(De)Constructing Worlds
High Modernism, Architecture and Photography

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Abstract

Since the last decade of the twentieth century, there has been renewed interest in photographing high Modernist structures and architectures. A significant portion of these images has tended towards the autotelic or spectacle, with far fewer functioning as social commentary or critique. However, the need for an independent and critical photography of architecture remains. Such a practice furthers our understanding of the lasting legacy of architectural modernity and its ongoing impact. This dissertation investigates the critical representation of high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning in specific works by contemporary artists and photographers, Andreas Gursky, Filip Dujardin, David Goldblatt, and Beate Gütschow. However diverse their practice, each of these artists and photographers engages with the authoritarian impetus of high Modernism: a drive towards social order and control enacted through its structures and architectures.

Through investigation of a range of photographic projects produced with a view to critique the social expression of high Modernism, I argue that contemporary photography which takes architecture as its subject has the ability to communicate wider notions about society. These artists and photographers reveal the degree to which humanity has been elided by high Modernist architectures and planning. By discussing these projects I contribute to a relatively under-researched area of study.
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Modern science, which displaced and replaced God, removed that obstacle [limits on freedom]. It also created a vacancy: the office of the supreme legislator-cum-manager, of the designer and administrator of the modern world, was now horrifyingly empty. It had to be filled or else… The emptiness of the throne was throughout the modern era a standing and tempting invitation to visionaries and adventurers. The dream of an all-embracing order and harmony remained as vivid as ever, and it seemed now closer than ever, more than ever within human reach. It was now up to mortal earthlings to bring it about and to secure its ascendancy.

Introduction

High Modernism no longer represents the future; its dominance over the design community has declined. Its aspirations for a better world have faded and the movement has since been supplanted by hypermodernity, postmodernism, and deconstructivism. Due to its advent alongside rapid globalisation in the twentieth century, the legacy of high Modernism can be found in buildings and structures scattered across countries and continents. However, these ‘machines for living’ as extolled by Le Corbusier, today no longer stand for progress and a glimpse of a better life, but exist as relics of a past civilisation, an ideological outlook that waits to be unearthed and discovered again.

While critiques levelled at high Modernism’s architectures by architects and commentators on architecture alike are numerous and varied – with the most famous including Robert Venturi’s complaint that high Modernism’s legacy is “soulless and predictable” (1977: 7), Jane Jacobs’ warnings of “isolation and social breakdown” (1961: 5), and Charles Jencks’ startling claim that “Modern Architecture died in St. Louis, Missouri (…) when the infamous Pruitt-Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final coup de grâce by dynamite” (1977: 9, my italics) (Figure 1) – the last decade of the twentieth century nevertheless saw the beginnings of a revival for its architecture (Tournikiotis, 1999: 65).

Buildings that were once almost universally reviled have become popular in some circles, and architects once condemned as agents of social collapse have in certain instances had their reputations restored (Ibid, 67).

Likewise, in the field of photography, there has been renewed interest in the photographing of high Modernist structures and architectures. This has resulted in an overwhelming proliferation of architectural imagery being produced (and continuing to be produced) (Redstone & Pardo, 2014: 9). Today, 

Figure 1. The second widely televised demolition of a Pruitt-Igoe building in 1972.

1. I define and discuss high Modernism at length in Chapter 1.

2. For further reading, see B.C. Brolin’s The Failure of Modern Architecture (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1977), P. Blake’s From Follies Fiasco: Why Modern Architecture Hasn’t Worked (New York: Little, Brown & Co, 1977), and N. Glazer’s From a Cause to a Style: Modernist Architecture’s Encounter with the American City (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). Also, in Philip Johnson’s 1959 lecture at Yale University entitled Wither Away – Non-Miesian Directions, the architect, who had previously been an admirer of the then ‘new architecture’ stated, “I have grown tired of what I have come to regard as superfluous dogmatism” (Johnson quoted in Denslagen, 2009: 53).
both digital photography and the internet have made the creation and dissemination of images more immediate and prolific than ever, with architecture proving to be one of the most popular and photogenic of subjects for both professionals and amateur photographers alike (Ibid). At the time of writing, a search for ‘architecture’ on Instagram returned over fifty-eight million photographs – a colossal data bank of architectural imagery seeking the validation of ‘likes’, comments, and reposts. The internet has likewise become a hub for such imagery, with scores of Tumblr blogs and innumerable photography sites devoted to the subject. Of this, a significant portion tends towards the fetishisation of architecture, with the categories of ‘ruin porn’ or ‘urban archaeology’ (with popular subreddits including the likes of r/AbandonedPorn and r/urbanexploration), and ‘architectures of density’ proving most popular. The power to photograph architecture and to broadcast it to the world has thus shifted from photographic professionals to ordinary people, to some degree.

In the field of contemporary ‘art’ photography, particularly in Western Europe and North America, there has also been an increase in interest among contemporary artists and photographers’ focus on high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning as subjects, and often with a view to critique. Examples of this trend will be discussed further later in this document.

My dissertation, (De)Constructing Worlds: High Modernism, Architecture and Photography, examines the intersection between contemporary ‘art’ photography and the high Modernist architectural movement. Here, I investigate the role played by contemporary architects and photographers who photograph high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning to make social comment about the high Modernist movement and ideology in general and about its failed social idea(s) in particular. Although the artists and photographers I have chosen come from different countries and approach the subject in a range of different ways, whether these be formally, materially, or conceptually, they all work photographically in order to explore how high Modernists’ structures, architectures, and urban planning communicate the failure of high Modernism’s social idea(s).

The use of the phrase ‘(De)Constructing Worlds’ in my dissertation’s combination title is a play on the title of Elias Khoury’s famous book Constructing Worlds: Photography and Architecture in the Modern Age (2014). Where the verb ‘to deconstruct’ means to reduce (something) to its constituent parts in order to reinterpret it, I have found the idea of deconstructing particularly interesting as a tool to the idea of constructing. This idea of ‘constructed photography’, wherein we surmise that if structures and architectures built by societies (or worlds) dominated by a high Modernist ideology, in and through discussion of high Modernism as an overarching theoretical, and philosophical model. In literature and philosophy, this approach questions the underlying assumptions behind many critical, methodological, and theoretical models. In architecture, deconstruction was meant to do the same – that is, question the many unspoken assumptions made about architecture, such as stability, ideas of shelter, stable or consistent meanings, and ultimately its humanist basis.

Photography and Architecture

Since the early days of the medium, architecture has been photography’s most willing subject. The long exposure times required by the first cameras often favoured the static attributes of buildings, making them a far more reliable subject than the human figure. Over time, photographers have documented the ever-changing qualities and characteristics of the built environment, from the grand buildings of the Ancien Régime to the office blocks of the modern era, and vice versa, contributed to the dissemination of architectural ideas and forms. This relationship between photography and architecture has, for the most part, been symbiotic to the point of co-dependency (Campany, 1999: 60). British writer of photography, curator, and artist David Campany succinctly sums up this relationship, stating “Photography has been pollen that can be blown by the wind, that can mobile representations that can transcend and promote the rootedness of built form, while architecture provides the raw material for display of photography’s ability to translate the world into an alluring flatness” (Ibid, 62). This relationship between photography and architecture has not only influenced how we understand architecture’s role within a broader socio-political and economic context, but it has also influenced how we look at and how we think about architecture and vice versa.

However, with a proliferation of architectural imagery extant, it is important that a clear distinction is made between the everyday image and those images of a ‘critical’ nature or intended as social comment, responding to architecture in order to say something about our world and how we live. Bearing in mind that a significant number of high Modernist architectural images produced by amateurs or on social media platforms, according to Campany (2014: 38) “belong to the very same networks of spectacle”, it becomes clear that an independent and critical photography of architecture is as ‘vital’ as it is ‘endangered’ (Ibid). Where this dissertation seeks to investigate how contemporary artists and photographers image high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning to critique the failure of high Modernism’s social idea(s), I intend to, as the focus of this research, analyse key projects by select contemporary artists and photographers that, I believe, satisfy this need for an independent and critical photography of architecture. While I acknowledge the valuable work done by writers and critics of architecture and photography such as Judith Turner (2002), Gordon Baldwin (2003), Daniela Janzer (2013), and Lazlo Moholy-Nagy – photographers that aimed to reinvent the photographic medium from a more pure photographic end, their work was more concerned with compositional and technical means in order to achieve a unique artistic expression.

3. There are, however, many well-known contemporary photographers working in this field who are from neither Western Europe nor North America, such as Simon Norfolk (1953–) from Nigeria, Nader Kander (1963–) from Israel, Hiroshi Sugimoto (1956–) from Japan, and Michael Kenna (1953–) from South Africa.

4. While I use the term ‘high Modernism’ in its singular form, this is not to discount the many subterranean and sometimes non-existent nuances in high Modernist form. Instead, Norfolk (1953–) from Nigeria, Nadav Kander (1963–) from Israel, Hiroshi Sugimoto (1956–) from Japan, and Michael Kenna (1953–) from South Africa.

5. European high Modernism to Soviet high Modernism to African high Modernism.

6. These photographers have been influenced both formally and materially by modernism, particularly with my decision to move away from the photographic term ‘flatness’. Their formal aspects referenced modernist photographers including Andreas Feininger, Aleksandr Rodchenko, and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy – photographers that aimed to reinvigorate the photographic medium from a more pure photographic end, their work was more concerned with compositional and technical means in order to achieve a unique artistic expression.
In order to inaugurate this intellectual frame, I define and discuss high Modernism, identifying the relevant characteristics and contexts of select case studies, and marking how they reflect or communicate the social idea(l)s or ideologies responsible for their construction. This is followed by a brief overview of architecture’s ability to communicate meaning, particularly through form and sign, which provides a foundation for the discussions in Chapters 3 and 4. Finally, the chapter concludes with the concrete applications of high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning across the globe.

In Chapter 2, I trace the history of photography’s relationship with architecture, beginning with the advent of the medium in the nineteenth century and ending with the present. As the investigation of contemporary photography at its interface with fine art is the focus of this dissertation, this history establishes the precedents for much of the photography I have chosen, and locates these contemporary works within a broader trajectory.

I engage further with my research question in the following two chapters. In Chapter 3, I explore Andreas Gursky’s Paris, Montparnasse (1993) and Filip Dujardin’s Fictions (2007–2011). In a South African context, I then discuss David Goldblatt’s South Africa: The Structure of Things Then (1998). While my interest lies mainly in contemporary African photography, I have chosen to explore Goldblatt’s work as it is important that I address what my research question means within the space and place that I am sited.

In Chapter 4, I conduct an in-depth investigation into Beate Gütschow’s S (2004–2009) which forms the culmination of the research project. S reconfigures in the most direct and succinct way the thesis that certain contemporary photography uses high Modernist structures and architectures to critique high Modernism’s failed social ideas and ideals. I begin this discussion with reference to an earlier work, LS (1999–2003).
Chapter 1: Establishing the Terrain

In this chapter, I establish the terrain from which I intend to investigate how contemporary artists and photographers image high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning to critique the failure of high Modernism’s social ideal(s). As this dissertation investigates the relationship between high Modernism, architecture, and photography, it is imperative that I first establish what I mean by ‘high Modernism’ in regard to the formulation ‘high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning’ mobilised in my project description. In framing this understanding, I also provide a brief overview of high Modernism’s contexts, characteristics, and applications, so as to suggest just how these structures and architectures differ from their more ‘democratic’ counterparts. Here, I include an outline of architecture’s ability to communicate meaning through form and sign, as the contemporary artists and photographers whom I discuss in Chapters 3 and 4 each use the signs and languages of architecture to communicate with – and to refer back to – high Modernism. Of significance are Le Corbusier’s Unite d’habitation housing projects (1947–1965) as an adaptation of his Ville Radieuse (1924), as well as Ville Radieuse’s influence on other projects such as Minoru Yamasaki’s Pruitt Igoe (1954–1965) and Juscelino Kubitschek, Lucio Costa, and Oscar Niemeyer’s Brasilia (1957–1960). As I discuss in the chapter, each example was selected because of its resonances with the contemporary photographic works I have chosen.

I integrate Le Corbusier’s Unite d’habitation project with a broader discussion of his unrealised Ville Radieuse because Le Corbusier’s plans for Ville Radieuse, though unfulfilled, were pioneering in their designs for the high Modernist city. In addition, this was one of the first large-scale urban development projects intended to create a “progressive utopian society” (Yiftachel, 1995: 215). The influence of Ville Radieuse was integral to the formation of the Unite d’habitation, which adapted Ville Radieuse’s plans for its housing district, as was the case for Pruitt-Igoe in the United States and the layout of Brasilia, Brazil’s new capital. Ville Radieuse was likewise integral to the design and development of Chandigarh, the capital of India’s Punjab province. In this particular example, one can see the application of high Modernist structures and architectures in not only Western Europe (as with the Unite d’habitation), but also North America (with Pruitt-Igoe), South Asia (with Chandigarh), and South America (with Brasilia).

The discussion on Brasilia will be allocated a section of its own, as it is not only a very large project but it also illustrates particularly well the adoption (and adaptation or indigenisation) of high Modernist architecture and urban planning in the context of a ‘developing country’ and its subsequent failure as a social ideal(s). For example, certain structures in Brasilia, such as the civic structures designed by Niemeyer, were deemed ‘tropical interpretations’ of high Modernism where their curvy, organic designs tended away from the rigid and purely rectilinear forms of European high Modernism. This variation in form is important as it aids my understanding of the high Modernist structures and architectures depicted in the works of my chosen artists and photographers. While Andreas Gursky’s Paris, Montparnasse (1993) depicts a more traditional Western European high Modernist structure, and the same could be said for Filip Dujardin’s Fictions (2007–2011) (although there is an element of late-Soviet high Modernism in his structures), a different story could be told about the ones in David Goldblatt and Beate Gütschow’s works. In Goldblatt’s South Africa: The Structure of Things Then (1998), one can sense a more South African variation of high Modernist architecture in certain images, which, although similar to their Western European and North American counterparts, have been adapted to suit apartheid ideology, as well as the country’s climate, availability of materials, and budgets. Similarly, in Beate Gütschow’s S (2004–2009), there is an inclination towards a late-Soviet high Modernist architecture, and more specifically, Soviet Brutalism. These late-Soviet architectures produced (primarily) in the former Eastern and Soviet Bloc were each carefully selected by Gütschow for the construction of her images
as their formal languages were deemed best able to communicate high Modernism's largely totalitarian imperatives (Gottscho, personal communication, April 20)

While there is emphasis placed on high Modernism and how it manifests in architecture and urban planning in this chapter, this has been done with the view to understand how the dynamic structures and architectures they depict, and in how these variations in formal language help to communicate particular social idea(s), it is important that I create a framework suitable for such discussion.

What is high Modernism?

For the purposes of this document, I use the term ‘high Modernism’ to refer to “a school of architecture and design – one especially dominant during the Cold War decades of 1945–1991 – that placed complete trust in science and technology” (Mallgrave, 2005: 192). This movement is today often characterised by the cold logic with which it viewed human factors and nature as obstacles to be overcome (Ibid, 196).

While I recognise that there are many different definitions and understandings of ‘modernism,’ or rather ‘modernisms’ (see Habermas [1985], Harris [1997], Meecham & Sheldon [2004]), I find these definitions less appropriate in this context because they tend toward a more general and philosophical overview of ‘modernity.’ This pertains more to the Enlightenment and to industrialisation than to actual high Modernist structures and architectures. For example, with Jürgen Habermas’ (1985) definition, modernity began with Descartes and is therefore identified with the Enlightenment. Charles Harrison’s (1997) definition, modernity is said to owe its origins to both Charles Baudelaire and Gustave Flaubert, and to the romantic revolution of the revolutions and progress in science and industry. High Modernism in this context, although at times congruent in vision and intent, therefore holds little to no affiliation with its literary predecessors, as it lacks the provisionality of modernism, its elusive nature, and its constant search for progress and new forms tends to preclude any totalising definition.

While my chosen definition focuses specifically on aspects of architecture and urban design central to this research (and relating to contemporary photography), it is important to also acknowledge that such tendencies in architecture and urban design were a necessary link to much larger economic and socio-political conditions. Thus, in my attempt to locate the movement within these broader contexts and conditions, I have chosen to foreground political scientist James C. Scott’s definition of high Modernism. Although not dissimilar, Scott defines high Modernism as “a form of modernity, and more appropriately in this context, a form of modernism” (1999: 236). This functional order has been associated with ideological high Modernism and reflects the interests of those who advocated its authority. In many cases, with Nikita Kruschev in the former Soviet Union, Robert McNamara in the United States, and Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, these advocates were often powerful administrators and heads of state. They tended to prefer certain forms of planning and social organisation (such as centralised communication and transportation hubs, large factories and farms, and grid cities) because these forms fit neatly into a high Modernist view of society (see Le Corbusier, 1985) and needs, the mastery of nature (including human nature), and, above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws” (Ibid, my italics).

In keeping with Anson Rabinbach (1992) and Gregory Kaza (1995), high Modernism’s origins are traced back to Germany's economic mobilisation under Walter Rathenau’s during World War I, from whence it spread rapidly across Western Europe and North America as a by-product of the centralisation of resources and progress in science and industry. High Modernism in this context, although at times congruent in vision and intent, therefore holds little to no affiliation with its literary predecessors, as it lacks the provisionality of modernism, its elusive nature, and its constant search for progress and new forms tends to preclude any totalising definition

For high Modernist urban planners such as Le Corbusier, a functional order was naturally brought about through visual order (an observation elaborated upon in my analysis on the architect’s high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning). While my chosen definition focuses specifically on aspects of architecture and urban design central to this research (and relating to contemporary photography), it is important to also acknowledge that such tendencies in architecture and urban design were a necessary link to much larger economic and socio-political conditions. Thus, in my attempt to locate the movement within these broader contexts and conditions, I have chosen to foreground political scientist James C. Scott’s definition of high Modernism. Although not dissimilar, Scott defines high Modernism as “a form of modernity, and more appropriately in this context, a form of modernism” (1999: 236). This functional order not only meant that populations could be made legible, but it also helped to minimise unruly crowds and introduced as much control into the movement and conduct of a populace as physical planning alone could encourage (see sedentarisation).

This research and development shifted rapidly during the Cold War period, especially for opposing superpowers such as the United States and the Soviet Union, different manifestations of the movement were, ironically, embraced by states across the political spectrum. A faith in high Modernism could be detected in policies ranging from the radical left to the conservative right. Equally, the promise of utopia associated with high Modernist urban planning and social organisation, also made it a popular choice for those who wanted to bring about significant changes in people’s work habits, living patterns, moral conduct, and worldview (Scott, 1996: 3). However, such aspirations for the creation of
a ‘progressive utopian society’ meet with failure rather than success more often than not, as will be discussed later in this document. Such failures have tended to occur when these visions were held by ruling elites who had little commitment to democracy or civil rights and who were therefore likely to use unbridled state power for its implementation (Ibid). Examples of this ‘utopianism’ can be seen in the social engineering efforts of Apartheid South Africa, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Eastern Bloc in the mid-1900s, to cite some of the more notorious cases.

In these examples – and particularly in Apartheid South Africa, to which I return in Chapter 3 – failure of such social engineering endeavors occurred because the very tools and methods used by the “high” (according to Yiftachel [1995: 216], policy-makers and bureaucrats) to effect such a ‘progressive utopian society’ were also used to control, segregate, dispossess, and dispossess those whom Yiftachel (Ibid) again terms the “low” (residents and ordinary citizens) which comprised said society. Stated simply, the planning tools and methods used to assist social reform and improvement in people’s quality of life, if that was even intended, were often used as means of controlling and repressing those very same people. According to Yiftachel (Ibid, 219), like most other areas of public policy, modernist planning became a “double-edged sword, capable of reform and control,” and oppression.

Thus, it could be said that in certain instances, where a high Modernist ideology was combined with an authoritarian or totalitarian state, such nations were able to use the full weight of their coercive power to bring high Modernist schemes into being. For Scott (1999: 5), the most conducive situations for this unrestrained use of power were typically “those in war, territory, and struggle for national liberation.” Scott continues, stating that this often left behind a passive, “socially” village that lacked the capacity to resist the implementations of these plans (Ibid, 88). While many of these examples highlight failed social idea(1)s under high Modernism as enacted on a much broader scale and socio-political scale by ruling elites, this is not to discount the many smaller architectural projects proposed with less powerful (although highly influential) advocates such as Le Corbusier and Jean Prouvé, which also failed (see Jacobs [1961], Jencks [1997], and Glazer [2007]). Although smaller in scale, these projects equally reflect the broader ideologies responsible for their construction. For example, Jean Prouvé’s Maison Tropicale (1949–1952) project, although not included in this paper, reflects broader European ideas about cultural dominance as told through the colonial project. Likewise, the African men’s hostels, as portrayed by Goldblatt’s photographs, are there is a place between the modernist ideologies of apartheid which included notions of racial segregation, discrimination, and control. The capacity of such architectural projects to reflect the broader ideologies responsible for their construction relates back to the work of nineteenth-century art critic John Ruskin, who first proposed the idea that “architecture is an expression of society” (Ruskin quoted in Rosenberg, 1998: 286). However, for the purposes of this dissertation, in which I intend to present an argument that urban photographers imagine high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning to critique the failure of high Modernism’s social idea(1)s, I have adapted this idea to include the high Modernist structures and architectures. If architecture is, in Ruskin’s words “an expression of society,” then in furthering this premise one could surmise that the structures and architectures built by societies dominated by a high Modernist ideology, in and of themselves, express the ethos characteristic of the prevailing ideology (that is, of high Modernism).

In much the same way, while many of my examples highlight some of the failed social idea(1)s under high Modernism, it is not within the scope of this dissertation to provide a detailed account of their failings. However, I will set for one account for it as a core tenet for much of the following research, that being, “designed or planned social order is necessarily schematic; it always ignores essential features of any real, functioning social order” (Scott, 1999: 6). While a Modernist project, South Africa, with which one could level on which he has a point. In translating this restriction to actual, physical structures within the built environment, one is made aware of a much broader and less ignored in their design: the aspect of humanness and how humans interact with their built environment. It is this feature that drives much of my research, which constitutes a core concern of the artists and photographers whose works I discuss over the course of this document. Much of this document and the contemporary photography which I am interested in can be read as a case against the imperialism and aority of a high Modernist, planned social order. I stress the word aority here because I am not emphatically making a blanket case against the bureaucratic planning or high Modernist ideology, but rather against an imperial or hegemonic planning mentality that excluded the human – intentionally or unintentionally – which one would hope otherwise have constituted its nucleus.

Architecture as a Form of Communication
(The Rhetoric of Architecture)

A phenomenological consideration of our relationship with architectural objects tells us that we commonly do experience architecture as communication, even while recognising its functionality.

— Umberto Eco (1997)

The assumption that architecture is invested with meaning and can, in turn, communicate that meaning is not a new one. Architects and writers have long deliberated and contested this assumption, from Vitruvius’s De Architectura (c. 30–15 BC) (published as Ten Books on Architecture [1995: 13]) to Amos Rapoport’s writings in the twenties and twenty-first centuries (see Rapoport [1990: 21]; [2005:21]), with each contesting that architecture is more than utilitarian as it evidences social life. This is primarily due to architecture’s ability to convey social meaning, which includes expressing the religious and cultural beliefs and political practices of a society (or more broadly the ideology of a society), through its physical and visual form.

Where architecture is widely defined as “the art or practice of designing and erecting buildings,” it can, in turn, be reduced to its most basic constituents: art and building (Conway & Roethnich, 1984: 4). Like certain forms of art, certain architectural objects can be recognised as self-referential objects, due in part to the basic generic elements that constitute their form, asier alike: volume, plane, line, proportion, size, scale, mass, material, texture, pattern, colour, ornamentation, and façade (Muschenheim, 1984: 35). When combined, these elements
interact to create a whole – a physical and visual form or gestalt – that helps define the existing context and communicate information (Lynch, 2002: 46).

However, according to art historian Donald Preziosi (1997: 30), architecture is also able to convey such meaning through another system; one which directly involves the structured relationship that exists between the building and its immediate and/or wider surroundings: semiotics.24 Though it will not be discussed in great detail, semiotics was widely used by scholars (in the late-nineteenth and twentieth-centuries) as a means to understand and interpret how architecture communicates meaning. Here, semiotics, in the approach of the Structuralists and Poststructuralists,25 is based on the assumption that architecture on its own is a sign system (a means of communication analogous to writing or speech) with its own grammar and syntax. As Umberto Eco claims in Linguaggio architettonico (Language of Architecture) (1966: 33), “Architectural language is an authentic linguistic system obeying the same rules that govern the articulation of natural language. In this way, it is understood that architecture can be read as a ‘text’.” Examples of this approach can be found in the works of Geoffrey Broadbent (1986), Eco (1997), Robert Venturi (1966), Jenkins (1997), and William Whyte (2006), where each describe architecture as a ‘code’ capable of being used to communicate the intentions of the patron to the building user, or in this case the viewer and critic, for interpretation (Jenkins, 1997; Eco, 1997).

The manner in which architectural signs and language function and essentially ‘speak’ is an important aspect of my study, as the contemporary artists and photographers whom I discuss, in Chapters 3 and 4, each use these signs and languages to communicate with – and to refer back to – high Modernism. Architecture can also communicate meaning by (i) influencing perception, which in turn influences human behavior, such as how humans interact with architectural content or navigate through it, or even how human actions are impacted by architecture’s ordering and organising of physical space. Other methods include (ii) prestructuralism, which reflects “morphologies of feeling”, defined by Susanne Langer (1957) as “invoking patterns of internal experience as motion, rest, tension, release, agreement, discord, and change” and (iii) metaphor, which examines the distinction between “is and like” – that architecture is like a language in that it has meaning as well as components that are systematically joined, versus that architecture is in fact, a language with all the features thereof” (Hollier, 1992: 32). However, it is architecture’s ability to communicate via form and to be a sign that will be employed in this document as methods for interpreting meaning.

The Relationship between high Modernism and Structures, Architectures, and Urban Planning

As stated previously, high Modernism was often characterised by an “infinite confidence in science and standardisation, simplification, and ordering of physical space. Applications of this ideology are best illustrated in the ‘machines for living in’ (Wolfe, 1978: 12), a term first proposed optimistically by Le Corbusier, and thereafter used ironically by various critics to describe the essential un-liveability of the ‘box architecture’ implemented by high Modernism in large-scale housing projects and urban planning.” Similar to the high Modernist project, high Modernist architecture was – from its inception (Hombrey, 2006; Jencks, 2015) – a utopia. Discontent with simply re-envisioning pre-established conventions in architecture and space, the high Modernist architectural movement committed itself towards a (complete) restructuring of society for a better future (Stierli, 2015: 8). High Modernist architecture was therefore always planned as both a spatial and a social project, addressing both the urbs (city) and the civitas (citizens). If individual buildings were conceived of as partial utopias – as nuclei from which larger developments were to emerge – it was certainly large-scale urban planning and development projects and their preoccupations with creating a blank slate, or a tabula rasa of sorts, that articulated the essential basis for architectural utopian thinking in the twentieth century.26

24. Self-referentiality designates the situation where a work draws attention to its own nature as a created work of art. This creates a meta-level where the audience, or in this case the viewer, is simultaneously drawn into the work but also critically aware of its constructed nature.

25. Semiotics was defined by linguist Ferdinand Saussure as “the study of signs or the study of the life of signs within social life” (Macaulay, 2000: 547).

26. Similarly, modernism (in photography) was often characterized by an unfailing confidence in science and technology as a means to record the social and natural world (Purcell, 2008).

27. Equally, modernism (in photography) was often characterized by an unfailing confidence in science and technology as a means to record the social and natural world (Purcell, 2008).

28. Le Corbusier believed that buildings should function as “machines for living in”, analogous to cars which he saw in machines for traveling in (Wolfe, 1978: 12).

29. “The terms of ‘postmodern’ and ‘poststructuralist’ are used to refer to people and things that are connected with structuralism or poststructuralism. Structuralism is ‘an approach to linguistics that analyzes and describes the structure of language, as distinguished from its comparative and historical aspects’ (‘Structuralism’, 2012). Poststructuralism, on the other hand, is less singularly defined as a movement than is structuralism. A number of literary theories fall under the larger umbrella of poststructuralism, including gender theory and queer theory. These theories advance the overarching notion that meaning does not exist as an essence, but challenges the belief in the superposition of spatial and social concepts from above, and has deconstructed modern architecture’s paternalistic and even totalitarian impulses (Foucault, 1977).”
Tabula rasa, a Latin word meaning “scraped tablet” or “cleaned slate” is a term often used to refer to something new, fresh, unmarked or uninfluenced, or an opportunity for a fresh start (“Tabula rasa”, 2015). It can also refer to an empty piece of land. However, in the context of high Modernist architecture, tabula rasa often referred to a piece of land that was cleared out for urban development, either through bulldozing large tracts of forest or jungle (as in Brasilia), or through forcibly removing and demolishing pre-existing communities and structures (as with District Six [see Figure 6] or Sophiatown, later Triomph, in South Africa). Likewise, the ‘blank slate’ that was created by the bombing in the Second World War can also be referred to as a tabula rasa.

Like high Modernism, high Modernist architecture had a particular temporal and social context. Where modernism as an overarching cultural and philosophical movement arose as a reaction to wide-scale and far-reaching transformations, as with the development of modern industrial societies and the rapid growth of cities in Western Europe and North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Lewis, 2000: 38), high Modernism and its architecture only really developed in the 1920s (Tournikotis, 1999: 53). This development coincided with the newfound beliefs of key modernist architects and designers such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier, who, in viewing the progressive industrialisation of the twentieth century and the new materials that were brought about (such as plate glass, mass-produced steel, and reinforced concrete), developed the belief that new technology should render the old styles and structures obsolete inherited from Ancient Greece or from the Middle Ages obsolete. Following this ‘machine aesthetic’, high Modernist architects stripped off ornamental or decorative elements and instead endeavoured to produce structures of a more geometrical and rectilinear form that emphasised the materials used in their construction (truth to materials”).

Even colour was stripped off, with architects advocating for a complete transformation of existing conditions in society, usually through “transcended the bodily world, the world of physical desire” (Ibid). Thus, it could be said that it was this initial meeting point between functionalism and the aesthetic ideals (form) of modernism that led to the advent of the International Style.

Although modernism and high Modernism were both concerned with human progress and the potential for human intervention to bring about positive changes in the structure of society, Scott believes that high Modernism’s vision placed a greater reliance on the expertise of intellectuals as well as on technological and scientific innovations, making it the more elitist project (1999: 94–95). This notion of elitism as entrenched in high Modernism served to elevate the views of a select few to the detriment of a weakened civil society (Ibid).

More importantly, high Modernism advocated for a complete transformation of existing conditions in society, usually through the creation of a blank slate that often disregarded historical, social, and geographical contexts in its development (Scott, 1999: 14). This resulted in the application of standardised models to a variety of locations, and usually with socially disruptive consequences, as illustrated in the following examples.

Le Corbusier’s Unite d’habitation housing projects (1947–1965) as an adaptation of his unrealised Ville Radieuse project (1924)

The Unite d’habitation (French for “housing unit”) refers to a large-scale high Modernist housing project developed by Le Corbusier in the years following the end of the Second World War. The idea for the Unite d’habitation was adapted from Le Corbusier’s earlier design principles for the Unite or the housing district in his Ville Radieuse project (French for “Radiant City”) (see Figure 2). Although unrealised, Ville Radieuse is to this day the most influential of all high Modernisms large-scale urban planning and development projects (as can be seen in Figures 2–3) (Merin, 2003). Designed to contain effective means of transportation, as well as an abundance of green space and sunlight, Le Corbusier’s ‘city of the future’ was not only intended to provide residents with a better lifestyle, but to contribute to creating a better society (that is, the project was driven mainly by Le Corbusier’s impetus towards the creation of a progressive utopian society). Although radical, strict, and near “totalitarian” (Curtis, 2006: 122) in its order, symmetry, and standardisation, Le Corbusier’s proposed principles for Ville Radieuse had an extensive influence on modern urban planning and development. This influence led to the development of new high-density housing typologies, such as the Unite d’habitation housing project at different locations throughout Europe, the Märkisches Viertel in Berlin (Figure 3), the Stuyvesant Town – Peter Cooper Village in New York (Figure 3), and Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis, amongst others. Ville Radieuse also had a profound impact on the layout of Brasilia, Brazil’s new capital (Merin, 2003). Its master plan was first presented in

30. However, it was not until after the Second World War that high Modernist architecture gained (mass) popularity. This was after modernist planning was implemented as a solution to the previous failure of architecture and design to meet basic social needs.

31. “Truth to materials’ is a principle of modern architecture stating that the nature of any material should not be hidden but rather celebrated for what it is, and that the qualities of each material should dictate the way in which it is used” (Farny, 2015: 1). The concept was advocated by English architect A.W.N. Pugin in the nineteenth century and developed by Ruskin in writings such as his entitled “The Seven Lamps of Architecture” (1841), in which he spoke of an “honour and unpretending” architecture (1841: 5).

32. “The International Style in architecture, also known as the ‘Brasilia style’ while under the directionship of Mies van der Rohe (1922–1923) in Dessau; 1926–1927 in Chicago), was marked by the absence of ornamentation and by hierarchy between the function of a building and its design” (Friedewald, 2009: 8). Design innovations commonly associated with the International Style include “radically simplified forms, truth to materiality, rationality and functionality, and the idea that mass-production can be reconciled with the individual artistic spirit” (Pevsner, 1995: 180).

33. While both modernism and high Modernism claimed to be “democratic” and “utopian”, that is, in their ideological forms, high Modernism was often totalitarian in its practical application (see Potter, 2002).
1924, and was later published as a book of the same title in 1933.

Le Corbusier, born Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (1887–1965), was a Swiss-born French essayist, painter, architect, and urban planner. Widely regarded as the father of high Modernist urban design, Le Corbusier today not only exemplifies the authoritarian role undertaken by many architects during high Modernism, but his works are often used as examples to make a case against the high Modernist ideology and its unswerving faith in technocracy. Active roughly between the 1920s and 1960s, Le Corbusier was less an architect than a visionary urban planner of great ambition. While most of his large-scale development schemes were never built (as with Ville Radieuse, which typically required a political resolve and financial wherewithal that few authorities could muster), some do exist. The most notable are perhaps Chandigarh and the Marseille Unite d’habitation. However, it must be noted that while Le Corbusier’s views are today considered extreme, they were highly influential at the time, particularly amongst other high Modernist architects whose practices, more often than not, were influenced by Le Corbusier’s design principles and philosophy (such as with Jean Dubuisson’s Mouchotte building in Paris, discussed in Chapter 3) (Cohen, 1992: 7).

In accordance with the modernist ideals of progress, which encouraged the annihilation of tradition, ‘Radiant City’ was to emerge from a tabula rasa: that is, it was to be built on nothing less than the grounds of the demolished vernacular European cities (Merin, 2013). This new city would contain prefabricated and identical high-density skyscrapers, spread across a vast green area and arranged in a Cartesian grid, allowing the city to function as a ‘machine for living in’. As Le Corbusier (1987: 36) explains, “the city of today is a dying thing because its planning is not in the proportion towards the creation of a progressive utopian society. The Unite d’habitation principle formed part of Le Corbusier’s ongoing impetus towards the creation of a progressive utopian society.

Figure 7: Le Corbusier with model of Ville Radieuse (1933).”

34. The city of Chandigarh (inaugurated in 1966) - an example of Le Corbusier’s ‘European’ ideas transposed in a developing context – was originally conceived as a by-product of the then partitioning which took place between India and Pakistan in August 1947. Lahor, the capital city of India’s Punjab province, was assigned to Pakistan, thereby leaving the state without a capital. However, for law-abiding Nehru (India then Prime Minister and local advocate of the high Modernist movement), Chandigarh was “not just to be ‘this new capital’, but an emblematic proclamation of India’s modernity on the world stage”, an embodiment of his faith in the modern way of living from which the future of India was to emerge (Nehru quoted in Bharne, 2011: 39). Le Corbusier’s designs for the new city therefore not only transformed India’s destiny, but also seemed faithful Nehru’s political stratagem of suppressing India’s colonial consciousness and embedding its latent optimism through its modernist ideals. However, once laden with patriotic values, the city today stands as a failed social idea(!) – both complete in its envisioned form, nor replace with its founding meanings, looming between the Nehruvian-Corbusian vision that gave birth to it and the socio-political vicissitudes of the post-colonial India that nurtured it” (Bharne, 2011: 99). For further reading see V. Bharne’s Le Corbusier’s ‘Rain: The Changing Face of Chandigarh’s Capital’ (2011).
projects throughout Europe of the same designation, with the first and foremost being the Unite d’habitation in South Marseille, France (1947–1952). This was later followed by the Cité Radieuse in Briey (Meurthe-et-Moselle) in Briey-en-Forêt (1959), and Firmiun in Loire (1967).

The Marseille Unite d’habitation, perhaps the most influential and illustrative of all Le Corbusier’s principles, is today the largest single-standing housing structure of Le Corbusier’s to have been built. With 377 apartments over eighteen storeys, the vertical structure was originally intended as a prototype for a new and revolutionary standardised system, which, when built en masse had – according to Le Corbusier – the potential to not only resolve Europe’s post-war housing crises but to also address the many unsuccessful attempts made by European states to permanently sedentarise itinerant persons (Sbriglio, 2004: 33). However, only five of these structures were ever built, and never as a complete urban plan.

As can be seen in Figure 11, while Le Corbusier was mostly unsuccessful in his efforts to implement the Unite d’habitation project on a larger (or even global) scale, he did achieve much of his fame through the five structures that were built. Indeed, his recognition as an architect stems for the most part from his impressive use of reinforced concrete in their frameworks, as opposed to a more traditional steel-frame (which was far too expensive in the post-war economy) (Curtis, 2006: 232). Reinforced concrete, or beton brut, was the cheapest building material available in post-war Europe. Interestingly, it had been Le Corbusier’s use of reinforced concrete in the construction of the Unite d’habitation that initially heralded the Brutalist architectural style and philosophy (Banham, 1966: 16).

In Le Corbusier’s vision, the Unite d’habitation fostered the development of communal living. As with Ville Radieuse’s Unites, residents could shop, play, live and come together in what the architect termed a “vertical garden city” (Le Corbusier quoted in Sbriglio, 2004: 33). For its designs, Le Corbusier drew on his studies of Soviet communal housing projects, particularly the Narkomfin Building in Moscow, a renowned landmark for socialist collective living, which, like the Unite d’habitation, offered communal services within the block (see Figure 11).

With a task so ambitious, Le Corbusier’s greatest challenge lay in developing an approach to spatial organisation capable of successfully navigating 1,600 residents within a single structure. Unlike residential housing projects, which traditionally spread out horizontally over the landscape, Le Corbusier broke with convention and instead designed a single high-rise structure in which an entire community could be contained. Building vertically meant that more people could be housed per square metre, which supposedly left open more space for parks and other endeavours. However, the increase in structural density meant that apartment spaces became smaller and more claustrophobic, with some rooms built without windows or any other forms of ventilation. This, according to Scott (1999: 110), was not the result of ignorance but of a careful determination and calculation of the basic needs required by each resident to maintain a state of ‘health’. He writes:

Le Corbusier calculates the air (la respiration exacte), heat, light, and space people need as a matter of public health. Starting with a figure of fourteen square metres per person, he reckons that this could be reduced to ten square metres if such activities as food preparation and laundry were made communal (Ibid).

By his own reasoning, Le Corbusier was planning for the needs of his fellow men – needs that he believed were ignored or de rigueur in the existing city. This, he established by stipulating an abstract, simplified human subject with certain material and physical requirements. This schematic subject needed so many square metres of living space, so much fresh air, so much sunlight, so much open space, and so many essential services. At this level, he aimed to design entire cities (as with the later Chandigarh) that were “far more ‘healthful and functional than the crowded, dark slums of the existing organic city” (Ibid). Thus, Le Corbusier spoke of “punctual and exact respiration,” and of various formulas for determining optimal sizes for apartments (Scott, 1999: 117).

While the completed Unite d’habitation project was, in its earlier years, regarded by architects and critics of architecture as “yet another successful manifestation of high Modernism” (Dalrymple, 2009), its residents – that is, the people for whom it was designed – regarded it as a “machine,” much like an ocean liner (1979: 41, my italics), spatially and functionally optimised for its residents.

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35. Le Corbusier nicknamed the Marseille Unite d’habitation Cité Radieuse or Radun City after Ville Radieuse (Shriglo, 2004: 19).
36. The Marseille Unite d’habitation is frequently used as a synonym for the Unite d’habitation project (Shriglo, 2004: 10).
37. According to Pile (2009: 340), this was perhaps due to its combative and often inscrutable nature which, unsurprisingly, led to a resistant and often resentful client base blocking his projects.
38. Brutalist architecture or ‘Brutalism’, popularised by British architectural critic Reyner Banham, is an architectural movement that flourished from the 1950s to the mid-1970s in Western Europe and North America, and from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s in the former Eastern and Soviet Bloc, and other developing nations (Banham, 1966: 14). According to Banham (Ibid, 17), “Examples of Brutalist architecture are typically massive in character (even when not large), fortress-like, with a preponderance of exposed concrete construction, or in the case of the ‘brick Brutalists’, ruggedly combine detailed brickwork and concrete. There is often an emphasis on graphically expressing in the external elevations and in the whole-one architectural plan the main functions and people-flows of the building.” Brutalism was a radical new form of high Modernism, espoused in socialist (and later authoritarian and totalitarian) ideas that embraced hard lines and a utilitarian lack of ornamentation (as per the modestist dictum, ‘form follows function’). It became a popular choice for educational buildings (especially university buildings), as well as many government projects, high-rise housing, and shopping centers, “creating an architectural image that communicated strength, functionality, and frank expression of materiality” (McCladdan & Stewart, 2017: 12).
39. The structure had become a city within a city, or in Le Corbusier’s words “a machine, much like an ocean liner” (1979: 41, my italics), spatially and functionally optimised for its residents.
The Pruitt-Igoe housing project – yet another project based on Le Corbusier’s rationalist principles for Ville Radieuse – is an interesting example as it remains to this day a powerful symbol of the social, racial, and architectural tensions that dogged America’s cities in the mid-twentieth century. Designed by Japanese-American architect Minoru Yamasaki in the early 1950s, and built between 1954 and 1956 in the U.S. city of St. Louis, Missouri, the Pruitt-Igoe public housing project was intended as a solution to St. Louis’ problems of overpopulation (Bristol, 1991: 164). In order to save central properties from an imminent loss of value, city officials settled on redeveloping the “inner ring” around the central business district, whilst removing the ‘underclasses’ to the city’s outskirts (ibid).

In 1951, Yamasaki first published his original proposal for Pruitt-Igoe. That year, Architectural Forum, in an article entitled ‘Slum Surgery in St. Louis’, praised Yamasaki’s plans as being “the best high apartment of the year”, citing the project’s “spatial efficiency, allowances for plenty of green space, and innovations such as its limited-stop elevators” (Alexiou, 2006: 38–39). Overall density was set at a moderate level of 50 units per acre (higher than in downtown slums [Bristol, 1994: 164]), yet, according to the planning principles of Le Corbusier and the International Congresses of Modern Architecture (CIAM). “Like with the Unité d’habitation, each apartment block had its own communal areas such as large corridors, outdoor spaces, lounges, and shared facilities for activities such as laundry and catering. As can be seen in the screengrab below, Pruitt-Igoe was – at the time of its completion – seen as a breakthrough in urban renewal, with residents considering it to be an ‘oasis in the desert’ compared to the poor quality of housing they had occupied previously (The Pruitt-Igoe Myth, 2011). Some even referred to the apartments as “the poor man’s penthouses” (ibid).

The Pruitt-Igoe public housing project – or more formally the Captain W.O. Pruitt Homes and William L. Igoe Apartments – was a racially segregated, middle-class complex that consisted of 33 eleven-storey high-rise blocks that made up a total of 870 individual apartments. At the time of the project’s inception, middle-class, predominantly white, residents were leaving the city, and their former residences were becoming occupied by low-income families. Black and white slums of the old city were segregated and expanding, and threatened to engulf the city centre (Bristol, 1994: 164). In order to save central properties from an imminent loss of value, city officials settled on redeveloping the “inner ring” around the central business district, whilst removing the ‘underclasses’ to the city’s outskirts (ibid).

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Figure 17. An aerial view of Pruitt-Igoe in June 1971, by which time most of the 33 buildings stood vacant. According to writer Colin Marshall (2013), “Even today, when our eyes have supposedly grown accustomed to all manner of developments meant to shock us with their sheer incongruity, aerial photographs of the Pruitt-Igoe complex give you pause. There it stands, like a poor man’s Ville Radieuse, on 23 freshly cleared hectares of St Louis’s existing urban fabric, looking oddly alien to the miles of low-rise 19th and early 20th-century brick structures surrounding it.”

However, living conditions in Pruitt-Igoe declined soon after its completion in 1956. This was mainly due to its small apartment sizes, poor build quality,42 as well as the lack of maintenance afforded to its upkeep. According to Oscar Newman (1996: 12), “The apartment sizes were deliberately small, with undersized kitchen appliances. ‘Skip-stop’ elevators stopped only at the first, fourth, seventh, and tenth floors, forcing residents to use stairs in an attempt to lessen congestion. These same ‘anchor floors’ were equipped with large communal corridors, laundry rooms, communal rooms, and garbage chutes.” While the project’s 2,870 units reached a peak of 91% occupancy in 1957, this figure would plummet below 35% by 1971, when just 600 people remained in the seventeen of the complex’s buildings that were not yet boarded up (Bristol, 1991: 168). Reports proliferated of property crime, gang activity, drug dealing, prostitution, and murder.43 Heaters, toilets, garbage incinerators, and electricity all malfunctioned, and at one point the faulty plumbing let loose floods of raw sewage through the hallways (Ibid).44

While Pruitt-Igoe’s short, troubled existence can, to an extent, be attributed to the very failure of society itself, it was, however, according to Katherine Bristol (1991: 168), “the high Modernist architectural movement with its top-down policy and near totalitarian impetus towards order and control that initially created its social problems. For Bristol, Pruitt-Igoe, rather than representing an idealistic view of the future, came to represent all that was wrong with the intertwining of architecture and high Modernist policy and the hierarchical way in which many of these policies were implemented (Ibid).” Similarly, Benjamin A. Lawson (2004: 1), in his dissertation entitled The Pruitt-Igoe Projects: Modernism, Social Control, and the Failure of Public Housing, 1954–1976, states that what is most interesting about Pruitt-Igoe is that despite the obvious shortage of adequate housing in St. Louis at the time, city officials decided to tear down the complex after visible signs of disorder demonstrated that they had “lost control”. Here, city officials and ‘elite’ citizens, anxious to secure their positions of authority, focused on damage-control policies – such as dynamiting Pruitt-Igoe when it became a problem – rather than utilising the resources necessary to fix the problems at its source (Ibid).45

By the same token, even before the dust settled from the infamous, widely televised 1972 implosion of some of Pruitt-Igoe’s buildings (the last of which would not fall until 1976), the argument that the design had doomed itself was beginning to reach traction. Here, architectural historian Charles Jencks cites that much-seen dynamiting as the moment “modern architecture died” (1977: 9). According to Jencks (Ibid), “Pruitt-Igoe is a prime example of high Modernism’s intentions running contrary to real-world social development. Its failure represents the failure and indictment of the social-changing aspirations of the International School of Architecture.”46 With Pruitt-Igoe’s demolition being the first of many demolitions of high Modernist architecture (see Figure 18), it was therefore not long before the housing project became an internationally-recognised symbol of the architectural failing linking to the high Modernist movement, and a truism for environmental and behavioural literature (La Gory & Pipkin, 1981).

Figure 18. The second stage of demolition in April 1972.

42. The Public Housing Administration, objecting to the price of Yamasaki’s original plan, insisted on a cost-saving uniform tower height of eleven storeys. Likewise, the Korean War and squabbles in Congress ensured that the construction budget only got more straitened thereafter, resulting in poor build quality and cheap fixtures that doomed Pruitt-Igoe not long after the first occupants arrived (Marshall, 2013).
43. “I never thought people were that destructive,” Yamasaki said to the Architectural Review, lamenting the vandalisms that beset Pruitt-Igoe in the 1960s. “It’s a job I wish I hadn’t done” (Yamasaki quoted in Marshall, 2013).
44. Likewise, according to Alexander von Hoffman (2003), “The project’s monumental galleries and ‘skip-stop’ elevators, once heralded as architectural innovations, had by the late 1960s become nuisances and danger zones due to their lack of maintenance. Large numbers of ‘vacancies’ indicated that even poor people preferred to live anywhere but Pruitt-Igoe.”
46. This is, of course, considering that the structure did in the first instance cost 267 million (approximately 1976.57 million in current dollar values), 65% above the national average for public housing (Ramoth, 2007: 855).

Figure 19. Mathieu Pernot, Meaux, 17 April 2004. From the ‘Implosion Series’ (2008–2013). Pernot’s photographs of imploding buildings can be read as a general representation of modern architecture’s failure (Redstone & Pardo, 2010: 33). For Pernot (Ibid), “The spectacle of demolition is a potent symbol of the breaking down, not just of individual buildings, but also of an approach to architecture and planning that has failed society at large.”

Figure 20. The second stage of demolition in April 1972.
Another example, and perhaps the largest realisation of Le Corbusier’s ideas for Ville Radieuse, is the model city of Brasilia (1957–1960), Brazil’s federal capital. According to anthropologist James Holston (1999: 118), “Brasilia is about the closest thing we have to the high Modernist city, having been built more or less along the lines set out by Le Corbusier and CIAM.” The idea of a new capital in the interior predates even the independence of Brazil. Its realisation was the personal undertaking of Juscelino Kubitschek, Brazil’s populist then president (1956–1961), who promised Brazilians “fifty years of progress from utopian. Inasmuch as Brasilia was intended as “a single-function strictly administrative capital”, the planning itself was greatly simplified (Scott, 1999: 118).

However, where Brasilia was conceived of by Kubitschek, Niemeyer, and Costa as a city of the future, a city of development, and a realisable ‘utopia’, it made little to no reference to the habits, traditions, and practices of Brazil’s past, or of its other cities. Instead, it was to be ‘an exemplary city’, a centre that would transform the lives of the Brazilians who lived there; a space that could socially engineer every aspect of its residents, from their personal habits and household organisation to their social lives, leisure, and work (Scott, 1999: 119). The goal of making over Brazil (and by implication the Brazilians) necessarily implied a disdain for what Brazil had been (as evidenced by the notion that the more utopian the high Modernist plan, the more thoroughgoing its implied critique of the existing city). In this sense, the new capital was, according to Scott (Ibid), intended to function as a manifest contrast to the corruption, backwardness, and ignorance of the old Brazil (that is, in its ideological form). However, in its practical application, this idealism proved far from utopian.

Perhaps its greatest failing was the “aesthetic monotony” of its bland and repetitive designs, over and above its massive scale, which largely contributed to the feelings of isolation, forced conformity, and disorientation experienced amongst its populace (Scott, 1999: 125). Moreover, the decision to completely eliminate the street and the square as spaces for public life (except for the colossal Plaza of the Three Powers) only served to expedite Brasilia’s social breakdown (Ibid, 123). While Brasilia may have created formal order and functional segregation, it did so at the cost of a sensorially impoverished and monotonous environment – one which inevitably took its toll on the spirit of its residents. Where officially designated public spaces did in fact exist, these were limited to a stadium, a theatre, a concert hall, and a few planned restaurants. The smaller, unstructured, informal public spaces did in fact exist; these were limited to sidewalk cafes, street corners, small parks, and neighbourhood squares – did not exist.


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As for the city’s housing, Niemeyer and Costa were, like Le Corbusier, strongly influenced by the designs for Soviet high Modernist communes. In Brasilia, individual apartment buildings were grouped into what were called ‘superquadras’ in an attempt to facilitate the development of collective living. Each superquadra (which consisted of roughly 360 apartments housing 1,500 to 2,500 residents) had its own nursery and elementary school; and each grouping of four superquadras had their own secondary school, cinema, social club, sports facilities, and retail sector. However, many of the superquadra structures were built along the city’s margins, which meant that the poorer residents of Brasilia often had to commute long distances to the city centre where they worked. Wealthier residents, on the other hand, were allowed to live in the centre of the city, which only reinforced the existing class distinctions (Segawa, 1997: 295).

In Jane Jacobs’ critique of the high Modernist city (of which she includes Brasilia), the “magisterial assumptions” behind the doctrines of many urban planners (that they know what people want and how people should spend their time) are criticized as being both short-sighted and arrogant. According to Jacobs (1961: 173), “They [the urban planners] assumed, or at least their plans assumed, that people preferred open spaces, visual (zoned) order, and quiet. They assumed that people wanted to live in one place and work in another. They were however mistaken.”

Thus while Brasilia is considered, particularly by its residents, to be a failure in terms of its visual monotony, isolation, forced conformity, disorientation, and social breakdown (see Segawa [1997], Holston [2009], and Stierli [2010; 2013]), it was in its time regarded by architects and designers as something quite spectacular (Holston, 1989: 192). With its monumental scale and rational design, centred on mobility, uniformity, and functionality, Brasilia was not only lauded as a “utopic manifestation” of high Modernism, but as the first city (it preceded Chandigarh) to have truly epitomised the movement (Ibid, 193).

While it could also be argued that Brasilia was surely a rational, healthy, (somewhat) egalitarian, state-created city, it did, however, make precious little concession to the desires, histories, and social practices of its residents — yet again, the people for whom it was built. Neither did it acknowledge or uphold the people’s pride in their country, nor the culture that its state officials so passionately sought to establish. However, it can be argued that certain civic structures such as the National Congress Building and the Cathedral of Brasilia, with their tendency towards a curvier, more organic design (deemed a “Tropical Modernism”), presented a re-interpretation of the nation’s colonial past as well as a revitalisation of its indigenous African and popular cultures in their blending towards a new national society (Stierli, 2013: 11).

As this dissertation investigates the relationship between high Modernism and architecture, and the contemporary photography that uses this architecture to critique high Modernism’s failed social idea(s), I have, in this chapter, sought to establish the relationship between high Modernism and architecture.

The first part of the chapter was dedicated to establishing what high Modernism is so as to understand how it applies to the built environment and to society at large. By illustrating the predominantly authoritarian or totalitarian attitudes displayed by the movement and ideology, and by advocates of high Modernism, I established the terrain from which the reader can understand why subsequent artists and photographers display an antipathy towards these structures and architectures, either overtly or covertly, as well as the social idea(s) which gave rise to them. Following this, I provided a brief overview of architecture’s ability to communicate meaning, principally through form and sign. This is important, as the contemporary artists and photographers whom I discuss in Chapters 3 and 4 each use the signs and languages of architecture to communicate with — and to refer back to — high Modernism. The rest of the chapter was dedicated to Le Corbusier’s Ville Radieuse and its many adaptations. Although I placed emphasis on the more well-known Unite d’habitation, the unrealised Ville Radieuse provided a common thread for my discussion of several projects. Such discussion not only helped to illustrate the implementation of high Modernism in a global context, but it also interrogated the degree to which these ideas were implemented, from the single-standing housing structure to the fully-fledged high Modernist city.

Perhaps most importantly, though, I have touched upon many of the issues responsible for the failure of these projects; issues which arise again and again in the contemporary works that I discuss in Chapters 3 and 4. Although too numerous to mention, some of these issues — oversize and overcapacity, the poor quality of their building materials, the lack of maintenance or safety regulations afforded to them, the forced conformity and isolation experienced by their residents, issues of sedentarisation, or even just the aesthetic monotony of their designs — are concerns that arise so often in high Modernist architecture and urban planning that they have in a sense become characteristic of the movement. While a strong emphasis was placed on high Modernism and how it manifested in architecture and urban planning in this chapter, this was done with the view to understanding how these architectures and their characteristics are later harnessed by my chosen artists and photographers; a utilisation addressed in the chapters that follow.
Chapter 2:
Photography’s Relationship with Architecture

As the investigation of contemporary photography comprises the focus of this dissertation and underlies its concern with architecture’s expression in fine art, this chapter is dedicated to establishing and framing my understanding of photography’s relationship with architecture from the advent of the medium in the nineteenth century to the present. As mentioned earlier, this relationship has, for the most part, been symbiotic to the point of “co-dependency”. However, as will be seen in the following overview, this relationship has shifted over the course of photography’s history, from architecture working in the service of photography to photography working in the service of architecture, in addition to the mutually beneficial relationship observed.

The Nineteenth Century

The photographing of architectural structures is a field that reaches back in time to the history of the medium itself. Joseph Niépce’s (1765–1833) heliograph, *View from the Window at Le Gras* (c. 1826) (Figure 24), for example, is not only the first known photographic image, but it is also the first photographic image to have contained within its frame an architectural subject. Though near indistinct, Niépce’s heliograph can only be recognised as an image insofar as it shows the view across the rooftops of his estate. The volumes of the roofs, as seen from his attic window in faint and irregular outline, are all that can be easily distinguished. This leaves one with only a rudimentary understanding of the architectural information contained within its frame.

Although *View from the Window at Le Gras* is credited as being the first known image of architecture, it is also interesting to note that while Niépce made the decision to capture an architectural subject, this decision had remained contingent on the requirements of his experiments and little reflected his concern with architectural form itself (Lambert, 1985: 2). Architecture not only provided the definitive forms and conditions of illumination essential to his experiment, but it also proved the ideal subject, as it remained completely still. With early exposure times calling for anything from several hours to several days, it was therefore necessary that his subject remain inert for indefinite periods. And so, at the very advent of the photographic medium, architecture had seemed the obvious choice for photographers.

The same can be said for much of early photography where long exposure times severely restricted the scope of the photographic pioneers. As a result, both landscape and architectural scenes were greatly favoured due to their fixity. Like *View from the Window at Le Gras*, such images, principally those of architecture, were not intended as particular representations of their subjects (compared to, say, the contemporary projects that I intend to discuss), but instead functioned as general, serviceable experiments for improving the photographic image.

However, this, according to architectural historian James S. Ackerman (2002: 16), had changed by the mid-nineteenth century, when photographs of historical and exotic...
architectures found popular appeal amongst a mass market where they satisfied a growing interest in art, culture, and the world beyond everyday experience. This likewise correlated with an increase in international travel which had previously been the prerogative of a privileged minority (Ibid). The obsessive documenting of such images not only proved a captivating and highly lucrative preoccupation for pioneer photographers, such as Horace Vernet (1789–1863), Francis Bedford (1815–1894), and J-P Girault de Prangey (1804–1893), but, in the process of making the architectural image more prevalent, it also helped introduce it to a much wider audience. Thus it was not long before both the historian of architecture and the architect came to realise the value of the architectural image as a potentially useful resource and stimulus for the design of new buildings that employed reference to historical styles (see Ackerman, 2002).

The New Language of Modernism in the Twentieth Century

Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946), known for his photographs of the city and architectures of New York, is often credited as having brought about a particular shift in photographic practice following his return to New York in 1890. At the heart of Stieglitz’s efforts lay the intention to “promote photography as ‘art rather than as ‘document’ (Gaule, 2014: 122). This he sought to achieve with the establishment of the Photo-Secession movement in 1902, a movement which aimed to promote photography as a fine art in general and photographic Pictorialism in particular. It was here that he championed the works of contemporary American photographers such as Clarence H. White (1857–1930), Frank Eugene (1865–1931), Gertrude Käsebier (1852–1934), Edward Steichen (1879–1973), and Alvin Langdon Coburn (1882–1966), amongst others. However, it was his journal Camera Work (1903–1917) that had been the first to engage seriously and critically with the art of photography (Gaule, 2014: 122).

What is remarkable about Stieglitz is that for nearly two decades, whilst advocating the work of the Pictorialists with their traditionally ‘aesthetic’ subject matter and soft-focused imitations of Impressionism, he himself had been producing works that were awesomely ‘straight’. That is, his works were devoid of the manipulations of the photographic plate that were so common amongst the Pictorialists (Orvell, 2003: 90). Instead of the literary subjects, the pastorals, the still-life images that were modelled on paintings and that were part of an older aesthetic vocabulary, Stieglitz was helping to invent the new language of modernism, with its celebration of the machine and of the urban scene – the streets and skyscrapers of a growing New York, the ferry boats and railroads, the airplanes and ocean liners. Instead of the soft-focused view and the manipulated surface, Stieglitz was testing the limits of what the camera could do as a mechanical instrument, photographing in extreme weather conditions (snowstorms and wet, rainy nights) and working in the darkroom to bring out what was already there in the print. In effect, Stieglitz was inventing the vocabulary of twentieth-century photography with its celebration of the moment in time that could be seized propitiously by the speed of the new cameras.54

In his Flattiron image of 1903 (Figure 27), Stieglitz broke away from the then prevalent documentary approach to the photographing of architecture (as could be seen in the works of Atget in Europe at the time) and instead sought to capture and comprehend the very physical presence of the modern city by way of its architecture. In the early twentieth century, the vibrant energies of New York and particularly the emergence of the skyscraper became an arresting subject for the artist. In an article in 1916, Stieglitz recalls photographing the newly erected Flatiron Building on the day of a great snowstorm: “I suddenly saw the Flattiron Building as I had never seen it before. It looked, from where I stood, as if it were moving toward me like the bow of a monster ocean steamer, a picture of the new America in the making” (Stieglitz quoted in Whelan, 2000: 15). For New Yorkers the Fuller building, nicknamed ‘the Flattiron’ because of the triangular area of land on which it was built, was a symbol of a new and modern America—in-the-making.

Contrasted with the natural shape of the tree and bathed in snow and evening light, the building is an element of quiet beauty in a photograph of soft tones and simple shapes.

By 1914, as Stieglitz became aware of developments in avant-garde culture and the new realism of ‘straight photography’, he found himself increasingly captivated by the idea of a more modern visual aesthetic for photography, and, as a result, shunned his previous ideas about Pictorialism (Orvell, 2003: 90). According to William Homer (2002: 22), “As he [Stieglitz] became aware of what was going on in avant-garde painting and sculpture he found that Pictorialism no longer represented the future – it was its past.” This change was influenced in part by Stieglitz having been introduced to the works of Charles Sheeler (1883–1965) and Paul Strand (1890–1976). In 1915, Strand introduced to Stieglitz a new photographic vision that was embodied by the bold lines of everyday forms. Struck by the beauty and

Eugene Atget (1857–1927), working in Paris in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is a precursor of modernism. Although Haussmann’s work was met with fierce opposition and he was finally dismissed by Napoleon III in 1870, work on his projects continued until 1877.

PHOTOGRAPHY’S RELATIONSHIP WITH ARCHITECTURE

51. Angel’s style was unique in that it was more creative and experimental than that of his predecessors. According to Campany (2008), “Between 1879 and 1890, the photography of architects looked very much like stand-alone portraiture, characterized by formal composition, rigorously straight verticals, and an elevated perspective.”

52. Hassam’s renovation of Paris was a vast public project that had been the first to engage seriously and critically with the art of photography (Gaule, 2014: 122). What is remarkable about Stieglitz is that for nearly two decades, whilst advocating the work of the Pictorialists with their traditionally ‘aesthetic’ subject matter and soft-focused imitations of Impressionism, he himself had been producing works that were awesomely ‘straight’. That is, his works were devoid of the manipulations of the photographic plate that were so common amongst the Pictorialists (Orvell, 2003: 90). Instead of the literary subjects, the pastorals, the still-life images that were modelled on paintings and that were part of an older aesthetic vocabulary, Stieglitz was helping to invent the new language of modernism, with its celebration of the machine and of the urban scene – the streets and skyscrapers of a growing New York, the ferry boats and railroads, the airplanes and ocean liners. Instead of the soft-focused view and the manipulated surface, Stieglitz was testing the limits of what the camera could do as a mechanical instrument, photographing in extreme weather conditions (snowstorms and wet, rainy nights) and working in the darkroom to bring out what was already there in the print. In effect, Stieglitz was inventing the vocabulary of twentieth-century photography with its celebration of the moment in time that could be seized propitiously by the speed of the new cameras.54

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grace of Strand’s style, particularly in the image *Wall Street, New York* (1915) (Figure 28) which experimented with formal abstraction, Stieglitz decided to include a number of photographs by Strand in the last two issues of *Camera Work* (Orvell, 2003: 91). According to Abigail Solomon-Godeau (2003: 155–156), “In the final issues of *Camera Work* in particular, Paul Strand’s terse and straightforward style of photography was championed by Stieglitz, signalling that photography had finally become an authentically modernist art form” (author’s italics). In 1917, in an act to promote this new and modern style of photography, Stieglitz dissolved the Photo-Secession.

Although Stieglitz would go on to photograph a wide variety of photographic subjects over the course of his career, the architectural subject remained a firm favourite. Beginning in 1927, Stieglitz began photographing the view from his apartment at the Shelton Hotel, until ill-health forced him to give up photography in 1937. During this time, Stieglitz produced almost 90 photographs of the cityscape. The pictures taken from the Shelton include famous views of the RCA Building and the General Electric Building taken at various times of day and night and in different seasons, both from his apartment windows and from the hotel’s fifteenth-storey terraces (Connor, 2001: 159). With its reflection of popular ideas about the nature of the modern city, Stieglitz’s Shelton series remains one of the more significant moments of modern photography.

By the 1930s and 1940s, the photographing of architecture had, for the most part, become a predominantly commercial enterprise in the United States (see Lambert, 1985). However, there were many exceptions to this rule, such as with key modernist photographers like Berenice Abbott (1898–1991), Edward Weston (1886–1958), and Walker Evans (1903–1975) who continued to challenge prevailing attitudes with their innovative and individualistic ideas. Likewise, Edward Steichen, renowned for his unusual, original depiction of the Empire State Building in the image *The Maypole (Empire State Building)* (1932) (Figure 30), is regarded by art historian Barbara Haskell as being “one of the most innovative and influential of American photographers” (2000: 11).

The Empire State Building, the central motif in *The Maypole (Empire State Building)*, caused a media frenzy when it was built. The
steps Weston took to achieve this discreet presence were elaborate, and his photographs apply rigorous formal considerations of balance and tension, setting an early precedent for what was to become a highly constructed and precision-oriented genre of photography.

In Europe, modernist photographers such as Italian Futurist Mario Bellusi (1895–1955), and early Soviet photographers such as Aleksandr Rodchenko (1891–1956) and El Lissitzky (1890–1941), likewise challenged and broke many of the conventions associated with the new genre of ‘architectural photography’, a genre which was not considered to be art.

As can be seen in Figure 32, Bellusi’s image Trafic modern nell’antica Roma (Modern Traffic in Ancient Rome) (1930) illustrates the dynamic movement of the modern age, a theme central to much of the Futurists’ work. Here, the image’s visible ‘superimpositions’ achieves a simultaneous representation of time and space. Following the 1910 ‘Futurist Photography Manifesto’, where Filippo Marinetti (1876–1944) and Tato (1896–1974) declared photography to be a powerful tool in the Futurist effort to eliminate barriers between art and life, Futurist exhibitions of the 1910s presented avant-garde images that not only revealed an awareness of international modernist currents but also demonstrated strategies specific to the Italians (Listo, 1982: 361). As with Bellusi’s image, Futurist photographic techniques tended to include the layering of multiple negatives, perspectival foreshortening, and photomontage.

Rodchenko, on the other hand, a key figure of Russian modernism, is often regarded as having redeﬁned the photographic movement, particularly through his experimental work for Neues Sehen (New Vision) – a movement which he helped form along with Bauhaus teachers Laszlo Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946) and Walter Peterhans (1897–1960) in the 1920s. Rodchenko’s image, The Mosselprom Building, the First Soviet Skyscraper (1931) (Figure 33), was produced around the time when photography became a particularly important medium for creative experimentation and research in the Soviet Union. From as early as 1921, El Lissitzky had pointed out that in post-revolutionary Russia, traditional types of art were no longer relevant: ‘The [painted] picture fell apart together with the old world that it had created for itself. The new world will not need pictures. If it needs a mirror, it has the photograph and the cinema’ (Lissitzky quoted in Nisbet, 1987: 64). With the suggestion that film, and by extension photography, should now replace painting as the art forms appropriate for the new proletarian society, Rodchenko endeavoured to create a new way of seeing, using photography. Having only taken his first photograph in the mid-1920s, much of Rodchenko’s approach to photography was, around this time, adapted from the devices and practices that he had developed in his abstract paintings, three-dimensional constructions, collages, and photomontages (Lodder, 2014: 2). As can be seen in The Mosselprom Building, the First Soviet Skyscraper, Rodchenko’s employment of a dramatic and unexpected diagonal composition – combined with a low angle – is reﬂective of the diagonal arrangements of some of his paintings, while the collapsing of space and flattening of the image brings the compositional process closer to that utilised in painting. Where the image is intended to portray the Soviet Union’s ﬁrst skyscraper, the freshness of Rodchenko’s unusual approach captures the novelty of the moment.

In the image, the surging verticality of the architecture is suggested, and with its shifted point of view, two renderings of the building’s façade are given. The title The Maypole was undoubtedly suggested by the flagpole located just to the right of the cast-iron ﬁgure on the image’s extreme left. This ﬁgure, dwarfed by the shifted façade, and swings out the image as if propelled by the force of the structure itself. However, manipulation such as Steichen’s was of little interest to the early modernist photographers who viewed the role of the photographer in a very different way. That the photographer should so obviously show his hand would not have occurred to them. Instead, their intention was to present the subject in such a discreet way that it would be accepted without question by the viewer. The viewer would not be able to conceive the photograph in any other way. For Weston, this was considered “a coat of invisibility” (Weston quoted in Lambert, 1985: 25). However, the

The project of comprehending the modern city and its architectures therefore played, and would continue to play, a central role in the visual history of photography. The great themes of the city – its kinetic activity, its juxtapositions and inns, its massive forms and tiny details, and perhaps most importantly, its ongoing drive towards utopia – not only provided fascinating subject matter for the artist and photographer but also pioneered new
modes of visual perception and communication that would fundamentally transform the nature of the medium (see Stout, 2011). Likewise, it could also be said that particular developments in architecture imparted a corresponding momentum to photography. This could be seen in Germany, where radical changes in the architectural vocabulary (such as with the Bauhaus’ reshaping of architecture under Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius) led to a similarly radical change in the photographer’s view of architecture. This radical change can be seen in the development of the Neue Sehen (mentioned previously) and Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) movements. Although both currents favoured medium specificity and a separation from painting, they diverged on a fundamental level. While Neue Sehen developed “a new way of seeing” based on the use of unexpected framings, the search for contrast in form and light, and the use of high and low camera angles (Moholy-Nagy, 1932: xii), Neue Sachlichkeit brought about a sharply focused, ‘objective’ quality to the photographic art (Michalki, 1994: 181). However, it should be noted that this new ‘way of seeing’ was not only applied to new architecture, but instead the theoretical reappraisal that had been introduced by new architectural principles was also applied by photographers to all architecture.

Albert Renger-Patzsch (1897–1966), the German figurehead of the Neue Sachlichkeit, illustrates this change particularly well. As can be seen in his photographs of Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer’s Fagus-Werk (The Fagus Factory), particularly in Faguswerk in Alfeld/Leine (1928) (Figure 34), the influence of familiar modernist styles of the mid to late 1920s such as De Stijl and Constructivism on the structure is equally reflected in the image’s composition. That is to say, while the image contains the sharp, matter-of-fact quality characteristic of Neue Sachlichkeit, one can also evidence both the geometric abstraction of De Stijl as well as the industrial angular style of Constructivism in its considered partitioning and perspective approach. Although commissioned, the images taken at Fagus, along with Renger-Patzsch’s works at AEG, are today considered under the rubric of industrial ‘art’ photography (Redstone & Pardo, 2014: 109). 55

The Genre of ‘Architectural Photography’

As mentioned previously, architectural photography began to emerge as a distinct genre in the 1920s and 1940s. As distinct from the photograph of architecture, the difference between architectural photography (as produced by the journeyman architectural photographer) and the photograph of architecture (as produced by the ‘critical’ artist and photographer) revolves around the image’s relationship to form and content. According to Redstone & Pardo (2014: 7), “While a functional architectural photograph simply communicates a building ‘efficiently’, a photograph of architecture makes the viewer engage with an idea through the motif of architecture.” The architectural photograph first emerged as photomechanical and photo-reproductive methods became available to architecture magazines. This not only made it cheaper and easier for such magazines to reproduce the architectural image, but it also contributed to the (often international) dissemination of architectural ideas and forms. This type of image was commissioned by both architecture and real estate professions to present buildings in the best possible light. It tended to be more technical than conceptual (it was thus not considered a ‘serious’ art form) and often utilised a strict set of conventions in its production. As a photographic style, architectural photography developed its own visual tropes: perspective control with an emphasis on vertical lines that are non-converging (usually achieved by the use of view cameras, tilt/shift lenses, or post-processing), wide depths of field, and generally unpopulated environments (Higggott & Wray, 2013: 22). This type of image was typically taken in brilliant sunshine on a rare deep blue-skied day. 56

Figure 34. Albert Renger-Patzsch, Faguswerk in Alfeld/Leine (1928) opposite.
day (atypical lighting); a light which reveals and distinguishes forms and surfaces as light from another direction or diffuse light from an overcast sky rarely could. Interiors (if depicted) were artificially tidy, furniture was carefully aligned, and people (if included) were depicted in the lifestyle or manner appropriate to the building or home (Stoller, 1965: 44) (Robinson, 1975: 10). Furthermore, the building was often divorced from its context, which, as in the case of buildings built in the International Style that were not intended to be rooted in any one particular location, helped to reflect the high Modernist ideology.

To have a striking image, even if it did not correlate exactly with the actual building, helped the architect to publicise themselves. Editors of architecture magazines and journals often chose to publish buildings based on the attractiveness of their images, sometimes without regard for their facticity, and going so far as to crop and abstract images further in order to attract the curiosity of readers (Oshima, 2009: 82). This often led to situations where architects ‘colluded’ with photographers in order to improve the attractiveness of their buildings, with many architects forming lifelong personal relationships with their ‘preferred’ photographers. This could be seen with Richard Neutra and Julius Shulman (1910–2009), Mies van der Rohe and Ezra Stoller (1915–2004), Frank Lloyd Wright and Pedro E. Guerrero (1917–2012), and Le Corbusier and Lucien Hervé (1910–2007), amongst others. In such instances, a symbiosis came out of many of these relationships, which were mutually beneficial to both architect and favoured photographer. However, these mutualistic relationships were, for the most part, exceptions to the rule as the photographer usually functioned as an instrument of the architect. That is to say, the journeyman architectural photographer’s photographs were often just a useful addendum to the architect’s vision of his structure, rather than evidence of the photographer’s own interpretive vision. Photography was thus in the service of architecture.

Many of the more well-known architectural photographers, such as Julius Shulman, Ezra Stoller, and Ken Hedrich, worked in America in the years following the end of the Second World War. It is here that they created a ‘new architectural photography’ that sought to capture the ‘new modern architecture’ of the United States; an architecture intended largely as “a metaphor for the better life that had long been promised” (Robinson & Herschman, 2001: 122). This new architectural photography, modelled after American fashion photography, created seductive statements about a comfortable lifestyle and the architecture through which it could be achieved (Ibid, 124). Successful magazine photographers adopted a propagandising style because they needed to sell modern architecture as a product of progress and technology. Thus, the photograph mirrored a lifestyle intended to work within the framework of the building. Some architectural photographers even included visual “witnesses” – people intended to illustrate just how the spaces could be used. Their placement in photographs of building interiors and gardens

Figure 35. Ken Hedrich, Samuel Marx, May Residence (Entrance View) (1946).
Figure 36. Ezra Stoller, Drurying House, Casey Key FL, Paul Rudolph, Architect (1955).
Figure 37. Julius Shulman, Case Study House #22 by Pierre Koenig, Los Angeles, CA (1960) opposite.

57. The architectural photograph, instead of merely acting as a representation of the building, often became more significant than the building itself. In the 1930s, Goodhart-Rendel, President of the Royal Institute of British Architects, made the iconic statement, “The modern architectural drawing is interesting, the photograph is magnificent, the building is an unfortunate but necessary stage between the two” (Goodhart-Rendel quoted in Elwell, 1988: 64).
demonstrated exactly how these spaces could be occupied. This made images of new homes seem more comfortable to the American consumer, paralleling trends in television and magazine advertising. As Magazine requirements changed, commercial architectural photographers began working in both black and white and colour; a change which can be seen in the works of Julius Shulman.

Shulman, a powerful advocate for Southern-Californian Modernism, is perhaps best known for his lavish architectural photographs which advertised the new post-war American lifestyle. His most iconic images are those of the ‘Case Study Houses’, an initiative launched by Arts & Architecture magazine in 1945 to offer the public and the building industry a series of low-cost modernist housing models.

Of these photographs, the most influential by far is Case Study House #22 by Pierre Koenig, Los Angeles, CA (Figure 37). In May 1960, Shulman photographed Pierre Koenig’s Stahl Residence, a glass-enclosed Hollywood Hills home with a breath-taking view of Los Angeles. To show the essence of the cantilevered building, Shulman set two glamorous women in cocktail dresses inside the house, where they appear to be floating above a mythic, twinkling city. Taken just as the sun was setting, the image seems to be held in an effortless suspense between light and dark, inside and outside, foreground and background, so that it feels both anchored to a specific moment (5 May 1960) and utterly timeless. The photograph, which Shulman called “one of my masterpieces” (Shulman quoted in Redstone & Pardo, 2014: 71), is arguably the most successful architectural photograph ever taken.38

While the architectural photograph was rarely rated for its artistic value, it was admired for the strict technical conventions used in its production (such as the use of large-format view cameras, wide-angle lenses with perspectival control, and a sharp and even focus). These conventions went on to influence subsequent generations of artists and photographers, ranging from the then contemporary ‘New Topographics’ movement to the later ‘Düsseldorf School of Photography’. In particular, the artists and photographers whom I discuss over the course of this

38. According to architectural critic Cathleen McGuigan (quoted in Redstone & Pardo, 2014: 71), “The mise-en-scène that he creates in these photographs do more than just capture the allure of each architectural subject – they seem to distil the essence of an era.” McGuigan continues, stating, “You can practically hear the Sinatra tunes wafting in the air and the ice clinking in the cocktail glasses” (Ibid).
New Topographics and the Emergence of a Critical Photography of Architecture

The New Topographics movement emerged in the 1960s as a reaction to the idealised imagery of the Group f/64 photographers, including Ansel Adams (1902–1984) and Edward Weston, who adumbrantly depicted the landscape as an entity of unscathed and organic beauty (O'Hagan, 2010). Instead, the photographers of the New Topographics strove to show the rapidly increasing imprint that man was imposing on the environment. As suburban development started to spread across the United States with fervour, artists such as Robert Adams (1937–), Lewis Baltz (1945–2024), Stephen Shore (1947–), and John Schott (1944–) undertook to depict, as objectively as possible, the effects of an increasingly industrial culture. They turned their cameras towards newly-built tract houses, industrial parks, expansive highways, and commercial strip malls as proof of man's impetuous development. What is so affecting about their photographs is the stark juxtaposition between humanity and the environment, as can be seen in Robert Adams' Lakewood, Colorado (1974) (Figure 40).

The New Topographics movement reached its highpoint in an exhibition entitled 'New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape', which opened at the George Eastman House, New York in 1975. The exhibition, which initiated a radical shift away from traditional and often idealised depictions of the landscape (and of architecture), featured works by eight then young American photographers: Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, John Schott, Frank Gohlke (1944–), Nicholas Nixon, Bernd Becher (1931–2007), Hilla Becher (1934–2015). These artists and photographers turned their backs on the unspoilt natural vistas and instead took as their subject scenes of stark industrial landscapes, ordinary suburban sprawl, and other everyday views in America that previously had not been considered of aesthetic interest. This, according to curator William Jenkins, formed part of the exhibition's intention to posit "an aesthetic of the banal" (quoted in Salvesen, 2014: 14, author's italics). He continues, stating, ‘The images are stripped of any artistic frills and reduced to an essentially topographic state, conveying substantial amounts of visual information but eschewing entirely the aspects of beauty, emotion, and opinion’ (Ibid., 17).

Of the artists exhibiting in 'New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape', it is the Bechers who are most essential to the further progression of this document. Working in a similar vein to Atget’s ‘Landscape’, it is the Bechers who are most overlooked” (author’s italics). In this respect, Gaule (2014: 125) writes that the Bechers “pared their work - clearly delineated, neutral views of industrial forms” (Ibid). In contrast, the Bechers’ work - clearly delineated, neutral views of industrial forms - looked back to a richer tradition in the German art that preceded it: the New Sachlichkeit photography of August Sander (1876–1954), Karl Blossfeldt (1865–1932), and Albert Renger-Patzsch, amongst others (see Figure 42).

For thirty years, the couple took pictures that evoked the Bechers’ photographs differed from those of any artistic frills and reduced to an essentially topographic state, conveying substantial amounts of visual information but eschewing entirely the aspects of beauty, emotion, and opinion’ (Ibid., 17). The most prominent photographer at that time was Otto Steinert (1935–2007), whose ‘subjective photography movement’ attempted to reassert moribund ideas of expressive Pictorialism (Ibid). In contrast, the Bechers’ work - clearly delineated, neutral views of industrial forms - looked back to a richer tradition in the German art that preceded it: the New Sachlichkeit photography of August Sander (1876–1954), Karl Blossfeldt (1865–1932), and Albert Renger-Patzsch, amongst others (see Figure 42).

For thirty years, the couple took pictures that are, from one decade to the next, stylistically similar and produced in accordance with the same compositional principles. Buildings are centrally placed and framed in their entirety with background detail, especially the presence of people, kept to a minimum. They are often seen from a raised viewpoint – the camera is elevated on ladders or scaffolding and the viewpoint is tilted to create the illusion that the viewer is looking at the structures from mid-way up (Bush quoted in Redstone, 2014: 13). Eschewing fine weather, for which most architectural photographers habitually wait, the Bechers’ skies are typically Germanic (or English or Midwestern): flat and overcast.40 Apart from the artifice of the radical cropping, the fascination is not in the presentation, but in the forms themselves (Redstone & Pardo, 2014: 109). For the Bechers, the structures were of primary importance, and their modus operandi was to document them as closely as possible (Gaule, 2014: 125).

Although the Bechers’ images were intended as documents, and in their individual capacity (or as ‘sets’) can be read as documents, this function is broken when it is presented as a group with different individual structures. While the individual image (or set) has a “purely indexical documentary function”, this function is broken when it is presented as a group with different individual structures (Ibid). Typologies are therefore understood more as ‘sets’, because “they are conceptual and thus open to metaphorical and symbolic appropriation” (Ibid).

Reinforcing the notion that the Bechers’ work is indeed ‘art’ and not ‘document’, Sally Gaule (2014: 125) writes that the Bechers “pared down uninfective aesthetic offered a new approach to the art of photography. The value of images such as these is that they sensitised the spectator to the inherent ‘beauty’ of these structures, which had hitherto been mostly overlooked” (author’s italics). In this respect, the Bechers’ photographs differed from those of the New Topographics, for whom the aspect shadowless light is not without significance. Like the preferred light for much of the continental ‘informational’ imagery created in the 19th century. In the ocularcentric sciences the absence of shadow was equated with impartial judgement (here, ‘subjectivity’). The clear but soft light of day was constructed as a liberation from the prejudice of chiaroscuro. Revelling in the wealth of photographic detail, modernity’s visual positivism mistook the prejudice of chiaroscuro. Revelling in the wealth of photographic detail, modernity’s visual positivism mistook
of ‘beauty’ was abjured in entirety. Regardless, as artistic statement their work has done much to expand the canon of photography and has had a profound influence on the field of contemporary photography, and most notably on the works of their students, such as Andreas Gursky (1955–), Thomas Ruff (1958–), Thomas Struth (1954–), and Candida Höfer (1944–).

Likewise, the New Topographics aesthetic, with its deadpan expression and plain presentation of facts in a manner that looked essentially ‘topographic’, or informative, rather than artistic, had a ripple effect on the entire medium and genre, not only in the United States but in Europe (and Africa) too, where generations of photographers sought to emulate the spirit and aesthetics of the exhibition. Again, this influence can be detected in the works of many of the contemporary artists and photographers whom I discuss, and particularly with Beate Gütschow who, in an interview with German critic and curator Maren Lübbke-Tidow (2017: 43), cited Lewis Baltz, Stephen Shore, and Robert Adams, along with the Bechers, as important influences on her series. Similarly, it can be argued that David Goldblatt’s neutral, almost bureaucratic style of photography (as evident in South Africa: The Structure of Things Then), was influenced by the New Topographics movement (Riordan, 2013: 8).

The work of Gursky, on the other hand, although resonant with the formal and technical conventions used by the Bechers (under whom he studied at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf) (see Galassi, 2001), has, since the early 1990s, experienced a dramatic shift from the Becher paradigm. That is to say, Gursky’s photographs are intended and presented as artworks through production values and scale, and not as documents. While the Bechers embraced a typological approach to their subject, Gursky seeks out visually unique ones. While the Bechers were driven by the need to communicate their subject as objectively as possible, Gursky engages with digital technology in the construction of his images. Notwithstanding such differences, Gursky remains a pivotal figure in the history of photography, being one of the first artists to engage with digital technology in the creation of his images.

Building on the legacy of earlier Gursky images such as Paris, Montparnasse (1993) (see Chapter 3 for a full discussion) and Hong Kong Shanghai Bank (1994), a new attitude emerged in many contemporary artists’ and photographers’ approach to the architectural subject, in which these artists and photographers have felt free to edit, appropriate, cut, paste, and multiply photographic imagery without the accurate representation of an individual building being of primary concern. This attitude has been reflected in the emergence of many exhibitions on the subject, including ‘Manipulating Reality: How Images Redefine the World’ (2009–2010).

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61. Shortly after their participation in the New Topographics exhibition, Bernd and Hilla Becher created a new photography course at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf (Düsseldorf Art Academy), where they mentored many of the young German students who would in the 1990s come to define and dominate world photography – the ‘Düsseldorf School of Photography’. 62. A stylistic term used to mean cool, detached, sharp, objective, and non-emotional (Cotton, 2014: 98). The term is often employed to characterize the works of the Bechers and the New Topographics group, as well as other practitioners. Although the photographs of the Bechers and these other artists contain some of the farce intended by deadpan’s original meaning as dry humour, or disguised comic delivery, the term does point to the matter-of-fact, detached, or expressionless character of their photographs.
Chapter 3:
Artists Working in the Terrain

In this chapter, I discuss specific projects by contemporary artists and photographers, both international and South African, that engage with high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning as a subject. These include Andreas Gursky's Paris, Montparnasse (1993), Filip Dujardin's Fictions (2007–2010), and David Goldblatt's South Africa: The Structure of Things Then (1998).

While I have chosen to examine these specific pieces, it is important that I stress that these works are incredibly diverse in their aesthetics, methods, and strategies. While Gursky and Dujardin employ manipulation techniques in the creation of their 'artworks', Goldblatt’s images remain 'straight' and relatively un-retouched in their intended function as social documents. These tactics will be discussed further in this chapter. Their differences notwithstanding, there is a common thread in each artist or photographer’s work: each uses images of high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning to critique the failure of the social project of high Modernism.

Andreas Gursky

Andreas Gursky (b. 1955 in Leipzig, former East Germany) is a contemporary artist best known for his signature detached, and often manipulated, large-format colour images of architecture and landscape. A student of Bernd and Hilla Becher, Gursky entered the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf (Düsseldorf Art Academy) in 1971, shortly after the graduation of Thomas Struth and Axel Hütte. It was here that he studied alongside Candida Höfer and Thomas Ruff. Together, these five artists make up part of the ‘Düsseldorf School’, a group of artists who studied under the Bechers at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Responding in part to the objective concerns of both Bernd and Hilla Becher and New Topographics,5 the Düsseldorf School’s works are characterised by a sober, documentary quality, ‘straight on’ (and often expansive) topographic views of landscapes, a focus on cityscapes or interior environments, and the minimisation of the human figure. Since the early 1990s, aided by new technical capabilities in digital photography and printing, a trademark of the group’s photographs has been a combination of excessive detail, colour, and size, giving the works an immersive quality and contributing to a blurring of boundaries between photography and painting (Kane, 2006: 172).

While the group’s formal and conceptual concerns are strongly resonant in Gursky’s work, the artist’s decision to apply manipulation techniques to his images has taken him on a singular path. In opposition to the ‘objective’ aesthetic of the Bechers, New Topographics, and the Düsseldorf School, Gursky introduces “a romantic and spectacular subjectivity, alongside a willingness to transform and alter reality, and to manipulate facts in order to tell a greater truth and communicate his vision of the world” (Jaeckle, 2014: 199). According to Gursky (in Artner, 2002),

What is important to me, and ultimately, is whether my pictures are persuasive. I want always to project the real world, not the surreal world. The world of today is [my limit]: my intention is never to lose contact with it. But the possibility of digital manipulation offers a much wider field. In the past, all I had wanted to do was to project better what my eyes saw. That’s what changed through digital manipulation. I now can do things that I would not have done before. So I’m always debating whether I should leave [an image] the way it is or clean it up. Sometimes one could say the end product has nothing to do with what the beginning was. But as far as the content goes, it’s still there. The world in itself exists.

5 Curator Britt Salvesen described the New Topographics exhibition as “a bridge between the still-new field of contemporary art and the expanding post-conceptual field of contemporary art, simultaneously asserting and deconstructing the medium’s modernist specificity, authority, and autonomy, and ultimately serving as a progenitor of today’s Düsseldorf-inspired school of landscape photographers, whose work is presented at contemporary art” (2010: 11, my italics).
Similarly, for Michael Fried (2008: 170), who writes: "Beneath the veneer of the Copan (2002) photograph’s indexicality (the physical relation between the object photographed and the resulting image) (Gunning, 2004: 40), Gursky’s digital manipulation makes what appears in the frame seem more controlled or intentional, and thus more determined by the artist.

While Gursky’s artistic oeuvre embraces a vast selection of contemporary themes64 with the intention of creating a richly composed catalogue of the human species and its environments, it is, however, his considered attention to architectural form as subject matter – arguably conceived as an analogue for his own formal and conceptual concerns65 – that best resonates with the intentions of this document. It is thus within architectural form – from Norman Foster’s Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank building in Hong Kong through Oscar Niemeyer’s residential Edificio Copan in Sao Paulo (Figure 48) to Jean Dubuisson’s Mouchotte in Paris (Figure 49) – that Gursky finds parallels between the ordering of structures and their principles, and those attempts made by architects (and to an extent, Gursky himself as photographer) to choreograph and control lived experience (Jaeckle, 2014: 199).

With Paris, Montparnasse Gursky critiques the austerity and oppressiveness of high Modernism’s totalising vision as made evident in its large-scale urban housing projects, selecting Parisian landmark Mouchotte as his subject. Designed by French architect Jean Duboisson, Mouchotte (1959–1964), a prime example of high Modernist Brutalism, was, like many other buildings of its time, influenced by Le Corbusier’s Unité d’habitation housing project (see Chapter 1). With that said, Paris, Montparnasse, while offering a critique of Jean Duboisson’s architectural designs in particular, can also be read as synecdoche for a much larger condition: high Modernist urban planning in general. Through my analysis of Gursky’s Paris, Montparnasse below, I hope to demonstrate just how Gursky images Mouchotte to critique the failure of high Modernism’s social ideal(s) as evidenced in its urban planning.

In the early 1990s, Gursky began photographing the Immeuble d’habitation La Grande-Motte-Montparnasse II building, or ‘Mouchotte’, in central Paris; a beacon of post-war high Modernism and urban development and the city’s largest residential building. The monumental structure accommodates roughly 2,000 residents in approximately 750 apartments over eighteen storeys (including car parks and other communal spaces such as shops, interior streets, gyms, tennis courts, and a children’s club). Although castigated as "an architecture of unhappiness" and an “eyesore” that dramatically altered the Parisian landscape of the twentieth century (Vincendon, 2011),66 Dubuisson viewed Mouchotte as “a work of art that he was giving to the public” (Barret, 2013, my italics).

While the structure was indeed based on Le Corbusier’s design principle for the Unité d’habitation housing project, there is nevertheless a distinct difference between the two buildings. Unlike the original Unité d’habitation (1947–1952) which was designed as a solution to Europe’s post-war economic and housing crises in the years following the end of the Second World War, Mouchotte was a planned response to Europe’s post-war boom – a period of population and economic growth. Thus, where Le Corbusier’s design principle was devised as a cost-effective solution to mass housing needs during a period of economic crisis, partly explaining its need for cheaper materials and its increase in density, it remains unclear as to why the Mouchotte apartments were built even smaller,67 calculated at less than nine square metres per person (Barret, 2013). However, this was not the only shortcoming of the building. Reading through comments from residents who lived in Mouchotte in the 1960s, common issues associated with the building included problems with its thermal regulation, poor management and maintenance due to its vast expanse, a narrowness of apartment spaces, noise pollution, and constant fears of children climbing onto the roof for lack of an open space to play (Barrett, 2013).

Paris, Montparnasse marks an important turning point in Gursky’s career, presenting one of the first digitally altered images made by the artist; an approach that would go on to define his practice. The work was realised as a chromogenic colour print and measures a staggering 87⅝ × 42⅝ × 6.2cm (see Figure 49); a scale befitting of the overwhelming size of the Mouchotte building (Montparnasse’s front view measures an impressive 40 × 200m).

The image is divided into three horizontal bands: ground, building, and sky. The building occupies approximately two thirds of the overall composition, leaving sky and ground with a combined third. The sky is cloudless and devoid of any significant presence. It has essentially been emptied of effect, a device used by the artist to direct attention to the image’s focal point, that of the monumental and dizzying Mouchotte.

By foregrounding the architectural rigidity of the structure – that is, its geometric unfulfilled costly materials. The majority of the budget was allocated to its floor-to-ceiling aluminium and glass façade, designed to emulate Mies van der Rohe’s Seagram building in New York (Figure 49).
Figure 51. Piet Mondrian, Composition with Large Red Plane, Yellow, Black, Grey and Blue (1930).

Figure 52. Gerhard Richter, 1024 Colours (1973) from the ‘Colour Charts’ series (1973–1992).
The CIAM Grid, or Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne Grid, is a grid system that was used in modernist architecture. It allowed architects to present projects in a standardised way, facilitating the exchange of ideas among different architects and contributing to the development of modern architecture. The grid system was not only used in architectural design but also in other fields such as urban planning.

In the context of modernist art, the CIAM Grid was seen as a tool for the modernist focus on mass and the individual. These grids were seen as a way to conceptualise and represent the future, envisioning a society that was based on mass production and individuality. The CIAM Grid was a way to formalise and standardise the modernist vision of a utopia.

However, the CIAM Grid was also critiqued for its limitations and the potentially oppressive nature of its structure. The grid was seen as a rigid and inflexible system that could potentially run on forever. This critique was reflected in the work of artists such as Andreas Gursky, who used the grid to critique the oppressive, claustrophobic and inhumane nature of the totalitarian structure. Gursky’s work, such as *Rear Window* (1994), used the grid to comment on the alienating social anonymity that resulted from it.

Gursky’s work is a prime example of how architects and artists can use abstraction and representation to critique and re-introduce socially sedentary people. The use of manipulation therefore plays a central role in determining how the image is read and experienced. For Gursky, the intention of *Paris, Montparnasse* was to “communicate the oppressive, claustrophobic and inhumane nature of the totalitarian structure” (Gursky quoted in Stallabrass, 1993), and of high Modernist urban planning in general, it also functions as a conceptually powerful critique of the alienating social anonymity that has resulted from it.

As stated in Chapter 2, it had been Gursky’s legacy, apparent in these works from the early 1990s, that initially inspired the new attitude to technology in contemporary artists’ and photographers’ approach to the architectural subject, where they have felt free to edit, appropriate, cut, paste, and multiply photographic imagery without the accurate representation of an individual building being of primary concern. Besides the more well-known practitioners working in this stream such as Thomas Ruff, Nancy Davenport (1965–), and Nicolas Grospierre (1975–), there are other lesser-known and often undertheorised artists such as Beate Gütschow, discussed in Chapter 4. According to the artist, “The key element of my work is to compress reality into a hyperreal image that balances on the edge of the plausible” (Dujardin quoted in Redstone, 2014:196, author’s italics). This is evident in his *Fictions* series (2007–2011), where Dujardin constructs convincingly realistic high Modernist structures that have no real-world equivalents. Instead, these hypothetical architectures are constructed from images of structural fragments taken from the real world and pasted together; a technique much like that of Beate Gütschow, discussed in Chapter 4. Dujardin images high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning to critique the failure of high Modernism’s social ideal[es].

Filip Dujardin

Filip Dujardin (b. 1971 in Ghent, Belgium), like Gursky, engages digital manipulation in his works. Using digital composing techniques – digital photomontage, to be exact – Dujardin constructs convincingly realistic high Modernist structures that have no real-world equivalents. Instead, these hypothetical architectures are constructed from images of structural fragments taken from the real world and pasted together; a technique much like that of Beate Gütschow, discussed in Chapter 4. According to the artist, “The key element of my work is to compress reality into a hyperreal image that balances on the edge of the plausible” (Dujardin quoted in Redstone, 2014:196, author’s italics). This is evident in his *Fictions* series (2007–2011), where Dujardin uses photomontage to combine fragments of real-world structures into extremely realistic architectures. Because these structures are (arguably) plausible, they offer a satirical take on the relationship between utopian ideology and visionary high Modernist architecture (Gadanho, 2012:12). Dujardin, an architectural
photographer by profession, uses his own source images of high Modernist structures and architectures from the 1960s and 1970s found in and around his hometown of Ghent to construct ‘transgenic’ built environments which, through their architectural languages and strict use of architectural photographic conventions, critique the austerely and underlying totalitarianism of high Modernist urban planning and development projects. In fact, it could even be said that with Fictions, Dujardin constructs a new architectural idiom out of a pre-existing modernist language.

While Dujardin’s works are interesting on their own, they also tap into a rich history of modernist architecture, both utopian and dystopian. One can make a link between Dujardin’s impossible architectures and the works of the German Expressionists, among them Paul Scheerbart (1863–1915) and Bruno Taut (1880–1938), the Italian Futurists such as Antonio Sant'Elia (1888–1916), and the Russian Constructivists, including Leonid and Victor Vesnin (1880–1933; 1882–1950), Ivan Leonidov (1902–1995), and El Lissitzky (Figure 57), all of whom imagined grand and utopian schemes in the early twentieth century. Further still, the series suggests an as yet undiscovered high Modernist reality of extreme cantilevers that take Frank Lloyd Wright’s ambitions to the extreme (Figure 57), of alien and ironic Brutalism that makes the outlandish and ‘utopian’ megastructures of late Soviet totalitarianism seem conventional (Figure 58), and of intense and austere reinforced-concrete living blocks whose ‘periflauge’ contemptuously mock Le Corbusier’s Unité d’habitation housing project (see Figure 59).

The idea for Fictions first arose in 2007 when Dujardin decided that he wanted to design buildings of his own, rather than merely documenting those designed by others (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012). Since then, Dujardin has been crafting images of fictional buildings, unconstrained by functional necessities (such as client whims, regulations, and economic constraints) or even the laws of physics. These buildings have evolved out of a frustration with not always having a sufficiently dynamic subject to make for an interesting image, as well as boredom with the perceived nondescript qualities of everyday high Modernist architecture (Sheets, 2012).

In terms of his technique, Dujardin first experimented on his photographs of existing buildings, using Adobe Photoshop to digitally erase the windows and doors so as to create a kind of surreal sculpture (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012). He then began using cardboard, and sometimes his children’s Lego sets, to construct more elaborate and bizarre maquettes, which he would photograph and use as a digital canvas on which to collage elements from other buildings (Franklin-Wallis, 2011). Today, Dujardin’s process is more honed. He begins by creating a virtual structure using Google SketchUp, a simple three-dimensional modelling tool. After settling on a perspective for the final artwork, he then converts the model into a two-dimensional line drawing in Photoshop. Finally, he seamlessly layers on surfaces sampled from his own photographs of buildings in Ghent, manually adjusting the colours, shadows, and contrast (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012). These composed images each consist of about one hundred and fifty or more fragments, all taken from Dujardin’s extensive archive of high Modernist architectural components, textures, and landscapes photographed over the years (Hartley, 2013).

At first glance, Dujardin’s photographs seem almost banal, although highly modern. The images are meticulously constructed, with the details of seams completely erased. The compositing into environments is entirely believable. Likewise, the material qualities and textures are rendered completely plausible, yet they still reveal their ‘fictions’. This is done in two different ways. The first occurs at the level of overall figuration. The cantilever is too much or the conflict of masses too contorted for habitation. A second moment of doubt is raised by the inner-articulation of the image. A roof repeats too many times, floors are missing behind the façade, or the windows have been completely removed from a cityscape. There is an exaggeration or virtual hyperbole 75 of sorts. These tensions between figure and articulation raise architectural questions, even if Dujardin is not an architect. There is just enough astray in the work to make the viewer doubt its reality. There is also just enough to engage an aesthetics of realism.

This strategy is akin to the postmodern strategy of parafiction. Parafiction is, by definition, “an experiment with truth” (Lambert-Beatty, 2007: 63). “It is the creation of fictions that read as fact by way of the insertion of the virtual into the actual and the actual into the virtual” (Ibid). A successful parafiction is post-simulacral 76 in that it is as real as–or more real than—the real, without a representational origin. Dujardin’s images could be considered successful parafictions in that they not only appear as real as, if not more real than, the real, but they also have no real-world equivalents. Thus, in the given examples of Dujardin’s works, the viewer begins to doubt more than just the artwork itself. They come to question other momentous claims to represent ‘reality’, extending the effects of the artwork well beyond the piece itself and into a world that includes architecture.

This can be seen in the image Untitled #7, which for the first time, Dujardin quotes in the final artwork (Figure 60). 77. Arguably, in the sense that their structural integrity defies the laws of physics. However, according to Dujardin (quoted in Melnitzky, 2013), these structures are possible. He states: “As an architectural photographer I am aware of what is structurally possible in architecture. Nowadays, building technology could usher in a new way of life with practical and utilitarian sensibilities (see Chapter 1). The works of the Russian Constructivists, perhaps best resonate with the works of Dujardin’s Futurist designers, such as Antonio Sant’Elia, worked under the belief that ‘architecture is breaking free from tradition’ (McGregor, 2004: 112). They tended to aggressively reject historical reference, doing away with monuments, classical arcades, frivolous decoration, and commemorative architecture. Instead they championed a cult of the machine, not unlike Le Corbusier. Futurism incorporated new materials like reinforced concrete, iron, and glass in their designs, envisioning highly industrialised cities built around an aesthetic of solidarity and calculation. They, like the high Modernists, enthusiastically believed that science and technology could usher in a new way of life with practical and utilitarian sensibilities (see Chapter 1). 78. “My structures exist just on the right side of believability: they are just real enough to be believable and just fantastic enough to stimulate the imagination” (Dujardin quoted in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013, author’s italics). 79. From simulacrum (plural: simulacra): A simulacrum, as theorised by French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, is a copy or an image in which the original no longer exists.
for instance. At first glance the structure appears to be ‘real’, but on closer inspection it reveals itself to be a fictional reimagining of a high Modernist concrete-slab apartment complex (à la Le Corbusier). While the image appears normal on the level of its overall figuration, its fiction is revealed by its inner-articulation.

Some of the windows are completely removed from the apartments and others are gradually bricked up and blocked out. Although such an occurrence is mostly99 un-believable in itself, the effect of it is nevertheless extended beyond the image. It is thus in the real world that the image functions to foreground some of the more well-known complaints about high Modernist urban planning, in this case critiquing the shortage of windows in many large-scale housing projects due to their high costs (Glantz, 2008: 22). This shortage often resulted in a lack of light and ventilation for residents and sometimes led to the buildings’ eventual decline.

Although Untitled #7 displays a distinct visual relationship to Gütschow’s Parts, Montparnasse does. While in Gütschow’s image the human figure does not even factor in as a scale, Dujardin’s scenes in his more tongue-in-cheek compositions, such as Untitled #10 (2007) or Untitled #22 (2009), this is an image of little humour. Here, the residents remain concealed. Save for the few open windows and drawn curtains which hint at a human presence, the human figure is otherwise completely (and successfully) sedentarised. They are, as Edmund Bacon (1967: 137) writes in his classic work on town planning entitled The Design of Cities, “Out of sight, out of mind. The world, emptied of uncertainty, is now controlled and controllable. Order all around.”

While Dujardin’s works resonate with Gütschow’s, they can also be compared to those of Jürgen Gütschow. Besides the obvious similarity in their formal languages and in how they approach their subject, the above two images, for example. Here, Untitled #6 by Dujardin is compared with S#24 by Gütschow.

In each image a housing structure stands in what appears to be an isolated locale. Both images are constructed as if photographed from a low angle looking up at the structure in locations with a reasonably level terrain, so as to emphasise the monolithic and isolated nature of the buildings they ‘depict’. Moreover, both structures display a similarity in their overall design and build quality. Although smaller in scale than Le Corbusier’s Unite d’habitation, both housing structures ‘represented’ in these works appear to have been constructed from reinforced concrete, and display an obvious shortage of visible and functioning windows.

Both images also reintroduce the human figure into the picture plane, but these figures are not the focus of the image. They function instead as scale indicators dwarfed by the oppressive structures. A further similarity can be drawn between Dujardin’s Untitled #8 and Gütschow’s S#2. Here, each image presents a view of the high Modernist city. Once again there is a visible similarity in their formal languages and in their strict use of architectural photographic conventions. Both images are constructed as if they were photographed from a slightly elevated perspective, using large-format view cameras with perspective correction so as to maintain the severity of their building’s straight lines without risk of distortion.

However, Gütschow’s photographs are intentionally black and white with a light grain, so as to mimic the conventions of 1950s and 1960s architectural photography (Egan et al, 2007: 42), colour plays an important role in Dujardin’s production. This is primarily because Dujardin chooses to place some of his scenes in a natural landscape, which has been tainted by mankind’s interventions. Where S#2 showcases a landscape completely stripped of almost all its flora and fauna, and which are replaced with reinforced concrete, Dujardin’s images display something quite different. The buildings are more integrated into a ‘man-altered’ landscape, which, while cultivated and manicured, seems to be inching back to reclaim itself.

Further, it could be said that there is an overall pathos to Dujardin’s images. For example, in Untitled #2, like in Untitled #6 and Untitled #9, the buildings appear in isolation from other structures and from the city. They look tired. In these images, a quasi-Soviet-era patina is applied to prevent the buildings from appearing like the glossy renderings used by architects and real estate agents. According to Dujardin (quoted in Franklin-Wallis, 2011), “The parts I use are often from dull office buildings in Ghent and so they have a kind of sixties and seventies patina. They are like architectural monuments that have been lost on the periphery of the city.”

Looking at Gütschow’s, Dujardin’s, or even Gütschow’s images, it is also interesting to note their mutual depiction of elements of Brutalist structures and architectures, even though these structures and architectures were sourced from locations around the world. It may just be that the Brutalist language, with its grand and exaggerated mannerisms and awe-inspiring scale, possesses an inherently totalitarian presence that these artists have found well-suited to their specific intentions. The Brutalist style, with its roots in German war bunkers in the Second World War (Brummet, 2013), was, regardless of political affiliation, adopted as the style of choice for many authoritarian state buildings and institutions, particularly
in developing countries under a colonial or fascist rule, and in the former Eastern and Soviet Bloc. Likewise, Brutalism was the architectural style of choice for many high Modernist state buildings and institutions in Africa and especially in Apartheid South Africa, as evidenced in the following discussion of David Goldblatt.

David Goldblatt

Working in a South African context, David Goldblatt critiques the failure of apartheid and its radical implementations in his influential work South Africa: The Structure of Things Then (1998). Goldblatt’s (b. 1930 in Randfontein, South Africa) is a contemporary photographer best known for his extensive documentation of the prosaic details of social and political life in South Africa, and particularly during the period of the apartheid, a brutal idea(1) now shown to have failed.

Apartheid – literally ‘separateness’ in Afrikaans – was a system of institutionalised racial segregation and discrimination in South Africa. It began with the National Party winning the parliamentary elections in 1948, and ended with the speech delivered by President FW de Klerk on 2 February 1990. Incidentally, the period of apartheid, which ran from 1948–1990, almost perfectly coincided with the era of white domination in South Africa as evidenced in the following discussion of South Africa: The Structure of Things Then (1998).

South Africa: The Structure of Things Then (1998)

Goldblatt began work as a professional photographer in 1969, but ‘High apartheid’ refers to what political scientist Anthony Butler identifies as the ‘German model’ of apartheid (Ibid, 13). Not unlike National Socialism (Nazism) in Germany, apartheid was above all an ideology based on the belief that the Afrikaners were a ‘master race’ (German for ‘master race’) predestined to rule the country, and that people of colour (then Africans, Coloureds, Indians, Malays, and Chinese) were inherently inferior to white people (Goldblatt, 1998: 7). This belief in a divine destiny meant that apartheid segregation was not just systematic, but was understood to be ‘just’ and in compliance with Christian ethics (Ibid, 7).

‘High apartheid’ refers to what political scientist Anthony Butler identifies as the “second phase” of apartheid (1998: 71). This second phase began around the year 1960 and ended with the fall of the regime. A time of major ideological and structural change in South Africa, high apartheid ran counter to trends in post-colonial Africa and to the rest of the world, where policies and legislations had begun to tackle racism and segregation (as could be seen in the Southern States of the U.S. and in Portugal’s withdrawal from Mozambique and Angola) (Ibid, 72). While 1960s legislation systematically oppressed black people, the 1960s and 1970s were marked by extraordinary experiments in state creation and social engineering. Between 1960 and 1983, around 3.5 million people were forcibly relocated under group area schemes and separate developments legislation (Ibid).

While a significant portion of Goldblatt’s six-decade long oeuvre examines the broad ideological and physical restructuring of public and private life under apartheid, as can be seen in On the Mines (1973), Some Africaners Photographed (1973), In Boksburg (1982), The Transported of KwaNdebele (1986), and South Africa: The Structure of Things Then (1998), I have chosen to focus exclusively on the latter as its extensive investigations into actual physical structures and architectures in South Africa has the greatest bearing on my research.

The photographs in this book are about structures in South Africa which gave expression to or are evidence of some of the forces that shaped our society before the end of apartheid. Many of our structures tell much and plainly and with extraordinary clarity, not only of qualities of existence and of the needs, contents, longings, and fears of those who built and used them, but often too, of vital beliefs and ideologies upon which lives here were made contingent …

Our structures often declare quite nakedly, yet eloquently, what manner of people built them, and what they stood for (Goldblatt, 1998: 10–11).

Dubow advances this premise in Constructs: Reflections on a Thinking Eye, wherein he states that although South Africa: The Structure of Things Then is “about actual structures – bricks, mortar, mud, corrugated iron, race” (German model of apartheid, Ibid) about ideological structuring: about the mental constructs that underpinned the structures of South Africa in its colonial era and more specifically, the apartheid years, the locust years, of its recent past” (1998: 23, my italics). Dubow goes on to state, “What Goldblatt has done is to frame these physical structures within a photographic constructs which, cumulatively and compellingly, reveal the many ways in which ideology has shaped our landscape” (Ibid). While the work is today read in relation to present perspectives as testaments of history, it is important to remember that at the time of its publication South Africa was barely four years out of the formal end of apartheid, making the book less a view into the past and more a reckoning with the shifting shape of the then contemporary realities of place (Enwezor, 2005).

The book is often regarded as the progenitor for Goldblatt’s on-going ‘Structures’ series. Understood in this way, South Africa: The Structure of Things Then, in combination with the later series Structures of Dominion and Democracy (2014), testifies to Goldblatt’s active, ongoing investigation into the contradictions and constructs in South Africa that express some of the forces that shaped society both before and after the end of apartheid. Considered a major body of work for its extraordinary visual insight into its subject and the influence it has had on subsequent generations of South African photographers, ‘Structures’ was described by Nadine Gordimer as “an extraordinary visual history of a country and its people” (quoted in Marian Goodman Gallery, 2014).

Further, Structures of Dominion and Democracy is regarded as an updated version of the earlier work, traversing both eras of South African history. Whereas in South Africa: The Structure of Things Then, Goldblatt referred to the era of white domination in South Africa as the ‘Era of Baasskap’, Structures of Dominion and Democracy sees this period reframed as ‘dominion’ (Goodman Gallery, 2014). Although the body of work takes the form of a photo-book, the original prints have been presented at numerous exhibitions, though never as a complete series. Goldblatt’s book can be seen as a larger agenda that pervades the work of a number of South African artists, such as Gay Tillim and Mikhael Subotzky, whose present contemporary concerns about South African space and landscape owe a great deal to the legacy of his photographic output. However, though Goldblatt’s influence often shifts the works of these artists, his photographic vision differs from theirs in one significant way for the modernist in Goldblatt’s images veer towards the eventless; “a feeling that sometimes may suggest a state of inarticulation, if the landscape, people, photographs for the influential South Africa: The Structure of Things Then…” (Goldblatt, 1998: 10–11).

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the latter series contains a substantial quantity of images from its predecessor, it concentrates on the period after the fall of apartheid, or democracy.87 While worth mentioning (in the sense that it bears witness to the transformation of space in South Africa), Structures of Dominion and Democracy will not form part of this discussion as a considerable portion of its structures falls outside the parameter of what has been defined as high Modernism.

Equally, while South Africa: The Structure of Things Then comprises a wide variety of structures built over the ‘Era of Baasskap’, the following discussion will only focus on those structures erected during the later years of apartheid, as it was during this later period that the regime’s adoption of a high Modernist ideology was most apparent in its structures. Thus, in my reading of South Africa: The Structure of Things Then, the apartheid regime becomes the failed social idea(l) under critique.

Images analysed include Monuments to the Republic of South Africa and to J.G. Strijdom, with the headquarters of Volkskas Bank on Strijdom Square, Pretoria, Transvaal (25 April 1982), and South-east wing, African men’s hostel, Alexandra Township, Johannesburg, Transvaal (1 June 1988); incidentally, two photographs that are placed on a double-page spread. What makes these images particularly curious, besides their obvious portrayal of high Modernist structures, is that they were all taken during the 1980s, when apartheid had reached its violent apogee. That Goldblatt continued to create images that veered towards the ‘eventless’88 when there was “a driving need to record those situations and moments of extremity that were the stuff of the media”, was considered unusual at the time (Goldblatt, 1998: 7). However, these images, although quiet and distant, are not wholly removed.89 Instead, Dubow (1998: 22) describes them as being of a “thinking kind”. He writes, “They [are] concerned with structures of a physical sort, with another kind of narrative. They [speak] of another sort of violence of a more covert kind, a violence done to the social landscape.”

However, before analysing these images it is important that I briefly address Goldblatt’s photographs of Afrikaner Protestant churches, as their changing architectural idioms express, perhaps more eloquently, architecture’s ability to communicate meaning and to convey dominant social ideologies through its physical and visual form.

Going back to the regime’s enabling of a theocentric synthesis of Christian-Nationalism and Afrikaner political and economic power, the Afrikaner Protestant Church played a central role in developing Afrikaner national identity. It spread the Word—“the Gospel according to Christian-Nationalism — that Afrikaners were a ‘chosen people’ preordained to guide and lead South Africa” (Goldblatt, 1998: 16). Perhaps the most telling structures to have emerged out of apartheid, the Afrikaner Protestant churches visibly exemplified and propagated these values and worldviews. According to Goldblatt (Ibid.), “Changes in church architecture precisely mirrored and expressed the rise, the triumph, and the decline of the Afrikaner Volk (German for ‘people or nation’) as a principle power.”

Such changes can be discerned in the images Apostolic Faith Mission, inaugurated circa 1979, Birchleigh, Edenvale, Transvaal (28 December 1983) and Gereformeerde Kerk, Edenvale, Transvaal (28 December 1983). Where the early high Modernist churches of the 1920s and 1960s tended towards tall and often powerfully-triangulated forms that reflected the triumphant spirit of the time (Figure 6.3), the late high Modernist churches of the 1970s and 1980s became less prominent and more insular (Figure 6.4) — an architecture which corresponded closely with the increasingly obvious failure of apartheid (Goldblatt, 1998: 19). To account for these changes, Goldblatt developed a thesis which distinguished the different stages of the development of the Afrikaner church. These different stages can be seen metaphorically as “Beacon, Megaphone,
and Laager” (Ibid, 27). Dubow (1998: 27) elaborates on these variations in form, stating, “In the many forms (and in their various denominations, off-shoots of the Dutch Reformed Church) churches are the visible symbols of permanence and rootedness in the South African landscape. They stand as beacons, usually in a neo-Gothic or Gothic-bucolic form. In a later triumphalist phase they act as spiritual megaphones, instruments through which the Word may be conveyed to the faithful, to the Volk. The laager form, defensive, inward-looking, is equated with the latter days of the apartheid era, when South Africa’s leaders invoked the battle cry of ‘total onslaught’ and matched this by an aggressively defensive posture to the outside world (author’s italics).”

Monuments to the Republic of South Africa and to J.G. Strijdom, with the headquarters of Volkskas Bank on Strijdom Square, Pretoria, Transvaal (25 April 1982)

In Monuments to the Republic of South Africa and to J.G. Strijdom, with the headquarters of Volkskas Bank on Strijdom Square, Pretoria, Transvaal (25 April 1982), three distinct structures stand on a public square. The first, a cylindrical fountain topped by a bronze sculpture with four horses, is situated to the left of the foreground. The second, a sculpted bust, sits at the right of the foreground and is visually joined to the first monument by a freeform concrete cupola. The third, a tall, albeit cropped, high Modernist multi-storey building, stands at the background of the image. This building, as the title suggests, is the headquarters of Volkskas Bank. The monument at left, Monument to the Republic of South Africa by architect Hans Botha and sculptor Danie de Jager – a triumphant display of what Botha describes as a “group of four fiery, young horses with every muscle … tightly stretched in a bundle of energy and power” (Botha quoted in Goldblatt, 1998: 253) – celebrates the fifth anniversary of the Republic of South Africa. The one at right, also by architect Hans Botha and sculptor Coert Steynberg, is a 3.6m high bust of J.G. Strijdom, former Prime Minister and militant protagonist of White supremacy, who died in 1958. Finally, at rear is the equally monumental headquarters of Volkskas Bank, designed by Samuel Paww.

The tone of the image, much like its title, is direct and matter-of-fact. Photographed head on from a slightly raised viewpoint, and with background detail (especially the presence of people) kept to a bare minimum; the image allows for the structures to speak for themselves. This neutral, almost deadpan approach to the subject evokes the seeming objectivity claimed by the Bechers and New Topographics, not only by way of its visual (and to an extent technical) approach, but also through its intended form as an objective document capable of “conveying substantial amounts of visual information but eschewing entirely the aspects of beauty, emotion, and opinion” (Jenkins quoted in Salvesen, 2000: 17). Likewise, its precisionist approach to the subject is equally redolent of the technical conventions of architectural photography. Here, the scene is enhanced by exaggerated verticals and horizontals, as well as by perspective control and a wide depth of field, in addition to Goldblatt’s decision to shoot on a large format under bright sunlight so that light and shadow emphasise its volumetric forms.

In terms of the image context, Strijdom Square, the plaza upon which the three structures stand, was once Pretoria’s historic market square before it was transformed into the granite-paved plane commemorating J.G. Strijdom. The new square, which abutted the proposed opera house, was intended to accommodate both de Jager’s Monument to the Republic and Steynberg’s monument to Strijdom (Silverman, 1998: 31). As for the Volkskas headquarters, the structure was only factored in afterwards, when the Pretoria City Council required that a large building serve as a backdrop to the Strijdom monument (Ibid). However, while neither the Strijdom monument nor the Monument to the Republic exists in the space today – in 2001, on...
the 40th anniversary of Republic Day, Strijdom’s bust collapsed into a parking lot below and shattered (Kuper, 2015) while de Jager’s sculpted horses were later removed and installed at the University of Pretoria (Hlaban, 2013) – the Volkskas structure (today the Aba centre) continues to dominate the space.

In terms of the actual structure, the Volkskas headquarters, which is central to this analysis (and incidentally, centrally placed within the image), represents the final incarnation of the Volkskas Bank. According to architect Melinda Silverman (1998: 129),

“The Volkskas Bank was a project of Afrikaner nationalistic ideologies, established after the First World War to allow the volk to create its own wealth outside institutions of British imperialism. It was a bank inspired by such ideas as nation-building and economic empowerment, and it gave deliberate expression to these ideas in an ambitious building programme that stretched from small rural towns to major cities.”

Indeed, the bank’s own two-volume history – Die Bank van Oom Bossie (Uncle Bossie’s Bank) and Van akker tot Eld (From Acorn to Oak) – devotes substantial attention to these building projects, from Gerard Moerdyk’s structure in Central Street, Pretoria (1935) to Paau’s climactic headquarters in Strijdom Square (1978). Volkskas as an institution was thus, from its very inception, projected as nothing less than the embodiment of the Afrikanerdऩom, which were “particular instances of a wider consensus about the prospects for large-scale social transformation, and a confidence in a suitably modern state’s capacity to bring it about” (1996: 13).

Silverman, writing in Desire Lines: Space, Memory and Identity in the Post-Apartheid City (2007), elaborates on this adoption of a modernist aesthetic as follows:

“[M]odernism became ‘domesticated’ as a style of choice for use in the latter part of the twentieth century in the service of Afrikaner nationalism. This is possibly the cruelest application of modernist design ideas and forms from the city scale down to individual buildings. Many international styles and variations of modernism were emulated in the project of asserting national spatial identity. From the art deco style of Gerard Moerdyk’s design for the Voortrekker Monument, to the Corbusian planning for Cape Town’s Foreshore reclamation project; from the fluid forms and expressions of the Taal Monument, to the brutalism of the Pretoria State Theatre and Strydom Monument; and from the regionalist modernism of Fagan’s Volkskas Bank buildings to the Kahnian modernism of the Rand Afrikaans University, modern architecture became the style and visual language of the apartheid period” (2007: 52).

Likewise, in Pretoria, the Wachthuis – headquarters of the South African police and designed by Norman Eaton – and the Receiver of Revenue building – designed by Moerdyk and Watson together were Moerdyk and Naude’s – both demonstrated a modernist aesthetic. Similarly, the H.F. Verwoerd Building – headquarters of the Provincial Administration (portrayed in South Africa: The Structure of Things Then [Figure 67]), exhibits such an aesthetic.

Volkskas headquarters, like these other structures, was a product of the so-called ‘Pretoria School’. An early champion of European-style modernism, the Pretoria School – initially the school of architecture at the University of Pretoria – brought the ideas of Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Mies van der Rohe to South Africa (Silverman, 1998: 133). Paau, himself a student at the University of Pretoria, found the International Style, particularly its skyscrapers, invaluable in expressing notions of progress and utilised many of its formal elements in his designs for Volkskas. However, this ‘declaration’ was somewhat ironic as the architect was using the language of the modernist skyscraper to communicate notions of progress in South Africa when the style was already deemed outdated in North America and Western Europe. At the time, widespread changes in architectural practice were often slow to respond, taking as many as fifteen to twenty years in smaller cities and developing nations (as can be seen in the comparison between the Volkskas headquarters of 1978, the Seagrm Building of 1958, and the One Chase Manhattan Plaza of 1960 on the following page).

Like many other modernist structures in Pretoria, however, Volkskas reworked the modernist idiom to suit South African conditions such as climate, available materials, and technology. In place of a Miesian steel-framework, Paau used Corbusian béton brut: raw concrete poured in situ and sandblasted. Thus, while the emphasis was on modernism, the final product was very much a monument, and a Pretoria-style monument at that (Silverman, 1998: 142). Entirely without the elegance associated with tall buildings of the time, the structure reflected a deliberate rejection of the then-pervasive style of “die gladde eenzamee anonieme glas-en staalgordynmuur-geboue wat ‘n kenmark is van die sogenaamde ‘form follows function’”, or “the smooth simple anonymous glass and...
steel curtain-wall buildings of the so-called ‘form follows function’ (Engelbrecht: 318: 320). Instead, there was a Brutalist quality to its concrete forms and severe facade. Brutalist in the sense that these forms – large and imposing – reflected the modern totalitarian style, which, hardly inappropriate, echoed the totalitarian-like enforcement of the apartheid regime. Here, reinforced concrete was used with excessive enthusiasm, typically for the horizontals but also, unconventionally, for the verticals. The lifts and air-conditioning ducts, usually the central core of a building, were shifted to the outside in order to articulate the façade and to break the symmetry. The windows were also deeply recessed – supposedly in response to South Africa’s harsh sunshine – that the solid, reinforced concrete elements predominated. According to the architects, the final structure was intended as “a most plastic and sculptural sort of architecture, one especially suited to the sharp sunshine and deep shadows of the local climate” (Ibid).

Although Goldblatt photographed the structure as it was intended – as a backdrop for the Strijdom monument – the structure’s formal qualities, particularly its highly graphic grid of horizontals and verticals, as well as its strong contrast of light and shadow, help to clearly delineate or separate it from the concrete cupola at front. Instead of receding well into the background of the image, the Volkskas headquarters is equally weighted with the concrete cupola that houses the Strijdom monument. Read symbolically, this could speak of the equal vision shared between both Volkskas and Strijdom towards the creation of an Afrikaner nationalism and dominance. On the other hand, the image’s right cropping, which cuts off almost all of the structure’s height, speaks of failure. While at the time of the image’s photographing in 1982, it would have been impossible to predict that the Strijdom statue would eventually collapse, or that Volkskas would, with the fall of apartheid, cease to exist, with the knowledge that the two monuments no longer exist in the space or that the Volkskas dream of Afrikaner Nationalism, along with the bank, were ultimately collapsed – that collectively critique not only the failure of Afrikaner nationalism and dominance as a social ideal(i) in particular, but of apartheid and its quest towards the creation of a ‘utopia’ in general.

South-east wing, African men’s hostel, Alexandra Township, Johannesburg, Transvaal (1 June 1988)

South-east wing, African men’s hostel, unlike the image of Strijdom Square discussed prior, is relatively straightforward. As the title suggests, the image depicts the south-east wing of an African men’s hostel, here ‘Madala’s hostel’ (isiZulu for ‘old man’), situated in Alexandra Township, Johannesburg. In the image, the great brick monolithic structure, centrally placed, is surrounded by a wire fence topped with coils of concertina barbed wire. There are two figures, one at the centre-left of the image at the building’s vanishing point and the other in the direct foreground. The foregrounded figure, cropped at the bottom-right edges of the hostel’s overall scale. The structure is photographed from a corner viewpoint using a low angle. As opposed to the frontal shot generally used by Goldblatt, the corner viewpoint (temmed a perspective approach in photography) not only accommodates the full length of the structure into the picture plane, but also emphasizes its three-dimensionality. This three-dimensional view helps to create a better understanding of the hostel’s overall scale. The structure is not only large in terms of its length but it also forms part of an even larger complex; an overall whole composed of many similarly sized structures. Likewise, the low angle from which the image was taken, where the camera gazes up at the structure, emphases its scale and makes it appear strong and powerful.

The foregrounded figure, another unusual addition to the architectural image, appears quite the opposite. In contrast to the strong and powerful structure, the figure appears weak and dejected – his back is turned to the viewer and his head is slung low as he walks on and out of the picture plane. This feeling is echoed by the second figure in the background. Although he faces into the image, his posture remains the same as he gazes down onto the barren and dusty ground as if searching for something amongst the nothingness. This feeling of emptiness, of barrenness, is equally echoed in the sky which, devoid of clouds, is without promise of rain. The tone of the image is therefore one of desolation; a desolation not only of the forsaken environment or even the dreary and repetitive structure, but made worse...
manifest in the hopeless expressions of the two figures. While South-east wing, African men’s hostel does, to an extent, deviate from Goldblatt’s more objective, deadpan approach to the architectural subject, by way of its oblique angles and foregrounding of the human figure, I have chosen to discuss the image as it is important in its critique of the hostel system, a regimented and inhumane system of black migrant housing built in pursuance of the apartheid dream.

In terms of the image’s context, South-east wing, African men’s hostel is located in the Alexandra Township in Johannesburg, one of the poorest urban areas in South Africa. Established in 1912, Alexandra was declared a so-called ‘native township’ (Morrison, 2000). Because the township was proclaimed before the South African 1913 Land Act, it was one of the few urban areas in the country where black people could own land under a freehold title.

By 1916, the township had a population of around 30,000 people over one mile radius. With the township in desperate need of management, the Alexandra Health Committee was soon established. However, the Committee was not allowed to collect local taxes, nor was the Johannesburg City Council able to enforce the ‘White by Night’ policy, which could rapidly isolate sections of the hostel if it became necessary to restrain the ‘inmates’ or to put down a riot, are undoubtedly reminiscent of a prison (Goldblatt, 1998: 252).

While the ‘prison-like’ structure did indeed succeed in keeping black workers off the city streets at night, this was not the only factor that determined the government’s decision to build such a structure. Instead, the government believed that by confining black people to such modern, regimented living conditions, they could be moulded into an orderly and submissive underclass. This, they hoped, would resemble that of the Panopticon: an early precursor for the modern prison and symbol of the disciplinary society of surveillance (see Foucault, 1977) (Figure 71). Likewise, the structure’s limited entrances (there are only four) and remote-controlled steel shutter doors, which could rapidly isolate sections of the hostel if it became necessary to restrain the ‘inmates’ or to put down a riot, are undoubtedly reminiscent of a prison (Goldblatt, 1998: 252).

This is further corroborated by the choice of fencing used to enclose the overall structure. As evidenced in the image, the hostel is enclosed by a wire fence drawn between steel standards and topped with a concertina coil. The concertina coil, in particular, is a type of barbed wire used on applications where volume is necessary as it forms a tube of lethal blades that is very difficult to break. Typical installation sites include industrial and military buildings, particularly prisons.99

While the ‘prison-like’ structure did indeed succeed in keeping black workers off the city streets at night, this was not the only factor that determined the government’s decision to build such a structure. Instead, the government believed that by confining black people to such modern, regimented living conditions, they could be moulded into an orderly and submissive underclass. This, they hoped, would help to reduce the ‘black-on-black’ violence that they feared would “spill over into the white suburbs” (Poplak, 2015).

Like the superpananda of Brasilia, the hostel was to be a structure that would transform the lives of those who lived there; a space that could socially
engineers every aspect of their experience, from their personal habits to their social lives, leisure, and work. Thus, the hostel system, like the apartheid city, was a radical attempt at social engineering. It not only controlled and restricted the movements of its residents, but it also forced them to live in austere and overcrowded conditions, often sharing tiny rooms with up to four other men. As for men with families, no provisions were made for them to stay together – there was to be absolutely no children, or persons of the opposite sex inside the hostel (Horrell, 1964: 106). Besides destroying entire families, the hostels stripped men of their dignities and impinged on their basic human rights – their rights to freedom, to privacy, to health, and to family. This, however, was of little concern to the government who viewed such social disintegration and debasement as collateral damage in the implementation of a larger and greater scheme. Thus, it could be said that the architecture was as much about ‘unbuilding’ as it was about building, literally using the law to expropriate and destroy countless family systems with the view to implementing apartheid ideology. According to Goldblatt (1998: 14),

[It] was no matter . . . that the execution of the dream (apartheid) required social engineering on a vast scale, without regard to the wishes of those – almost exclusively Black – who were to be moulded to fit its designs. Apartheid was a radical creed. It demanded radical changes and whatever it cost to achieve them.

Thus, with South-east wing, African men’s hostel, it is this belief, this ideology, that black people could be socially engineered into an orderly and submissive underclass, that is perhaps most manifest in the image of the passive black migrant. In contrast to the strong and powerful structure, the worker appears weak and dejected. Stripped of his family, he might even appear lonely. Therefore, it could be said that with South-east wing, African men’s hostel, Goldblatt not only images the high Modernist structure but its inhabitants too, so as to critique the failure of the hostel system as both inhume and debasing; a failed social ideal(1) under the radical creed of apartheid. However, it is important to note that with Goldblatt, his critique is not formed through what might have happened outside the moment in which the image was taken. That is to say, that the figures might have been subjected to the ‘White by Night’ policy after hours, or that the structure, as a means to cultivate a submissive underclass so as to reduce possible threats of violence, would eventually fail in its intended purpose and become a site of violence in itself, is of little concern to the photographer. Instead, what truly matters to Goldblatt is that in this particular image, these particular people have been robbed of their dignities, their rights to health and happiness, their status as human. That these particular people are in this particular moment unhappy and alone.

As this dissertation investigates the critical representation of high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning in specific works by contemporary artists and photographers, I have used this chapter as an opportunity to discuss Andreas Gursky’s Paris, Montparnasse, Filip Dujardin’s Fictions, and David Goldblatt’s South Africa: The Structure of Things Then. As mentioned earlier, while each artist and photographer images high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning with a view to critique the failure of the social project of high Modernism, they do so in highly individualistic ways. In Paris, Montparnasse, Gursky digitally manipulates the image by seamlessly merging two separate photographs of the same structure. This use of manipulation serves to exaggerate the failed social ideal under the radical creed of apartheid, and to increase the repetitiveness of its design; a critique of the excesses and shortcomings of Mouchotte in particular, and of high Modernism’s large-scale housing developments in general. The artist’s use of exaggeration not only changes how we see the structure, but it also changes how we experience it. This is, for Gursky, a key aspect of the work, as what is ultimately most important to him is that his images are persuasive (Arntz, 2002). It is thus through digital manipulation that he is able to achieve such cogence as never before: digital manipulation makes what appears in the image seem more controlled or intentional, and thus more determined by the artist.

With Fictions, Dujardin also employs digital manipulation techniques, except that he creates digital montages using at least one hundred and fifty different image elements. This strategy of reconfiguration, much like Gütschow’s in the chapter that follows, is used in conjunction with exaggeration and hyperbole to construct new buildings that have no real-world equivalents. However, what is important about Dujardin’s structures is that they remain on the right side of plausibility; that is, Dujardin, like Gursky in Paris, Montparnasse, projects the real world and not a surreal one. He illustrates high Modernism’s (often) visionary and ‘utopian’ ideas – ideas for structures and architectures that were almost never built, but could have been – to show just how ridiculous some of these ideas were.

Of the pieces discussed here, it is only in Goldblatt’s South Africa: The Structure of Things Then that there is a dramatic shift in method. For Goldblatt, a manipulation of the content of his images is unnecessary, as they are simply intended as documents, and nothing more. As such, I approached Goldblatt’s work via their content, because the image itself is meant to speak for itself. At least according to Goldblatt, the structures and architectures speak for themselves, nakedly and eloquently (1998: 10–11).
Chapter 4:
Beate Gütschow

In this chapter, I conduct an in-depth investigation into German artist Beate Gütschow’s S (2004–2009) with a view to examine how she uses high Modernist structures and architectures to point to the failures of high Modernism.

Beate Gütschow104 (b. 1970 in Mainz, Germany) is a contemporary artist best known for her digitally manipulated landscapes, both natural and urban, which directly question pictorial representations of reality. Like Filip Dujardin, Gütschow uses digital compositing techniques, or digital photomontage, to construct convincingly realistic landscapes that at first glance appear as if captured from reality, yet upon closer inspection reveal themselves to be fictions (Museum of Contemporary Photography, 2008). These landscapes, evident in her LS (for Landschaft or landscape) series (1999–2003) and her S (for Stadt or city) series, will be discussed further and in detail in this chapter. Aside from its mentioned questioning of pictorial representations of reality, these series also compel the viewer to think about and to question notions of the ideal or of utopia; that is, what an ideal is, by whom it is determined, and to what extent it can be reached.

Both LS and S were originally presented as a photo-book entitled Beate Gütschow: L/S (2007). As with Goldblatt’s South Africa: The Structure of Things Then, these works will be approached with this book format in mind.105 Beate Gütschow: L/S is divided into two parts or ‘chapters’, with the first chapter dedicated to the fifteen digitally altered colour landscapes of LS, and the second dedicated to S, consisting of seventeen tonal black and white digital montages of the city. While both series are presented in their most complete form in Beate Gütschow: L/S, many of the prints have been presented on noteworthy exhibitions, including ‘Manipulating Reality: How Images Redefine the Digital Age’ (2012–2013) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. On both occasions, images from S were presented as simply framed LightJet prints of approximately 180 × 270 cm (see Figure 72), and images from LS were presented at a similar size, unframed and mounted on aluminium (dibonded) (Egan et al, 2007: 37).

Although LS and S are presented with equal importance in Beate Gütschow: L/S, I will focus on S as it best embodies my claim that certain contemporary photography uses high Modernist structures and architectures to critique high Modernism’s failed social ideas and ideals. This relates more specifically to Gütschow’s own claims that “[w]hile S might be about destruction, I am also describing an architecture that stands for social ideal[is] that have failed” (Gütschow quoted in Egan et al, 2007: 41, my italics). However, for the purposes of introducing Gütschow’s methods and concerns, as well as for the purposes of comparison, I will begin this investigation with a brief discussion of LS.

While LS has less bearing on my research, it is relevant, nonetheless. High Modernism’s movement and ideology was not only limited to the reordering of the social world but also that of the natural. This harks back to Scott’s definition volunteered in Chapter 1, wherein he describes the ‘movement’ of high Modernism as “a form of modernity, and more appropriately an ideology, characterised by its unfaltering confidence in science and technology as a means to reorder the social and natural world” (1999: 4, my italics). Equally, it is important to reiterate that the camera itself was a form of technology used to reform and control, and thus reorder, the social and natural world, as will be seen in both S and LS.

First, though, it is worth clarifying why this chapter forms the culmination of my research project. Beyond S’s direct application of the...
In her first series, LS, Gütschow uses photographic means to reconstruct depictions of landscapes in seventeenth and eighteenth-century paintings. Here, each landscape is meticulously constructed using anything from thirty to a hundred disparate image fragments in a manner similar to Dujardin’s compositions; and it is by accurately and minutely copying these parts, and afterwards skilfully and judiciously combining and arranging them, that the most perfect works in the art have been produced.

In an attempt to capture the essence of these ‘ideal’ landscapes, Gütschow therefore goes beyond merely emulating their visual rhetorics, and instead imitates the predefined schemes used in their construction. Where her predecessors composed new landscapes using fragments copied from the real, Gütschow uses image fragments taken from her own images, combining and arranging them using digital compositing methods. Gütschow describes these predefined schemes in some detail in Beate Gütschow: LS/S, where she methodically dissects the creative process behind Classical and Romantic landscape painting, and, by its association, LS.

106. Arcadia is further seen as a lost and Edenic form of life, which contrasts with the progressive nature of utopian designs. Where the term utopia was used in Chapter 2 to describe an ideal and progressive urban space or place (and thus society), the term Arcadia is here used to describe an ideally perfect (and equally impossible) rural or pastoral space.

107. Staffage is defined as “accessory items in a painting, especially figures or animals in a landscape picture” (“Staffage,” 2015).
viewer, ‘enters’ into the landscape via the foreground. The people, here photographed park-goers, are placed between the foreground and middle ground and look out into the landscape on behalf of the viewer. In this instance, the middle ground contains a river, and the background is composed of a view into what appears to be a forest. Again, like with these landscape paintings, light mainly enters from the side, illuminating some areas and leaving others in shadow.

By applying ‘predetermined schemes’ to her constructed landscapes, Gütschow succeeds in creating seeming ‘Arcadian’ by mixing together elements of images she had taken of parks, construction sites, pristine nature, and people engaged in leisure activities (Egan et al., 2002: 39). I say seeming, because some of the materials used to construct the landscapes in LS are distinctly post-industrial, and therefore did not originate from what could be considered an ‘Arcadian’ source. Here, a seemingly idyllic measurement was not shot in pristine pastoral land that has remained untouched, but was rather constructed from images of plants, trees, and textures appropriated from construction sites and old factories (Ibid, 38).

As Gütschow phrases it, “All you have to do is follow two or three of these rules and the photographs will look like paintings, because this is how our perception has been moulded” (Gütschow quoted in Strozzi, 2009). In other words, because the viewer is assumed to have seen such landscape paintings so often in visual imagery, the history of landscape painting to which Gütschow refers becomes somewhat naturalised in the viewer’s way of looking at landscapes in general.

However, through a deliberate inclusion of ‘less than ideal’ elements in these constructed landscapes – the languid persons in everyday T-shirts seated amongst discarded rubbish in LS#8, the inclusion of a tree stump in LS#8 (2003) (Figure 76), or the exposed ground and crevasses in LS#7 (1999) (Figure 77) – Gütschow subverts the apparent ideality of the scene and breaks its connection to these paintings. These disruptive elements intervene in the inner articulation of her landscapes, as in Dujardin’s images. Elsewhere, a simple switch of the traditional landscape format for a portrait one, that ideal and landscapes are artificial constructs (Ibid).

So as to avoid deviating from my research question, I will not elaborate on this particular body of work any further. However, a few key points on LS merit emphasis to lay the foundations for S. As mentioned earlier, Gütschow’s monograph Beate Gütschow: LS/S is divided into two separate parts or chapters: with LS intended to function as a foil to S. In LS, Gütschow not only exposes the constructed ideals and landscapes are artificial constructs (Ibid).

In S, Gütschow develops her technique of digital photomontage used in LS to produce a series of what appear to be high Modernist architectural landscapes. These architectural landscapes are constructed from her own109 photographs of high Modernist structures and architectures taken from a broad range of geographical and social contexts, although there is an inclination towards the use of images of structures and architectures taken from the former Eastern and Soviet Bloc (Barbara Gross Gallery, personal communication 2015, August 14). These structures and architectures, although stripped of their original contexts, each remain able to communicate or at least express the failure of the social ideal109 once responsible for their construction, and particularly in the context of the Eastern and Soviet Bloc, their often totalitarian impetuses. According to Gütschow (in Janser, Seelig & Strahel, 2013: 157), these constructed landscapes “clearly reference documentary photography, but at the same time contradict it with their photographicictions”.

In S, Gütschow employs her technique of digital photomontage used in LS to produce a series of what appear to be high Modernist architectural landscapes. These architectural landscapes are constructed from her own109 photographs of high Modernist structures and architectures taken from a broad range of geographical and social contexts, although there is an inclination towards the use of images of structures and architectures taken from the former Eastern and Soviet Bloc (Barbara Gross Gallery, personal communication 2015, August 14). These structures and architectures, although stripped of their original contexts, each remain able to communicate or at least express the failure of the social ideal109 once responsible for their construction, and particularly in the context of the Eastern and Soviet Bloc, their often totalitarian impetuses. According to Gütschow (in Janser, Seelig & Strahel, 2013: 157), these constructed landscapes “clearly reference documentary photography, but at the same time contradict it with their photographicictions”. I

109. This attempt to see and to idealise beauty in leftover urban spaces is somewhat reminiscent of Bernd and Hilla Becher’s images of industrial structures (Chapter 2).
110. Although used for the purposes of contrast in this document, there is an historic relationship between architectural photography (as with S) and landscape painting, particularly the works of Claude Lorrain in Italy and Jacob van Ruisdael in Holland. These stimulated, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a taste for what theorists of architecture and landscape design call the ‘picturesque’. Ackerman states that the conventions of early landscape and architectural photography do indeed owe a debt towards classical landscape painting, as the practice of copying the compositions of these paintings became a prevalent part of early photography (Ibid., 130). There are some exceptions, such as with Stilos (Figure 61), where Gütschow adapted into the constructed landscape elements taken from media images of the First Iraqi War (Egan et al., 2007: 43). These media images, which contain within their frames scenes of war and terror, lend the landscapes a distinctly dystopian feel.
As can be seen in the previous images, high Modernist structures and architectures play a pivotal role in the series. This is chiefly due to their ability to function as expressions of society (von Amelunxen, 2006). When questioned on the particulars of this role, Gütschow made the central claim, I think that architecture is always an expression of society and I believe that this is what my works are about. Precisely by collecting photos [of structures and architectures] from different countries I produce a summarisation of what modernism has been. Perhaps a form of modernism, that lies fifty years back, while we are already much further in the future. Modernism is disintegrating; it has not worked, and is now nothing more than a form of shelter. It hasn’t proven itself. And it also stands for totalitarianism, which was also a part of modernism — giving orders and surveillance. In my works, I am more concerned with describing a by [sic] using architecture; it is not really about architecture but about the state (Gütschow quoted in von Amelunxen, 2006, my italics).

Gütschow later adds, in her interview with museum director Natasha Egan for Beate Gütschow: LS/S, “While S might be about destruction, I am also describing an architecture that stands for social idea[s] that have failed” (Gütschow quoted in Egan et al., 2007: 42, my italics). Indeed, it is this later statement that corroborates the series’ relevance to my research topic, which investigates how contemporary artists and photographers image high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning to critique the failure of high Modernism’s social idea(s). However, in order to investigate this through S, it is important to clarify whether Gütschow is in the first instance speaking of high Modernism as being that particular ‘form’ of modernism, as she at no point elucidates this in her statement. Likewise, it is important to note that the first quote, taken from the artist’s website, is a direct translation from German, and perhaps lacks in necessary detail and nuance. Once this is clear, I will go on to discuss how these high Modernist structures and architectures function as ‘expressions of society’, as well as decipher what exactly Gütschow might be referring to when she speaks of ‘the state’.

Where Gütschow refers to “a form of modernism, that lies fifty years back, while we are already much further in the future” (in von Amelunxen, 2006, my italics) – it is clear that she is referring to a particular strain of modernism and not to modernism as an overarching philosophical and social movement. In much the same way, where she states that this modernism “also stands for totalitarianism” (Bild), it is made obvious that the form of modernism to which she refers, is one closely associated with totalitarianism. This association could either refer to a form of modernism adopted by a totalitarian state, and thus “stand[s] for totalitarianism”, or it could refer to a form of modernism that is totalitarian by nature: a modernism that is authoritarian or oppressive. As high Modernism was both – as a political system, totalitarianism called for a political system, totalitarianism called for a cortisol and surveilling. Therefore, it is this later statement that stands to reason that the form of modernism to which Gütschow refers is high Modernism.11

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The notion that different manifestations of high Modernism were often embraced by states across the political spectrum, and that this association could either refer to a form of high Modernism as being used in Western Europe and North America by totalitarian states, and it was, for the most part, totalitarian in the sense that it was often tyrannical in its drive towards a complete reformation and control of society – it therefore relates back to Gütschow’s statement that she is “describing an architecture that stands for social idea[s] that have failed” (quoted in Egan et al., 2007: 39, my italics). However, while it may be the case that most of the structures and architectures included in S are taken from the former Eastern and Soviet Bloc, it is important to note that Gütschow does sometimes include elements of high Modernist structures and architectures taken from other geographical and social contexts. For example, there are, in the image S#9 (2006, radium), nudiments of a high Modernist structure taken from Chicago, while in S#26 (2008) (Figure 81), Gütschow mixes together image fragments of high Modernist structures and architectures taken from outside the former Eastern and Soviet Bloc (Barbara Gross Gallery, personal communication 2015, August 24).

In my interview with Gütschow, I asked her why she sometimes includes in her montages image fragments of high Modernist structures and architectures taken from outside the former Eastern and Soviet Bloc. Gütschow responded, stating, “I sometimes mix together building elements from various social contexts to show that opposing utopias often use a similar formal language [that is, similarly styled structures and architectures]” (Gütschow, personal communication 2016, April 20). This response was particularly interesting in that it invocation of opposing utopias, or rather opposing ideologies, relates back to the notion that different manifestations of high Modernism were often embraced by states across the political spectrum, and that in each of these states, architectural forms and structures were adopted and sometimes adapted to communicate their particular social ideal(s) and contexts (I say ‘sometimes’ because in certain instances these architectural forms and structures were transposed without any change). This then resulted in subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, variations in architectural form. For example, while the Brutalist style was originally intended to communicate “strength, functionality and a frank expression of materiality” (McClendon & Stewart, 2007: 12), it also came to be associated with totalitarianism in the former Eastern and Soviet Bloc, and particularly in the Soviet Union, where its often large and fortress-like forms were adopted and adapted to instead communicate the sense of power, majesty, and vileness inherent in these totalitarian administrations. Thus, while Brutalism was being used in Western Europe and North America, from the time of its introduction in the late 1940s to the end of high Modernism, as a form of social democracy12 (see Saval [2006] and Beanland [2016]), a similar formal language was being used in these blocs to communicate totalitarianism.

Correspondingly, in the example of S#26, where Gütschow mixes together image fragments of high Modernist structures and architectures taken in England with image fragments of similarly styled structures and architectures taken from the former Eastern and Soviet Bloc, this is done to illustrate how two opposing utopias or ideologies, one democratic and the other totalitarian, use similar formal languages to communicate wholly different social ideal(s). This connects back to Goldblatt’s image of the Volkspark Bank or even to the cities of Johannesburg and Pretoria at large where International Style structures and architectures, once implemented in Western Europe and North America to largely ‘democratic’ ends, were instead appropriated to communicate the ‘progressive’ utopian ideal(s) of Apartheid South Africa (which, ironically, was at the time totalitarian). Likewise, it could also be said that by mixing together elements of high Modernist structures and architectures taken from completely different social contexts and ideologies – that is, by juxtaposing them so as to make them appear as if they could have existed side by side in the same environment – is equally redolent of the imminent ‘threat’ of homogeneity that the high


12. When I interviewed Beate Gütschow, she at no point denied that she is referring to high Modernism. However, 2015. The Exhibition. Berlin: Stern, 29–31. Furthermore, the title of the exhibition was practiced very differently in different times and geographic contexts within the twentieth century, from Nazi Germany to Maoist China to Stalinist Russia to Pinochet’s Chile to Apartheid South Africa.

13. There were, like Egan, few exceptions, as with Ma Carthy’s Centre of Subversion housing project, which was (ironically) influenced by Soviet architecture.
Modernist (architectural) movement posed in its efforts towards global standardisation. It is also interesting that these structures are able to hold these ideological contradictions.

While in S, high Modernist structures and architectures “stand for social idea(l)s that have failed” (Gütschow quoted in Egan et al, 2007: 38, my italics). Gütschow occasionally includes images of destruction and decay so as to render this failure all the more visually immediate. For example, in the images, S10 (2005) (Figure 83) and S14 (2005) (Figure 78), Gütschow exaggerates this failure and renders it somewhat dystopic by inserting into their architectural landscapes images of war and terror. In S10 there are media images taken from the First Iraq War, and in S14, Gütschow inserts her own image fragments of the bullet-riddled Local Newspaper Building,66 in Sarajevo (Barbara Gross Gallery, personal communication 2015, August 24). According to philosopher and art historian Hubertus von Amelunxen, these images describe a “post-apocalyptic world” wherein “utopia has since turned dystopian” (von Amelunxen, 2006). He states that these images “possess something very depressing, they are all monochrome, black-and-white, they all deal with destruction or incompleteness, with barrenness, desertedness. One could say that they form the opposite of what utopia effected” (Ibid, my italics).

This notion of a high Modernist dis/utopia nevertheless evokes Dijkstra’s earlier statement, wherein he condemned the high Modernist movement and ideology, as expressed in the forms of its structures and architectures, as “austere, anti-human, and oftentimes dystopic” (Dijkstra quoted in Hogan, 2006, my italics). Equally, the notion that modernism, or rather modern architecture, is today nothing more than a “form of shelter” (Gütschow quoted in von Amelunxen, 2006) is reminiscent of Dutch architect and architectural theorist Rem Koolhaas’s concept of a ‘Junkspace’. In 2002, Koolhaas produced a ‘sardonic elegy’ on architecture called Junkspace, a term that he used to describe the soulless and residual space left behind by architects during the twentieth century. He writes,

Junkspace is the sum total of our current achievement; we have built more than did all previous generations put together, but somehow we do not register on the same scales . . . It was a mistake to invent modern architecture for the twentieth century. Architecture disappeared in the twentieth century; we have been reading a footnote under a microscope hoping it would turn into a novel; our concern for the masses has blinded us to People’s Architecture (Koolhaas, 2002: 173).

According to Koolhaas (2002: 173), “The built product of modernisation is not ‘modern architecture’ per se, but is instead an Other space, a heterotopia67 of sorts, in which the remainder of modernisation, once it had run its course, continues to exist.” That is to say, while modernism had a rational plan which sought to ‘share’ its scientific and technical discoveries with the world, this resulted in entropy, or a gradual decline into dis-order, today more widely known and processed as the failure of modernism (see Glazer [2007], Jencks [1977], and Jacobs [1961]). Indeed, it is this legacy of failure that forms a core part of S. In S, there is a ‘Junkspace’, except that this space encompasses high Modernist structures and architectures. Where these high Modernist structures and architectures were once considered the apotheosis of modernisation and of the twentieth century, S illustrates their descent into complete entropy, a stagnation of progress which has left behind architectural structures as mere carcasses of a former era and which today exist as “nothing more than a form of shelter” (Gütschow quoted in von Amelunxen, 2006).

Thus, in S there is a visible contrast between the often ‘utopian’ social idea(l)s of high Modernism and their manifest failures. While this notion of utopia-turned-dystopia will be elaborated on during the course of this chapter, it is important to begin by noting the connection between the architectural landscapes of S and what Florian Ebner (n.d) terms their “synthetic ‘drawing-board’ architectures and classic image perspectives”. While these qualities reference the architectural photography of the 1950s and 1960s (Egan et al, 2007: 41), addressed later, they also invoke the high Modernist architectural movement and its conflation of the ‘perfect city’ (or Stadt) and ‘perfect society’, a social idea(l)68 which, while seemingly utopian, has failed in almost every incarnation (see Segawa [1997], Holton [2009], and Stierli [2010]).

As a final point, where Gütschow asserts that she is “more concerned with describing a by [sic] something else using architecture” and that her work “is not really about architecture but about the state” (Gütschow quoted in von Amelunxen, 2006), it is important to clarify what exactly Gütschow means when she speaks of ‘the state’.

As reasoned thus far, Gütschow images high Modernist structures and architectures with the view to critique high Modernist’s failed social idea(l)s in general, and their (often) totalitarian impetuses in particular (see Figure 85). By including image fragments of high Modernist structures and architectures taken from a range

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66. More properly known as the Olosbođenje building.
67. For further reading see M. Foucault’s Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias (Diacritics, 1996).
68. As reasoned thus far, Gütschow images high Modernist structures and architectures with the view to critique high Modernist’s failed social idea(l)s in general, and their (often) totalitarian impetuses in particular (see Figure 85). By including image fragments of high Modernist structures and architectures taken from a range
of geographical and social contexts, many of them totalitarian, Gütschow levels a critique against the high Modernist movement and ideology that, like the ideology itself, is not limited to any one specific location. In this vein, it stands to reason that with S Gütschow is not referring to, or rather intending to critique, any one particular state, but is rather speaking of the high Modernist state in general, which tended towards authoritarian or oppressive rule. This position is not unlike Scott’s in his influential book Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed (1995), wherein he refers to the state as a general entity. For Scott, this state, or rather the ‘high Modernist state’, includes any nation or territory from across the political spectrum or globe that embraced or adopted a high Modernist ideology in its day-to-day functioning. Similarly, it could be said that in S Gütschow images high Modernist structures and architectures to critique the high Modernist states’ failed social ideal(is) in general and their (often) totalitarian impulses in particular, this is but my understanding and interpretation of her work, backed by interviews and other information I have sourced.

S and its Methods and Strategies

As established, each landscape in S is, like in L.S., a digital photomontage. These photomontages are assembled from a diverse archive of large format black and white analogue photographs taken at locations around the world. For this, Gütschow uses the image-processing program Adobe Photoshop, wherein she applies what she terms “a pre-photographic approach” (Gütschow quoted in Egan et al, 2007: 40). When using Photoshop, Gütschow limits herself to only five functions. These five functions “simulate classical photographic tools”, and include cutting (scissors), exposing (burn and dodge), brightness and colour adjustment (more red and yellow), and retouching (Gütschow quoted in von Amelunxen, 2006). This connection to classical methods of photography becomes important especially in the next section, where I discuss the relationship between S and traditional documentary photography. Notwithstanding, Gütschow’s preoccupation with analogue methods is central to her concept. In her interview with Egan for Beate Gütschow LS/S, Gütschow discusses her transition from analogue to digital (and back to analogue) in the creation of her photomontages. She states, My process starts with analogue photography, which is light captured on film. I put the images into the computer, digitise them, and work on them, but the end product is again analogue, a matter of light meeting photographic paper. There are no pixels visible; it is a chemical reaction. That’s also why I don’t use digital cameras. I like to have the grain in the photo; if you look closely, you can see it. For me it is a manifestation of reality – although in fact it is the manifestation of a medium (Gütschow quoted in Egan et al, 2007: 42).

This “manifestation of reality” – or the image’s indexical trace – survives through the grain in her completed work, and like the image grain, it holds on to marking as a sort of “inscription” that takes place at the beginning of the image-making process. Later on, when Gütschow outputs the file to photo paper, a laser then “writes light” back onto the paper (von Amelunxen, 2006). The resultant grain on the printed image, as opposed to digital pixels, therefore becomes significant: it functions to retransfer the final image back to its analogue base and strengthens its connection to documentary photography; a relationship, once again, expanded later.

Before discussing Gütschow’s “pre-photographic approach”, a distinction must first be made between this approach and a typical or traditional photographic method. In conventional photography, the starting point of any given image is the 360 degrees of information that surrounds the photographer, and from which he or she chooses to select a slice of reality. The resultant image is, therefore, a framed section taken out of a much larger situation. This is a reductive process. In the pre-photographic approach, however, the starting point is a ‘blank canvas’ or, in Gütschow’s case, an empty file. It is upon this blank canvas or empty file that Gütschow then assembles and constructs entire landscapes, much like a painter does. This is an additive process. However, by using a pre-photographic approach to construct her landscapes, these landscapes become, like paintings, isolated constructions. Although pointing to the real, they have no real-world equivalents: they are simulacra. That is, Gütschow’s landscapes occupy an in-between space, where on the one hand they testify to existence – the photographic surface seems to attest to that – and on the other hand, they are fictions, because their landscapes have been constructed (Gebbers, 2002: 3).

While the pre-photographic approach resonates with painting strategies, Gütschow asserts that her production process “goes against what painting has to offer” (Gebbers, 2002: 2). Again, this is important because of S’ close relationship with LS. This departure from painting can be discerned through her use of “distancing strategies” in the production of her images (Ibid). These begin with the initial capture of her images, where she states that the “mechanical aspect of the camera creates an initial distance to things” and end with the outputting of her files, where she utilises a computer to transform her “handmade photography into a commercial tool” so as to maintain this distance” (Gütschow quoted in Gebbers, 2002: 3).

In a similar vein, Gütschow’s use of photomontage can also be regarded a distancing strategy. This is because her photomontages occupy an in-between or liminal space, constructed as they are from elements of images that are mixed together and disconnected. As Scott (1995: 117) states, the world no longer faces the viewer in a straightforward fashion, “the world no longer has a face”, rather it is “decomposed” into different fragments, each with its own truth. Thus, Gütschow’s photomontages, as opposed to the traditional ‘cut and paste’, hands-on approach of photomontage, Gütschow further expands this distance.

Classical photomontage of the 1920s and 1930s, as practiced by artists such as John Heartfield and John Heartfield, juxtaposed images in a manner such that the viewer was forced to view them in a certain way. Gütschow’s photomontages, on the other hand, are not arranged in a similar manner. Instead, her approach is more akin to a painter’s, where each element is arranged in a way that is pleasing to the eye. This is in contrast to the “cut and paste” approach of photomontage, where each element is arranged in a way that is pleasing to the eye. This is in contrast to the “cut and paste” approach of photomontage, where each element is arranged in a way that is pleasing to the eye.
level of reception, which is possible due to the perfect montage. And then there is a level of reception where you [the viewer] have a prior knowledge of the image fragments, and the montage thus dissolves.

In other words, while S (or even LS) appears at first glance to have been ‘captured’ from reality, it is possible to shatter this illusion with knowledge of the image fragments (or structures) used in their construction. This holds true in S58a, where Gütschow uses her own images of a familiar structure – again, the Local Newspaper Building in Sarajevo – to construct the photomontage, or even in S58b, where she uses media images taken of the First Iraq War. It is by having a prior knowledge of these image fragments, or the ability to recognise that the viewer is equipped to dissolve what the artist terms ‘the perfect montage’. However, I would argue that such images or structures may not be recognizable to many of her viewers, which then makes this dissolution of ‘the perfect montage’ possible to some and not to others.

Instead, I maintain that there is a third level of reception in her works. This occurs when the viewer grasps the ‘unlikeliness’ of the overall scene or figuration and recognises its artifice, as in S55 (2005) (Figure 85). Likewise, the subtle errors in the image’s inner-articulation, such as the illogical arrangement of buildings and the conflicting use of light, shadow, and perspective as seen in S55 (2005) (Figure 97) also serves to dissolve ‘the perfect montage’.

While Gütschow constructs her landscapes to make them appear as if captured from reality, the fact that she inserts visual clues to their construction hints at a desire to shatter this illusion. This desire evokes the estrangement or distancing effect used by twentieth-century German playwright Bertolt Brecht in his epic theatre. According to Brecht (quoted in Brooker, 1994: 193), “Epic theatre involved stripping the event of its self-evident, familiar, obvious quality and creating a sense of astonishment and curiosity about it.” One of the techniques he used to achieve this was to address his audience directly during a production. This address was intended to force the viewer out of his or her ‘contemplative passivity’; that is, the state in which the viewer passively accepts visual reality as truth, and therefore does not contemplate or question it. Instead, the viewer is made ‘active’, no longer receiving information passively but instead actively involved, even if unconsciously, in making sense of what they see or receive. Gütschow, in a similar vein, uses her ‘disillusionment strategies’ to disrupt the contemplative passivity of her viewer, instead encouraging an active confrontation with the assertions contained within the photomontage. This need to confront and to question assertions on the part of her viewer – in her images and in all images – is an important aspect of Gütschow’s oeuvre, in that her modus operandi is to probe pictorial and photographic representations of reality.

Similarly, as if responding to French philosopher Bruno Latour’s (2005: 29) proclamation that “if you stick to them, images are dangerous, blaspheous, idolatrours, but they are safe, innocent, indispensable if you learn how to jump from one image to the next”,120 Gütschow employs the method of photomontage. Photomontage is a process that, in essence, enables a jump from one image to the next due to its construction using multiple images. It allows Gütschow to incorporate multiple perspectives: the idea of a flood of images versus a single and definitive statement.121 However, even photomontage, in its application of multiple images and thus multiple perspectives, has a history of deception and control, particularly by way of its use as a propagandist tool in Russian Constructivism. This can be seen in the photomontage imaged in Figure 89. Here, Russian architect Vladimir Tatlin’s image appears to document the Tatlin Tower, or the Monument to the Third International. Of course, as is today well known, the tower was never built.

120 Throughout history, images have been used as tools of deception and control. Plato, writing in Rep Publica (Republic) (c. 380 BC), regarded images as “indispensably deceptive” (Plato quoted in Thomas, 2014). For further reading see Plato’s Republic (London: Oxford Paperback, 1998).
121 According to Foucault (1999: 29), the photomontage can be used as a kind of “photo-slide-projection-painting”. In Photogenic Painting: Gerard Fromanger, Foucault describes Fromanger’s method as “a gradual reverting of the original image, which then turns into a kind of ‘image-machine’ that constantly generates other images”. To that effect, the finished picture can be regarded as a passage or a transit zone, where other images pass on by. For further reading see G. Deloze and M. Foucault’s Photogenic Painting: Gerard Fromanger (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1999).
Where Gütschow states that the constructed landscapes of S ‘clearly reference documentary photography, but at the same time contradict it with their photographic fictions’ (in Janser, Seelig & Stahel, 2013: 157), it is difficult to ascertain what Gütschow means by ‘documentary photography’, as it is, in itself, a broad category. That is to say, there is no precise definition or meaning of the term ‘documentary photography’, since it is really an umbrella term for a variety of camerawork. However, if one were to look at particular examples of images, such as Shor or Shor II, II, it is possible that she may be referring to documentary photography in the sense of ‘a type of sharp-focus photography that captures a moment of reality in order to convey a meaningful message about what is happening in the world’ (Encyclopaedia of Photographic Art, n.d.). Unlike photojournalism – which concentrates on breaking news events – or ‘street photography’ – dedicated to interesting moments of everyday life – documentary photography in this fashion typically focuses on an ongoing issue or story, relayed through a series of photographs (Ibid).

Thus, where S focuses on an ongoing issue as told through a series of photographs (here, the ‘legacy of high Modernism’ or the high Modernist structures and architectures that continue to ‘exist’ in a ‘Junkspace’ long after high Modernism ended), it is possible that Gütschow may be referring to this particular form of documentary photography, if not ironically. Here, the black and white analogue images of S with their light grain arguably imitate the style of those black and white photographs typically associated with documentary photography, such as the works of famous ‘documentary’ photographers like Walker Evans (1903–1975) and Dorothea Lange (1895–1965), amongst others.

However, while it is possible that Gütschow references documentary photography in the aforementioned sense, there is also the possibility that she may be referring to the ‘photograph as document’, if not both. I say this because Gütschow, in an interview with Maren Lübkle-Tidow, also discusses the influence of the New Topographics movement and its later exhibition on the creation of S (2007: 39). Here, Gütschow mentions, in particular, the influence of German artists Bernd and Hilla Becher, along with Lewis Baltz, Stephen Shore, and Robert Adams – artists and photographers who by no means produce documentary photography but rather photographs as document (Ibid.).[12] Baltz’s influence can be seen in Gütschow’s strict use of formalism and in the tightness of her cropping (see Figure 93), whereas her compositions can be attributed to those of Shore. Likewise, the occasional uprooted figures of Adams’ pictures can be discerned in the placeless and peripatetic figures present throughout S.

However, the influence of the Bechers’ direct and ‘objective’ method of photographing structures is perhaps most obvious in (2005). Although it is argued that the Bechers’ works are art, I have grouped them into the category of ‘photographer as document’ alongside the New Topographies photographers, as the Bechers chose to identify their works as documents and not as art (see Chapter 2).

While the influence of the Bechers is readily apparent in Gütschow’s S series, there is nevertheless a vital distinction between their bodies of work. Where the Bechers stress their images’ authenticity by applying a strict objective approach to their documentation, Gütschow’s images are completely constructed. Instead, what Gütschow does is she imitates the formal (and technical) ‘languages’ used by the Bechers, including their 4x5 large format cameras, wide-angle lenses with perspectival control, and a sharp and even focus; conventions that were, once again, used in commercial architectural photography and adopted (somewhat ironically) by the Bechers and New Topographics in the creation of their ‘objective’ images.

12. Although it is argued that the Bechers’ works are art, I have grouped them into the category of ‘photographer as document’ alongside the New Topographies photographers, as the Bechers chose to identify their works as documents and not as art (see Chapter 2).
makes the claim that all images are, to varying degrees, subjective constructs, and therefore have the capacity to deceive. Indeed, because the photographer always selects, edits, and otherwise changes the world that exists before his or her lens, no photograph – analogue or digital – can be said to represent the complete and objective truth of its subjects or objects. Gütschow, in an interview for Strazzina (2009) makes a similar claim:

I am interested in working on the difference between reality and representation. What we see in a photograph is very similar to what was in front of the camera’s lens, but there is always an enormous difference, even if it escapes our attention. I want to bring this difference to light.

Additionally, according to Gütschow, photography is not the so-called ‘real’ into her constructed landscapes (the ‘virtual’). As in S#10, this approach is akin to the postmodern strategy of parafiction. As mentioned in Chapter 3, parafiction is the ‘creation of fictions that read as fact by way of the insertion of the virtual into the actual or the actual into the virtual’ (Lambert-Beatty, 2005: 63). An image like S#10, which appears at first glance to be completely real, can thus be considered a successful parafiction in that it is post-simulacral. It is as real as – or even more real than – the real, and without a real-world equivalent.

Thus, the function of the S series is twofold. In the first instance, Gütschow constructs visually austere and anti-human architectural landscapes using high Modernist structures and architectures to critique the high Modernist states’ failed social ideal(is) in general and their (often) totalitarian impurities in particular. In the second instance, Gütschow directly probes photographic representations of reality by applying the formal (and technical) ‘languages’ used in various forms of documentary photography, including the photograph as document. In the construction of her images – and then subverts them so as to reveal their underlying construction (and thus the capacity of all images to deceive) – this is in regard to the images in S ‘reference documentary photography, but at the same time contradict it with their photographic fictions’ (Jansen, Seelig & Stahel, 2001: 175).

However, according to Egan (2007: 41), Gütschow’s reference to documentary photography can also refer to the so-called ‘documentation’ of Modernist structures and architectures in architectural photography of the 1950s and 1960s. Here, Gütschow’s use of black and white large format analogue as her medium of choice, in addition to her constructions of high Modernist structures and architectures, holds immediate associations to architectural photography and its often elaborate constructions4, and most notably to the works of Julius Shulman and Ezra Stoller (see Figure 93). This association has its own significance in that S, like LS, imitates the style or character of that which it intends to critique (that is, high Modernism, and perhaps architectural photography). In this regard, architectural photography is, like the Classical and Romantic landscape paintings critiqued in LS, an artificial and highly-organised construct, with S using its conventions and established vocabularies as tools to critique its ‘truth’ value.

The extent to which Gütschow is influenced by, or rather references, the style or character of other works through pastiche is an important aspect of S. This is more to do with the artist’s position as a postmodernist commenting on the ‘truth’ value or ‘objectivity’ of modernism – or rather undermining the modernist concepts of authenticity and originality – than genuine affect (Gebbers, 2002: 6). Since the advent of postmodernism, it was understood that photographic images stopped referring to ‘reality’ and instead alluded to other images. As postmodern semiotician Umberto Eco reminds us of continuities in ‘The Island of the Day Before’ (1995), ‘there is nothing new under the sun’ (Eccl., xi: 39, New International Version). This idea that no image exists in complete independence of other images is important, as the manner in which Gütschow creates a picture depends largely on the pre-existing images or sources of the subject, whether it be her own images or images taken from the media (Gebbers, 2002: 6). She states,

I imagine that nowadays there is virtually nothing that hasn’t already been photographed. My perception of the world is therefore shaped by other people’s images of this same world. It therefore follows – at least since postmodernism – that it makes more sense to make images about images than about the world (Gütschow quoted in Gebbers, 2002: 6).

In this regard, the application of intertextuality as a postmodern strategy forms an integral part of how one reads S. Intertextuality is the ‘shaping of a text’s meaning by another text, often through allusion, quotation, calque, plagiarism, translation, pastiche, and parody’ (Genette & Maclean, 1992: 66). Although intertextuality is a literary device that creates an ‘interrelationship between texts’ and generates related understanding in separate works, it is often used in non-written ‘texts’, such as performances, photography, and other digital media. These references are made to influence the reader (or viewer), and add layers of depth to a text (or image) based on the readers’ prior knowledge and understanding. Intertextuality does not require citation or referencing, which is perhaps why Gütschow often does not explicitly state the original sources or references used in many of her images. However, in borrowing from other sources, Gütschow essentially invites the viewer to compare his or her understanding of such images both inside and outside of S (as occurs in LS). Through intertextuality, the viewer is made to wonder why Gütschow chose these particular sources, how they integrate into her body of work, and to what effect they are re-imagined. Thus, it can be said that intertextuality is used as a strategy in S to essentially destabilise an understanding of such images, and in reframing them, forces the viewer to reflexively re-read and reconsider his or her perception.

Besides those strategies employed in Gütschow’s work, such as simulacra, pastiche, hyperbole, parafiction, and intertextuality, amongst others, S’s also inherently postmodern both temporally and in intent. It is temporally postmodern in that the series exists within a post-state of modernism; that is, a state in which modernism has already run its course and its supposed utopias have already failed and now exist as nothing more than vivid illustrations of their own failure. In intent, the work is postmodern in that Gütschow tends to present an ‘absolute’ view of high Modernism as fundamentally flawed, a view which parallels the ideas of many other postmodernists working within the field of architecture (see Bloomer [1993], Koolhaas [2002], and Stoner [2011]). Taken further, it could even be proposed that this ‘absolute’ view of modernism is a conscious, complete and, indeed, the equally absolutist views of Scott (1999), Jencks (1977), and Glazer (2007). Thus, where Gütschow states that ‘[her] perception of the world is shaped by other people’s images of this same world’ (Gütschow in Gebbers, 2002: 6), it is not unlikely that this perception is also shaped by other people’s ideas.

While on the subject of existing temporally within a post-state of modernism, or rather a state in which its so-called utopias have already failed, it seems only appropriate that I elaborate on the notion of utopia-turned-dystopia mentioned previously. Gütschow, speaking on the topic of utopia, describes the very idea of a working utopia as “unattainable” and “doomed to failure” (quoted in von Amelunxen, 2006). This view is not unlike the definition of utopia, which states that utopia, like Arcadia, is by its very nature “impossibly ideal” (Onions, 1981: 2444, my italics).12 However, according to Gütschow, her dismissal of the possibility of a successful and lasting utopia comes from her own assessment of its model, as being “fundamentally static, particularly in its disregard for the eventual continuation of things” (quoted in von Amelunxen, 2006). This idea that utopia can be viewed as a procession within which reached “everything afterwards

12 Interestingly, the word utopia literally means ‘no place’ (Egan et al, 2007: 58)
that these images were not produced with any specific narrative in mind, but were rather selected and rearranged post-production so as to create a narrative. That is, in reading S as a linear narrative, one is able to trace a gradual disintegration of order into dis-order. An example of this linear progression is apparent in the following images. Here, S#2 (2005) (Figure 94) is the first image in the series, and S#19 (2004) is located approximately three-quarters of the way into the series at its climax. However, before going on to discuss these images, it is important to briefly mention that the sequencing of images in Beate Gütschow: LS/S is not in numerical order. This is because Gütschow numbers her images in the order that she produced them. For example, S#2 was produced in 2004, S#24 was produced in 2007, and S#42 was produced in 2009. This particular method of titling the images, where S is an abbreviation for ‘Stadt’ and # denotes a number, is significant in that it reinforces her distance from the work as well as increases its ambiguity. Furthermore, one can reason from the sequencing of the images in Beate Gütschow: LS/S that these images were not produced with any specific narrative in mind, but were rather selected and rearranged post-production so as to create a narrative.

As established earlier, if architecture, in Ruskin’s words functions as “an expression of society” (quoted in Rosenburg, 1998: 186), then, in furthering this premise, the structures and architectures built by societies dominated by a high Modernist ideology, and in and of themselves, express the ethos characteristic of that same ideology. Those high Modernist structures and architectures are then able to function as a means to deconstruct and critique society and its ideal(s). Thus, in Gütschow’s S series, where high Modernist structures and architectures dominate its subject matter, an in-depth investigation into these forms becomes crucial to the work’s unpacking. In this section I attempt to deconstruct meaning in the images S#9, S#9, S#24 through an investigation of the architectural forms contained within their frames.

Analysing Structures, Architectures, and Urban Planning in S

While the architectural landscapes of S were constructed using image fragments of high Modernist structures and architectures taken from around the world, these structures and architectures also point to major architectural styles that developed in the twentieth century, such as the International Style and its descendant, Brutalism. Both architectural movements signify decisive moments within the evolution of high Modernism. That is, the International Style originated in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the formative decades of not only modern architecture in general, but the decades in which the high Modernist movement and ideology was first gaining credence and developing its philosophy. (Tournikiots, 1999: 53). The Brutalist style, on the other hand, flourished from the early 1950s to the mid-1970s in Western Europe and North America (Banham, 1966: 16), and from the mid-1960s to the early 1990s in the former Eastern and Soviet Bloc, a period which corresponds almost exactly with high Modernism’s apex (that is, between 1950 and 1990) (Mallgrave, 2005: 193).12 Gütschow’s inquiry into high Modernist structures and architectures may also be attributed to the elitist characteristics of high Modernism, mentioned in Chapter 1, which significantly diverged from more mainstream modernism (Scott, 1999: 46). In this view, Gütschow’s placement of image fragments of actual high Modernist structures and architectures (and sometimes entire images) in conditions that augment their austere, anti-human natures (again, through exaggeration and overstatement) may be said to criticise this elitism and its tendency towards often-misanthropic social and utopian endeavours. These endeavours might include mass housing developments, urban central planning, attempts at secession or even just the general alienation of structures and images.

12 The sequential format of the work as a book largely influences this reading.

13 The irrepressible urge of critics to classify contemporary movements which are still in flux, putting each neatly in a coffin with a style label on it, has increased the widespread confusion in understanding the dynamic forces of the new movement in architecture and urban planning. However, for the purposes of comprehension, I have applied more commonly used and accessible characteristics to the various groupings of architectures mentioned in this document.

14 Brutalism only really became the style of choice for the former Eastern and Soviet Bloc between the mid-1960s and early 1990s. Although scholars generally accept the mid-1960s as the end of modernism, widespread changes in architectural practice were often slow to respond, taking as many as fifteen to twenty years to develop. “The architectural style deemed most emblematic of an architectural ‘line’” (U.S. General Services Administration, 2008: 15).
architectures – endeavours that elucidate high Modernism’s attempt to create a perfect social order as decreed under the pretext of its ability to “improve the human condition” (Ibid, 5).

Likewise, there is an interesting parallel between the high Modernist disregard for historical and geographical contexts in the creation of a tabula rasa and Gütschow’s own process of eliminating the historical and geographical contexts of her images to construct a similarly blank slate (von Amelunxen, 2006). This parallel extends to Gütschow’s syntheses of diverse high Modernist structures and architectures. By juxtaposing these to make them appear as if they existed side by side in the same environment, Gütschow imitates, somewhat disconcertingly, the threat of homogeneity posed by the high Modernist (architectural) movement in its efforts towards global standardisation. Similarly, in certain images, such as S#13 (2005), S#14 (2005), and S#16 (2006), same images of architectural elements borrowed from a single structure are applied to different architectural landscapes (see Figure 95).

Although it is understood from previous discussions that Gütschow imitates many of the styles and conventions used by her subjects for the purposes of subversion and critique, there is also the case in which the artist, herself, imitates the subject of her criticism. In the process of designing and constructing such austere and anti-human architectural landscapes, Gütschow perhaps assumes the very same position as those autocrats, technocrats, and high Modernist “designers of the modern world” that she seeks to undermine (Bauman, 1989: 23). However, while it is unclear whether Gütschow intentionally or unintentionally imitates these high Modernist ‘elites’ in her role as artist, such mimicry does help to activate the work and give to it a layer of dynamic realism.

In the following section, I will discuss the images S#19 and S#24 to expose the layers of Gütschow’s critique. Each image opens itself up to various interpretations, some straightforward and others perhaps less obvious. Likewise, there is variation in the range of social ideal(s) under critique. This nevertheless points to the idea that with S#19 Gütschow images high Modernist structures and architectures to critique failed social ideal(s) in general, and their often totalitarian impetuses in particular. This also harks back to the idea that Gütschow constructs her images first and then arranges them so as to create a more definitive narrative. In other words, while her images are in no way consistent in their critique of any particular social ideal(s), they do, as a group or series, evoke a general antipathy towards high Modernism and its often totalitarian drive(s). Likewise, the quest for order and control, core tenets of high Modernism, recur alongside her structures. These motifs are often manifested in the visible sedentarisation and surveillance of people.

In S#19, one sees a cantilevered building perched on the edge of what appears to be an eroded rock embankment. The building is made up of a horizontal concrete slab supported by a network of columns. On the terrace outside the structure sits a mound of what appears to be sand and building rubble. Extending down from the terrace to the base of the picture plane, along the forward-facing side of the image, is a wall of reinforced concrete. This wall envelops the embankment and ‘boxes’ it in, co-opting the natural form into the structure. Tiled onto the wall are flat square plates of concrete. These plates function as ornamentation. At the base of the wall are three rectangular openings, each in shadow. These could be simple openings or they could be windows without panes. In the background, the structure appears to extend over the opposite side of the embankment. Like the building in S#24, the structure is ‘built’ in its entirety using reinforced concrete.

The right half of the image is divided into foreground, middle ground, and background. In the foreground, there appears to be a shallow aqueduct, cordoned off by a concrete wall. On the wall, there is evidence of structural dampness. In the middle ground, there is a field of mown grass. The field appears to lie on top of the concrete slab and perhaps disguises what may be an underground reservoir. Positioned along the perimter of the field are high-mast lights. In the background, there seems to be a city’s coastline. A few skyscrapers are scattered here and there. The sky is overcast with faint stratus clouds forming around the image’s centre. There are no visible figures.

Like S#24, which follows, there is no overt signification in the image, and any meaning or interpretation derived from it lies in connections imposed on different elements present in the composition. For example, if the viewer did not have any existing knowledge of the work, or access to this information (in the form of an exhibition label or catalogue), the image would most likely be read at face value. However, in this analysis, I interpret the image based on my knowledge of the subject and its content, as well as on the artist’s personal notes attained from her gallerist in Munich. This information would obviously not be available to the general viewer, and as such, this interpretation perhaps deviates from a more literal reading.

According to Gütschow’s notes, the structure in S#19 is intended as a “reinterpretation” of the Barcelona Pavilion of 1929 (Figure 97) (Barbara Gross Gallery, personal communication 2015, September 3). One of the earliest high Modernist structures, the Barcelona Pavilion,
As a physical representation of its social idea(l)s, the design of Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion tendencies in Spain, especially rationalism, as seen in one in 1888. The significance of the exposition generally lies intended to last for decades rather than months. quick, the quality of the materials used in its blurred inside and outside. Although built the underside of the roof and breezes wafting illusions enhanced by sunlight and moonlight, its gleaming, offset walls created subtle spatial essence, epitomised modernism.

The Barcelona Pavilion was thus itself intended as the exhibit, embodying in architectural form the Republic's idea(l)s for freedom and progress by way of its free form and floating roof (Newton, 2005: 66). Even though it was built only for the duration of the exposition and subsequently dismantled at its close in January 1930, the pavilion remains one of the most important, influential buildings in the history of modern, or rather high Modern, architecture (Ibid, 63) (Zimmerman, 2006: 38).

Despite Weimar Germany’s optimistic vision for its future, it would in a matter of years cease to exist. In 1933, Chancellor Adolf Hitler dissolved the Republic, ushering in the new era of the Third Reich (Shier, 1960: 135). Taking into consideration this failure, the pavilion, whilst having represented Weimar Germany’s idea(l)s towards freedom and progress at the time of its inauguration, is also able to communicate the failure of those very same idea(l)s. In this vein, the Barcelona Pavilion not only expresses the failure of Weimar’s values and aspirations, but also speaks of, perhaps less directly, the failure of democracy as a social idea(l), with the Weimar Republic (a once-proud democracy) giving way to the Third Reich (a racist and totalitarian regime).

While there are many noticeable similarities between the Barcelona Pavilion and its Parisian counterpart, Mario Botta’s Swiss Pavilion, there are various differences in their structure and materials. A reinterpretation of a single structure is not a replica. As Mies van der Rohe himself stated: “To reinterpret is not to repeat. Both structures are essentially flat, single-storey forms composed of dramatically cantilevered roofs supported by vertical columns, but they differ in their architectural materials and in the manner in which those building materials impact on or affect how each structure is understood. Where the transitive verb ‘reinterpret’ implies giving a new or different interpretation to something, the significance of Mies’s structure thus lies in how it evokes, yet differs from, the original pavilion.

With the Barcelona Pavilion, the materials used in its construction are what give it its true architectural essence, as well as the experiential qualities that the pavilion embodies. These materials, which, again, include steel, plate glass, reinforced concrete, and four different types of marble (that is, Roman travertine, green Alpine marble, ancient green marble from Greece, and golden marble from the Atlas Mountains) are each intended to mesh the manmade and the natural (Kroll, 2011). The use of marble, in particular, plays a major role in grounding the structure back into the natural. This grounding is perhaps most evident in the generous use of Roman travertine that wraps around the plinth on which the structure stands (see Figure 98). This travertine, when exposed to the sun, is illuminated almost as a secondary light source and washes light over the space. Its inherent luminous qualities, alongside with the architect's seamless application of plate glass (a material that would become synonymous with modern architecture), are what give the structure its 'free form' or lack of spatial demarcation, blurring inside and outside, and transforming the pavilion into one continuous volume rather than two separate entities.

With Stieglitz’s structure, on the other hand, the building materials, or rather material (reinforced concrete) used in its construction, does quite the opposite. Here, the roughly hewn textures of the reinforced concrete absorb light rather than reflect it. The oppressive heaviness of its Brutalist forms – its structural elements were taken from a Brutalist supermarket in Chicago (Barbara Gross Gallery, personal communication 2015, September 3) – and its lack of large spaces for windows prevents light from entering the structure, leaving the interior in darkness. This reinforces rather than dissolves the structure’s demarcation between inside and outside. Likewise, the impression of weight created by the reinforced concrete extends into the structure’s floating roof, which, rather than appearing to float, seems to weigh down onto the columns. This again contrasts with the Barcelona Pavilion whose roof, described by Andrew Kroll (2001) as having an “appearance of weightlessness that fluctuates between enclosure and canopy”, appears to ease gently onto its slender cruciform columns.

Further still, while the Barcelona Pavilion connects the manmade and the natural, Stieglitz’s structure is completely divorced from nature. The effects of concrete, rebar, or rod, There are no plants in sight save for the grass on the field, and any natural elements present in the image are ordered and controlled. Similarly, the human figure is completely absent. This, again, reinforces previous notions of sedentarisation, or of the physical order and control of its populace.

Thus, where Gutschow reinterprets the Barcelona Pavilion in Stieglitz, this reinterpretation is not a simple reversion to the Copenhagen Pavilion (previously a symbol of freedom and democracy) reimagined or reconfigured as a totalitarian manifestation of its former self. This reading of the new structure as totalitarian is not only based on the associations made
between its Brutalist forms (which establishes as the formal language of totalitarianism) and its strategic location (which might suggest its function as an observation deck), but also through other visual clues, such as the visible order and control of nature (including human nature) and the presence of high-mast lights, also an important feature of totalitarianism.

Although high-mast lights are generally used to illuminate large areas such as transportation terminals, airports, high-speed interchanges, or sports grounds, amongst other things, they are perhaps most often associated with prisons and surveillance. High-mast lighting was also a popular choice associated with prisons and surveillance. While this interpretation tends to rely on the viewer having an existing knowledge of the image and its content, it is however possible for the viewer, even with only the slightest knowledge or interest in architecture, to make some visual connection between its Brutalist forms (which establishes as the formal language of totalitarianism) and its strategic location (which might suggest its function as an observation deck), but also through other visual clues, such as the visible order and control of nature (including human nature) and the presence of high-mast lights, also an important feature of totalitarianism.

Figure 101. Julius Shulman, Case Study House #22 by Pierre Koenig, Los Angeles, CA (1960) above, and Stig by Pierre Koenig, Los Angeles, CA (1960) below.

In view of Gütchow’s residency at the Niton Foundation, Johannesburg, in the mid-1990s, it is possible that Gütchow was already aware of these connotations when she constructed the image (Barbara Gross Gallery, personal communication 2015, September 7).

Given the photographs’ iconic status (see Chapter 2), it is highly likely that Gütchow was influenced by the images when she placed her structure on the edge of an embankment.
In S#24 (Figure 103), a feeling of desolation pervades. In this portrait format black and white image, a single, distinct structure stands in an empty space located on the outskirts of the city. This building, centrally placed and ‘photographed’ from a slightly elevated viewpoint, is undoubtedly the focal point of the image. It stands tall and monolithic against the flat concrete ground and empty sky that surrounds it. In front of the structure are two figures, both male. These two figures appear to be in conversation. The first stands with his back to the viewer and is dressed in black. The second stands facing the viewer and wears a white shirt and dark trousers. His face is obscured by the figure in front of him. In the distant background, there is what appears to be a residential space, which consists of houses and apartment blocks nestled amongst trees. This residential space lies low in the distance and forms a horizontal band. In the immediate foreground, an empty concrete pot sits on the bare and cracked ground. Fragments of litter and sheets of what appear to be board or metal are scattered around it. This ground, which looks like an airport runway, has been covered with concrete. It is devoid of any sense of life and energy. Based on the visible cracks in the foreground, it appears to be in a state of disintegration. Likewise, the sky, which occupies nearly three-quarters of the picture plane, is clear and devoid of any distractions.

The structure itself consists of five storeys. At ground level there is what appears to be an entrance into the building at left. On this floor, there are two visible windows, one bricked up and the other blacked out. Two security cameras face opposite sides of the floor. A staircase runs up the left-hand side of the structure from the second to fourth floor. It has no railings. There are also no visible windows. On the top floor, that is, the fifth storey, there appears to be an observation deck. This viewing deck extends out of the top right-hand corner of the structure and contains what appear to be the only functioning windows in the building. The structure is mainly ‘built’ of reinforced concrete and shows signs of dilapidation. Aside from the bricked up and blacked out windows, the building also has damp and deep cracks on its façade.

This structure, like all Gütschow’s structures, is a digital photomontage made from image fragments of high Modernist structures and architectures taken from around the world. S#24 is assembled using (images of) building fragments taken from the Czech embassy building in former East Berlin, staircases from Sarajevo, a landscape from Los Angeles, and flower pots from Prague (Barbara Gross Gallery, personal communication 2015, August 24). As a composite or hybrid form, the created structure does not point to any one particular type of building, be it residential or commercial, but instead comprises elements from many different types. On the one hand, the structure could pass for an ordinary apartment block, yet on the other hand, the observation deck suggests that it may be a control tower of sorts. This leads to two different interpretations of the image.

While there is no set meaning in the image, nor was the structure intended to refer to any one particular thing, a more literal interpretation could imply that the image contains a scene of what may be an abandoned airport located on the outskirts of the city. The building itself could be a control tower which has since fallen into disrepair and possibly even been claimed as a form of shelter, as the presence of the two figures attests to the fact that the structure is not completely abandoned. However, while this reading of the image does not point to any particular failing of modernism or high Modernism per se, it does speak of a general failure. The image stands as a literal representation of a disintegrating modernism; a modern structure has been rendered obsolete and now exists as “nothing more than a form of shelter” (Gütschow quoted in von Amelunxen, 2006). It is essentially, returning to Koolhaas, a “junkspace” (2002: 175). Likewise, the observation deck, in conjunction with the two security cameras located at the structure’s base, brings the image back to notions of surveillance and control, and to Gütschow’s central claim that modernism “also stands for totalitarianism, which was also a part of modernism — giving orders and surveilling” (Gütschow quoted in von Amelunxen, 2006). This is corroborated by the position of the two figures, who stand outside the line of sight of either security cameras or observation deck as if trying to avoid being seen.

In the second interpretation, the building stands as a single apartment block located in what appears to be the city’s margin. This particular type of structure and its peripheral location might suggest a reference to the often cheap and mass-produced housing developments implemented under high Modernism that were built at the city’s periphery (as with...
the Pruitt-Igoe housing project discussed in Chapter 1. This was usually done to create a buffer zone (another tabula rasa) between the poorer classes and the wealthier residents who (mostly) resided nearer the city centre.

Likewise, the structure’s deterioration, visible in the cracks in the walls, structural dampness, and boarded windows, points to the lack of maintenance generally afforded to these types of projects. The same could be said for the empty pots, which emphasise the near non-existent plant life. Furthermore, the absence of railings on the staircase makes reference to the lack of safety regulations implemented in many of these projects, which often resulted in so-called ‘danger zones’ (as with the broken elevators at Pruitt-Igoe or even the compromised balconies at Mouchotte’s rooftop [Barnett, 2013]). The boarded windows also speak of the shortage of windows in many of these structures (like Unite d’habitation or even the African men’s hostel), which were, once again, the result of cost-cutting and a so-called ‘careful determining’ of the amount of air, heat, and light people need as a matter of public health (Scott, 1999: 110). In a similar vein, the presence of the two figures conversing outside the structure could also reference the lack of facilities available for social networking in many of these developments.

Thus, the structure arguably functions as a particular representation of a much larger issue. It is essentially synecdoche for a host of other structures. The two anonymous figures, likewise, can be said to function as particular representatives of a much larger group of people. However, by limiting her depiction to a single structure and to a single pair of figures, Gütschow once again hyperbolises the perceived isolation and hostility experienced by residents of such developments.

These visual clues hint at a failure of top-down or hierarchical policies and rational simplifications implemented by high Modernist policy-makers and bureaucrats in the design and construction of public housing. The overreliance on reinforced concrete (after Le Corbusier),134 which not only permeates the structure but also extends into the physical landscape, speaks (by way of exaggeration) of the often unrestrained freedoms granted to technocrats and other proponents of the movement. However, while the first interpretation of the image requires little knowledge of high Modernism and its known failures (particularly in the built environment) and is based off the general feeling of emptiness and disintegration communicated in the image, this second interpretation relies more on the viewer having an existing knowledge of the subject.

Where this dissertation investigates the critical representation of high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning in specific works by contemporary artists and photographers, I have, in this chapter, conducted in-depth research into Beate Gütschow’s S with a view to understanding how she uses high Modernist structures and architectures to point to the failures of high Modernism.

While Gütschow does produce photographic representations of reality in S, particularly through her use of construction as well as through certain postmodern strategies including pastiche and intertextuality, it is, however, in her imaging of high Modernist structures and architectures that her critique of the high Modernist states’ failed ideal(1)s lies. As established, Gütschow constructs her architectural landscapes using image fragments of structures and architectures taken from around the world, although there is an inclination towards the imaging of structures and architectures from the former Eastern and Soviet Bloc. These are favoured because they were built under a totalitarian administration, and as such, their architectural languages continue to express the spirit of that ideology. Given Gütschow’s interest in a modernism that also stands for totalitarianism – here, high Modernism – it thus makes sense that she would use an architectural language that communicates notions of totalitarianism in order to communicate high Modernism’s equally totalitarian impetus through its structures and architectures. That is to say, in S, Gütschow does not concern herself with any particular form of totalitarianism that may have been practised in these blocs, or even outside, but rather borrows their architectural languages in order to critique the totalitarianism of high Modernism in general. Likewise, where Gütschow uses structures and architectures with a similar formal language, this is done to illustrate just how opposing ideologies often use similarly styled structures and architectures to communicate their particular social ideal(1)s and contexts, as well as express how widespread the high Modernist architectural movement indeed was in implementing its efforts towards global standardisation. This, however, differs from both Gursky’s and Goldblatt’s works, where specific structures and architectures were utilised in order to enact a specific critique of high Modernism and its failed social ideal(1)s, although such a critique could also be regarded as synecdochic of much larger or more general issues.

While the high Modernist structures and architectures used in S are intended to critique the failure of the high Modernist states’ social ideal(1)s in general, and their often totalitarian impulses in particular, it has been established that Gütschow also intervenes on another level. Gütschow, a postmodernist, necessarily enacts a postmodern critique of modernism, exaggerating and overstating much of the negative issues associated with high Modernism. For example, the high Modernist structures and architectures used, while arguably austere on their own, are also placed into conditions and contexts that further augment their ascetic natures. Here, Gütschow speaks of the general severity of these architectures by exaggerating the materials used in their construction, as well as their lack of maintenance, issues of isolation, safety hazards, and forced conformity. Furthermore, Gütschow comments on the aspect of totalitarianism in high Modernism through visible instances of surveillance and control, and through sedentarisation.

Thus, where I have, in this chapter, sought to understand just how Gütschow images high Modernist structures and architectures to point to the failures of high Modernism, it is however, impossible, due to the diverse, complex methods and strategies used in S, to isolate Gütschow’s critique to any one particular method. Instead, it is a combination of the many different strategies and methods used in S that creates a feeling of antipathy towards high Modernism in general.

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134. Le Corbusier once referred to reinforced concrete as “my reliable, friendly concrete” (quoted in Dalymply, 2009).
Then, as this morning on the dock, again I saw, as if for the first time in my life, the impeccably straight streets, the glistening glass of the pavement, the divine parallelepipeds of the transparent dwellings, the square harmony of the grayish blue rows of Numbers. And it seemed to me that not past generations, but I myself, had won a victory over the old god and the old life.

—Yevgeny Zamyatin, We (1924)
Conclusion

In investigating how contemporary artists and photographers image high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning to critique the failure of high Modernism's social idea(1)s, I have focused on how these structures and architectures have been represented in four different contemporary photographic works by four different artists and photographers. By constraining my research in this way, I attempted to more closely explore the significance of the formal, aesthetic, and strategic decisions made by each artist and photographer. However, I would argue that there is also a need for a more inclusive study of contemporary, and especially 'critical', photographs of high Modernist structures and architectures.

In order to delve into these representations, I felt it necessary to first establish, in Chapter 1, what I meant by 'high Modernism' in regards to the formulation 'high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning' mobilised in my project aims. While I initially offered Malgrave's (2005) more architecture/design-centric definition, I went on to foreground Scott's (1999) more recent conception, as his attitude towards the subject appeared to have greater bearing on the contemporary works I had chosen. While Scott's work – Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed (1999) – is at times absolutist, I nevertheless found it useful as a framing device. The work captures, both expressively and articulately, the often authoritative and/or totalitarian impetus of high Modernism as movement and ideology. Developing on this understanding, I also provided an overview of high Modernism's contexts, characteristics, and applications, so as to suggest just how these structures and architectures differed from their more 'democratic' counterparts. For this, I included an outline of architecture's ability to communicate meaning specifically through form and sign, as the contemporary works that I discussed each utilised the signs and languages of architecture to communicate with – and to refer back to – high Modernism. Following this, I discussed Le Corbusier's Unite d'habitation housing projects (1947-1965) as an adaptation of his Ville Radieuse (1924), as well as Ville Radieuse's influence on other projects such as Minoru Yamasaki's Pruitt-Igoe (1954-1965) and Juscelino Kubitschek, Lucio Costa, and Oscar Niemeyer's Brasilia (1957-1960).

While these case studies worked to support my claim that much of high Modernism's social idea(1)s indeed failed, they also helped to set the tone for the document, resonating with the structures and architectures depicted in the contemporary works discussed. Likewise, such discussion not only helped illustrate the implementation of high Modernism in a global context, but it also revealed the variable scales of this implementation, from the single-standing housing structure to the fully-fledged high Modernist city. This became important in Chapters 3 and 4, where, for example, Gursky's Paris, Montparnasse focused specifically on a single-standing housing structure, whereas Gütschow's S focused on the high Modernist city in general. Through discussion of these projects I touched upon many of the issues responsible for their failures, such as excessive size and overcapacity, poor quality building materials, a lack of maintenance or safety regulations, forced conformity and isolation, sedentarisation, or even just aesthetic monotony.

Where Chapter 1 was dedicated to establishing the terrain for much of the following research, Chapter 2 established the precedents for the contemporary photography I had chosen. As the investigation of contemporary photography comprised the focus of the dissertation and underpinned its concerns with architecture's expression in fine art, I traced the history of photography's relationship with architecture, from the advent of the medium in the nineteenth century to the present. In providing such an overview, I located these contemporary works within a broader photographic trajectory, as well as elucidated many of the precedents that went on to inform and influence them. Of significance here was a discussion on the genre of architectural photography, as architectural photography not only influenced the visual and technical conventions of my chosen artists and photographers, but because a discussion of it brought to light the many discrepancies in photographic depictions of architecture
and architecture itself. Ironically, it was these discrepancies that indeed informed, yet contradicted, the critical impetus of the works I had chosen. Similarly, a discussion on the Becher and New Topographics helped set the precedent for many of the visual and technical conventions utilised in key works. I ended this chapter with a brief introduction to contemporary ‘cut and paste’, as I felt it relevant to evaluate ‘cut and paste’ works – and their methods, techniques, and concerns – in tandem with a discussion of my chosen works. This discussion continued through Chapters 3 and 4.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I tackled my research question less obliquely, examining how my chosen artists and photographers imaged high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning to critique the failure of high Modernism’s social idea(l)s. In Chapter 3, I discussed Andreas Gursky’s Paris, Montparnasse and Filip Dujardin’s Fictions – where both artists worked in the context of Europe—and David Goldblatt’s South Africa: The Structure of Things Then, rooted in South Africa. To begin, I acknowledged that these works were incredibly diverse in their aesthetics, methods, and strategies. That is, while Gursky and Dujardin employed manipulation techniques in the creation of their ‘artworks’, Goldblatt’s images remained straight and relatively un-retouched in their intended function as social documents. Their differences notwithstanding, each artist and photographer used images of high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning to critique the failure of the social project of high Modernism.

In a discussion of Gursky’s Paris, Montparnasse, I established that Gursky digitally manipulated his image by seamlessly merging two separate photographs of the same structure. This was done so as to exaggerate the proportions of the building as well as the repetitiveness of its design; a strategy used by the artist to critique the excesses of Mouchotte in particular, and of high Modernism’s large-scale developments in general. Dujardin, working in the legacy of Gursky’s earlier pieces, including Paris, Montparnasse, likewise employed digital manipulation in the production of Fictions. However, his technique involved using at least one hundred and fifty different image elements that he then montaged digitally. This strategy of reconfiguration, used in conjunction with exaggeration and hyperbole, manufactured new images simply because the situation in South Africa to which they referred was already so outrageous and absurd that the photographs did not need to be exaggerated or hyperbolised in order to get the message across.

While I had not intended to devote much time to Goldblatt’s South Africa: The Structure of Things Then, I established that Goldblatt critiques the failure of high Modernism and its social idea(l)s by exposing them. For Goldblatt, a lack of manipulation was important to his concept, as, unlike Gursky and Dujardin, he does not consider his works ‘art’, nor does he consider himself an artist. They are documents, he is a photographer. When I approached Goldblatt’s works, I therefore spoke about the content of his images more than I did the images themselves, as those images were merely intended as vehicles for transmitting particular messages. Likewise, I suggested that Goldblatt abstained from levelling judgement against the content of his images simply because the situation in South Africa to which they referred was already so outrageous and absurd that the photographs did not need to be exaggerated or hyperbolised in order to get the message across.

Finally, with Goldblatt’s South Africa: The Structure of Things Then, I established that Goldblatt critiques the failure of high Modernism’s ideas without digital manipulation.

As I mentioned in the chapter, much of my original research stemmed from interviews. I had conducted with both Gütowschow and her gallery, Barbara Gross, who is located in Munich. While Chapter 4 was dedicated to providing a comprehensive analysis of S, with a view to understanding how Gütowschow images high Modernist structures, architectures, and
urban planning to critique the failure of high Modernism’s social idea(les), I nevertheless began the chapter with a brief discussion of L/S. This I felt useful, as high Modernism was not only limited to a physical reordering of the social world, but also the natural. Again, this went back to Scott’s definition of high Modernism, wherein he described the movement and ideology as “a form of modernity, and more appropriately an ideology, characterised by an unflattering confidence in science and technology as a means to reorder the social and natural world” (1999: 4, author’s italics). Through my discussion of L/S, I set the precedent for a discussion of S, introducing the reader to the artist’s methods and concerns.

While a discussion of S proved highly complex at times, owing to the diverse methods and strategies used in its construction and the readings that arose from them, I nevertheless established that with S Gütschow reconfigures architectural landscapes – using a technique much like Dujardin’s – to critique the failure of the high Modernist states’ social idea(les) in general, and their often totalitarian impetuses in particular. Here, it was established that Gütschow constructed her architectural landscapes using image fragments of structures and architectures taken from around the world, although there was an inclination towards the imaging of structures and architectures taken from the former Eastern and Soviet Bloc. The reason for this was that these structures and architectures were built under a totalitarian administration, and as such, their architectural languages remained able to communicate the particular ideas and ideals associated with such a regime. This was important to understanding the work, as Gütschow’s interest lay in a modernism that also stood for totalitarianism (high Modernism).

Although the high Modernist structures and architectures imaged by Gütschow were able to communicate the often totalitarian social idea(les) responsible for their construction, it was also established that Gütschow intervened on another level. Using postmodern strategies such as exaggeration and overstatement, Gütschow augmented the general austerity of these structures and architectures, while exaggerating many of the negative issues associated with high Modernism’s architectural movement. Thus, when attempting to conclude the chapter by answering my research question, I found it difficult to attribute her critique to any one particular method or strategy. Instead, I concluded by stating that Gütschow in fact achieved much of her critique through the combination of different methods and strategies, which, when taken cumulatively, succeeded in creating a general feeling of antipathy towards high Modernism.

While much of this document and the contemporary photography that I discussed within it can be read as a case against the imperialism and austerity of a high Modernist, planned social order, it was not my intention to make a blanket argument against bureaucratic planning or high Modernist ideology. Instead, I hoped to rather problematise the imperial or hegemonic planning ethos behind many of those structures and architectures that excluded the human. My interest in this area of research is and has always focussed on humaniters, and how humans interact with their built environment. Sadly, it has in this case focused on how the built environment has in turn ‘interacted’ – if not dishonourably – with the human. It is this fundamental aspect of my research that I believe constituted a core concern of my chosen artists and photographers, and which I feel can be developed upon in future research.

This morning, after two years of writing this document, I walked around the city in which I live. I saw the vestiges of modernism and of modernist planning – the apartheid modernism, the totalitarian modernist structures, the gridded streets, and the government housing and hostels which were constructed with scant regard for people’s space, comfort, and of course respiration. The legacy of modernist architectures and planning will be with us for a long time to come.

And yet what I also observed were people that have taken these spaces and architectures and that are now using them in new and creative ways, not necessarily as they were intended (or even imagined) by their designers and planners: street vendors, hair braiders, squatters in office blocks, informal traders, informal street hubs, or even the renaming of streets... If in Brasilia, or even Chandigarh, areas were designed for the quick flow of people, they are now clogged with the wares of traders, existing as social spaces, spaces of life and conversation, interchange, and even spaces of laughter.

I wonder what Le Corbusier would say?


