(De)Constructing Worlds

High Modernism, Architecture and Photography

by

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Signature: [Signed by candidate] Date: 2017-08-14
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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HIGH MODERNISM no longer represents the future; its dominance over the design community has declined.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).

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 Nosrand Reinhold Company, 1977), P. Blake’s Form Follows 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: 55).
both digital photography and the internet have made the creation and dissemination of images more immediate and prolific than ever, with architectures being 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 the number of 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 ideals (Ibid). In particular, although the artists and photographers I have chosen have 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 achieve this.

European high Modernism to Soviet high Modernism to African high Modernism. 3. There has been an extensive body of literature on high Modernism, and it refers to different contemporary architects and photographers (Ibid). This idea of ‘constructed photography’ in the likes of digital manipulation or digital compositing, plays an important role in this document: three of my four chosen artists and photographers utilise digital compositing methods in the production of their images.

My interest in this specific area of research stems not only from a personal interest in high Modernist literature – particularly the works of T.S. Eliot in relation to issues of urban alienation, isolation, and the loss of identity – but also from my own practice as a photographer. In 2014, I completed an undergraduate degree in Fine Art with photography early on as a major issue. My fourth year body of work was presented as a book: Constructing Worlds: Photography and Architecture in the Modern Age (2014). The book contains three black and white photographs of the modern city. These images moved away from tradition with ethereal depictions of the city, which were often pristine and utopian, and sought to reference a surreal and somewhat dehumanised space, which I titled Mezzanine. Although Mezzanine spoke of the modern city and that which exists within it; from the fleeting and romantic, the beautiful and majestic, the strange and absurd, the gritty and repetitive, the poignant and sombre, to the lyrical and whimsical, it also focused a great deal on the eventual and unavoidable alienation experienced by the viewer, and the built and shared spaces in which crops up consistently in my discussions on high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning in this document. Likewise, the literary equivalent of work as a photo-book – intended to encourage a dialogue between the images on its recto and verso – is what initially created an interest in many of the book-based works that I discuss. Notwithstanding, it is this initial interest in the relationship between photography and architecture, and more specifically in the photographic depiction of modernist structures and architectures, that is the main subject this dissertation seeks to investigate, an inspiration which I have carried forward into my MAFA.

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, contributing to the dissemination of architectural ideas and forms. This relationship between photography and architecture has, for many, 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 eloquently flatters architecture in 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 think about architecture and ourselves.

However, with a proliferation of architectural imagery extant, it is important that a clear distinction is made between the everyday image and those images that are considered significant or intended as social comment, responding to architecture in order to say something about our world and how we live. Bearing in mind the high 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 as it is, is not a process, but the means to an end.

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 ideals, 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 (2015), Daniela Jansen (2015), and László Moholy-Nagy – photographers that aimed to reinvigorate the photographic medium from a more deadpan and declarative form 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 not only from Western Europe and North America, such as Simon Norfolk (1951-1 from Nigeria, Nader Kander (1964-) from Israel, Horst Janssen (1980-) from Germany, Tillman (1953-) and Mikhail Subotovsky (1951-) from South Africa.

4. While I use the term ‘high Modernism’ in its singular form, this is not to discount the many subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, differences between high Modernist architecture and Modernist architecture as distinct movements in high Modernism as an overarching movement and ideology (see Chapter 1). It refers to a range of different high Modernist styles, each with their own distinct characteristics and qualities. These differences have been influenced both formally and materially by modernism, particularly with my decision to choose Benjamin H. D. Buchloh’s The Uses of the Image (1989: 144) as a starting point. Buchloh’s book has been influential to architecture, and the way it has been written, is a starting point for the ways in which I have approached my research.
Working in the context of Europe, the projects that concern me include Beate Gütschow’s South Africa: The Structure of Things Then (1993–2009), Andreas Gursky’s Paris, Montparnasse (1999–2003), and Filip Dujardin’s Fictions (2007–2011). In a South African context, I look at David Goldblatt’s South Africa: The Structure of Things Then (1998). 8 While this list is by no means comprehensive or encompassing, I feel that these artists and photographers reveal particular aspects of the critique of the social project of high Modernism through their practice, and that their works resonates with my own at a formal, thematic, and personal level.

With that said, the examples of contemporary photography I have chosen each have as their subject high Modernist structures and architectures or, at the very least, contain within their frames elements of these structures and architectures. While many of these structures and architectures were allegedly built in a spirit of hope and faith in high Modernism’s drive towards a utopic ideal (Henket, 2002: 10), as with the infamous Pruitt-Igoe housing complex (1954–1956) mentioned earlier, there was however a far more pragmatic and unpretentious, albeit somewhat sinister reason for their construction. For example, Pruitt-Igoe’s large scale and high-density development allowed for large numbers of people to be crammed into smaller spaces, which then made it easier for them to be surveilled and controlled. Its poor build quality and cheap fixtures, compounded by the uncompromising high Modernist layout of its public housing, also served as ways to maintain pre-existing social hierarchies, so that inhabitants could not move ‘up’ in such dehumanising conditions. As Pruitt-Igoe’s residents were almost exclusively black, this only served to enforce segregationist policies and to keep them out of the city centres where the so-called ‘elites’ lived.

Although Pruitt-Igoe is but one housing project in the broader scheme of high Modernism, I have found it important to mention as it perhaps best exemplifies the often totalitarian impetus of high Modernism that I intend to capture in this document: an impetus towards social order and control often enacted through its structures, architectures, and urban planning. I say often because this was not always the case, as high Modernist architectures and urban planning were heavily polarised. On the one hand, the cheap versions of high Modernist architecture which I concentrate on in this document – cheap because they were indeed cost-effective and intended for the underclasses – offered a dubious utopia of monolithic and impersonal mass housing, with, of course, all of the social problems that came with it. On the other hand, high-end architecture provided avant-garde society with extremely individual, expensive, and often striking showcases of progressive taste.

Nonetheless, Pruitt-Igoe and many of the other high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning that I discuss falls into the former category, and, according to Glazer (2007), Jencks (1977), and Jacobs (1961) failed in ways akin to the high Modernist movement. While Pruitt-Igoe no longer exists – in Jencks’ words, “it was finally put out of its misery. Boom, boom, boom!” (1977: 9) – many of these ‘failures’ remain, still able to communicate or at least express the (now failed) social idea(s) once responsible for their construction. It is these ‘failed’ structures and architectures that are the focus of my research and of the contemporary artists and photographers I have chosen to discuss in this document.

Fundamental to this research is the premise that contemporary photography which takes architecture as its subject has the ability to communicate wider notions about society. However diverse their aesthetics, each artist and photographer I have chosen challenges the orthodoxy of both the photography of architecture and architectural photography (which I distinguish later in the document) through their individual strategies. These might include anything from the use of exaggeration, hyperbole, dark humour, parody, hyperrealism, pastiche, irony, or in the case of Goldblatt, exposing. These tactics will be elaborated in the four chapters that follow.

In Chapter 1, 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 Modernist’s social idea(s). 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(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), where both artists work in the context of Europe. 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 international 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. 6 It reconﬁgures 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 idea(l). 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 (1954–1956) and Juscelino Kubitschek, Lucio Costa, and Oscar Niemeyer’s Brasília (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 Brasília, 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 Brasília).

The discussion on Brasília 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 idea(l). For example, certain structures in Brasília, 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 (Götzsch, 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 two are interlinked. The relationship between these is given substance by the fact that architectures are later harnessed by my chosen contemporary artists and photographers. As each of these artists and photographers has a particular interest in the formal languages of the 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 1940s–60s—that placed complete trust in the power of science and technology” (Malgrange, 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], Harrison [1997], Meecham & Sheldon [2004]), I find these definitions less appropriate in this context because they tend to restrict 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 bloody suppression 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 polyseme in the 1920s, or with 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 follow several intellectual streams: first, the provisionality of modernism, its elusive nature, and its constant search for progress and new forms tends to preclude any totalising definition.

In this context, I use the term utopia to describe a society imagined by its designers and visionaries. However, the need for scientific and technical research and development8 rapidly increased 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’8 associated with high Modernist urban planning and social organisation, also made it a popular choice among to be for “those who wanted to bring about huge changes in people’s work habits, living patterns, moral conduct, and worldview” (Scott, 1999: 3). However, such aspirations for the creation of

7 The Cold War (1941–91) was a period of political and military tension and impasse that arose after World War II, between powers in the Western Bloc (the United States, its NATO allies, and others) and powers in the Eastern Bloc (the Soviet Union and its allies in the Warsaw Pact) (“Cold War”, 2016). Although historians do not fully agree on the year the Cold War began, 1945 is commonly taken as the start-date for the Cold War (Stonor Sack, 1995).

8 The mobilisation of Germany’s economy under Rathenau’s leadership during World War I was considered a technological wonder of the war, and is today considered the most likely progenitor of high Modernism (Scott, 1999: 48). That Germany succeeded in keeping its armies adequately supplied in the field long after most observers had predicted its collapse was largely due to Rathenau’s planning.

9 This does not discount the technocrats (i.e. the urban planners, engineers, and architects, who likewise advocated for its future scientific and technical advancement (Scott, 1999: 3)).

10 For high Modernist urban planners such as Le Corbusier, a ‘social hierarchy’ was the role of his modernist forms (themselves made more amenable to control from above and outside).6 This is why I use the term ‘social hierarchy’ in this sense: high Modernism generally comprised a core_intf sation as it provided the basic infrastructure from which sociocultural dynamics were formed. Instead, the urban planning intended to harness the populace in ways that were more amenable to control from above and outside.”

11 This research and development manifested in the space race, arms race, research in automation, artificial intelligence, computer science, ecology, and meteorology, amongst other things (Oreskes & Krige, 2010: 43).

12 Defined as “a place, person, or condition ideally perfect in respect of laws, customs and conditions” or as “an impossibly ideal schema, especially for social improvement” (Onions, 1989: 1444), the word ‘Utopia’ was first used by Thomas More in 1516 to refer to a fictional island in the Caribbean, a Utopia in Latin from which the English word is derived (Gill, 1998: 19).

13 As the need for scientific and technical research and development8 rapidly increased 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.

14 “A place, person, or condition ideally perfect in respect of laws, customs and conditions” or as “an impossibly ideal schema, especially for social improvement” (Onions, 1989: 1444), the word ‘Utopia’ was first used by Thomas More in 1516 to refer to a fictional island in the Caribbean, a Utopia in Latin from which the English word is derived (Gill, 1998: 19).
a ‘progressive utopian society’ met with failure rather than success more often than not, as will be discussed later in this document. Such failures were usually 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 own 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 other utopian case choices.

In these examples — and particularly in Apartheid South Africa, to which I return in Chapter 3 — failure of such social engineering endeavours 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 disempower those whom Yiftachel (Ibid) again terms the “low” (residents and ordinary citizens) which comprised said society. Started simply, the planning tools and methods used to assist social reform and improvement in people’s quality of life, if that was ever 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, 16 emanation 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 (1995: 1), the most conclusive situations for this unrestrained use of power were typically “in war-like situations, when abstract town planners and engineers struggle for national liberation.” Scott continues, stating that this often left behind a “passive” civil society that lacked the capacity to resist the implementations of these plans (Ibid, 88). 17

While many of these examples highlight failed social idea(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 by 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 Goldhain’s photography, South Asia, there is a African Men’s Hostel, Alexandra Township, Johannesburg, Transvaal (1 June 1988) (1988) in Chapter 3, although enacted on a relatively small scale, reflect the ideology 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 study how these town planners and photographers image high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning to critique the failure of high Modernism’s social ideals, I have adapted this idea to include high Modernist structures and architectures. If architecture is, in Ruskin’s words “an expression of society”, then in furthering this premise one should consider how utopian and utopian 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 such 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 [1999: 14]) to Amos Rapoport’s writings in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (see Rapoport [1990: 21], [2005:23]), with each contending 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, cultural, political, and social 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 constituent: art and building (Conway & Roethlis, 1984: 4). Like certain forms of art, certain architectural objects can be recognised as self-referential 18 objects, due in part to the basic generic elements that constitute their form, which include: 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 (Lukomsky, 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.

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 other words, 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 Hershberger (1980), Jencks (1997), and William Whyte (2006), where each describe architecture’s ability to communicate via form and to create 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 “unfaltering confidence in science and its promise to create utopia” (Scott, 1999: 42). At its centre was a self-confidence about linear progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge (which often involved a reliance on the expertise of scientists, engineers, bureaucrats, and intellectuals), the expansion of production, and the rational design of social order (Ibid, 88) (Taylor, 1999: 28).

In the field of architecture, confidences in the technocratic abilities of individual architects and planners to solve problems of large-scale urban development often led to the construction of visually austere and anti-human structures whose designs, more often than not, ran contrary to unplanned social development.

Cultural critic Bram Dijkstra, in an interview with Ron Hogan (2006), similarly criticised high Modernism as an “austere, anti-human, and oftentimes dystopic vision” of modernism, stating:

Much of the post-WWII high Modernism in America and the rest of the Western world is anti-humanist, hostile to notions of community, of any form of humanism. It becomes about the lack of meaning, the need to create our own significance out of nothing. The highest level of significance, that of the elite, becomes abstraction. So the concept of the revolutionary elite arises again, deliberately excluding those who haven’t evolved.

One of high Modernism’s characteristics was a keen emphasis on spatial order as rational design, as enacted through its standardisation, simplification, and ordering of physical space. Applications of this ideology are best illustrated in the ‘machines for living in’ (Wolfe, 1981: 23), 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’s large-scale housing projects and urban planning.

Similar to the high Modernist project, high Modernist architecture was – from its inception (Hornbrey, 2006; Jencks, 1997) – and 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: 5). High Modernist architecture was therefore always planned as both a spatial and a social project, addressing both the urbs (city) and the civitas (citizen).

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.27

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

25. Semiotics was defined by linguist Ferdinand Saussure as “the science of signs or the study of the life of signs within social life.” (Massey, 2010: 547).

26. The term “structuralism” (and “Poststructuralism”) is “an approach to linguistics that analyses and describes the structure of language, as distinguished from its comparative and historical aspects.” (St鸠rtefeld, 2017). 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 postmodernist criticism. These theories advance the overarching notion that meaning does not exist outside a text, or in this case, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, “a language in which the language is, as a system 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 create a sign that will be employed in this document as methods for interpreting meaning.

27. Equally, modernism (in photography) was often characterised by an unfailing confidence in science and technology as a means to record the social and natural world. (Solomon, 2008: 195).

28. Le Corbusier believed that buildings should function as “machines for living in,” analogous to how he saw “machines for traveling in” (Wolfe, 1981: 23).

29. Although it can be argued that the Foucauldian critique of ‘space as an apparatus of power’ has since instance form, and, in addition, that the meaning of a text or form is not fixed but rather contingent and unstable.

25. MŠrkchenes Fiertal social housing project (1957–1979) in Berlin – a large-scale adaptation of the ‘box architecture’ of Le Corbusier’s Ville Radieuse (Staib, Drostholer, & Rosenthal, 2008: 34). Here, the 1200 apartments are able to house up to 3000 residents.


27. Figures 5. A later adaptation of Ville Radieuse, developed in 1925–1927, then public official Robert Moses bulldozed ‘highrise’ areas and replaced them with high-rise housing projects. According to Dana Schulz (2005), “two buildings once containing 3,200 families, 500 stores and small factories, three churches, three schools, and two theaters, were razed.” Today, the complex has a total of 152 apartments, housing more than 2500 residents (Solomon, 2008: 195).
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 (Tourouliotis, 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 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 tending towards the use of neutral tones such as white and beige. According to Mark Wigley (1995: 598), the omnipresent ‘whiteness’ of high Modernist architecture served as a disciplinary device, a way of controlling perception itself. White buildings not only showed decorations as superficial, but they also revealed a more abstract constitution of fashion and in so doing “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: 94–96). This notion of elitism as entrenched in high Modernism served to elevate the views of a select few to the detriment of intellectuals as well as on technological and scientific innovations, making it the more elitist project (1999: 94–96). This notion of elitism as entrenched in high Modernism served to elevate the views of a select few to the detriment of artists and other professionals in the arts. 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. 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 Mährisches Viertel in Berlin (Figure 3), the Stuyvesant Town – Peter Cooper Village in New York (Figure 5), 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, 2007). Its master plan was first presented in 1950 as the ‘Bauhaus style’ while under the directorship of Mies van der Rohe (1925–1930 in Dessau; 1937–1953 in Chicago), which was “marked by the absence of ornamentation and by harmony between the function of a building and its design” (Friedlander, 2008: 4). 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, 1991: 160).

Le Corbusier’s Unite d’habitation housing projects (1947–1965) as an adaptation of his unrealised Ville Radieuse project (1924) was a manifestation of this thought process. 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, 2007). 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 Mährisches Viertel in Berlin (Figure 3), the Stuyvesant Town – Peter Cooper Village in New York (Figure 5), 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, 2007). Its master plan was first presented in
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 unwavering 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 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: 96) 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 housing principle formed part of Le Corbusier’s ongoing impulse towards the creation of a progressive utopian society.”

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

Figure 8. Jeanneret’s ‘Ville Radieuse’ Mouchotte building in Paris, discussed in Chapter 3 (Cohen, 1992: 7).

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. Laid out as the capital city of India’s Punjab province, Chandigarh was consigned to Pakistan, thereby leaving the state without a capital. However, for Jawaharlal Nehru (India’s first Prime Minister and leading 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 reading see V. Bharne’s Le Corbusier’s Ruin: The Changing Face of Chandigarh’s Capitol (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 Résal in Nantes (1953), Westend in Berlin (1957), Briey (Meurthe-et-Moselle) in Briey-en-Forêt (1963), and Firminy in Loire (1966).

The Marseille Unite d’habitation,38 perhaps the most influential and illustrative of all Le Corbusier’s projects,39 is today the largest single-standing housing structure of Le Corbusier’s to have been built. With 337 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 (Shriglio, 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,1 he achieved 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: 212). Reinforced concrete, or béton 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 Brutalist1 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 Shriglio, 2004: 55). 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 12). 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.1

Le Corbusier calculates the air (et 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 disregarded 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: 11).

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 – were some of the most harshly critical of its many flaws. As can be seen in Figure 11, while the buildings were designed with the intention of fostering a sense of community, the actual social and physical environments often fell far short of the vision.

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 predominance of exposed concrete construction, or in the case of the ‘brick Brutalists’, raggedly 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 buildings.” Brutalism was a radical new form of high Modernism, unapologetic in socialist (and later authoritarian and totalitarian) ideas that embraced hard lines and a utilitarian lack of ornamentation (as per the modernist 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, 2011: 12).

39. The structure had become a city within a city, or in Le Corbusier’s words, “a machine, much like an ocean liner” (1962: 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 threatened to engulf the city centre (Bristol, 1991: 164), 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, 1991: 164]), yet, according to the planning principles of Le Corbusier and the International Congresses of Modern Architecture [CIAM]), “Like with the Unite 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).
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, as well as the lack of maintenance afforded to its upkeep. According to writer Colin Marshall (2013), “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. 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).”

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).”

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 it gained much 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.” 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 failure linking to the high Modernist movement, and a truism for environmental and behavioural literature (La Gory & Pipkin, 1981).

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 continued long after the first occupants arrived (Marshall, 2013).
43. “I never thought people were that destructive,” Yamasaki said to the Architectural Review, lamenting the vandalism that beat 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 (1983), “the project’s institutional 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.”
45. For further reading see K.G. Bristol’s The Pruitt-Igoe
46. This is, of course, considering that the structure did in the first instance cost $36 million (approximately $338.57 million in current dollar value), 67% above the national average for public housing (Ramey, 2007: 85).
47. According to Marshall (2013), “other detractors used the occasion to hold up its architect, Minoru Yamasaki, for condemnation as a figurehead of all the superficial, social-engineering modernists too high-minded and self-regarding to consider the needs of regular people.”

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 utterly alien to the miles of low-rise 19th and early 20th century brick structures surrounding it.”

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

Figure 19. Mathias Pernot, Memoir, 17 April 2006. France from the ‘Implosion Series’ (2002–2008). Pernot’s photographs of imploding buildings can be read as a general representation of modern architecture’s failure (Redstone & Pardo, 2014: 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.”
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 (1989: 48), "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 in five” and a future of self-sustaining economic growth (Scott, 1999: 118). Where officially designated public spaces did in fact exist, these were limited to 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 – sidewalk cafes, street corners, small parks, and neighbourhood squares – did not exist.

Perhaps its greatest failing was the “aesthetic utopia”, 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 up-to-date the high Modernist plan, the more thoroughly going 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.

In 1957, Oscar Niemeyer, who had already been named the chief architect for Brasilia’s public buildings and housing prototypes, organised a design competition that was won by Lucio Costa on the basis of very rough sketches. Costa’s idea – for it was no more than that – was of a “monumental axis” intended to define the centre of the city, which consisted of terraced embankments describing an arc intersected in its centre by a straight avenue, and a triangle to define the city’s limits (see Figure 21) (Holston, 1989: 32).

After the design was completed, construction began almost immediately on an emptied site located nearly 1,000 kilometres from Rio de Janeiro and the coast. The state planning agency controlled all the land on the site so there were no private property owners with whom to negotiate. The city was then designed from the ground up, according to an elaborate and unified plan. Housing, work, recreation, traffic, and public administration were each spatially segregated (or zoned) as per Le Corbusier’s rationalist principles for Ville Radieuse. 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 up-to-date the high Modernist plan, the more thoroughly going 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: 126).

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 – sidewalk cafes, street corners, small parks, and neighbourhood squares – did not exist.

48. Following the successes of the Marshall Plan in Europe after the Second World War, contemporary development theory of the time stressed the need for developing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to modernise under a high Modernist ideology so as to emulate, or rather ‘catch up to,’ the ‘more advanced’ nations of Western Europe and North America (Ibid, 122). Media critic Herbert Schiller refers to this as ‘cultural imperialism’. In his seminal essay Theory of Cultural Imperialism, Schiller (1989: 7) writes, “Less economically prominent cultures essentially ‘import’ culture. As one society exerts cultural dominance over another, the latter society begins to adopt its customs, philosophies, worldviews, and general ways of life. Under the imposition of another culture, the ‘lesser’ culture is then thought to lose some of its own identity in the process.”

49. As a long-time member of the Brazilian Communist Party, much of Niemeyer’s work was influenced by Soviet high Modern architecture (Scott, 1999: 186).
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).

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 the contemporary photography that uses 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 Nicéphore 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.50 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 (1813–1894), and J-P Girault de Prangey (1804–1894), 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 paradigm shift in photographic following his return to New York in 1890. At the heart of Stieglitz’s efforts lay the intention to ‘promote photography as an art rather than as document’ (Gaule, 2014: 121). This he sought to achieve with the establishment of the Photo-Scènes 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 (1871–1925), Frank Eugene (1865–1953), 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: 121).

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 avowedly ‘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 literal 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 1906, Stieglitz recalls photographing the newly erected Flatiron Building on the day of a great snowstorm: “I suddenly saw the Flatiron 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: 23). 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 opposition and he was finally dismissed by Napoleon III in 1870, work on his projects continued until 1877.

53: “Modern photography”, Campany (2004) asserts, “would be based not on artifice but on an intelligence of the document” (author’s italics). He continues, stating “Atget certainly made intelligent documents but not in the first instance as art. Rather it was art that recognized the intelligence of Atget’s work, meaning in turn the archivist’s obligation that fulfills most documents” (Ibid, author’s italics).

54: Stieglitz used the vernacular term ‘snapshot’ in titling some 1900 photographs. Custer-Brown would describe the same thing later as the photographer’s effort to capture the ‘decisive moment’, a concept that was to influence later generations of twentieth-century photographers (Bouvier, 2002).
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. As can be seen in the images *From My Window at the Shelton, North* (1935) and *New York, from the Shelton* (1935) (Figure 29), the sense of awe associated with the promise of the skyscraper remains to this day suspended in the image, regal and unaffected by the passage of time.

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 (1891–1945), 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 Traffico 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 (Lista, 1981: 36). 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: 6). 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 Figure 37, Aleksandr Rodchenko, The Mosselprom Building, the First Soviet Skyscraper (1931). 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 unseen, 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, 2013). 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 Neues 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 Neues 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, 1937: 12), Neue Sachlichkeit brought about a sharply focused, ‘objective’ quality to the photographic art (Michalski, 1994: 18). 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 ‘art’ photography (Redstone & Pardo, 2014: 109).

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 (Higgott & Wray, 2013: 22). This type of image was typically taken in brilliant sunshine on a rare deep blue-skied day.
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 life-long 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 (1912–2007), 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 mutuallistic 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

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 Edwall, 2008: 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 breathtaking 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 (9 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.26

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

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26 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 784 photographers, including Ansel Adams (1902-1984) and Edward Weston, who adumbrately 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 (1945–2007), Stephen Shore (1947–), Nicholas Nixon (1940–), and Joe Deal (1942–2010) endeavoured 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 1977. The exhibition, which initiated a radical shift away from traditional and often idealised depictions of the landscape (namely Beate Gütschow, Andreas Gursky, Filip Dujardin, and David Goldblatt) each display in their images the influence of architectural photography.39

Although the Bechers’ images were intended as documents, and in their individual capacities (or as ‘sets’) can be read as documents, this quality changes when they are presented as ‘typologies’ (Figure 43). According to the Bechers, ‘A set documents a particular structure from different angles, while a typology presents a group of photographs that are different instances of the same type or ideal form’ (Bechers quoted in Biro, 2012: 362, my italics). In other words, sets refer indexically to one actual structure, while typologies refer indexically to a number of 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 ‘art’, 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: 123) writes that the Bechers “paved down uninflected aesthetic offered a new approach to the art of photography. The value of images such as theirs 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

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39. Incidentally, Filip Dujardin began his professional photography career working as a commercial architectural photographer (Mikoczi, 2013).
40. Of the Becher light, Company (1993: 61–63) writes, “That Northern Europe, the site of modernity’s hunting ground, was for much of the 20th century, with its cold, light, and acerbic tones, was the preferred light for much of the committal informational [here, ‘topographic’] imagery created in the 19th century. In the iconoclastic sciences the absence of shadow was equated with impartial judgement [here, ‘objectivity’].” The clear but soft light of day was constructed as a liberation from the prejudice of chiaroscuro. Rivaling in the wealth of photographic detail, modernism’s visual postmodern mystique, the inescapable for the objects, and clarity of appearance for the clarity of facts.
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 S 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.

Reading the Contemporary (The Photography of Architecture in the Twenty-First Century)

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).
at the Strozzina Cultural Centre in Florence, ‘After Photoshop: Manipulating Photography in the Digital Age’ (2012–2013) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and ‘Cut ’n Paste: From Architectural Assemblage to Collage City’ (2013–2014) at the Museum of Modern Art, also in New York. In these shows, many artists and photographers use technology, along with traditional assemblage and collage, to manipulate images to such an extent that they actually construct their own architectural fantasies, reimagining the city and critiquing notions of authenticity in architectural imagery.

From as far back as Mies van der Rohe’s early photomontages (see Figure 46), architects and artists alike have long-embraced the traditions and techniques of avant-garde movements such as Dadaism, Surrealism, and Constructivism in the creation of their images. While the visual language and cultural appropriation of ‘cut and paste’ assemblage was, in the twentieth century, the perfect medium to shock and provoke through its projection of an irregular disruptive vision (see Ades, 1976), digital technology has today allowed for photomontage to be a much more polished affair. The term ‘cut and paste’ today allowed for photomontage to be a much more polished affair. The term ‘cut and paste’ works, or rather digital photomontages, it much to say about these contemporary ‘cut and paste’ assemblage and relatively un-retouched in their intended 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 ultimate, 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.

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 (2007–2011), 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 Hutte. 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,65 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 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 ultimate, 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.

65 Curator Britt Salvesen described the New Topographics exhibition as “a bridge between the still-similar fine art photography world 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 in contemporary art” (2010: 11, my italics).
Similarly, for Michael Fried (2008: 170) – who, like Barthélémy Michaud (2006: 440), the digital manipulation that underlies Gursky’s photographic practice has an important, positive effect. Although it condemns the 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 themes 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 concerns – 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 São 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 form seem more controlled or intentional, and thus more determined by the artist.

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 Dubuisson, 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 Dubuisson’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 imagines 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 Immuable d’habitation Maîne-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 response 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 (Barret, 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 187 x 427.8 x 6.2 cm (see Figure 50; a scale befitting of the overwhelming size of the Mouchotte building (Mouchotte’s frontal view measures an impressive 40 x 200 m).

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

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64. These range from transformed stock exchanges to 200-storey towers and Prada products, commenting on modern life in its density overpopulated and globalised mass, with Gursky stating, “I pursue one goal – the encyclopedia of life” (Gursky quoted in Meunier, 2000: 20).
65. As Gursky puts it, “My preference for clear structures is the result of my desire – perhaps illusory – to keep track of things and maintain my grip on the world” (Gursky quoted in Gunning, 1998: 23).
66. Emblematic of the architectural and urban thinking of the growth period after the war, Mouchotte formed part of an extensive urban renewal project that involved the destruction of many historical sites, including the old Montparnasse train station. This, once again, relates back to the high Modernist perception of creating a tabula rasa that disregarded historical, social, and geographical contexts in its development.
67. Money was obviously not an issue as Mouchotte
is, one can immediately permeates his work.

Incidentally, Gursky refers in his essay ‘Clichés’ (2001: 33) to this characteristic vantage point as a ‘God-eye view’ (Dubuisson and Le Corbeiller, 2013). This view allows him to do justice to his grand subjects whilst also reflecting the dispassionate attitude that permeates his work.

In the sense of art, the grid states the autonomy of the realm of art. Flattened, geometrised, ordered, it is antinatural, antinomical, antireal. It is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature. In the flatness that results from its coordinates, the grid is the means of crowding out the dimensions of the real and replacing them with the lateral spread of a single surface. In the overall regularity of its organisation, it is the result not of imitation, but of aesthetic decree. Insofar as its order is that of pure relationship, the grid is a way of abrogating the claims of natural objects to have an order particular to themselves; the relationships in the aesthetic field are shown by the grid to be in a world apart and, with respect to natural objects, to be both prior and final. The grid declares the space of art to be at once autonomous and autotelic (1979: 52–53).

To capture the expansive view, Gursky had to photograph the building’s façade in two separate frames before merging them using digital manipulation to create a flattened, seamless composition. The ‘seamlessness’ of the composition creates verisimilitude – a semblance of ‘truth’ or ‘reality’ – which, in strengthening the critical nature of the image, induces a criticality within the viewer. That is, although the seriousness of the work modernist urban planning and its radical implementations.

Figure 50. Sotheby’s employees holding Gursky’s Paris, Montparnasse at its auction house in London. While the image evokes the scale of the structure, it is usually placed at just below eye level, requiring that the viewer look down into it almost as a God’s eye view. This view allows him to do justice to his grand subjects whilst also reflecting the dispassionate attitude that permeates his work.

Figure 51. Piet Mondrian, Composition with Large Red Plane, Yellow, Blue, Black, Grey and Blue (1930).

Figure 52. Gerhard Richter, Colour Charts (1973–75). As can be seen in this image, even though Gursky used a wide-angle lens as per architectural photographic convention, it would have been impossible for him to capture the entire façade within a single shot. This is due to the building’s immense width, in addition to the blockages caused by the trees and other structures.

Figure 53. Gursky quoted in Cooke, 1998: 14).

Figure 54. Sotheby’s employees holding Gursky’s Paris, Montparnasse at its auction house in London. While the image evokes the scale of the structure, it is usually placed at just below eye level, requiring that the viewer look down into it almost as a God’s eye view. This view allows him to do justice to his grand subjects whilst also reflecting the dispassionate attitude that permeates his work.

Figure 55. Mouchotte’s façade. As can be seen in this image, even though Gursky used a wide-angle lens as per architectural photographic convention, it would have been impossible for him to capture the entire façade within a single shot. This is due to the building’s immense width, in addition to the blockages caused by the trees and other structures.
that it could potentially run on forever. These strategies aid in exaggerating the building's actual proportions, where the former creates a flattened effect, heightening its sense of claustrophobia, and the latter makes comment on its oversize and overcapacity. The image's all-over-flatness, again reminiscent of the modernist grid, privileges surface, giving each detail the same focus and significance. This, according to Jaeckle (2014: 199), encourages "a dual mode of viewing, as the initial moment of dazzling submersion in the totality of the image gives way to a close examination of its details, conceptually and physically putting the viewer into a state of empathy with the artist's concerns for the macroscopic and the microscopic, the mass and the individual". These technical processes, in addition to the image's overwhelming scale and seductive detail, successfully heighten the image's realism and create a gestalt when experiencing it. 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 inhuman nature of the totalitarian structure" (Gursky quoted in Stallabrass, 1993), an experience clearly relayed through his clever use of cropping and enveloping scale. Moreover, the work's title Paris, Montparnasse (as opposed to Montparnasse, Paris) plays on the sheer density of the structure, as if all Paris's inhabitants reside within the single Mouchotte.

In the process of reading the week, however, one does experience rare and intimate moments of human presence. Here, colour plays a significant role in distinguishing individual areas within an otherwise sterile façade. Shades of yellow, green, blue, purple, and orange highlight distinct apartment blocks and inspire a curiosity for them, as in the famed Hitchcock thriller Rear Window (1954). Here, one recognises people, furnishings, and a range of human activity (Figure 56). By adding this element of humanness to the countless individual systems and visions of lives depicted in these room-sized units, Gursky destabilises the rigidity of the structure and re-introduces an otherwise sedentarised people. Thus, while Paris, Montparnasse does indeed "communicate the oppressive, claustrophobic and inhuman 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 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 (1967–), and Nicolas Grospierre (1971–), there are other lesser-known and often undertheorised artists such as Beate Gütschow (1975–), there are other lesser-known and often undertheorised artists such as Beate Gütschow (1975–), Cyprien Gaillard (1980–), Dionisio Gonzalez (1967–), and Filip Dujardin (1977–), who also work in this vein. Thus, where the next section is dedicated to exploring Filip Dujardin’s Fictions, I hope to shed some light on his practice, as well as showcase just how Dujardin images high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning to critique the failure of high Modernism’s social ideals.

Filip Dujardin

Filip Dujardin (b. 1971 in Ghent, Belgium), like Gursky, engages digital manipulation in his works. Using digital compositing 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 architectural Fictions. Because these structures are (arguably) plausible, they offer a satirical take on the relationship between utopian ideology and visionary high Modernist architecture (Gadanho, 2014: 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 austerity 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 (1856–1935) and Bruno Taut (1888–1978), 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 (1902–1955), and El Lissitzky (Figure 59), 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 ‘puraforma’ contemptuously mock Le Corbusier’s Unité d’habitation 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 textures sampled from his own photographs of buildings in Ghent, manually adjusting surfaces. For the final artwork, he then converts 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 city block. There is an exaggeration or visual hyperbole 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: 61). “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 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 moments that claim 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 #17 from Dujardin’s extensive archive of high Modernist architectural components, textures, and landscapes photographed over the years (Holloway, 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 city block. There is an exaggeration or visual hyperbole 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: 61). “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 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 moments that claim 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 #17 from Dujardin’s extensive archive of high Modernist architectural components, textures, and landscapes photographed over the years (Holloway, 2013).

To conclude, it can be said that Dujardin’s works are just a new manifestation of the simulacrum (plural: simulacra). A simulacrum, as theorized by French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, is a copy or an image without reference to an original, or a copy or an image in which the original no longer exists. A simulacrum, as Baudrillard (1981) writes, “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 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 moments that claim to represent ‘reality’ extending the effects of the artwork well beyond the piece itself and into a world that includes architecture.

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This can be seen in the image Untitled #17 from Dujardin’s extensive archive of high Modernist architectural components, textures, and landscapes photographed over the years (Holloway, 2013).
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 (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 mostly 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 87 displays a distinct visual relationship to Gütschow’s Paris, Montparnasse does. While in Gursky’s image the rich tessellated colours of the apartment is concealed. Save for the few open windows and drawn curtains which hint at a human presence, the human figure is otherwise completely invisible. 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 round.” While Dujardin’s works resonate with Gursky’s, they can also be compared to those of Gütschow. Besides the obvious similarity in their techniques where both artists work with digital photomontage, there is a distinct similarity in their formal languages and in how they approach their subject. Take the above two images, for example. Here, Untitled 96 by Dujardin is compared with 87 by Gütschow.

In each image a housing structure stands out as a scale indicator, as is the convention in traditional photographs of architecture. 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 Unité 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 87 and Gütschow’s 81. Here, each image presents a view of a 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 frontally and 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: 41), 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 81 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 97, like in Untitled 89 and Untitled 87, 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 sixty and seventies patina. They are like architectural monuments that have been lost on the periphery of the city.”

Looking at Gursky’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 manmesticisms 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 (Brunent, 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 (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(s) 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 F.W. de Klerk on 2 February 1990. President F.W. de Klerk on 2 February 1990. Goldblatt defines this period as the ‘Era of Baasskap’, a photo-book consisting of 170 tonal black and white images of structures in South Africa, including private homes, public housing, resettlement communities, government buildings, Dutch Reformed churches, architectural ornamentation, and monuments. The photographs are accompanied by an introductory text written by David Goldblatt, a reflective essay entitled Constructs: Reflections on a Thinking Eye by Neville Dubow, and detailed captions which provide additional insights into the structures contained within each photograph and the contexts from which they emerged.

South Africa: The Structure of Things Then (1998)

Goldblatt begins work as a professional photographer in 1964, when he was given a number of assignments by the Sunday Times. Goldblatt referred to 'master race' (German for 'Herrenvolk') as the most brutal idea(s) of colour (then Africans, Coloureds, Indians, Malays, and Chinese) were inherently inferior to white people (Goldblatt, 1998: 7). This belief in the divine destiny meant that apartheid segregation was not just systematic, but was understood to be ‘just’ and in compliance with Christian ethics (Ibid, 17).

‘High apartheid’ refers to what political scientist Anthony Butler identifies as the ‘second phase of apartheid’ (1998: 71). 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, 17).

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 Afrikaners 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, conceits, 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 ...

Not unlike National Socialism (Nazism) in Germany, apartheid was above all an ideology based on the belief that the Afrikaners were a Herrenvolk (German for ‘master race’) destined 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, 17).

This basic premise is elaborated as follows:

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Our structures often declare quite nakedly, yet eloquently, what manner of people built them, and what they stood for (Goldblatt, 1998: 19–21).

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, and race’ (1998: 71), it is also 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 create these physical structures and provide a photographic construct 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 (2004), testifies to Goldblatt’s active, ongoing investigation into the social landscapes 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 Baasskap’, Structures of Dominion and Democracy sees this period reframed as ‘dominion’ (Goodman Gallery, 2014).

Although

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Our structures often declare quite nakedly, yet eloquently, what manner of people built them, and what they stood for (Goldblatt, 1998: 19–21).
the latter series contains a substantial quantity of images from its predecessor, it concentrates on the period after the fall of apartheid, or democracy. 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 Sterjdom 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’ 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.88 Instead, Dubow (1998: 23) 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 most 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 Geereformeerde Kerk, Edenvale, Transvaal (28 December 1983). Where the early high Modernist churches of the 1950s and 1960s tended towards tall and often powerfully-triangulated forms that reflected the triumphant spirit of the time (Figure 63), the late high Modernist churches of the 1970s and 1980s became less prominent and more insular (Figure 64) – an architecture which corresponded closely with the increasingly obvious failure of apartheid (Goldblatt, 1998: 193). 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, 

88 In his artist’s statement for the same-titled exhibition, held at the Goodman Gallery in 2014, Goldblatt summarised the shift between the two bodies of work. He writes,

In the 1980s and ’90s I photographed structures that were South Africans had made during the Era of Baasskap, that time, from about 1960 until 1990, in which Whites gradually came to exert dominion over all of South Africa and its peoples (...) Beginning in 1999 – 40 years after the first democratic elections that brought the African National Congress to power – and continuing into the present, I have engaged in a similar photography of some of the structures that have emerged with our democracy and that I believe are expressive of values in this new, nascent way of being in our society (Goldblatt quoted in Goodman Gallery 2014).
and Laager” (Ibid, 27). Dubow (1998: 27) elaborates on these variations in form, stating,

Church building is the material expression of the Afrikaner’s belief in his God-given mandate to rule. In their 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 (23 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: 251) – 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 Pauw.

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.90 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 Volkskas Bank was a project of Afrikaner nationalism, ideologues, 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 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 Eik (From Acorn to Oak) – devotes substantial attention to these building projects, from Gerard Moerdyk’s structure in Central Pretoria (1935) to Pauw’s climactic headquarters in Strijdom Square (1978). Volkskas as it was an institution was thus, from its very inception, projected as nothing less than the embodiment of the volk, and its buildings can be seen as manifestations of this ideological fervour.

Like the Afrikaner Protestant churches, where shifts in nationalism ideology imparted shifts in nationalist ideology imparted corresponding stylistic responses in their architectures, the high Modernist skyscraper, the Volkskas headquarters, like these other buildings to the Kahnian modernism of Fagan’s Volkskas Bank, the Pretoria State Theatre and Strydom Monument, to the Corbusian planning for Cape Town’s Foreshore reclamation project; 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 Bank buildings to the Kahnian modernism of the Rand Afrikaans University, modern architecture became the style and visual language of the apartheid period (2007: 32).

Likewise, in Pretoria, the Wachtbusch – headquarters of the South African police and designed by Norman Eaton – and the Receiver of Revenue building – designed by Moerdyk and Watson together with Melinder and Naude – both demonstrated a modernist aesthetic. Similarly, the H.F. Verwoerd Building – headquarters of the Provincial Administration – by J.C. de K. Wijnhuis in Bloemfontein (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: 115). Pauw, 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 Seagarm Building of 1958, and the One Chase Manhattan Plaza of 1961 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.91 In place of a Miesian steel-framework, Pauw 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 eenvoudige anonieme glas-en staalgordynmuur-geboue wat ‘n kenmerk is van die sogenoemde ‘form follows function’”, or “the smooth simple anonymous glass and steel frame”92 that was not only manifest in the structures of Volkskas or in the private sector (as evidenced by the skyscrapers in Johannesburg) but also in the public sector, where the government embraced a modernist aesthetic in the construction of its public buildings as part of a comprehensive programme of modernisation (Ibid, 127).

91 For further reading see C. Engelbrecht’s Die Bank van Oom Bossie (Pretoria: Volkskas, 1981) and Van Akker tot Eik (Pretoria: Volkskas, 1985).

92 According to architect, Gilbert Herbert (1975: 152), ‘...in Pretoria the tendency is away from the purity of style; its decorative aspect is softened and freely adapted...’
The structures that Goldblatt has chosen to photograph have to do with memory. In a literal sense, many of them are memorials – memorials to conquest, to faith, to an ideology of racial superiority. On a deeper level these images speak of the need to remember. (my italics). Dubow continues, stating, “These structures are part of our inheritance – millstone and cross, they cannot be wished away, nor can they be ignored. There is much we can learn from them” (Ibid).

Thus, in returning to my research question, it could be argued that it is the manner in which Goldblatt chose to photograph the structures in Memorials 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) – when combined 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(s) in particular, but of apartheid and its quest towards the creation of a ‘utopia’ in general.

Figure 69. David Goldblatt, South-east wing, African men’s hostel, Alexandra Township, Johannesburg, Transvaal (1 June 1988).

Figure 68. One Chase Manhattan Plaza, New York (1958) (middle), and Volkskas headquarters, Pretoria, Transvaal (25 April 1982) (top left).
manifest in the hopeless expressions of the two figures. While South-east wing. African men’s hostel does, to an extent, derive 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’ (Morris, 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 a 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 allowed to collect local taxes. Thus, although it was in its early years a place of relatively high employment, the committee not only had to seek financial support from various other sources, but was also dependent on a limited number of resources and proper management. As the settlement grew, its lack of tarred roads, rainwater drainage systems, street lighting, and sewerage systems, accompanied by haphazard shack development, gave it the appearance of a ghetto.

Thus, by the time the apartheid administration was formalised in 1948, Alexandra had an estimated population of between 80 000 and 100 000 residents (Morris, 2000). Deciding that the population needed to be controlled, the newly-appointed government placed the settlement under the direct control of the Department of Native Affairs. With the aim of reducing the population, the provisions of the 1933 Land Act were re-implemented. This meant that forced relocations were withdrawn from those residents who owned their own properties. In addition, forced relocations proved an effective means of population control. Between 1958 and 1973, some 26 000 people were removed from Alexandra and resettled in Soweto and another 15 000 were removed to Tembisa on the East Rand (Ibid).

By the 1970s, the apartheid government owned nearly all the land and houses in the township. After the Sharpeville killings of 1960, the government clamped down on opposition parties with a state of emergency. It was here that Alexandra should be removed altogether and rebuilt as a ‘hostel city’ (Morris, 2000). Twelve hostels were to be built for single men and women, each housing 500 people (Ibid). However, of the twelve hostels proposed, only three were ever built. Madala men’s hostel (depicted in the image) went up in 1971, and Nobuhle in 1972. A women’s hostel – the Helen Joseph women’s hostel (Figure 70) – was completed in 1981, after it was acknowledged that it was not feasible, with the destruction of family life being the major stumbling block (Goldblatt, 1998: 252).

While the three hostels are identical in design and layout, the women’s hostel is larger with an additional centre segment that runs along the length of the courtyard. As there are no clear aerial images of the Madala hostel available, I have included an image of the women’s hostel taken by Goldblatt in 2009 as it gives a good indication of Madala’s overall arrangement. Madala is shaped like an irregular hexagon connected by ten adjacent segments. Each segment is composed of five floors. On each floor there are twenty small rooms of equal size connected by a corridor. These add up to a hundred rooms per segment, and a thousand in total. Enclosed within the hexagon is a grassy area, presumably intended as a recreation space for residents. Two sky-brides run across this area connecting opposite sides of the hostel. The building walls are constructed from red face brick and the roofs are assembled using some form of corrugated iron. The windows are small and numerous, running along the upper length of each floor. This pattern is broken by a single vertical window placed in the middle of each room. Together the windows allow for light to enter into the rooms, but due to their high and awkward placement, they limit the residents’ view outside the complex.

Madala men’s hostel was originally built to accommodate black migrant workers employed in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg, as strict rules meant that black labourers could not live in areas designated for white people (“South Africa: High-Rise Apartheid”; 1973). As a result, although intended as a residence, Madala was built more like a prison. This likeness is evident in the architectural logic of the structure, particularly in its hexagonal shape and open centre which resembles 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 residents’ ‘inmates’ or to put down a riot, are undoubtably 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 breach. Typical installation sites include industrial and military buildings, particularly prisons.

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, 2013). 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

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97. Although not cheap, face brick is a robust material. Cost cuts would have been effected in other areas, such as the design and layout, the women’s hostel is larger with an additional centre segment that runs along the length of the courtyard. As there are no clear aerial images of the Madala hostel available, I have included an image of the women’s hostel taken by Goldblatt in 2009 as it gives a good indication of Madala’s overall arrangement. Madala is shaped like an irregular hexagon connected by ten adjacent segments. Each segment is composed of five floors. On each floor there are twenty small rooms of equal size connected by a corridor. These add up to a hundred rooms per segment, and a thousand in total. Enclosed within the hexagon is a grassy area, presumably intended as a recreation space for residents. Two sky-brides run across this area connecting opposite sides of the hostel. The building walls are constructed from red face brick and the roofs are assembled using some form of corrugated iron. The windows are small and numerous, running along the upper length of each floor. This pattern is broken by a single vertical window placed in the middle of each room. Together the windows allow for light to enter into the rooms, but due to their high and awkward placement, they limit the residents’ view outside the complex.

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98. See Throogonal Prison, The Shape of Things to Come (1994). Civil engineering (1899) (1994). available: in the use of corrugated iron for the roof and the small windows. The affordability of this material has been an important consideration, since they were designed to be built on or near the ground. 100. According to journalist Richard Poplak (2013), “The hostel would be a microcosm of society, a shadow of what the apartheid state had wrought, a place where the poor could learn to live in a society where segregation was entrenched.” The hostel dwellers would be housewives, a shadow of what the apartheid state had wrought, a place where the poor could learn to live in a society where segregation was entrenched.”

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engine 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 as well, too, so as to critique the modernist architectural agenda. 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, and 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, 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 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 (Artner, 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, manipulates 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 integral to my investigation. As such, 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 LS (2004–2009) with a view to examine how she uses high Modernist structures and architectures to point to the failures of high Modernism.

Beate Gütschow's works are presented as a photo-book entitled Beate Gütschow: LS/S (2007). As with Goldblatt's South Africa: The Structure of Things Then, these works will be approached with this book format in mind. Beate Gütschow: LS/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: LS/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 x 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: LS/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 idea[ls] 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 as movement and ideology was not only limited to the reordering of the social world but also that of the natural. This harps 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...
concerns of this document, there are other reasons for my acute interest in Gütschow’s works. As a woman working in a similar field, particularly in my own practice as a photographer, I am interested in her position as a female artist in what is arguably a male-dominated arena. More than that, and as I reveal in this chapter, I find Gütschow’s connection to the works of the New Topographics artists and photographers, especially Bernd and Hilla Becher, extremely fascinating. To me, this scheme is not only an exciting moment in the history of photography but it also speaks of a moment that did much to innovate and reinvent the medium. Last but not least, part of my decision to devote such attention to Gütschow’s works is the lack of existing research. Save for a few interviews conducted in German, and media snippets or features here and there, there is very little and coherent information available on the artist’s methods and concerns, and even less in academia or art history. By focussing attention on Gütschow, I hope to consolidate existing knowledge of this artist, whilst contributing some of my own. While much of my own contribution is her work, whilst contributing some of my own. While much of my own contribution is a product of in-depth analyses of pre-existing information and of a process of deduction, I have also sought to supplement any gaps through an interview that I conducted with her in April 2016.

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 that were copied from real landscapes, and then later combined and arranged according to “predefined schemes” (Egan et al, 2007: 38). Richard Payne Knight, an eighteenth-century scholar best known for his theories of picturesque beauty, writes in The Landscape: A Didactic Poem in Three Books: Addressed to Uvedale Price: Esq. (1794: 47) thus:

[...]nature scarcely ever affords a complete and faultless composition; but nevertheless she affords the parts of which taste and invention may make complete and faultless compossitions; and it is by accurately and minutely copying these parts, and afterwards skilfully and judiciously combing 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 rhetoric, 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.

LS

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This similarity extends to the fictitious spaces described by the terms, which are both essentially unattainable. However, the two terms differ in that the one, Arcadia, refers to the rural, and the other, utopia, points to the urban.106 Thus, for the construction of LS, Gütschow cites the bucolic (Arcadian) landscapes of Claude Lorrain (c. 1600–1682) and Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788) as important influences (Egan et al, 2007: 37).

According to John Barrell (1972: 8), ‘landscape’ in painting was, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an artificial and highly organised construct. Instead of depicting scenes exactly as they were, artists composed new landscapes using fragments that were copied from real landscapes, and then later combined and arranged according to “predefined schemes” (Egan et al, 2007: 38).

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LS#8

106. Arcadia is further seen as a lost and Edenic form of life, which contrasts with the progressive nature of utopian schemes. Where the term utopia was used in Chapter 1 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.
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 ‘Arcadias’ by mixing together elements of images she had taken of ‘parks, construction sites, pristine nature, and people engaged in leisure activities’ (Egan et al, 2007: 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 meadow 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 LS88, the inclusion of a tree stump in LS88 (2003) (Figure 76), or the exposed ground and crevasses in LS97 (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 Gütschow refers becomes somewhat naturalised in the viewer’s way of looking at landscapes in general.

"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 is in colour, while S is in black and white. LS focuses on the natural landscape and on notions of Arcadia, whereas S depicts the city and speaks of utopia (or dystopia, as is suggested later). Furthermore, it is in LS that Gütschow first introduces her particular methods and concerns. Here, Gütschow introduces the viewer to her technique of digital photomontage – a technique intended to address the constructed nature of much of painting and photography. This helps to understand or rather delve into Gütschow’s interest in pictorial (and photographic) representations of reality and their ability to deceive. Finally, LS (like S) focuses on more than just the visual aspects of the subject matter under critique; that is, on the aesthetics of Classical and Romantic landscape painting. It also deals with the ideas, the philosophical concepts, and the ideologies that informed their compositions, subjects, and visual rhetorics; a point that the viewer should take into consideration when examining S."

In S, Gütschow develops her technique of digital photomontage used in LS to produce a series of what appears to be high Modernist architectural landscapes. These architectural landscapes are constructed from her own 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 2005, 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 ideal(s) 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 & Stahel, 2013: 157), these constructed landscapes “clearly reference documentary photography, but at the same time contradict it with their photographic fictions”.

The claim that early landscape photography which included architectural structures and fragments of architecture, was profoundly affected by the conventions of Western 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, 209). There are some exceptions, such as with Silsoe (Figure 61), where Gütschow adapted into the constructed landscape elements taken from media images of the First Iraq War (Egan et al, 2007: 40). These media images, which contain within their frames scenes of war and terror, lend the landscape 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 Amelnuxen, 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 Amelnuxen, 2006, my italics).

Gütschow later adds, in her interview with museum director Natasha Egan for Beate Gütschow: LVS, “While S might be about destruction, I am also describing an architecture that stands for social ideal[s] that have failed” (Gütschow quoted in Egan et al., 2007: 41, 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 ideal(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 Amelnuxen, 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” (Bid), 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 “standing [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 modernism is both, a modernising force 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 stands to reason that the form of modernism to which Gütschow refers is high Modernism.22 (As a political system, totalitarianism called for a complete surrender and submission of society. Like high Modernism, it was largely auster and anti-human.)

Based on the connection Gütschow makes between high Modernism and totalitarianism, it can also be reasoned that Gütschow uses images of high Modernist structures and architectures taken from 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 vilenly 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 democracy23 (see Saval [2006] and Beanland [2016]), a similar formal language was being used in these blocs to communicate totalitarianism.

Correspondingly, in the example of S26, 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 Volkas Bank or even 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’, therefore fascist, social 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 Modernist structures and architectures form generally seen in S.

According to McInerney, “High Modernism’s social idea[l]s” are presented as a “radicalization” of its indigenous African and popular cultures in their blending towards a new national society. Likewise, in S26, the patterned detailing of the dome directly references the Portuguese architectural decorations used in many of Brasilia’s civic structures (Barbara Gross Gallery, personal communication 2015, August 25).
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 ideal[s] that have failed” (Gütschow quoted in Egan et al, 2007: 31, 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, Strø (2005) (Figure 83) and Strø (2005) (Figure 78), Gütschow exaggerates this failure and renders it somewhat dystopic by inserting into their architectural landscapes images of war and terror. In Strø there are media images taken from the First Iraq War, and in Strø, Gütschow inserts her own image fragments of the bullet-riddled Local Newspaper Building 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” (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 heterotopia of sorts, in which the remainders 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 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 ideal[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 condensation of the ‘perfect city’ (or Stadt) and ‘perfect society’; a social ideal[s] which, while seemingly utopian, has failed in almost every incarnation (see Segawa [1997], Holton [2009], and Stierl [2000; 2013]).

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 Modernism’s failed social ideal[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...
In this section, I have endeavoured to provide an explanatory analysis of Gütschow’s intentions for S. Unlike Gursky’s Paris, Montparnasse (1993) or Goldblatt’s South Africa: The Structure of Things Then (1998), for which there are vast amounts of information available and which have been discussed in depth by other academics, critics, or even the artists themselves, there is, however, little coherent and reliable information available on Gütschow’s S series. As such, while I have felt it important to contribute new knowledge to the series, I have also felt it imperative that I reason and engage with pre-existing information so as to understand Gütschow’s intentions where the artist has left these open for interpretation. Thus, where I claim that in S, Gütschow images high modernist structures and architectures to critique the high Modernist states’ failed social and political spectrum or globe that embraced or opposed totalitarian, Gütschow levels a critique of geographical and social contexts, many of them totalitarian. Gütschow’s specular images 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 states 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 (1994), 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.

As established, each landscape in S is, like in LS, 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, 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 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 meaning as a sort of inscription that takes place at the beginning of the image-making process.119 Later on, when Gütschow outputs the file to photo paper, a laser then “writes light” back onto the given image (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.120 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’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”121 and end with the outputting of her files, where she delegates her printing to a commercial lab “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. Gütschow’s idea is to say, the world no longer faces the viewer in the form of a single image – its indexical connection is weakened. Moreover, by using a computer as a digital mediator to construct these photomontages, as opposed to the traditional ‘cut and paste’, hands-on approach of photomontage, Gütschow further increases this distance.

Classical photomontage of the 1920s and

117 This relates back to the writings of Barthes, who, in Camera Lucida, states that an image always carries with it a referent of reality (an indexical trace). He writes (1985: 78–81).

Every photograph is a certificate of presence. The important thing is that the photograph possesses an evidential force, and that its monumentality leaves not on the object but on time. From a phenomenological viewpoint, in the Photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation.

119 According to Gütschow (2005: 4), “The camera makes it possible to produce a surface that bears personal signatures. It has a de-emotionalising effect that exists in stark contrast to the haptic surface texture of a painting.” However, one can argue that even photographs bear personal signatures.
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 S#2, where Gütschow uses her own images of a familiar structure – again, the Local Newspaper Building in Sarajevo – to construct the photomontage, or even in S#1, 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 recognisable 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 S#2 (2005) (Figure 8). 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 S#1 (2005) (Figure 9) also serves to dissolve ‘the perfect montage’.

While Gütschow constructs her landscapes to make them appear as if captured from reality, the fact that the viewer grasps the ‘unlikeliness’ of the overall scene or figuration and recognises its artifice, as in S#2 (2005) (Figure 8). 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 S#1 (2005) (Figure 9) also serves to dissolve ‘the perfect montage’. The viewer makes this connection. There are two levels of reception with the landscape works. Either you [the viewer] just look at the photos, take them in directly and so make these image fragments, or the ability to construct the photomontage, or even in S#1, 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 recognisable to many of her viewers, which then makes this dissolution of ‘the perfect montage’ possible to some and not to others.

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...
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, Seeberg & 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 S004 or S014, 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 Dorothy Lange (1896–1965), 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 (2017: 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). Baltz’s influence can be seen in Gütschow’s strict use of formalism and in the tightness of her cropping (see Figure 91), whereas her compositions can be attributed to those of Shore. Likewise, the occasional uprooted figures of Adams’s 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 S. This is particularly evident in Gütschow’s seemingly detached views of her structures and architectures. In many of Gütschow’s images, such as S014, S024 (2007) (Figure 103), and S013 (2005), buildings are centrally placed and framed in their entirety with background detail, especially the presence of people, kept to a bare minimum. These buildings are often seen from a raised viewpoint as if the ‘camera’ was elevated on a ladder or scaffolding and the viewfinder tilted to create the illusion that the viewer is looking at the structures from mid-way up. Gütschow’s skies are also typically Germanic (or English or Midwestern), although her images do not point to any one particular location. That is to say, they are, like the Bechers’ skies, flat and overcast, and their lighting is similarly diffused. Indeed, Gütschow employs many of the technical conventions 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.

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, and to an extent the New Topographics photographers, to construct her subject but with a view to subverting it. That is, by creating images in the likeness of the Bechers (a form of pastiche), and by using their conventions to maintain seeming objectivity in the construction of purely subjective images, Gütschow critiques the so-called ‘objectivity’ or truth value in the Bechers’ works in particular, and in documentary photography in general. Thus, by showing that even an illusion of objectivity can be constructed, Gütschow indirectly

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S and its References (Intertextuality)

Figure 91. Beate Gütschow, S024 (2007) at left, and Bernd and Hilla Becher, Maisoncelles, Seine Marne, France (c. 1972–1979) at right.

Figure 92. Beate Gütschow, S014 (2005) above, and Lewis Baltz, Santa Cruz (1970) below.
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 Strozzina (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, where Gütschow inserts images taken from the media (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: 6). 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 visibly austere and anti-human architectural landscapes using high Modernist structures and architectures to critique the high Modernist states’ failed social ideal(s) 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). Thus, it is in this regard that the images in S ‘reference documentary photography, but at the same time contradict it with their photographic fictions’ (Janser, Seelig & Stahl, 2011: 157). However, according to Egan (2007: 41), Gütschow’s reference to documentary photography can also refer to the so-called ‘documentarism’ 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 ‘constructions’, 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 has 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 (Egan, 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’ (1993), ‘there is nothing new under the sun’ (Exclusarii 2:9, 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: 26). 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 reread 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 is 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), Koohlaas (2002), and Stoner (2001)). Taken further, it could even be proposed that this ‘absolute’ view of modernism is the equally absolutist views of Scott (1999), Jencks (1977), and Glazer (2007). Thus where Gütschow states that “[h]er 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 apposite that I elaborate on the notion of utopia-turned-dystopia as 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, 1989: 2444, my italics).21 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 process where once reached “everything afterwards

21. Interestingly the word utopia literally means ‘no place’ (Egan et al, 2007: 38).
Figure 94. Beate Gütschow, S#2 (2005) at left, and S#1 (2004) at right.

would become worse” (Ibid), offers an interesting parallel with S and its arrangement as a series.

While almost all the images in S indicate a post-state of modernism and its so-called utopias, the various ways in which individual images speak of such ‘failure’ suggests an active process of deterioration or disintegration within the series which then functions as a sort of narrative. That is, in reading S as a linear narrative,114 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#4 (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’s LS/S is not in numerical order. This is because Gütschow numbers her images in the order that she produces them. For example, S#4 was produced in 2004, S#2 was produced in 2005, and S#4 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’s 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.

Although the landscape of S#2 is undoubtedly ascetic and uninviting, not to mention (seemingly) impossible to navigate, it is, when contrasted against S#4, relatively utopian. That is, it presents what Gütschow envisions as a ‘high Modernist utopia’. Here, its meticulous landscape, constructed using nothing but reinforced concrete in the manner of Le Corbusier, is nearly sublime, with its impressive and sturdy structures. The image as a whole presents an incarnation of high Modernism and its tendencies towards order and control. There is little to no evidence of nature or plant-life in this landscape, which perhaps alludes to the high Modernist drive to order and control the natural world. Likewise, the few figures that are visible are restricted to the periphery of what appears to be an open plaza, leaving the vacant emptiness of human presence. This points toward a successful attempt at sedentarisation – or at an ‘out of sight, out of mind’ approach, as in the words of Bacon (1957: 137) – whilst also referencing the empty plazas of Brasília discussed in Chapter 1.

The issue of sedentarisation, a theme central to this document, remains significant in its frames.

Analyzing Structures, Architectures, and Urban Planning in S

As established earlier, if architecture, in Ruskin’s words functions as “an expression of society” (quoted in Rosenberg, 1998: 186), then, in furthering this premise, the structures and architectures built by societies dominated by a high Modernist ideology, 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 said society and its ideals. 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 world’s unpacking. In this section I attempt to deconstruct meaning in the images S#4 and S#2 through an investigation of the architectural forms contained within their frames.

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

115. The airplane, a modern machine designed to mimic a bird in nature, here lies ‘crippled’.

116. While it is commonly accepted that the International Style originated in the late 1920s and early 1930s, it is noteworthy that both scholars and professionals studying twentieth-century architecture vary widely in their definitions of different architectural movements and styles, and the exact periods that they encompassed. Generally, architects of the era and present-day architectural historians have avoided defining these movements and styles through any strict set of characteristics due to the extensive range of materials and characteristics found in the buildings (U.S. General Services Administration, 2009: 12). Walter Grupp, modernist architect and founder of the Bauhaus School, in conversation with John Piper (1944: 17) once stated that “This impossible urge of critics to classify contemporary movements which are still in flux, putting each clearly 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.

117. Brutalism only recently became the style of choice for the former Eastern and Soviet Bloc between the mid-1950s and early 1990s. Although scholars generally accept the mid-1940s as the end of modernism, widespread adoption of Brutalist architecture in architectural practice was often slow to respond, taking as many as fifteen to twenty years. Many smaller cities and developing nations, continued to deploy styles deemed outdated by an architectural elite (U.S. General Services Administration, 2009: 15).
In the following section, I will discuss the images S19 and S24 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 Gütschow images high Modernist structures and architectures to critique failed social ideal(s) in general, and their often totalitarian impetuses in particular.

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 S19, 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 S24, 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 perimeter 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 S24, 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 S19 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,
designed by Mies van der Rohe, was the ‘flag’ that represented not only Germany at the 1929 Barcelona International Exposition129 (20 May 1929 – 15 January 1930) in Barcelona, Spain, but also modern architecture’s introduction to the world (Dodds, 2005: 14). The structure, in essence, epitomised modernism. Unlike the other pavilions at the exposition, the Barcelona Pavilion stood as a building and nothing more. Set on a travertine plinth, its gleaming, offset walls created subtle spatial illusions enhanced by sunlight and moonlight, shimmering and sparkling from both the rich building materials and from the rectangular pool that linked the structure to its plinth. With reflections of sun-dappled water playing on the underside of the roof and breezes wafting through open walls, the Barcelona Pavilion stood as a building material of architecture, a building material that represented not only Germany at the exposition and subsequently dismantled at its end in January 1930.130 the pavilion remains one of the most influential, influential buildings in the history of modern, or rather high Modern, architecture (Ibid, 63).131 The Barcelona Pavilion was thus itself intended as the exhibit, embodying in architectural form the Republic’s ideal(s) for freedom and progress by way of its free form and floating roof (Newton, 2005: 66).132 Even though it was built only for the duration of the exposition and subsequently dismantled at its end in January 1930,133 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). Referring to the significance of its structure, in this vein, the Barcelona Pavilion’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 ethereal and 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 onyx from the Atlas Mountains) are each intended to mesh the manmade and the natural (Kroll, 2011). The use of marble, in particular, plays an important 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, along with the architect’s seamless application of plate glass (a material that would become to have its structure’s ‘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 Stiéray’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 (2002) 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, Stiéray’s structure is completely divorced from nature. It sits perched on what appears to be bare rock. 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 Gütschow reinterprets the Barcelona Pavilion in Stiéray, this re-interpretation sees the Barcelona 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.

The device, used to illuminate large sections of informal settlements and townships under the pretext of ‘crime prevention’ (See Figure 100). The device, however, transcended its ‘original application’, proving useful to security forces in maintaining control in townships by allowing the state to easily survey and thus control the movements of inhabitants using helicopters (Goldblatt, 1998: 43) (Wainwright, 2014).

Furthermore, where Gütschow earlier claimed that “it makes more sense to make images about images than about the world” (Gütschow quoted in Gebbers, 2002: 6), there is a certain resemblance between Shulg and Julius Shulman’s photographs of Pierre Koenig’s Stahl Residence (see Case Study House #22) as can be seen in the following images. The connection between Shulg and Shulman’s images further reinforces the notion that Shulg not only references the modern architectural movement, but also architectural photography of the 1950s and 1960s. 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 Shulg’s structure and the Barcelona Pavilion or Mies van der Rohe’s other works, given their proliferation and iconic status. The same could be said for the structure’s connection to Shulman’s images of the Stahl Residence, considering that these images are perhaps the most well-known photographs of architecture.

However, it must be stated that Gütschow often assumes her viewer to be familiar with her subject or the structures and architectures used in her images. This assumption perhaps holds true in this particular example, although anything more than the slightest connection is improbable. However, this also begs the question of who Gütschow’s intended audience might be. As evident from her many references to Western European and North American artists, photographers, and architects, it seems likely that her images were created for a more Western-educated audience. For those viewers outside Western Europe and North America, their understanding of her images would, for the most part, be based on the visual connections or associations between the different elements in her compositions.

Nonetheless, Gütschow’s decision to reinterpret the Barcelona Pavilion in Shulg is significant. The structure illustrates the premise that architecture functions as an expression of society by embodying the Weimar Republic’s social ideal(s). Its formal language speaks of hope, idealism, and joy. Its beautiful materials taken from nature, its intimations of beautiful lifestyles, and its celebration of the natural (by way of its integration of inside and outside) each speaks of such idealism. However, history makes us look at it differently. Based on the events that followed, the Barcelona Pavilion has come to also stand for the failure of democracy and its transition to totalitarianism, both in the context of Weimar Germany’s failure and transition into the Third Reich, as well as modernism’s failure as a democracy and transition into a more totalitarian manifestation (high Modernism). By illustrating what a totalitarian manifestation of the Barcelona Pavilion might look like, Gütschow reinforces the notion that high Modernist structures and architectures were often adopted by states across the political spectrum, and that their formal languages were adapted to suit or to communicate their particular social ideal(s) and contests. Perhaps in this instance, the structure in Shulg presents a could-have-been manifestation of the Barcelona Pavilion, were it commissioned under the Third Reich.

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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 denied 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 balustrades on Mouchotte’s rooftop [Barret, 2013]). The boarded windows also speak of the shortage of windows in many of these structures (like Unité 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 overzealous use of 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 unstrained 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 on 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 probe photographic representations of reality in S, particularly through her use of construction as well as through certain postmodern strategies including paricité and intertextuality, it is, however, in her imaging of high Modernist structures and architectures that her critique of the high Modernist states’ failed social idea(l)s is evident. 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 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 critique high Modernism 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 idea(l)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 idea(l)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 idea(l)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.
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)
In investigating how contemporary artists and photographers image high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning to critique the failure of high Modernism’s social ideal(s), I have focussed 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 authoritarian 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 *Unité 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 ideal(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 Bechuan 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 ideal(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 buildings that have no real world equivalents. Through their construction, Dujardin satirised high Modernism’s often visionary and ‘utopian’ ideas – ideas for structures and architectures that were never built, but could have been – to show just how ridiculous some of these ideas were. Furthermore, by discussing both Gursky’s and Dujardin’s works, I made apparent just how important a role digital manipulation played in the execution of their concepts. For Gursky, digital manipulation made his subject matter seem more controlled or intentional, and thus more determined by the artist, whereas for Dujardin, digital manipulation made the impossible possible. As there were no real world equivalents to the latter’s structures and architectures, it would have been impossible for him to communicate high Modernism’s ideas without digital manipulation.

Finally, with Goldblatt’s South Africa: The Structure of Things Then, I established that Goldblatt critiques the failure of high Modernism and its social ideal(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 these 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.

While I had not intended to devote much time to Goldblatt’s South Africa: The Structure of Things Then, deep consideration nevertheless proved necessary, as the project comprised nearly four decades of Goldblatt’s active investigation into the structures and architectures of South Africa (as opposed to a single project like Gursky’s Paris, Montparnasse). Likewise, apartheid as a failed social ideal(s) was itself complex and diverse, making it difficult, if not impossible, to discuss his works in isolation from its historic context. A discussion in isolation, I believe, would have done a major disservice to his body of work.

In Chapter 4, I conducted an in-depth investigation into Beate Gütschow’s S. As established early in the document, this investigation formed the culmination of the research project. Here, I disclosed my reasons for an acute interest in her body of work, with the most important being that her S series succinctly embodies the thesis that certain contemporary photography images high Modernist structures, architectures, and urban planning to critique the failure of high Modernism’s social ideal(s). In addition, as I stressed in the introduction, save for a few interviews conducted in German and media snippets or features here and there, there is very little coherent information available on the artist’s method and concerns, especially in academia or art history. This provided me with an exciting opportunity to contribute new knowledge, as well as to supplement any gaps in existing knowledge around what I felt was an incredibly stimulating body of work.

As I mentioned in the chapter, much of my original research stemmed from interviews I had conducted with both Gütschow and her galerist, 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 Gütschow images high Modernist structures, architectures, and
urban planning to critique the failure of high Modernism's social ideal(s). I nevertheless began the chapter with a brief discussion of LS. 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 LS, 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(l)s 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(l)s 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 humaneness, 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?
26. Screening of footage taken of the Pruitt-Igoe housing complex upon its demolition, in a video entitled “The Death of an Architectural Myth”. Available https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3j9FHNHee1k&index=201&list=PL3Dq3rQJQaR1vGQ5CQ2 
31. Lucien Hervé. Ouvrages de peintres de la Révolution (1862). Albumen Silver Print. 23.7 x 29.1cm.
new-york).
francais-1898-1952).


