the implementation of the Burra Charter and The Nara Document of Authenticity within British and Danish heritage legislation and how this has affected the appraisal of Recent Past heritage. The outcome displays a clear difference in the interpretation of the documents within the two national frameworks: The Danish guidelines present a dual interpretation which includes the fabric as a historic asset, whereas the UK, draws a clear distinction between fabric and theory.

The broad definition of authenticity, which the Nara Document introduced in 1994, has clearly influenced the reasoning behind the two case studies. Thus, is “the idea” identified as a key asset rather than the originality of the period. The introductory statement of the LBC of Palægaragerne clearly epitomises this (translated from Danish):

“The (Modern red.) assets are clearly defined as conceptual rather than being related to the fabric”

Still, the two projects present very different, architectural approaches which will undoubtedly appear even clearer once the Florey project has been completed. The difference appears to relate to two aspects in particular:

- The national regulatory framework and the legal interpretation and implementation of international guidelines at a national level.
- The appraisal format.

The configuration of the existing national heritage legislative system also seems to have a crucial impact on how designated assets are dealt with during interventions:
The UK grading system establishes the significance of a designated asset from an early stage by rating it within a hierarchy of three. The potential issue of this system is the low rating of a designated heritage asset indirectly suggests a higher level of tolerance to interventions prior to any actual analysis taking place.

The Danish single designation system indicates an equal significance of all designated assets and allows for a gradual assessment of the designated asset. This is notable in the Palægaragerne project which holds a similar attention to tectonics, detail and atmosphere as would be expected when working with an ancient building.

In both countries, the research and knowledge on practical conservation of Recent Past buildings remains scarce. Current knowledge on Modern conservation appears to be limited to theoretical principles and preservation strategies for mitigation.

While the Historic England “Practical Building Conservation vol. 3” does cover concrete conservation (English Heritage, 2013), there are no case studies available on sensitive upgrades or repair to modern materials and building components. Guidelines on facades even seem to condone a Facadist approach to a listed building by emphasising the graphic appearance rather than the original elements. The Danish authorities do not appear to have published any guidance on the subject matter either.

Yet, the 2011 Historic England publication “Listing Selection Guide. Domestic 4; The Modern House and Housing” outlines a general terminology on material quality and key assets of the era while still acknowledging that studies are ongoing. Despite England being 20 years ahead of Denmark in Resent Past designation, this still seems a bold conclusion at such an early stage of research.

The Danish guidance presents a more cautious approach by providing tools for analysis rather than offering any direct conclusions which to some extent makes the intended implementation of the guidance very unclear.

The national legislation displays a clear division between over precaution and broad generalisations on the era. The diverging interpretation of ongoing research of a period still in its historical infancy questions the current ability to fairly evaluate resent past heritage. Are current benchmarks simply too vague to provide a proper assessment of resent past within the palimpsest of history?

According to the French historian, George Duby, the most interesting evidence of the past is what a period has not said about itself: The essence of a period simply cannot be reached through contemporaries immersed within it, but only once the phase of time has ended, when the perspective has been irrevocably altered. (Ankersmit, 1998). So, if we are indeed still “too close” to the Recent Past to properly assess it from a neutral perspective should this not be reflected in statutory guidelines as these essentially affects the nature of the interventions granted permission?

The designation of the building concept as a key heritage asset combined with a disregard of the fabric as inferior basically reduces the designated asset to a principle. A view, which defies the dual aspect of historic building conservation by justifying the replacement of original (inferior) fabric. Preservation which mainly reflects the idea or the symbolic value of a historic building is not unheard of in traditional conservation (Bold, Larkham & Pickard, 2017). However, the application of this as common practice to a particular architectural period seems contradictory to a profession founded on the safeguarding of ancient structures to enable their continuous study.

As established above, the authenticity of a designated asset is not solely dependent on the retention of original fabric. However, can it be justified for historic, architectural research to primarily base itself on theory by neglecting the importance of architecture’s physical nature? And if so, how can a knowledge base be retained to ensure heritage assets are not permanently lost for future research?

The preservation of Recent Past built heritage clearly presents a challenge for established conservation practice. However, as the period may call for a different architectural approach it is also clear that this does not
justify the current disregard of fabric and architectural detail from the period. In the words of William Morris: “We are only the trustees for those who come after us.” (Nay, 2000) which is regardless of the asset’s age.

Conservation is essentially a scholarly practice whose approach may seem onerous and conservative to many. Despite this, the practice has never been static and “good practice” has been influenced and changed by a variety of movements since the 18th C. and should continue to be so (Prudon, 2008). Yet, the current disregard of recent past fabric presents a risk of eroding a main pillar of conservation: To ensure the continued study of our historic buildings. An act, which is heavily compromised when large quantities of fabric is replaced or irrevocably altered. Despite the theoretical elaboration on historic authenticity, fabric continues to provide evidential information which may be learnt from a sandwich panel, an aluminium frame or a concrete aggregate.

Preservation, analysis and understanding of an architectural period does not only provide a foundation for subsequent interventions but also ensures a base for future research and understanding of the asset. Therefore, the significance of recent past built heritage needs to be extended to include an appraisal of the building fabric to understand how they realised the architectural ideas behind the buildings.

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