



Brideshead and the Tower Blocks

by Patrick Wright

A review of Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea*, Heinemann, 1988.

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Witold Rybczynski introduces his book with a telling anecdote. During the six years of his architectural education, 'the subject of comfort' was only mentioned once. He finds this 'a curious omission', since comfort should surely be central to architecture - like justice to law or health to medicine. The point is a strong one, and Professor Rybczynski duly piles it on. Bitterly deprived by his own education, he can only write from a position of 'ignorance'. As he sets out to discover the 'meaning of comfort', he is at pains to differentiate his own ecological approach from the high-rise proclamatory style, full of arrogant expertise and alienated technique, with which his profession still tries to hide the 'fundamental poverty' of its modern ideas. Here, then, is another architect going all human on us, eating humble pie and sending himself on a remedial course to find out what everyone else has always known.

This is a familiar rhetorical ploy. Rybczynski's genial investigation of the domestic interior is stretched, like so much chintz upholstery, over a polemical framework which is all the more effective for being padded and partially covered.

As William Gass pointed out in 1986, when this book was published to rapturous reviews in the United States, *Home* contains an assault on the 'modern' that conforms to type. It appeals to 'us', the long-suffering public, and it points the finger at 'they' who have deprived us of everything we love best. 'They' have taken the 'tunes' from our music, the 'real people' from our novels, the 'figures' from our paintings and the 'comfort' from our homes. Never mind, as Gass continued, that it remains easier to publish and sell a 19th-century novel than a 20th-century one, or that symphony societies exist largely 'to ensure that each season the same dead horses will be ritually flogged.' Never mind that the modern house is a rarity even in the United States - 'there may be two in town' - or that the truly modern interior only turns up with any



frequency in 'watch the rich' magazines. It is the 'backyard barbecue' and not the back-breaking Wassily chair which is ubiquitous. But the well-rehearsed sense of threat persists.

Rybczynski opens his quest for comfort by introducing his reader to Ralph Lauren, the tycoon of 'life-style marketing'. Here, and as shown in a million advertisements, is the 'comfortable man': close-cropped greying hair, a 'half-smile' on a tanned face and a silver Rolex peeping out from behind a jacket sleeve. Lauren may pull in an eight-figure income, but he pictures himself in Levis, a frayed shirt and whatever else may 'feel good'.

Launched in 1984, the Ralph Lauren Collection offered a 'total home environment' in which clothes and furnishings were matched. Rybczynski found it at Bloomingdales in four different lines, each one assembled round a nostalgic theme of its own. 'Log Cabin' was full of rough-hewn beams, brushed flannel and allusions to the frontier. 'Jamaica' was a ruffle-trimmed Sunbelt dream fully fitted with verandah and Planter's Punch. 'New England' was restored Vermont and rather staid. 'Thoroughbred' was sourced in Brideshead televised: a cluttered Anglophilic fantasy with mounted pheasants and mahogany.

Ralph Lauren is the 'comfortable man' who has made fortunes selling homely nostalgia to the affluent, and Witold Rybczynski squares up to him as the user-friendly professor of architecture who will offer a more genuinely historical account of these invented traditions and the enthusiasms to which they speak. With a quick reference to Albrecht Dürer's *Saint Jerome in his Study* he plants his reader at the door to his own study in Quebec. There on the wall is old Saint Jerome in Nuremberg circa 1514, bundled up against the cold with his inkpot and quill, his slippers and his crucifix. Despite the centuries which have passed (to say nothing of the lion which is snoozing on the floor), we could still walk into this room and feel at home.

Meanwhile, back in the 1980s here's our author at work in the house that he designed for himself in rural Quebec. The wooden ceiling slopes down 'like an upturned boat', but though the room resembles a 'Parisian attic', it actually looks out over an orchard, a line of poplars and the Adirondack Mountains. Rybczynski swivels on his creaky wooden armchair, another comfortable figure in Levis and frayed shirt as we must surely presume, and introduces us to the whole funky scene: the phosphorescent glow of the word-processor, the grey



dhurrie, the Gujarati wall-hanging, the mementoes scattered about, the creative disorder of the desk . . .

Insisting that 'not so much has changed in over four hundred years,' Rybczynski whisks us off on a brisk historical tour designed to prove this thoroughly anti-Modernist point. Our guide has studied his sources closely - Huizinga, Braudel, Giedion, Ariès, Praz - and he quibbles agreeably with these higher authorities as he shows us round selected buildings of the old world. First on the itinerary is a Mediaeval town house: a public place full of the 'crush and hubbub of life', where living and work are combined, and where the inhabitants are just camping out in scarcely -differentiated space. By the time we get to 17th-century Paris, the bourgeois house has four or five floors and an internal courtyard. Cooking has been separated out, and there is greater distinction between servants, tenants and the main family. There may have been panelling and frescoes in the residences of the Parisian nobility, but there was no *stimmung*: no sense of interior intimacy about the place.

For this we must travel to late 17th-century Kristiana in Norway, where Frederik Jacobsen Brun lives with his wife Marthe. The Bruns have installed smoke-free stoves, and these allow considerable decentralisation of space. There is a proper differentiation between upstairs and downstairs, and it is only the infants who share the parental bed. After settling the older children upstairs, Frederik and Marthe come down to chat over the day's events by candlelight. Having listened in to their homely conversation, Rybczynski reports that the values of intimacy and privacy have at last come into the world: 'the husband and wife have begun to think of themselves - perhaps for the first time - as a couple.'

Treating 'home' as an evolving amalgam of architectural style, domestic technology and cultural values, Rybczynski traces it through various formations - the 'feminised' domestic interior of the 17th-century Netherlands, Rococo at Louis XV's Versailles, the 'masculine' style of the Georgian country house in England - before bringing it to perfection in the late 19th century. The housewife may only just be starting to whizz around in busy harmony with her labour-saving devices, but the architect has already come up with the revivalist style that can best accommodate her. Like 'Shingle' in the United States, English 'Queen Anne' offered a small-scale house in which comfort, style and convenience were combined. And there, like so many of us, Rybczynski would have been glad to leave the story of 'home': a tale of 'gradual evolution' which



has successfully accommodated the disappearance of servants, the coming of electricity, and the advent of household management. All could have been well, but for the catastrophe that comes next.

By the 1920s Art Deco had proved that 'comfortable interiors could be designed without any specific reference to the past.' But then Le Corbusier came along, disfiguring the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels with a 'New Spirit' pavilion which scorned all the hard-won conveniences of home. Adolf Loos described ornamentation as a 'crime' and decoration as a regressive kind of primitivism. But Le Corbusier was the arch-leveller who really alienated 'us' from our homes. It was he who 'uniformalised' human needs, denigrated craft in the name of mass production and came up with buildings that were 'prototypical, not personal'.

Rybczynski is duly scathing about Modern 'classics' like Breuer's Wassily chair or Mies van Der Rohe's Barcelona chair. He is equally contemptuous of the Modern interior, which he describes, reasonably enough, as a 'rupture in the evolution of domestic comfort'. From the moment of that 1925 pavilion, 'only white austerity was virtuous. Decoration was bad for the soul; it had to be stripped away.' The freak show continues right up to the present. Rybczynski deplores the damage done by the 'socialist post-war governments in England, Germany, Holland and the Scandinavian countries' which responded favourably to the 'left-leaning rhetoric of the Modern school'.

But before this momentary engagement with the question of public housing disrupts his art-historical survey, he quickly jumps back into the rich man's house, which is now being remodelled according to the Minimalist tenets of 'conspicuous austerity'. Flipping through the pages of *House and Garden*, he sees one of London's more ridiculous art-dealers using a 'wet-bag' to carry soap and toothbrush into a bathroom which has been stripped of shelves and cabinets in the name of style.

Rybczynski ends his short history with some forceful conclusions. He condemns those who have attributed the popularity of 'home' to the weakness of a public that can't stand change. Many innovations have been accepted over the years, and the nostalgia on which Ralph Lauren's 'Thoroughbred' has thrived stems not from a vague sentimental backwardness but from a precise resistance to the Modern Movement's assault on the human heart. If only we bid a proper farewell to 'Modernism's shallow enthusiasms' we really could

have both 'cosiness and robots'. The plea, finally, is that we get beyond the trivial designer-led recreation of dadoes and ruffle-trim, and undertake a more serious revival of bourgeois traditions. Engineers and architects will doubtless continue to advance absurd definitions of comfort - treating it as the zero-degree condition 'in which discomfort has been avoided' or dismissing it as a purely 'subjective experience of satisfaction'. But we human beings should be more confident in the knowledge that our appreciation of 'home' has cultural and historical objectivity on its side.

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This is a lively and animated book, but it is also prone to error and oversimplification. It is, for example, quite wrong to suggest that the late 18th-century practice of 'sea-bathing' only developed in the 1880s. As for Jane Austen, even those who are prepared to swallow and agree that she wrote 'six brilliant novels' may feel inclined to wonder whether she can really have 'single-handedly invented' the 'domestic genre of novel writing'.

But the fact that Rybczynski writes smoothed-off history of this sort should not be allowed to obscure the important issues raised by his book. William Gass was right to agree that many of the values defended by Rybczynski are 'vital and worthy', and to accept - albeit 'at a certain split-level of ontology' - that there is 'nothing better than the life of the bourgeois'. He was also right to persist with critical questions beyond this point. Rybczynski may describe 'home' as an outcome of feminisation, but he gets too caught up in the trappings of the domestic scene. Nowhere, as Gass points out, does he betray the slightest awareness that 'the household wars are bloody and incessant: that there is more safety in the street and that 'housewives have broken out of the house the way thieves break in.'¹

These are significant shortcomings, and they follow from the polarised opposition between 'home' and a caricatured image of the , 'modern' that

¹ As Lynn Pearson shows in a fine new study, *The Architectural and Social History of Co-operative Living* (Macmillan, 1988) women have not just 'broken out of the home: they have attempted to re-design it with a different distribution of domestic labour. At least 15 co-operative housekeeping developments were built in England between 1874 and 1925. The co-operative living movement was concerned with working women's housing (the 'ladies residential chamber') but also experimented with the more affluent family home. Arts and Crafts or 'Queen Anne' architects like Woysey and Godwin were involved, but there was also a Fabian interest in buildings which combined 'flats' with communal kitchen, dining and nursery facilities.

stands at the heart of Rybczynski's book. Anyone who has ever been to suburbia will recognise that Rybczynski grossly overstates his case in treating Modernism as the schismatic disaster which has cut 'us' off from the kind of building which best suits our 'ordinary, human qualities'. But in the end William Gass doesn't do any better. Having pointed out the polemical nature of this opposition, he concludes that the conflict between Modernism and the popular conception of 'home' is just another round in the ongoing contest between middle-class philistinism and the true art which has always opposed it. He then falls back on his own set of comfortable phrases, claiming that 'the good has never once driven out the bad,' and repeating the anti-humanist arguments of the early Modernists: decoration 'dissolves form' and 'calms the eye with irrelevance'. In other words, he takes up the other available position within a polarity which needs to be dismantled.

Knowing the dignity that a long lineage can bestow, Rybczynski lines up Hogarth behind Ralph Lauren, but his idea of 'home' is formed in an opposition to the Modern that is actually far more New Georgian than old. The significant history of this opposition can be worked up from two of Rybczynski's asides. The first is that passing and formulaic swipe at the 'post-war socialist governments' who fell, so we are told, for the 'left-leaning rhetoric' of the Modern Movement. The second is a passage from *Brideshead Revisited* which Rybczynski is content to dangle, as if it were an emblematic truth needing no further comment, at the head of his chapter on 'Austerity'.

The nostalgic Charles Ryder is remembering the warm depths of a great mahogany-framed cooper bathtub at Brideshead. A huge towel hangs from a chintz arm-chair and a brass lever - 'heavy as a piece of marine engineering' - stands where modem taps might be. With its coal fire and steam-dimmed water colours, this bathroom is contrasted favourably with 'the uniform, clinical, little chambers, glittering with chromium-plate and looking-glass, which pass for luxury in the modem world.'

This brings us closer to the effective point of origin. Published a couple of months before Attlee's election victory in July 1945, *Brideshead Revisited* joins the over-valued paintings of its narrator in saluting the country house 'at the moment of extinction'. A fondly remembered place of white raspberries, fountains and rounds of halma played with Nanny Hawkins, the country house can hardly be expected to survive in a modem world where, even before the Army came along and turned its landscaped valley into an assault course,

one traditional building after another was being razed to make way for 'blocks of flats'.

In 1925 C.E. Montague wrote of 'a chilly fear' that had crept into the 'old squirearchical life'. In 1934 Lord Lothian alerted the National Trust to the rising problems facing the owners of large country houses. Meanwhile there were other fictional portrayals of the final dismal collapse. In *The House that Berry Built* (published in January 1945) Dornford Yates went the whole distance, portraying an England that was simply no longer habitable. There had been a disastrous general election and there were some Cabinet members who 'would not have qualified for the reference traditionally accorded to the incompetent charwoman'. The Pleydell family could no longer afford to maintain its ancestral seat 'White Ladies' and in 1937 the house had been signed over to the Government for use as 'an official retreat for the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs'. The exiled Pleydells move to the Pyrenees, where they discover a 'little, English meadow, locked in the arms of France', and set about rebuilding the house which could no longer be sustained in the deteriorated nation that had once been home. In a way that Rybczynski the DIY architect might appreciate, the Pleydells choose to do without the expertise of professional architects, preferring to be guided by superior cultural instincts of their own.

By 1945 the number of large country houses in National Trust ownership had risen to 17, and a concerted defence was under way. Dornford Yates's characters may have given up in disgust, but Vita Sackville-West had dug in her heels and was busy re-establishing an ancestral home and garden at Sissinghurst. Sackville-West was a moving force behind the National Trust's new Country Houses Scheme, recommending James Lees-Milne for the job of historic buildings secretary and also helping to define the aesthetic which would be built up around the preserved country house. In *English Country Houses* (1941) she started to theorise the English country house in terms that would prove deeply influential in the years to come.

Above all, the authentic country house was 'a home of men and women', a 'living thing' which would lose its very soul if it were put to institutional use as a school, asylum, hotel or a 'dead' museum. As for the interior, this was an organic domain which had 'grown' over the centuries. There could be no serious question of 'period' rooms of the kind that designers like so much.



Instead, 'every-thing is muddled up' in a cluttered and untidy manner that would 'make the purist shudder'. Where, as Sackville-West asks with wartime resonance, is the 'Dictator of taste' who would presume to judge the good and the bad? 'All we know is that our ancestors piled up their possessions generation by generation, and somehow managed to create a whole which is far more of a whole than any whole deliberately composed.'

In this defensive appreciation the country-house interior is grasped for its incremental and associational significance. It is a place of synecdoche, in Stephen Bann's sense, where the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts and where value is distinctly not of the tradeable kind. If the continuities of ancestral residence were to be broken, then the associational magic would die. If an object were to be removed - to auction house or public museum - both that object and the setting from which it was taken would be debased. This conception of the country house fitted well with the National Trust's methods of acquisition (of the 17 houses owned by the Trust in 1945, nine were still inhabited by the families of their donors), and it would soon give rise to a distinct interior aesthetic.

Just as John Fowler, who would become the Trust's favoured 'decorator' in the late Fifties, scorned the idea of 'design', James Lees-Milne distinguished the true country-house interior from the 'contrived "old world" flavour' of an architect like Lutyens. His diaries from this period frequently echo Sackville-West. Thus, for example, in June 1944 Lees-Milne visited Audley End and admired it all the more for its 'atrocious' portrait copies and the great quantities of 'indifferent stuff which made it 'a true English country house'.

The path from here to Ralph Lauren's 'Thoroughbred' may be circuitous but it is also unbroken. Since the Forties, when so many feared that the game was finally up, the country house has been preserved, developed as a countervailing image, and hammered back into the culture which nearly presided over its destruction. Saved not just from the war but from the peace that 'broke out' in 1945, it has gone on to inspire a vast and ever more diversified cult. The recent and fiercely anti-Modern revival of architecture (which includes both the revaluation of earlier figures like Sir Edwin Lutyens and the new work of a classical revivalist architect like Quinlan Terry) has intricate connections with the preserved country house.



Meanwhile that characteristic idea of the country-house interior has emerged as one of the more influential creations of post-war British culture. It continues to turn up regularly at threatened country houses like Calke Abbey in 1983 (where much of that celebrated ancestral 'junk' is now rumoured to have been left over from wartime military occupation), or, more recently, Brodsworth Hall. Last year it appeared in bohemian, if not frankly psychotic guise when the contents of Stephen Tennant's Wilsford Manor - a motley collection of clobber which had been left to moulder through the many years which Tennant himself spent declining in bed - were exhibited to enthusiastic crowds and then auctioned off by Sothebys in the usual striped marquee.

Brideshead became a television spectacular in the early years of Thatcher's reign ('You see, it's like this,' said Sebastian Flyte throwing open the shutters to reveal the drawing room after 35 years of the welfare state), and the influence of the National Trust interior marks the obsessively-detailed sets of any number of lesser television history productions. Designers have boomed on it, from Fowler and Colefax to Laura Ashley, and it has also played its part in the New Georgian mode of gentrification. The public museum has admitted defeat and started, under the direction of figures like Timothy Clifford and Sir Roy Strong, to imitate the National Trust interior, developing styles of display which try to create a sense of interior intimacy where previously there were only objects suspended in statutory space.

Brideshead has also become one of Britain's most successful cultural exports. It is appropriate that Tom Wolfe, that connoisseur of the cliché, should have registered its arrival in New York. His latest compendium, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, includes a hypocritical left-wing English journalist (modelled, it would appear, on Alexander Cockburn) who prospers by turning out fawning articles for magazines like *House and Garden*. It also shows the English country-house interior turning up on Wall Street's 50th floor: its paneling and other fixtures imported, cut down to size and squeezed into place by an enthusiastic banker.

In 1985 the National Trust took the real thing to Washington with its 'Treasure Houses of Britain' exhibition, appropriately arranged as a series of country-house interiors. By this time the *New York Times* was rampant with Victoriana ('To the Victorians, home was a haven'). Having opened a 'Home' section, it was featuring stories about antique importers like Kentshire Galleries who have used a loft building to set up 'residential vignettes', and about a new kind of 'Establishment Decorator' who specialises in cluttered rooms full of objects

that 'talk to each other', and explains: 'we are not only selling an object but selling the feeling that the object is part of.'

For a while at least, Ralph Lauren stays ahead of the field. In 1986, two years after the launch of 'Thoroughbred', he spent \$14 million re-theming his 'Limited' store on Madison Avenue. Intent on re-creating the interior atmosphere of a turn-of-the-century mansion, he filled it with old mahogany armoires, antique (and ever so slightly frayed) carpets and grandfather clocks. An extraordinary book edited by Mrs Alville Lees-Milne was doing brisk business in the American market. *The Englishman's Room* sent up the customary perspectives of a 'watch the rich' magazine by combining them with a sense of the bizarre that might normally be reserved for the reptile house.

Among the exotic English gentlemen photographed in their dens were no less than four champions of the National Trust interior, all of whom, as the book revealed, have somehow managed to move in to the chamber of their dreams. Professor Bernard Nevill, designer of many of Liberty's most successful fabrics, is pictured among massive furnishings bought during the sad years when so many of London's traditional Clubs fell under the auctioneer's hammer. Gavin Stamp stands in waistcoat and fob-watch in 'the essential profusion of accumulated clutter' which he has built up in his 'Standard Late Georgian Fourth Rate London terraced house' near King's Cross. Gervase Jackson-Stops, the National Trust's architectural adviser and organiser of the Washington exhibition, looks considerably better-off in his delicately restored mid-18th century Menagerie in Northamptonshire. James Lees-Milne sits at his desk in William Beckford's 'Grecian Library', sold to him as part of a 'maisonette' in Bath.

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If this is Brideshead in the Eighties, what about that opposed image of the nation - not just the luxury chromium-plated bathroom, but Rybcyzinski's ambitious 'socialist government' of 1945? Brideshead was televised in 1981, but Christopher Booker's devastating documentary 'City of Towers' had already gone out in 1978. The decades which have brought new security and cultural status to the country house have also seen the collapse of its initially overwhelming opposition. A monstrous imagery of blighted municipal tower blocks now occupies the place where those comparatively modest 'blocks of flats' had stood in Waugh's novel.



Against the background of mismanaged stackaprole council housing, corruption and buccaneering 'urban redevelopment which forms the basis for this imagery, William Gass's protestation that truly modern buildings are rare ('there may be two in every town') seems idle and beside the point. It is also inadequate to suggest, as some figures on the left are now doing, that the close identification of socialism with the negative imagery of the modern tower block is purely the result of right-wing manipulation. Post-war Conservative governments may indeed have used subsidies and other sticks to press local authorities into build high, but there is a limit to what can be blamed on Harold Macmillan, and the current symbolism of the tower block raises questions about public administration and state planning which run close to the heart of Labour's post-war endeavour.

But now that the stricken Nikolaus Pevsner has been whipped round the country on a second tour of the 'Buildings of England' - this one focused on the monstrous post-war edifices that have been thrown up alongside those fine traditional buildings which have somehow survived from his earlier excursion - the time has surely come to consider whether the polemical basis on which the victorious imagery of Brideshead has been built up is really adequate to the issues at stake. Conservative writers like David Watkin, Roger Scruton and, to a lesser extent recently, Gavin Stamp have worked with impressive zeal to see that every wretched tower block in the land is listed as a national monument to the reforming ambitions of 1945. They have also presented themselves as defenders of a plain or 'real' aesthetic truth, as if it was only the degenerate pseudo-prophets of the Modernist zeitgeist who resorted to polemic. In truth, however, Brideshead's has always been a polemical phrasing of tradition. Waugh's contemptuous identification of socialism with the sin of Envy is well-known. As architect of the National Trust's Country Houses Scheme, the young James Lees-Milne was a passionate reactionary who recycled his anti-Communism in 1945, combining his love for the threatened country house with a less than carefully reasoned hatred for reform of the more social-democratic kind.

More recent manifestations are no less striking. The National Trust has even been offered a new inaugural moment by the country house for which it has done so much. Founded in the 1890s to promote a public interest in buildings and landscapes threatened by delinquent private owners, the Trust has become the major promoter of an aesthetic which has been traced, partly under the

Trust's own auspices, back past its effective origins with Sackville-West and Lees-Milne to the French 1790s when the associational context linking art works to Church and aristocratic Château had to be bravely defended against the 'public interest' of a throat-slitting and atheistic mob.²

But it is in the current revival of Classical architecture that the polemic has broken out most forcefully. Quinlan Terry's Classical architecture is based on a rejection of progressivism and the reforming project of the welfare state which is as explicit in its detail as any capital or pillar. After the ravages of egalitarianism, the Classical orders are proposed as the basis of a new (allowing, of course, for the fact that 'nothing new is worth having') social literacy that will revive civilised behaviour. Meanwhile, and as if this were not enough, the London-based architect Leon Krier has been attempting to rehabilitate the Classical plans of Hitler's architect Albert Speer.

His argument features more than a little of the sub-Heideggerean jargon of authenticity which has become fashionable among advocates of 'real' architecture, but it also includes its share of polemical ranting about the 'moral depravity' of those who accepted the Modernist style in the rebuilding of German cities. Leon Krier does for the Allied air forces what Prince Charles (who includes Krier in his circle of architectural advisers) did for the Luftwaffe in his recent speech about Paternoster Square. It was neither Fascism nor wartime bombing that destroyed the true German city but a post-war reconstruction in which 'ignorant anti-Nazism' combined with the 'fanatical moralism' of 'industrial Modernism' and turned 'culture itself into its own most bitter enemy'. It is precisely this style of anti-Modern polemic - from anti-Bauhaus to anti-welfare state - rather than just an interest in Classical form that Speer and Terry have in common.

As these developments indicate, the argument about architectural Modernism and its many sins has been over-determined by a broader contest in which a war between ideologically-defined worlds is being waged. On one side stands Brideshead - a countervailing and predominantly rural world based on private values and culturally-sanctioned hierarchy, where history is venerated as tradition and society is based on ancestry and descent. On the other side, and piled up in a heap under the sign of the urban tower block, lies the wreckage of

² This interesting historical adjustment was carried out by Francis Haskell, as I suggested when revising the argument introduced in this article for inclusion in *A Journey Through Ruins* (Flamingo edition, 1993 p. 96).

1945: the commitment to public as opposed to private values, the anti-hierarchical egalitarianism, the hope that history could be made (rather than just received) through the progressive works of an expert and newly enlightened state, the idea of a society based on consent rather than descent.

Like the schematic imagery of this opposition, the nostalgia Rybczynski attributes to a widespread hatred of Modernism is actually far more broadly based in the failures of post-war modernisation. That these failures have been acute doesn't make the symbolic drama any more adequate. Brideshead has won by discrediting the project of 1945, not by solving the problems that the architects and engineers of that project set out, however inadequately, to address. Quinlan Terry's revival of the classical orders may be presented as an answer to the functional architecture of the public housing estate, but Terry builds his country houses as homes for proper gentlemen, not council tenants. Rybczynski's reinstatement of 'home' is similarly positioned.




Thanks to this ongoing polarity between Brideshead and the Tower Blocks, the revival of 'home' comes together with the revival of homelessness, which in Britain is now standing at the highest levels ever recorded. Rather than following Waugh in championing Brideshead, Rybczynski should have been more Shakespearean. He should have called down a plague on both houses and then gone on to outline the new combinations that are sorely needed – 'home' and decent municipal housing, domesticity and a proper place in the world, private comfort and public responsibility. Since he hasn't done this, we must suspect him of being an unwitting advocate of the brand of modernisation that Raymond Williams has described as 'mobile privatisation': 'home' as that convenient, credit-funded place where we go to enjoy 'cosiness and robots' in front of a television screen that occasionally brings us distancing views of a nation that has abandoned its public duties.

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