
The Uses of Nostalgia: Stirling and Gowan's Preston Housing

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The Uses of Nostalgia

Stirling and Gowan's Preston Housing

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To a visitor they are understandably depressing, these massed proletarian areas; street after regular street of shoddily uniform houses intersected by a dark pattern of ginnels and snickets (alley-ways) and courts, without greenness or the blueness of sky But to the insider, these are small worlds, each as homogeneous and well-defined as a village It is because for all ages such a life can have a peculiarly gripping wholeness, that after twenty-five it can be difficult for a working-class person either to move into another kind of area or even into another area of the same kind.

Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*

Many of the yards are packed with clothes hanging on the line, prams, sheds, boxes of geraniums and pansies, hutches for rabbits and guinea-pigs, lofts for pigeons, and pens for fowls. The only difference between the houses is the colour of the curtains and doorsteps which the wives redden or whiten when they wash down the pavement in front of their doors in the morning. Dilapidated but cosy, damp but friendly, in the eyes of most Bethnal Greeners these cottages *are* the place, much more so than the huge blocks of tenement buildings standing guard, like dark fortresses, over the little houses. On the warm summer evening of the interview, children were playing hop-scotch or "he" in the roadway while their parents, when not watching the television, were at their open windows. Some of the older people were sitting in upright chairs on the pavement, just in front of their doors, or in the passages leading through to the sculleries, chatting with each other and watching the children at play.

Michael Young and Peter Willmott,
Family and Kinship in East London

In the 1950s and '60s, the blitzed areas of Britain's cities and the postwar slum clearance schemes offered great opportunities and great threats. Drawn to this issue, sociologists Michael Young and Peter Willmott studied the effect of the newest of social institutions, the housing estate, on one of the oldest, the family. Although Richard Hoggart was more concerned with the impact of the mass media on working-class culture, he too recognized that the environ-

ment for that culture, the "landscape with figures," was at stake, albeit from different forces. The new architecture of British public housing in the 1950s and '60s had much to do with this postwar situation. Mainstream and avant-garde architects were more interested in embodying change than signaling continuity, and they were particularly concerned with how a technocratic modernism might solve the problems of reconstruction and a perceived lack of moderniza-

tion.¹ This article explores in some detail the response of James Stirling (1924–1992) and his rapidly developing attitudes toward history and the modern in the first decade or so of his career. Through examination of his and James Gowan's (b. 1923) previously neglected housing scheme at Preston (1957–61), I will show that Victorianism had an earlier and far stronger role in Stirling's movement toward a more skeptical engagement with modernism and a more reconciliatory approach to architectures of the past. Among other things, this means that rather than judge Stirling's early career in the 1950s as merely a limbering up, the pre- to the post-, one might contend that it had already by the end of the decade become finely attuned to the "peculiarly gripping wholeness" of these "small worlds," to the importance of "watching children at play," and to the creative contradictions of wanting both change and continuity.²

The most relevant elements of Stirling's early career will be established first, especially his evolving attitudes to modernism and to the Victorian past, and how his early, mostly unbuilt projects attempted to use regional forms to give rigor to the picturesque approach that was then-dominant in British modernism. After this account of Stirling's early architecture, the article focuses on the housing scheme at Preston. It will be extrapolated largely through an examination of the buildings themselves, but also through the architects' published statements, Stirling's photographs, and the critical reactions that the scheme inspired. Although neglected by architectural historians, Preston at the very least helps to revise the received story of Stirling's early development, usually seen as culminating in the Leicester University Engineering Building (1959–64).

Stirling and Gowan brought two important new resources to their work at Preston: a newly acquired interest in regional aspects of the "functional tradition" and, overlapping with this, a new open-mindedness about the possibilities of reconnecting with premodernist urban and architectural traditions, especially the despised Victorian city. The Preston scheme suggests that some of the characteristic features of Stirling's more famous later projects emerged earlier than is usually claimed. But rather than focus the argument on any incipient postmodernism in Preston, this article gathers its various strands together around the issue of nostalgia, as it was used negatively by reviewers of the scheme and positively by the architects. Instead of a jackdawlike and ironic attitude toward a fragmented, premodernist, and strictly architectural past, later characteristic of postmodernism, the positive use of nostalgia enabled the architects to reconsider the possibilities, both forward- and backward-looking, of a place-specific and communally minded architecture in postwar Britain.

Ideograms of Apostasy

Stirling and Gowan belonged to a formidable generation of British architects and critics—including Reyner Banham, Alan Colquhoun, Colin Rowe, and Alison and Peter Smithson—who were impatient of what seemed like the older generation's compromises, its parading of the "symbols of an epoch of reform."³ Yet, in a manner that has now come to be called "neo-avant-garde," they were equally distanced from what they knew as the "heroic" period of modernism in the 1920s and skeptical of any redemptive residue of it.⁴ Delayed by the war, they arrived late into architectural training, and dulled by the routines of office work as assistants, they put their creative energies into the Independent Group or Team X, looking for alternatives to a deadening consensus by exploring popular culture, consumerism and everyday life, alternative traditions in modernism, and the possibilities of a contemporary primitivism.

Stirling's attitude toward modernism in the 1950s, like many of this generation, is best described as a developing apostasy, a growing sense that while one must remain within it one could loosen its terms and infuse it with a renewed sense of the regional and the historical. The Liverpool School of Architecture, where Stirling studied immediately after the war, was marked by a "furious debate" about the merits of modernism, ranging from the eclectic Beaux-Arts predilections of some of its staff, through the liberalism of its head, Lionel Budden, to the polemical modernism of some of its students and younger staff. Stirling took up the last of these positions, and his final-year thesis in 1950 was a Corbusian exercise in the free plan, only hinting at future development in its variety of external treatments. Although this generally restrained modernism was confirmed by his experience of the "finickity, decorative, and inconsequential" architecture of the Festival of Britain in 1951, by the time of his first competition entries, such as that for Poole Technical College (1952), Stirling's abandonment of the free plan and his use of brick as an external facing material had begun to signal his movement away from the presiding influence of the Swiss architect or at least from his canonical interwar work. The reasoning behind these moves was that the free plan was seen to compromise both room usage and circulation, and that brick was regionally appropriate.⁵ Already, then, Stirling was tending to a position that was compatible with longer traditions of regional practice and latently sympathetic to the functional expressiveness of Victorian architecture. Expressiveness became especially marked in his design for the Sheffield University competition (1953), with each of its functions articulated distinctively on the exterior of the building while sharing with others a spinal circulation corridor and being housed within a long terrace.

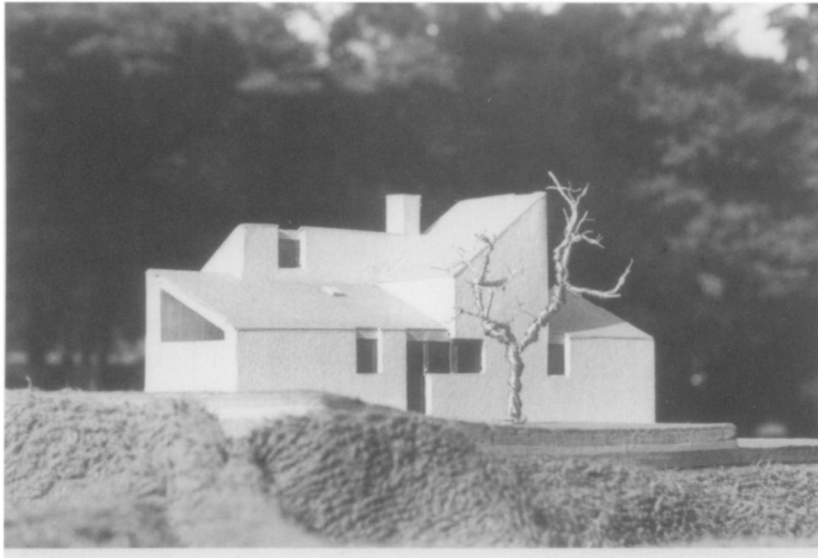


Figure 1 James Stirling, Woolton House, Lancashire, 1954, model of unbuilt project

It was after Sheffield that Stirling's work took on a new direction, perhaps partly because he began three years of work with the highly professional firm of Lyons, Israel & Ellis, renowned for its severe but carefully crafted school buildings, and partly because of his understanding of Le Corbusier's more recent architecture. In the unbuilt house for Woolton in Lancashire (1954; Figure 1), Stirling tried out the idea of using three parallel walls while turning the roofs into a cluster so that the freestanding house presented different faces on all sides and the lean-to roofs seemed to huddle around the entrance and chimney above. The result was that a small house, with a limited budget and only one room and a gallery on the first floor, was given a double-height living space and a stronger if still picturesque presence in the landscape, its highest roof forming the apex of its pyramidal massing, suggestive of a tower on a small church. Woolton embodied what Stirling came broadly to call "a new interpretation of vernacular," and, more specifically, with this project in mind, "the reflection of a devitalized technology and of a reversion towards cosiness in domestic life."⁶

In 1955, Stirling made a similarly suggestive village project for Team X's submission to the tenth Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) (Figure 2).⁷ Here Stirling accepted a linear street pattern and local materials but sought to enliven the scheme by grouping his houses in a staggered formation beside the road and by giving distinct external expression to their various aspects. The underlying conception for the dwellings was a remarkably simple "kit-of-parts." They consisted of three parallel walls of different profiles, which gave internal spaces of varying

widths. From the central wall separate lean-to roofs spanned the separate spaces. There was a strong sense of axis as well as a cubic huddle, with all components individually articulated, especially the central wall, which would be extended beyond the confines of the house and revealed at several points above the lean-to roofs. The folksy quality of Stirling's project offers points of comparison with Berthold Lubetkin's unrealized work at Peterlee New Town. There, in 1947–48, Lubetkin's desire to individualize houses within the common identity of terraces and similar structures had led him to propose a range of façade styles from which the residents could choose.⁸ Stirling, working without specific residents in mind but conceiving of his scheme as a way to develop existing villages, adopted a more picturesque solution whereby the individuality of each volumetric unit of the houses distinguished the different forms of accommodation within the staggered line. As Stirling put it, when advocating alternatives to stylization and structural expression as ways for modernism to advance, "the direct expression of the actual accommodation volumes in relation to each element [determines] the plastic composition of the building."⁹ Unlike much of its contemporary use in British modernism, the picturesque was invoked without whim or whimsy. It derived from an apparently logical process of characterizing different functional spaces, resulting in the "ideogram of the space organization."¹⁰ This was also a distinction made contemporaneously by Stirling's friend, the architectural critic Rowe. In describing mid-nineteenth-century architectural thought, Rowe discerned two forms of the picturesque: one that resulted from seeking visual effects, and one that derived from "the

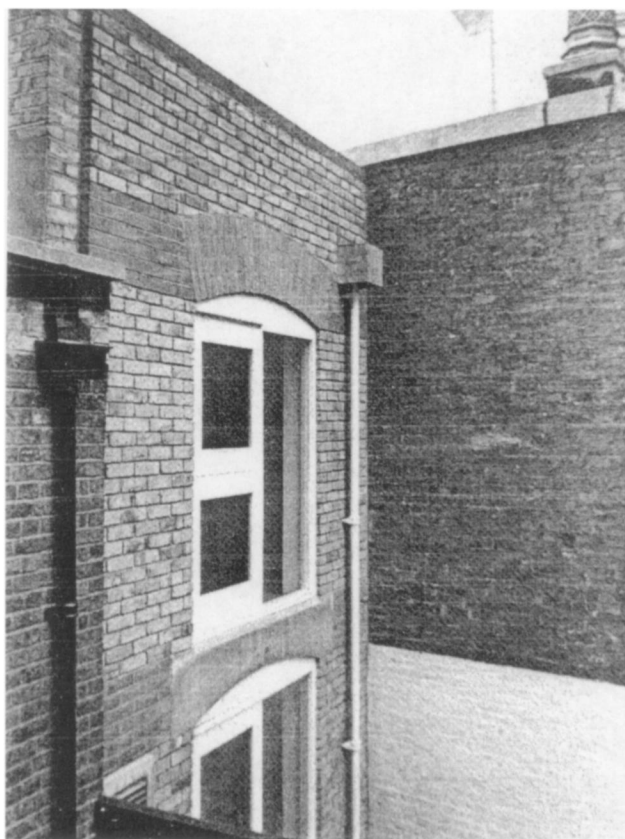


Figure 3 James Stirling and James Gowan, house in Kensington, 1957, wall onto courtyard

leling Stirling's own criticism of unthinking "systems" in contemporary modernism. Le Corbusier seemed largely to have abandoned rationalism, "programmatic theory," and utopian aspirations in favor of a powerful formalism inspired by vernacular buildings but "built by, and intended for, the status quo."¹⁸ In "Regionalism and Modern Architecture," written in 1957, Stirling identified as an obvious source for British urban regionalism the "unself-conscious and usually anonymous" warehouses and other industrial buildings that he knew from Liverpool and the industrial north where he had grown up, which epitomized the "infinite, idiosyncrasies of locality."¹⁹ As an article two years later made clear, Stirling was particularly admiring of nineteenth-century buildings.²⁰ This regionalism was most evident in his Leicester University Engineering Building, but it was first admitted and fully exploited as a source in the Preston buildings that form the focus of this article.

Victorian architecture offered other positive examples. Although Stirling disliked "the ugliness of the stylistic merry-go-round," he preferred to modern suburbs the forms taken by Victorian expansion on the edges of cities,

with its "social and constructional innovation in low density housing."²¹ Brick became almost ubiquitous in his and Gowan's projects at this time, reflecting what Stirling would cite as a specific inspiration—Victorian "knowledge in detailing structural brickwork."²² In addition, he valued the way that the backs of Victorian terraces revealed their "true organisation," showing clearly the different levels and unequal sizes of rooms; he also responded to the way the outbuildings defined the property walls, an observation he made contemporary with his Preston housing and, as will be shown, clearly having a relation to that scheme.²³ Given the sympathy for things Victorian in his writing, it might seem strange if his architecture had not likewise reflected Victorian traits. Beyond Stirling's concession that his buildings might "look a bit Victorian,"²⁴ there is a use of literal Victorianisms in certain of his buildings and projects that have been neglected or edited by the historical record. Three examples are worth mention. In the 1957 house he designed with Gowan in Kensington, the rear wall could easily be mistaken for the reuse of a Victorian remnant (Figure 3), but in fact its arched windows, brick polychromy, and chamfered concrete were entirely new. Furthermore, for the front of the building, which was built as a simplified Regency-style stucco façade, Stirling originally made a Victorian design.²⁵ In another example, their proposed semidetached houses at Sunninghill (ca. 1959), Stirling and Gowan were inspired by the "architecture of the 'Backs'"—the rear view of nineteenth-century terraces—to design an asymmetrical syncopation of gable ends for the front of their scheme (Figure 4).²⁶ Finally, for two houses in the Chilterns (1956), the architects proposed to articulate their buff-colored brick elevations with courses of blue-gray and red brick (Figure 5).²⁷ The examples may indicate a tentative reaching for an alternative vocabulary, but all these details would be reused in the Preston scheme.

The Woolton house and the village housing had both sought a regionalist rationale for their materials as well as contextual and residential logic in their irregular positioning and silhouettes. These features can also be found in the Ham Common Flats (1956–58), Stirling's first built project with Gowan. But though Ham played archaizing games with such things as concrete mantelpieces and water spouts, reworked the window details of nineteenth-century industrial buildings, and respected the scale and materials of the Georgian context, like the other early publicized projects it stayed at a level of historical abstraction consonant with modernism. This meant, for example, that, despite the protestations of the architects, it could be taken up as an example of the "New Brutalism" by Reyner Banham.²⁸ By contrast, the regionalist and picturesque elements in the

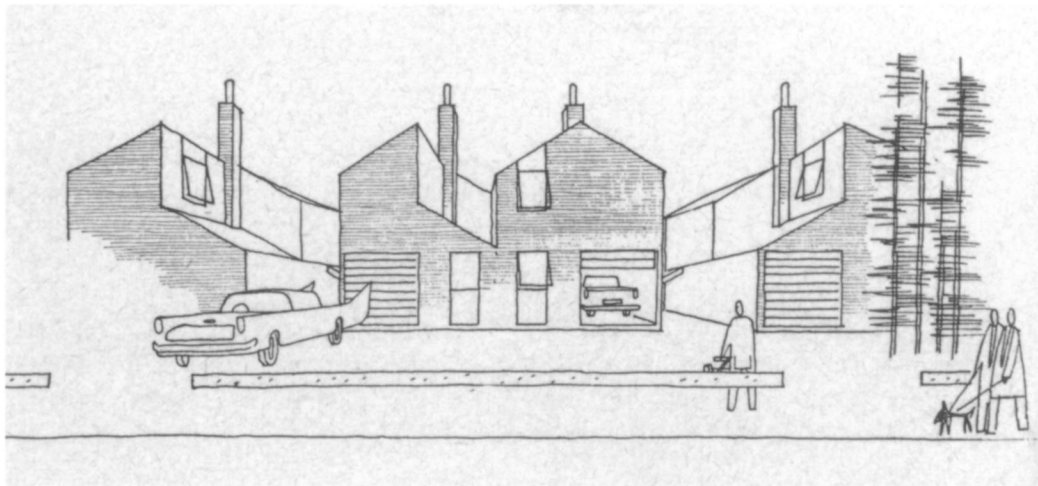


Figure 4 James Stirling and James Gowan, semidetached housing at Sunninghill, ca. 1959

Figure 5 James Stirling and James Gowan, house in the Chilterns, elevations and plans of proposed second house, 1956

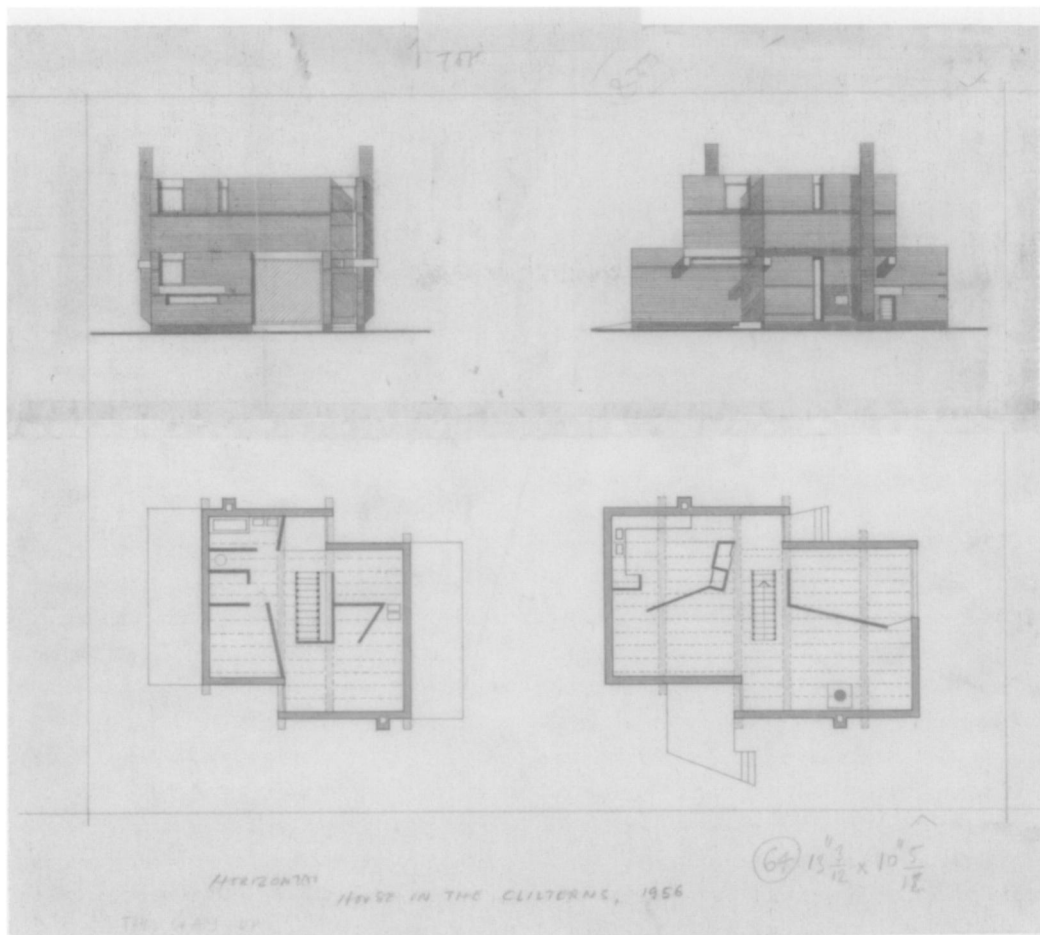




Figure 6 Photographer unknown, Victorian terrace housing in Brunswick Street, Preston, ca. 1954

infill housing at Preston were joined to a level of historical and even anthropological specificity that tipped the project into controversial waters and also, arguably, consigned it to a near-oblivion that meant that no defense could be offered against its recent demolition.²⁹

The Spirit of the Street

The housing scheme in the Avenham area of Preston (1957–61), consisting of sixty-two units of accommodation in a group of three- and four-story terraces and some seniors' housing, can be seen as the culmination of these various built and unbuilt projects of the mid-1950s, and was certainly Stirling and Gowan's largest project to date. Together with two eleven-story tower blocks by Lyons, Israel & Ellis, who had passed on the job of designing the lower development, Stirling and Gowan's buildings were part of the first phase of Preston Borough Council's slum clearance project close to the heart of the town.³⁰ Until clearance started in 1955, the area was occupied by a set of parallel bylaw streets, the typically regimented effects of public health legislation. These streets were filled with early Victorian terraces, many of which had pubs and mission halls at their ends (Figure 6). Behind the terraces were narrow paved yards congested with outbuildings for coal storage and lavatories.³¹

At Preston, Stirling and Gowan had in place all the components and conditions for a new reassessment of the

Victorian past through a serious engagement with the typology of the local housing. Adopting some of the despised urban elements of the Victorian city, they arranged their buildings as two three-story terraces and one four-story block of flats, placed around three sides of the large island site, with a separate group of two-story houses and flats for seniors (Figure 7). By reversing one of the three-story terraces, Stirling and Gowan managed to present three different faces to the surrounding streets, both deferring to and playfully disrupting the urban morphology. These terraces had a one-bedroom flat on the ground floor and a two-story maisonette. They were planned *ad quadratum* and given conventional interiors. The maisonettes were entered via a shared deck that was raised above the yards of the flats and bridged between the maisonettes and their individual "outbuildings." Just as the deck stood in for, or "maintained the spirit of," the street or back alley, so the outbuildings suggested the "spirit" of the coal-shed (or even a decommissioned outside lavatory), a ubiquitous feature of the local terraces.³² The mini-towers created by these structures, accented by long strips of wood acting as louvers on their window slits, gave the terraces a distinctive and nonregional stepped-back form, expressing what Stirling—echoing the picturesque effects of the earlier unbuilt housing projects—was to call "the articulation and identification of the scale of accommodation of which a building is made up" (Figure 8).³³ The outbuildings, together with the castellation of the roofline suggested by the inset windows of the

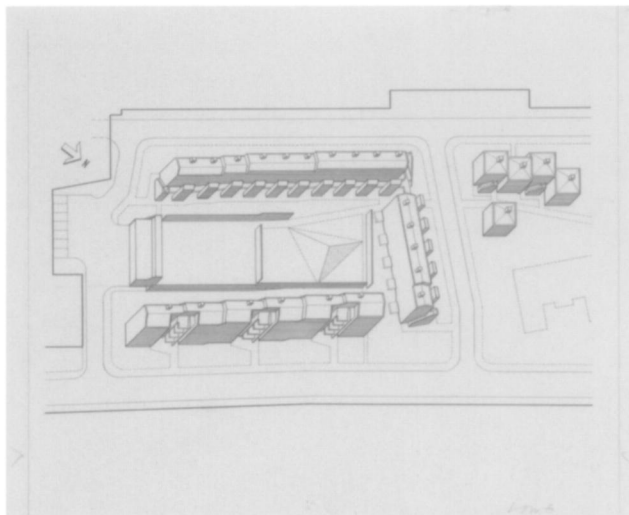


Figure 7 James Stirling and James Gowan, Preston housing, Lancashire, 1957–61, bird's-eye view of the site

Figure 8 Stirling and Gowan, Preston housing, view of three-story terraces





Figure 9 Stirling and Gowan, Preston housing, view of four-story flats

top floor, also lent the whole terrace a somewhat defensive effect (an idea given even more prominence in the architects' Churchill College competition entry [1958]). At the ends of the housing blocks, strongly defined ramps and bridges gave access to the decks and provided powerful abstract elements at three corners of the site, but particularly at the west corner, where two ramps were built. In one statement, the architects emphasized that the openness and visibility of the access spaces were created "so that the movement and meeting of people can be seen and enjoyed by everyone."³⁴ The ramps, then, were intended as a striking stage for these urban theatrics.

The four-story block of flats on the east side was the most self-effacing element in the scheme (Figure 9). It presented inset entrances and access stairways on its external-facing side, and here the details were most brutally modern, with awkward junctures between wood, concrete, and brick components.³⁵ Both long sides of the block were broken up with staggered groups of windows, their unevenness justified by the need to step down on the sloping site. Less a Victorian terrace in inspiration, this was more reminiscent of the warehouses Stirling had admired and illustrated in

his 1957 essay on regionalism: "the outside appearance of these buildings is an efficient expression of their specific function whereas today they may be appreciated picturesquely and possibly utilised arbitrarily."³⁶ Less industrial in derivation were the timber and glass balconies and gallery fronts used for the access stairways, which, in the three-story blocks, screened the small yards of the ground-floor flats. These balconies and gallery fronts were almost absurdly high, as if expressing a child's sense of scale—clearly a foretaste of the chunky, overscaled elements in much of Stirling's later work. The large courtyard behind the blocks was reminiscent of similar areas in Lubetkin & Tecton's housing estates; areas essentially for play were given hints of some more honorific purpose, with a low grassed pyramid and lengths of wall that suggest the vestiges of garden perimeters left behind with the terraces.³⁷

The architects placed the five small blocks of seniors' housing across the road from their reconstituted terraces (Figure 10). Four of the blocks were positioned in an informal row, the fifth slightly detached from them. External stairs were placed in the reentrant spaces created by the informal spacing, their angular sheer brick walls marking



Figure 10 Stirling and Gowan, Preston housing, seniors' flats

their family resemblance to the ramps of the terraces. In one of the most telling devices in these otherwise four-square volumes, “an architectural joke on the modern movement,” the entrances to the lower flats were cut through the external staircases.³⁸ The buildings were given pyramidal roofs, while the walls were articulated with exposed concrete lintels and lines of blue engineering brick at the levels of the floors and roofslab. The Victorian effect was extended to the chamfered edges of the lintels (given a functional justification by the architects).³⁹ The principal defamiliarizing device in the seniors' housing was the way the roofs stopped short, allowing the walls to extend upward as parapets and giving the buildings a starker effect: Victorian faces with modern hairstyling.

Almost cheek-by-jowl with Victorian terraces, Stirling and Gowan's scheme used other details from the buildings around it—splayed setbacks, copings made of bricks set on edge, bull-nosed brick-on-edge window sills, and the hard-faced bricks themselves. The bricks were chosen partly to cut costs but also because they had the effect of making the familiar strange. These semi-engineering bricks, normally used at the time for industrial buildings, had a hard reflec-

tive surface that Stirling particularly desired for its “out of context” effect.⁴⁰ “I never select materials emotionally,” he wrote in 1965. “They are chosen entirely at a practical level, but then, of course, they must be transformed to cohere at a level of significance.”⁴¹ For avant-garde architects in the 1950s to use bricks was in itself provocative, as they were seen as a dismal building material, the enemy of light and space.⁴² But the Preston bricks do not tell their age easily; their surfaces refuse to accumulate histories. They do not, in other words, carry the “bad everyday” connotations of the material as was common in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Britain, signifying repetitive labor, the desolate, and the unpleasant (“a wilderness of dirty bricks”).⁴³ But neither, however, are they easily associated with the “good everyday,” as bricks often were in a different nineteenth-century tradition, where their appearance was seen to embody the positive valence of ordinary actions.⁴⁴ By contrast, the effect of Stirling and Gowan's bricks seems, in part, to provide a distancing of the otherwise familiar qualities of the Victorian terrace, a way of putting the latter in parenthesis or in quotation marks, of emphasizing its extrinsic meanings.

The result is buildings of great planarity and hardness, echoing qualities in the city around them. They are precise in their profiles and silhouettes, a precision that arrives from stressing the thinness and tautness of the medium, giving the walls a curious weightlessness.⁴⁵ This is the beginning of that “prismatic style of hard shiny surfaces” that became an admired feature of Stirling’s later work.⁴⁶ At the same time, the accommodation entities within the scheme were expressed by the outbuilding towers, which in Stirling’s words served to “identify the position of the dwelling within the terrace.”⁴⁷ But the suggestion that the reconstructed Victorian terrace could be renovated if not reconstructed was created within a larger context of rupture with the nineteenth-century street pattern. The advantages of natural surveillance in the street and the learned limits to propinquity—so closely identified with the terraces—were inevitably fragile, form-specific social-spatial qualities. However much the scheme evoked the bylaw terrace, it was actually an estate centered on an empty play space rather than a shared channel of movement: it was a publicly owned rather than commercially driven development. The penetrability of the ends of these terraces into and out of the yard, the restricted public use of street-decks, and—with the loss of the privately owned yards of the Victorian terraces—the ambiguous ownership of proximate public spaces created when the housing of bylaw streets was converted into a perimeter block of housing all imply new behavioral codes or disciplines to be learned. In other words, following demolition and the creation of a *tabula rasa*, Stirling and Gowan were not content to leave tradition and community merely on the level of representation, but displaced them into a hopefully more resistant place-form.⁴⁸ Unlike the functionally driven picturesque of the village housing scheme or the flats at Ham Common, the picturesque effects at Preston seem to result from a consultation of the *genius loci*, a wilful use of modernist spatial abstraction, the expression of separate dwelling functions, and a merging of the forms of the terrace and the perimeter block.

Scenes of Toughness and Frolic

Such description takes analysis only so far. To go further into an understanding of the Preston scheme requires an insight into how the architects intended it to be understood and how contemporaries reacted to it. On the architects’ intentions, there are several published statements and a number of photographs Stirling made soon after the buildings were occupied, which were used by reviewers in the architectural journals.⁴⁹ A striking view of a group of

Victorian industrial buildings in Preston appears among the shots, possibly intended to indicate the architects’ inspiration in local traditions (Figure 11).⁵⁰ In most other contemporary contexts, such a subject would have provided an opportunity for an image of smoggy air, moldering brick, and hard, mean figures—as in the documentary films of Paul Rotha or Bill Brandt’s photographs of desolate northern townscapes. Not so for Stirling. In his image, the figures carry no emotional burden. Though the buildings are of variable heights, they cluster together in a densely articulated huddle, all angled gables, sheer walls of brick in pointillist gray and white, and dramatically contrasting shadows created by a raking light. The whole is unified by the flattening effect of a long-focus lens and some sly framing that lines one edge with a lamppost and fills one corner with a bulbous black car. The caption in *Architectural Design* reads: “the character of the city is tough, dark and complex,” identifying qualities Stirling wanted to be associated with the new scheme.⁵¹ The photograph portrays a rather different image of Preston than the mid-nineteenth-century terraces that were the more immediate context of the new housing—an image of work rather than residence—and by doing so it offers formal precedent for a looser and more various set of cubic shapes, giving license for the wilful placing of windows and for the abrupt termination of planes in the final scheme.

If this was the preferred image of Preston, Stirling’s photographs of the finished project tended to emphasize seemingly ad hoc encounters between residents and buildings. Although architectural photography showing buildings as used or populated was still extremely unusual at this time, the obvious precedents for Stirling’s work were Roger Mayne’s images of Park Hill, Sheffield, that had appeared in *Architectural Design* only a few months previously, in September 1961 (Figure 12).⁵² These works, as well as Nigel Henderson’s related photographs, are clearly behind Stirling’s imagery, especially in their evocation of a world of blurred movements and suggestive shadows, of the randomness of human association and out-of-doors play. In one of Stirling’s shots, two groups of children are seen sitting on the angled parapets of the ramps at the western corner, a particularly resonant part of the scheme for Stirling (Figure 13).⁵³ The composition clearly balances figurative and abstract elements. The new scheme appears as large flat slices of wall that are enlivened, even ornamented, by the children and the strong shapes of their shadows, labile body-images entirely at one with the sun-reflective sheets of brick. The past is manifested by a small cluster of chimneys that appears discreetly just behind some of the children to the right, by television antennas indicating modern accre-



Figure 11 James Stirling (?), photograph of Preston, 1961

tions. We look at the youngsters as they gather on the walls like birds on a line, entirely at home in their environment. Importantly, as in other photographs by Stirling, the figures actively engage in a tactile, fully embodied relation with the buildings. A view such as this, looking upward at planes of wall and sky, seems to deny perspectival space; instead of a suppression of the other senses in favor of rationalized sight, the picture aims to mediate our physical relation to the buildings through the bodies of the children.

In another photograph, human life is again signaled through children, this time caught running past one of the three-story blocks, which once more is cut abstractly by the edges of the image (Figure 14). Perspective is again denied by a wedge of black shadow at the bottom. Here the old is even more ethereal—the fuzzy shadow of a chimney—while the children and their shadows are even more like hieroglyphs for life. In a third image, the photograph is divided into two halves by the beginning of one of the street decks (Figure 15). Two



Figure 12 Roger Mayne, photograph of access stair tower, Park Hill, Sheffield, 1961

Figure 13 Stirling, photograph of children on ramps at Preston housing, 1961





Figure 14 Stirling, photograph of children running past three-story terrace at Preston housing, 1961

Figure 15 Stirling, photograph of children on bridge at Preston housing, 1961



children improvise play on this level and two more sit on the brick parapet of a ramp in the lower half. Seen through the glass of the street-deck rail and strongly silhouetted by back-lighting, the children's bodies are now cut across, fragmented, and rendered partly two-dimensional. In the immediate foreground the "open," "penetrable" architecture of modernist aesthetics is epitomized by the street-deck, but visible through it, like temporal layers, are the new lintels and brick polychromy of one of the seniors' houses, and then farther back the familiar shapes of a Victorian terrace.

Although a few of Stirling's images show elderly men, most of them are populated by children, which creates a double message: an optimistic future of adulthood-to-be, and a remembered past of childhood that was. The second of these is not an association one finds in Mayne's or Henderson's street photography, where children are more often used to suggest the deep "tribal" structures of urban space and the semiotics of street gestures and figural inscriptions. It is, however, legitimated by part of a quotation from Somerset Maugham that Stirling and Gowan chose to accompany their own statement on the scheme. Reporting on Charlie Chaplin, Maugham wrote about the comedian's memory-infused impressions: "To him the streets of southern London are the scene of frolic, gaiety and extravagant adventure."⁵⁴

What Stirling's photographs make clear is that the Victorian past is not rendered an accidental element of the townscape, nor are the new buildings juxtaposed with Victorian terraces in the form of a surreal encounter. Unlike his later buildings, where such treatments of past and present were usually given surreal and highly ironic overtones, at Preston the clash is both generational and generative.⁵⁵ In other words, it seems intended to say something about continuities across epochs as well as to produce new syntheses. The past and the present are sometimes layered, sometimes intermingled. Where we have come from, the images suggest, is always a factor in where we are going.

Worktown Re-worked

Stirling and Gowan's published statements on the Preston housing demonstrate their commitment to transferring the spatial anthropology of working-class life in the slums into the new scheme.⁵⁶ A particular current of sociology, led by the work of Michael Young and Peter Willmott, had been arguing for several years before this for a reevaluation of the spaces of working-class areas, especially for their intricate contribution to forms of social life. Regarded by some as backward-looking, such sociology nevertheless contributed directly to the work of young Team X members

and CIAM apostates like Alison and Peter Smithson, with whom Stirling had plenty of contact during this period.⁵⁷ The Smithsons' thinking is well known: the abstract functional zoning of modernism should give way to the promotion of identity and community through the use of comprehensible anthropological concepts of human spatial association. Streets and houses, districts and cities, were all right, after all.

Although their buildings seem more replete with historical forms and references than the Smithsons would ever allow, Stirling and Gowan's attitude to the preexisting social realities of Preston follows much of this Team X thinking, even if one must be somewhat skeptical of architects talking about and attempting to represent continuity when their livelihood depends on demolition and development. Citing recent research by the anthropological survey group Mass Observation, the architects believed that "the most remarkable aspect of worktown over the last two decades is its great unchange, particularly in the habit and character of its people—despite greater affluence."⁵⁸ A "neighbourliness and communal vitality" had been fostered by the Victorian city, which meant that the spirit of the "alley, yard, street terraces" had to be maintained, even if their forms were not actually reconstructed.⁵⁹ "The alleys and pavements were just big enough for their purpose," the architects wrote, "and they were crowded and vital places, in contrast to the oversized roads, pavements and building set-backs in the New Towns."⁶⁰ Yet what was actually happening in the Avenham area of Preston, as in other areas of British cities at this time, was wholesale slum clearance involving not only the demolition of Victorian bylaw terraces and the transfer of private property into public hands through compulsory purchase, but also the erasure of old street patterns and the creation of a new road system aimed often at creating isolated pockets or "estates" of housing and flats.⁶¹

In Stirling and Gowan's buildings there is evidence of some ambivalence toward the existing spatial forms of community, despite the links of motif and material. They seem to be seeking to renovate those forms rather than reinstating them or merely regretting their loss.⁶² On one level, renovation can be seen in the transplanting of the bylaw street into the raised, mostly single-sided deck typical of Brutalism. But on another level it can be seen in the way the main blocks seem lifted above as well as withdrawn from the surrounding streets, presenting ranges of brick on three sides and harboring the playground within their U-shaped configuration. Meanwhile, over the road, the seniors' housing is staggered informally but awkwardly, unsure whether it belongs to a village or to the new street

lines. It is as if the architects wanted to have some elevated, more archetypal sense of place while retaining a strong link with the familiar environmental forms of the area.⁶³

In this context, Stirling and Gowan's scheme was riven through with unintended ironies and tensions. Its rhetoric was of a repairing of a rupture with the past, yet it had come about only because of that rupture. It seemed to preach the reassuring verities of traditional housing scale though it was conceived by Preston Borough Council and knowingly entered into by the architects when they took on responsibility for the lower buildings from Lyons, Israel & Ellis, as merely the soft, low-rise end of a "mixed development" that also included eleven-story tower blocks. It elevated the supposed transfer of the coal bunker into a modern scheme as a matter of respecting custom, while it denied residents the back yards or private gardens of their previous houses. Finally, it celebrated the benefits of neighborly propinquity while subjecting expected notions of front and rear to a radical *bouleversement*.⁶⁴

Bad Nostalgia

Contemporary accounts identified the Preston scheme immediately with other representations of working-class life, particularly *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Alan Sillitoe's 1958 novel of the industrial city, a model study of frustration at the limitations of blue-collar life and of the allure of affluence as an escape. Many critics regarded Preston as a similarly hemmed-in environment. For one commentator in *Architectural Design*, the buildings were too reminiscent of the sites of Victorian labor: "Although preserving the intimate quality of the slums is possibly better than sterile suburbia, must the executed theory be so forbidding? . . . The mill was the daily drudgery from which worktown escaped, not the idiom they returned to, nor the 'vital spirit of the alley.' This seems like grinding them in."⁶⁵ In publishing the scheme, the Italian journal *Casabella* pushed Preston's postindustrial nostalgia further by including comparative images of a Victorian terraced street and a painting by L. S. Lowry, doyen of the glum northern scene.⁶⁶ When the scheme won the 1963 Good Housing competition, the *Daily Mail* reported that it had caused an uproar among architects for being "deliberately designed . . . to look like slums."⁶⁷ A few years later Nikolaus Pevsner, who had warned against a "return to historicism" in 1961, commented tartly that Stirling and Gowan's terraces "are evidently an attempt at reverting to the mood of the Victorian vernacular. It is curious that some people should have moved on recently to a nostalgia for the grimmer aspects of Victorian architecture."⁶⁸

Reyner Banham's subtle review of the Preston housing was made from a position closer to Stirling's, though he shared with Pevsner a rejection of any hint of stylistic revivalism and had recently described Italian Neo-Liberty as "infantile regression."⁶⁹ Like his friend Stirling, Banham had become a modernist apostate, particularly critical of the older generation's picturesque modernism. Nevertheless, in his review, Banham tried to suspend normal critical judgment, making superfine distinctions in the face of what could easily seem like a betrayal of any kind of modernism, "heroic" or not. In Banham's view, the image of close-knit working-class life implied by Stirling and Gowan's buildings was not of the same ilk as the "sentimental Hoggartry" that believed working-class virtues were the product of intimate physical propinquity; it was not a simple recidivism, a desire to turn the clock back.⁷⁰ Like the Smithsons and Team X, Stirling and Gowan had rejected what Banham called the "architectural charity" of modernism—its philanthropic pretensions—and had come to regard working-class culture as inherently valuable.

Banham identified the key components in this move as, first, the rediscovery of the vernacular through Le Corbusier, then a revaluing of English regional materials and a reawakening to the life of working-class streets, as Mayne and Henderson had pictured them. But what worried Banham in the Preston scheme was that, unlike the Smithsons or Denys Lasdun, who had taken the function of the street and placed it within an utterly different architectural form, Stirling and Gowan ran the risk of succumbing to "socialist formalism or working-class scene-painting." Banham pointed to the "slackly wilful" effect of the placing of windows on the four-story block of flats, but he approved of the outbuildings and the street-decks in the other two blocks: "these two terraces have the air of a vernacular tradition craftily re-assessed in terms of a society in transition."

Most intriguing and problematic were the seniors' homes. Here "the whole effect is so Victorian that they could almost be re-named Bessemer Cottages," and, because the building-forms were so close to actual Victorian types, "everything fits together with an unforced logic." Yet this too made Banham uneasy. As the rest of the scheme had shown that working-class community could be evoked with new spatial forms (the street-deck), the meaning of these apparently retardataire houses, their "intended social content," was ambiguous.⁷¹

There was a real contradiction here: were the architects serving a durable and unchanging working class life, or was this a form of revivalism, providing "an architecture that forces the working class into the role of picturesque peasantry"?⁷² Banham's own judgment is apparent by the

end of the article: though the Preston scheme may provide “a functional and visual setting for much that is valuable in proletarian culture *at the moment* [it] may leave a developing working class lumbered with an unsuitable functional environment twenty affluent years from now.”⁷³

Nostalgia for the Slums, and the Strange Man's Dwelling

In these responses, including Banham's equivocal review, Stirling and Gowan stood accused not just of a failure to develop but of a deliberate recidivism. The Preston scheme was not understood as a nostalgia for utopia, as was the brandishing of the fragments of an older modernism that could be found in the work of the neo-avant-garde.⁷⁴ Instead, Stirling and Gowan were accused of a nostalgia for perhaps the worst of all pasts at that time, the Victorian age. It seemed odd, even perverse, in these immediate postwar decades with their blitzed and slum-cleared wastelands—and certainly atypical of the architectural profession—to savor such a past in the heart of the city. After all, for nearly three decades, since at least the early 1930s and arguably since the start of the Garden City movement, British architects and planners, abetted by documentary filmmakers and photographers, had been berating what they regarded as the typical features of the Victorian city. The worst subject of their ire and their campaigning for new planning laws was the bylaw street, but invectives were also directed at inner-city pollution, lack of green spaces, and the absence of zoned planning: all offended against an aesthetics of hygienic and therapeutic clarity.⁷⁵

Modernism had been narrated by Pevsner as a movement of “pioneers” finding their way out of the Victorian jungle of style through new technologies and new materials and later—once the movement was established—combining rationalism and the hoped-for popularity of the picturesque.⁷⁶ The Victorian city acted as the other to modernism's enlightened city of towers and open spaces; it provided confirmation by contrast with the modernization of the postwar period. Although the Festival of Britain had sparked a revived interest in Victorian design, this was very far from the Victorian slums and the catastrophes of Victorian industrialism that populated modernist nightmares. But there were other, confusing factors. For those of an avant-garde disposition, to like Victorian architecture at this time was to risk association with the soft or picturesque wing of modernism, or with fogeys and revivalists of an older generation like John Betjeman and Osbert Lancaster.⁷⁷ But being attracted to what was deemed to be the deliberately ugly, including the violently clashing contrasts between the medieval and the indus-

trial, as could be found in the work of High Victorians like William Butterfield, was an accepted part of the world of Brutalist references.⁷⁸ Among all these factions, however, there was never a love or appreciation of the harder, slummiest aspects of the Victorian city, its “tough, dark and complex qualities.”⁷⁹

Stirling and Gowan had anticipated the objections to Preston, indeed the idea that their scheme was nostalgic is one that they themselves took up and turned to positive effect in promoting the scheme's virtues. This is one of the first examples of what could be called a principle of contrariness in Stirling's work that involves the transgression of accepted tenets—in this case, modernism's revulsion for nostalgia and its desire to consign the Victorian slum to oblivion—so that they could come into productive tension with their opposites.⁸⁰ Together with their project description, plans, and photographs, Stirling and Gowan also sent the press the quotation from Maugham about Chaplin that I mentioned above but bears citing in full:

I have a notion that he suffers from a nostalgia of the slums. The celebrity he enjoys, his wealth, imprison him in a way of life in which he finds only constraint. I think he looks back to the freedom of his struggling youth, with its poverty and bitter privation, with a longing which knows it can never be satisfied. To him the streets of southern London are the scene of frolic, gaiety and extravagant adventure. They have to him a reality which the well-kept avenues, bordered with trim houses, in which live the rich, can never possess. I can imagine him going into his own house and wondering what on earth he is doing in this strange man's dwelling. I suspect the only home he can ever look upon as such is a second-floor back in the Kennington Road. One night I walked with him in Los Angeles and presently our steps took us into the poorest quarter of the city. There were sordid tenement houses and the shabby, gaudy shops in which are sold the various goods that the poor buy from day to day. His face lit up and a buoyant tone came into his voice as he exclaimed: “This is the real life, isn't it? All the rest is just sham.”⁸¹

Though Chaplin may have been playing up a particular role for Maugham's sake, there is little doubt that the prominence Stirling and Gowan gave this account in presenting the new scheme at Preston meant that they wished to extol a *nostalgie de la boue*.⁸² Chaplin displays the classic symptoms of the disease of homesickness. Derived from the Greek *nostos*, or return, and *algos*, or suffering, nostalgia is a modern term denoting the pain, often treated as a medical condition in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, caused by an unappeased impulse to go back, to return home.⁸³ The sensation is about two different times and is usually felt on

the other side of some event or long separation in time from what the afflicted yearns for—most typically, as with Chaplin, the places and experiences of one's childhood—and it acts through a narrative reconstruction of that supposedly more authentic past. However, it is often, as with Stirling and Gowan's reviewers, used negatively to imply that the feeling is only a sentimental one that involves escape from the present into an idealized and distorted past, particularly a vicarious, overly rosy view of the history of other people; though this last is more *nostos* than *algos*, an "imagined nostalgia" lacking the homeward obsession and pain characteristic of the real phenomenon and of the feelings that Stirling and Gowan wished to evoke.⁸⁴

The negative view of nostalgia was deeply inscribed in modernist thinking, where it was regarded as a synonym for the distortion of history. Given the irreversibility of time, it was seen as backward-looking and therefore antiprogressive, and as sentimental and therefore irrational or at least irrelevant to strictly architectural thinking. Furthermore, although memory—likewise eschewed by modernism—may have regained favor, at least as put to ironic ends since the onset of postmodernism, nostalgia is still despised.⁸⁵ Ignoring the overlap between the two notions, it would seem that memory is admitted into critical theory because it conjures up the metahistorical, offering resistance to both official history and modernist amnesia, while nostalgia is seen as lacking any galvanizing powers.

All this makes it even more interesting that Stirling and Gowan should have presented the Preston scheme under the banner of nostalgia. They deliberately and very precisely summoned up the feeling and they did so partly as an act of provocative contrariness—enabling the return of what modernity had repressed—and partly as a declaration of independence from contemporary architectural mores. Nostalgia for them was neither a negative concept nor a reactionary one; it related to a continuity with the past and offered some critical purchase on the present. It was perfectly compatible with defamiliarizing devices that recalled the known but at the same time made it strange, restoring nostalgia's traditional links with the uncanny.⁸⁶ Most tellingly, and unlike the referential use of the past in some of Stirling's later works, the Preston scheme did not offer nostalgia as an isolated fragment; nor was it merely contextualist, but instead reasserted the past as a nonalienated relation between individual and community in the present.

What makes Chaplin's nostalgia different from one that denies the actual is not just that past poverty seems more real than the "sham" of present wealth, but also that economic conditions coexist and can be found in the same city as part of lived experience rather than vicarious reconstruc-

tion; the one is a critique of the other. These feelings are identified closely with buildings: the "well-kept avenues" and "trim houses" of the rich and the "sordid tenement houses" and "shabby, gaudy shops" of the poor. Chaplin's own trim house only becomes a "strange man's dwelling" under the power of nostalgia. The trimness and strangeness of this home are easily read, in the new context of postwar architectural discourse, as indicating modernism. Similarly, and even more provocatively, the term "sham" is turned inside out from what had become a common modernist adjective for the Victorian past and instead now denotes the modern itself.

Nostalgia may also have had personal, Chaplinesque meaning for Stirling. His birth in a Glasgow tenement followed by his upbringing in the Liverpool suburbs offered fertile soil for a detached *nostalgie de la boue* and one on which he clearly drew later in his career.⁸⁷ While he saw himself, according to Colin Rowe, as a "provincial hero," he was also "never completely at ease" in London.⁸⁸

Patently, nostalgia can be more manifold than modernists believed; it can reflect actual displacements and manifest changing realities which otherwise the ever-spinning wheels of development seek merely to fix as constant repetition, or the forward-looking gaze of modernism as whimsical return. Nostalgia seems to accompany epochal change; it is the corollary of large-scale development, crisis, the uprooting caused by disaster. Perhaps surprisingly, through its anxieties about the future or disaffection with the present, nostalgia can offer a critical perspective. Because it revalues elements of a despised past, nostalgia can question myths of progress and offer the perspective of users, the powerless. At Preston, for example, nostalgia might be seen as a relevant check on tabula rasa development. In this sense, a critical or positive nostalgia is close to the work of contemporary social theorists such as Hoggart or Young and Willmott, all of whom stressed that the changes they described had been made within living memory and that their books were inspired by the fear that something of great distinction, based on an identification between community and place, might be lost to a new "faceless" culture.⁸⁹

The question is whether Stirling and Gowan's work offered a critical perspective or whether, as many of its detractors felt, it was a betrayal of the present and its potential for the sake of a familiar but limited past. Crucially here, Preston did not offer up the past as a group of fragments that could constitute only either partial views of the past or fetishized remnants. It did not seek to remember what had already been dismembered; the Victorian terrace remained an active memory of the new scheme's tenants and a visible presence in Preston. The scheme sought rather, as sug-

gested above, to renovate that still active memory, indicating its displacement—but, emphatically, not its disappearance—through such defamiliarizing devices as the materials and the references to industrial buildings, while also reconfiguring its shared spaces (street, alley) within the new terms of a public housing estate.

In relation to the notion of nostalgia as a betrayal of the present, Chaplin's story is a kind of warning that has links with the Greek myth of Odysseus, trapped on Calypso's island and living a life of leisure and perpetual youth, or even the related myth of the lotus eaters, blithely neglecting all memory of home in their pursuit of present pleasures. Odysseus's nostalgia is a necessary pull to his duties, which are the only cure for his pain. Like Chaplin, it is "real life" that is missing from Odysseus's travels and his frolicsome existence with Calypso. Unlike Chaplin, however, his conscience overwhelms his life of delights and drives him home. As Milan Kundera has written, "rather than ardent exploration of the unknown (adventure), [Odysseus] chose the apotheosis of the known (return). Rather than the infinite (for adventure never intends to finish), he chose the finite (for the return is a reconciliation with the finitude of life)."⁹⁰

Conclusion

Surprisingly, given its scale, the Preston housing has not figured very significantly in accounts of Stirling's architectural development or even of his period of collaboration with Gowan. Gowan himself has said recently that Preston "put both of them off the Victorian thing."⁹¹ Stirling did not mention it in his 1965 account of his work or in his Gold Medal acceptance speech in 1980; it is entirely absent from Mark Girouard's biography of the architect and from Robert Maxwell's monograph;⁹² and when it is present in other histories it has played a minor role in their narratives, regarded half-damningly as "the most insular and vernacular [scheme] to come from the partnership."⁹³ Discussion of the projects of the 1950s is usually tailored so that the culminating point is Stirling and Gowan's work at Leicester, and in it Victorian influence is accepted but understood as only one among a range of resources invigorating Stirling's architecture. Leicester University Engineering Building is seen as the first major expression of a new postmodernism—"the first building in Britain after Modernism"—as though what went before is mere prelude to it.⁹⁴ However, it is possible to understand Preston not as a cul-de-sac or a route merely sketched out in Stirling and Gowan's work that was later marginalized by retrospective accounts, but rather as the first example in postwar British architecture of an attempt

to bridge a gap between modernism and previous architectural forms, indeed to treat the contrast or contrariness as one offering dialectical possibilities, of contradiction enabling a new formulation.

In this light, we might return to nostalgia and the Odysseus myth. Earlier in this essay, I portrayed Stirling and Gowan's avowed nostalgia as a positive, even critical stance, not tinged by despair or loss but activated by an ideal of renovation. However, the Odysseus myth, which I initially linked to the architects' association with Chaplin's homesickness, has a rather more ambivalent outcome. As Kundera points out, Odysseus did of course return to the "ecstasy of the known," fulfilling Homer's glorification of nostalgia, even if this meant the destruction of Penelope's suitors and a life among people who had never known him. But he left behind Calypso, a woman with whom he had lived for possibly longer than Penelope and who had borne him two children. Furthermore, few in Ithaca asked him about his twenty years away and it was in the experience of these years of wandering that the center of his life now lay.⁹⁵

Notes

I would especially like to thank Jules Lubbock for sparking my interest in the Preston housing and nostalgia some fifteen years ago, and James Gowan for his generosity and patience with my inquiries. I am also grateful to Michael Farr, Tom and Carole Frodsham, Elain Harwood, Malcolm Higgs, Howard Shubert, Shaun Theobald, and Michael Wilford.

1. The best accounts of this are Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland* (New Haven and London, 1994); and Nicholas Bullock, *Building the Post-War World: Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain* (London, 2002).

2. Any attempt to write in depth about Stirling's work immediately reveals the scarcity of scholarly writing about him—astonishing given his prominence. Apart from some excellent essays by architectural critics, much of the literature suffers from being too close to him or, as I indicate, untrustworthy because of the architect's own editing of the historical record. In addition, the fallout from the breakup of Stirling's partnership with Gowan continues to affect a balanced consideration of this critical period in both of their careers.

3. Colin Rowe, "The Blenheim of the Welfare State," *As I Was Saying: Recollections and Miscellaneous Essays* (1959; Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1996), vol. 1, 144.

4. On the neo-avant-garde, see Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Manchester, 1984).

5. James Stirling, "An Architect's Approach to Architecture," *Royal Institute of British Architects Journal*, ser. 3, vol. 72 (May 1965), 231.

6. James Stirling, "A Personal View of the Present Situation," *Architectural Design* 28 (1958), 233; Stirling, "House near Liverpool," *Architectural Design* 26 (July 1956), 241.

7. *Architectural Design* 25 (Sept. 1955), 287.

8. John Allan, *Berthold Lubetkin: Architecture and the Tradition of Progress* (London, 1992), 490.

9. James Stirling, "The Functional Tradition' and Expression," *Perspecta* 6 (1959), 89.

10. *Ibid.*, 92.

11. Colin Rowe, "Character and Composition; Or Some Vicissitudes of Architectural Vocabulary in the Nineteenth Century," *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays* (1953–54; Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 71, 74.

12. James Stirling, "From Garches to Jaoul," *Architectural Review* 118 (Sept. 1955), 145–51; James Stirling, "Ronchamp: Le Corbusier's Chapel and the Crisis of Rationalism," *Architectural Review* 119 (Mar. 1956), 155–61.

13. Stirling, "Ronchamp," 161.

14. 1957 lecture notes, as quoted in Mark Girouard, *Big Jim: The Life and Work of James Stirling* (London, 2000), 36.

15. Stirling, "Personal View," 233. This is less an ambivalence to prefabrication or systems building than a rejection of the stock application of particular modernist forms to particular building types. Stirling returned to the "kit-of-parts" concept in works like the student residences for St. Andrews University (1964–68), the housing at Runcorn New Town (1967), and the Olivetti training school at Haslemere (1967–72). See also James Stirling, "Packaged Deal and Prefabrication," *Design* 123 (Mar. 1959), 28–31.

16. Stirling, "Personal View," 233.

17. "It is becoming apparent that architecture, mainly due to economic pressures, is becoming multi-aesthetic; that is, not *one* style but a number of styles, each appropriate to the particular problem, are developing." James Gowan, "Curriculum," *Architectural Review* 126 (Dec. 1959), 316. Gowan went on to make it clear that by "problem" he meant typological and environmental constraints and expectations. *Ibid.*, 323. The controversy implicit in these remarks has recently been alluded to by Gowan: "The AA School head Michael Patrick tried to stop the publication but *AR* went ahead. Nikolaus Pevsner wanted to initiate a printed discussion with me but I declined." James Gowan, letter to the author, 14 June 2005.

18. Stirling, "From Garches," 151. In the case of the Maisons Jaoul, this primitive vernacular was, disturbingly, "within half of mile of the Champs Elysées." *Ibid.*, 146.

19. James Stirling, "Regionalism and Modern Architecture," *Architects' Year Book* 8 (London, 1957), 65, 68.

20. He makes this clear during comments on the famous special issue of *Architectural Review* (July 1957) on the "functional tradition," which in Stirling's view was "perhaps a little narrow, faintly Georgian, and too nearly confined to early industrialism." Stirling, "Functional Tradition," 89.

21. Stirling, "Personal View," 233.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Stirling, "Functional Tradition," 91.

24. Stirling, "Architect's Approach," 233.

25. James Gowan, interview with the author, 16 May 2005. Interestingly, when the house was published at the time as well as later by Stirling, no such Victorian aspects were allowed into its representation: see "House in Kensington," *Architectural Review* 127 (Mar. 1960), 191–93; Arthur Korn, "The Work of James Stirling and James Gowan," *Architect & Building News* 215 (7 Jan. 1959), 23; and Peter Arnell and Ted Bickford, eds., *James Stirling: Buildings and Projects* (London, 1984), 57–58. As well as excising Victorianism from the Kensington house, Arnell and Bickford call it a "house conversion" when actually it was a new build in the back yard of an older house. It was only when Gowan published the house much later that an image of the rear wall was allowed: David Dunster, ed., *James Gowan* (London, 1978), 21.

26. Korn, "Stirling and Gowan," 22.

27. The two houses were commissioned by M. S. Kissa for a site at Whiteleaf, Buckinghamshire. Both are illustrated in James Stirling, *James*

Stirling: Buildings and Projects 1950–1974 (London, 1996), 8, 43, where it is said that the main house was "rejected by the local planning authority." In an article published in 1959 and reproducing drawings of the main house, the text, presumably supplied by the architects, again claims that the design was rejected by the planning authority. This is another example of Stirling's tendency to drastically edit the historical record of his career. In fact the house was built, if to a rather different design. Planning application records including drawings signed by Stirling, kept by the Building Control Service of Wycombe District Council, show that the published drawings represent the second proposal for this project, dated 13 Sept. 1956. They were refused planning permission as "detrimental to the amenities of the locality," presumably because of the brickwork and the flat roof. A third design for only one house, dated 19 Dec. 1956, using local brick with pitched roofs and a thinned and elongated plan, was approved and this structure, with later accretions, still stands. One can only speculate that Stirling effectively disowned the house as actually built for being too compromised and that he saw the rejected designs as better representing his avant-garde credentials.

28. Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* (London, 1966).

29. In 1989, the scheme was substantially altered as a result of the government-sponsored Design Improvement Controlled Experiment (DICE). The DICE was based on the defensible space strictures of Alice Coleman. See http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_urbanpolicy/documents/page/odpm_urbpol_608114.hcsp. The scheme was demolished in 1999, save for the seniors' housing.

30. There were 194 dwelling units in total. The layout was approved in June 1957 and the tender (£386,129) was accepted in April 1959: CBP/27/5, Lancashire County Records Office, Preston (hereafter LCR). The second phase was again a mixture of blocks and terraces, this time by the Building Design Partnership (1964–67). The whole clearance and redevelopment program, based on a master plan made by the Preston Borough Architect's Department, was awarded to John Turner & Sons, a local Lancashire firm of contractors who brought in Lyons, Israel & Ellis. See David Hunt, *A History of Preston* (Preston, 1992), 256–57; and John Brook and Duncan Glen, *Preston's New Buildings* (Preston, 1975), unpag. Stirling and Gowan were thus in the relatively unusual situation, for the time, of working as private architects for a public housing scheme, though their responsibility was to the contractor. The original brief, according to Gowan, specified the units of dwelling to be built but not the specific height of the buildings: Gowan, interview.

31. Photographs of these houses and their yards were taken by the council shortly before the slum clearance scheme. See CBP 4/1/37, LCR. There is a photograph, probably by Stirling, of a nearby terrace, in the collection of the Canadian Centre for Architecture (hereafter CCA), DRCON 2000:0027:022:002.

32. James Stirling and James Gowan, quoted in Arnell and Bickford, *James Stirling*, 61.

33. *Architecture Canada* 45 (Apr. 1968), 44.

34. *Architect & Building News* 221 (14 Mar. 1962), 381.

35. These junctures seem to have fascinated, or perhaps worried, Stirling, judging by the number of photographs he took of them. 022:002 JS-007, CCA.

36. Stirling, "Regionalism," 65 (see n. 19).

37. Lubetkin and Tecton's work was clearly in Stirling's mind when he designed his Sheffield University project (1953).

38. Gowan, interview.

39. "This gives better protection during transit and site handling." *Architect's Journal* (8 June 1961), 849.

40. See *Architecture Canada* 45 (Apr. 1968), 44. As Charles Jencks noticed, standard plumbing traps were similarly appropriated, turned on their sides

- and used as rainwater spouts. Charles Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture* (London, 1973), 262.
41. Stirling, "Architect's Approach," 240. The importance for Stirling of getting exactly the right kind and quality of materials is attested to by Malcolm Higgs's experience of being sent to Holland to find the correct type of tiles for the Leicester University Engineering Building. Malcolm Higgs, interview with the author, 31 Oct. 2005.
 42. See Raphael Samuel, "The Return to Brick," *Theatres of Memory, Vol. 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London, 1994), 123.
 43. J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (1934; London, 1997), 323.
 44. On the good and bad everyday in relation to bricks, see Michael Fried, *Menzel's Realism: Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century Berlin* (New Haven, 2002), 152–59.
 45. Stirling had admired a similar "quality of weightlessness," though achieved by different means, at Ronchamp. Stirling, "Ronchamp," 156 (see n. 13).
 46. Mark Girouard, "Florey Building, Oxford," *Architectural Review* 152 (Nov. 1972), 260–77.
 47. James Stirling, "Anti-Structures" (1966), repr. in RIBA Drawings Collection, *James Stirling* (London, 1974), 38.
 48. "Place-form" is a term derived from Martin Heidegger by Kenneth Frampton to indicate "the absolute precondition of a bounded domain in order to create an architecture of resistance." Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," in Hal Foster, ed., *Postmodern Culture* (London, 1985), 24–25. An as yet unexplored line of inquiry into Stirling's work at this time might start with Preston and move through several schemes that sought to find symbolization for the collective home, the mini-community of propinquity: Churchill College, Cambridge (1958), the Children's Home, Putney (1960–64), and the Old People's Home, Blackheath (1960–64), are three further examples. These articulations might be compared to the image of the building as ship in Stirling's work as explored in Manfredo Tafuri, "L'architecture dans le boudoir," *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1990), 269–70.
 49. My attribution of these images to Stirling is based on that given by James Gowan in *Architect & Building News* 221 (14 Mar. 1962), 381, and the negatives and prints that are now in the CCA (022:002 JS-007; 022:002 JS-018; 022:002 JS-019). Stirling's photographs were reproduced in several other journals at this time. See, for instance, *Architectural Forum* 116 (Mar. 1962), 92–95; and *Architecture d'aujourd'hui* 104 (Oct.–Nov. 1962), 72–75.
 50. This photograph appeared in *Architectural Design* 31 (Dec. 1961), 538, and was later reproduced in Arnell and Bickford, *James Stirling* (see n. 25). See print and negative 022:002 JS-007 at the CCA, which also has other views of Preston by Stirling.
 51. See James Stirling and James Gowan, "Re-housing at Preston, Lancashire," *Architectural Design* 31 (Dec. 1961), 538.
 52. Other likely sources of inspiration were Mayne's images of Southam Street in Notting Hill, published in *Uppercase* 5 (1961), as well as Nigel Henderson's images of East End children, which had appeared in Alison and Peter Smithson's photomontage *CIAM Grille* (1953).
 53. He photographed these ramps many times. See 022:002 JS-007, CCA.
 54. Stirling and Gowan, "Re-housing at Preston," 538.
 55. On such surrealist juxtaposition, see Tafuri, "L'architecture," 271.
 56. These statements appear in a number of journals, sometimes in edited or rearranged form. See *Architectural Design* 31 (Dec. 1961), 538–45; *Architect & Building News* 221 (14 Mar. 1962), 381–86; and *Architects' Journal* 133 (8 June 1961), 845–50.
 57. On sociology and modernism in Britain, see Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 101–3, 122 (see n. 1).
 58. *Architectural Design* 31 (Dec. 1961), 538.
 59. Ibid.
 60. *Architect & Building News* 221 (14 Mar. 1962), 381–82.
 61. *Lancashire Evening Post*, 19 Apr. 1955, 29 Feb. 1958.
 62. On this renovative approach in Stirling's later work, see Robert Maxwell, *Sweet Disorder and the Carefully Careless: Theory and Criticism in Architecture* (New York, 1993), 231.
 63. In arguing for this unresolved dialogue at Preston, I am placing this issue earlier in Stirling's career than historians tend to put it: see, for example, Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (London, 1985), 268.
 64. "Visitors could not decide which was the front and back door of his flat." *Lancashire Evening Post*, 7 June 1961.
 65. *Architectural Design* 31 (July 1961), 285.
 66. *Casabella* 260 (Feb. 1962), 26–27. The reproductions accompany a translation of the statement by Stirling and Gowan that appeared in *Architectural Design* 31 (Dec. 1961), 538. The Lowry image was also sent out by Stirling and Gowan but only *Casabella* seems to have used it: 022:002 JS-018, CCA.
 67. *Daily Mail*, 18 Oct. 1963.
 68. Nikolaus Pevsner, *North Lancashire* (London, 1969), 198. For Pevsner on historicism, see his "Modern Architecture and the Historian or the Return of Historicism," *Royal Institute of British Architects Journal*, 68 (Apr. 1961), 230–37.
 69. Reyner Banham, "Neo-Liberty: The Italian Retreat from Modern Architecture," *Architectural Review* (Apr. 1959), 235.
 70. Reyner Banham, "Coronation Street, Hoggartsborough," *New Statesman* (9 Feb. 1962), 200. Interestingly, an extract from Banham's review was reprinted in Arnell and Bickford's monograph on Stirling's work (see n. 25). The article marks one of the few critical commentaries in Banham's many reviews of Stirling's work.
 71. Banham, "Coronation Street," 200.
 72. Ibid., 201.
 73. Ibid.
 74. See Tafuri, "L'architecture," 267 (see n. 48).
 75. See Jules Lubbock, *The Tyranny of Taste: The Politics of Architecture and Design in Britain 1550–1960* (New Haven and London, 1995), 333–37.
 76. Pevsner was far more concerned by modernist apostates playing with historicism than he was by "Georgian-Palladian diehards." Pevsner, "Modern Architecture," 230.
 77. Pevsner defended the *Architectural Review* from the charge of historicism by using the example of the Bride of Denmark, a Victorian pub reassembled in the basement of the *Review*. This he called a "folly" and certainly not an incubus for a Victorian revival. Ibid., 234. Similarly, the use of Victorian typography in the *Architectural Review* was "not a recommendation to look à la Victorienne but rather a recommendation to spice with Victorian ingredients." Ibid., 235.
 78. See Elain Harwood, "Butterfield and Brutalism," *AA Files* (summer 1994), 39–46.
 79. Stirling and Gowan, "Re-housing at Preston," 538 (see n. 51).
 80. This formulation is partly inspired by similar comments in Maxwell, *Sweet Disorder*, 316–18 (see n. 62).
 81. This was published in Stirling and Gowan, "Re-housing at Preston," 538. Gowan's recent views on this are that it was Stirling who insisted on the Maugham quote being used for publicity while he himself was appalled by it. Gowan, interview (see n. 25).
 82. The statement was sent out by the architects and was also photographed and enlarged for display with other images of the scheme. 022:002 JS-018, CCA.
 83. David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, England, 1992), 10.

84. On “imagined nostalgia,” see Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, 1996), 77.

85. On the denigration of memory by modernism, see Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London, 2000), 215–19. On the problems of the return of memory to intellectual respectability, see Kerwin Lee Klein, “On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse,” *Representations* 69 (winter 2000), 127–50. Nostalgia remains the bad object of contemporary architectural discourse. To take one example, Strangely Familiar is a group of British architects and critics supposedly dedicated to “unknowing the city” and widening the cultural context of architecture. However, this has well-established limits. There are eight references to nostalgia in the group’s most substantial publication; all are negative and none is developed or theorized: Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Jane Rendell, and Alicia Pivaro, eds., *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2001). See also the use of the term in Christine Boyer’s *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1996), where nostalgia, though defined, bears enormous negative weight throughout. It is especially interesting, in works that otherwise are well theorized, to find this key negative concept so untheorized, let alone explained. For nuanced discussions of nostalgia, one needs to look outside architectural discourse: see Wendy Wheeler, “Nostalgia Isn’t Nasty: the Postmodernizing of Parliamentary Democracy,” in Mark Perryman, ed., *Altered States: Postmodernism, Politics, Culture* (London, 1994); and Doreen Massey, “Space-time and the Politics of Location,” in James Lingwood, ed., *Rachel Whiteread: House* (London, 1995).

86. Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 7.

87. On Stirling’s early years, see Girouard, *Big Jim*, 1–3 (see n. 14). On Stirling’s use of nostalgic elements in his redesign of Albert Dock to serve Tate Liverpool (ca. 1984), see Richard J. Williams, *The Anxious City: English Urbanism in the Late Twentieth Century* (London, 2004), 113.

88. Colin Rowe, *As I Was Saying: Recollections and Miscellaneous Essays*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1996), 355.

89. Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London, 1958), 285; and Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London, 1957), 198–99.

90. Milan Kundera, *Ignorance*, trans. Linda Asher (London, 2002), 8. Much of my thinking on nostalgia has been stimulated by Kundera’s novel. Homer’s *Odyssey* is, in Kundera’s words, “the founding epic of nostalgia.”

91. Gowan, interview.

92. Robert Maxwell, *James Stirling Michael Wilford* (Basel, 1998).

93. John Jacobus, introduction to James Stirling, *James Stirling: Buildings and Projects 1950–1974* (London, 1996), 17.

94. John McKean, *Leicester University Engineering Building* (London, 1994), 5.

95. Kundera, *Ignorance*, 9, 34.

Illustration Credits

Figures 1, 2, 5, 7–11, 13–15. James Stirling Archive, Collection Centre Canadien d’Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal

Figure 3. Courtesy James Gowan

Figure 4. *Architect & Building News* 215 (7 Jan. 1959), 22

Figure 6. Courtesy Lancashire County Library and Information Service

Figure 12. *Architectural Design* 31 (Sept. 1961), 396