MODERN FORMS

To Olga, Mira and Feliks

Nicolas Grospierre

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An Expanded Subjective Atlas of 20th-Century Architecture

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For me, modernism, and architectural modernism in particular, is the embodiment of one of the greatest ideas in the history of mankind – progress. Alas, the idea failed, but this failure has taken on a certain nobility characteristic of fallen ideals. This moves me considerably on the aesthetic and the ideological level. My works can be received as a form of a critique of modernism, but I must emphasise this is not a critique that comes as a result of reluctance. It is, rather, a contestation, an attempt to demonstrate what had gone wrong. For I can identify with ideas of progress, I believe in them and I long for them.

Nicolas Grospierre

Modern architecture has proved to be an enduring and fascinating subject for Nicolas Grospierre. While photographers in the twentieth century – most notably Lucien Hervé, Ezra Stoller and Julius Shulman – played an important role in creating what would become the popular image of modern architecture, contemporary photographers are now focusing on the remnants of this era to reflect more critically on the legacy of the modern movement. Modern architecture can be seen not just as the physical embodiment of modernist ideology but also, for Grospierre and others, as an expression of both its achievements and its failures to deliver a better world for humankind.

Nicolas Grospierre has been extensively and systematically photographing modern architecture around the world for over a decade, and *Modern Forms: A Subjective Atlas of 20th-Century Architecture* presents an edited selection of images from his extensive archive. At once a reference work and an ongoing personal exploration of modernism, this collection of Grospierre's photographs predominantly covers structures built between 1920 and 1989 in Europe, North and South America, the Middle East and Asia. However, the buildings included here are not categorised by country, date, architect or, indeed, the political regime under which they were built. Instead the photographs constitute a celebration of architectural form, with buildings presented as a continuum of shapes. This sequence represents a shift away from the notion that modern architecture revolved around singular works of greatness, suggesting that it perhaps had a rather more fluid evolution.

Grospierre's criteria for inclusion in this atlas are, as the title suggests, subjective. Some of the buildings are exceptional; others are exceptionally banal. While some iconic buildings are featured, such as the Gateway Arch in Saint Louis and the Eames House in California, the focus is mostly on more unassuming structures. Grospierre is drawn to buildings that were intended for the common good: housing estates, sports facilities, religious buildings, transport infrastructures, hospitals – all buildings intended to improve the lives of ordinary citizens in accordance with the modernist belief that a better world could be built. The present-day realities of these buildings suggest that the modernist project has not always been successful in delivering on its promise.

There is a strong focus on socialist modernism, embodied in buildings such as the Ukrainian Institute of Scientific Research and Development in Kiev and the Institute of Robotics and Technical Cybernetics in Saint Petersburg. Several buildings in this atlas were the result of, and successfully outlasted, the communist regimes that instigated them, raising questions about whether the underlying ideals of modern architecture can be immune from ideology. At the same time, epochal changes in politics, economics and lifestyles have also resulted in many of the buildings captured by Grospierre now facing dereliction and destruction, or serving different functions: a Soviet children's camp in Crimea that used to host thousands of children each year lies in a state of disrepair; a House of Culture in Estonia is being used as a warehouse for agricultural machinery, while others in Crimea and Lithuania are empty; and an ornate water tower at a balneological hospital has since been demolished when the complex was converted into a water park.

Grospierre dwells on several unfamiliar aspects of post-war modern architecture that speak of some of the disparate forces that have shaped the twentieth century, such as the architectural phenomenon of Polish brutalist churches, the utopian Israeli modernism built on kibbutzim, and the Oscar Niemeyer-designed International Fairgrounds in Tripoli, never completed due to the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War. All these buildings are photographed in an unpretentious, straightforward style – Grospierre aims to communicate a clear idea of any given building in just one image – and presented on the page with minimal information identifying their use or location, coercing readers into forming their own judgements and responses based on just the facade and general condition of the building. The photography is accompanied by an index at the back of the book with further information. Collated by Grospierre, and informed by extensive research by the Warsaw-based Centrum Architektury, the index offers facts and anecdotes about the featured buildings and serves as an extended resource regarding many of these overlooked examples of modern architecture.

While the book can be read as a valuable addition to the discourse around modern architecture, essentially it functions as an artist's book: a singular project conceived by Grospierre that is both playful and searching. At the heart of this atlas, and Grospierre's wider practice, is a desire to critique the underlying modernist belief that a better world could be built. Through his photography, Grospierre encourages us to do this too.

A Global Montage of Attractions

Martino Stierli

As the twentieth century rapidly fades into the distant past, the formal repertoire it has developed in terms of modern architecture increasingly fills us with wonder and awe. The awareness of historical distance is thus paired with a sense of the exotic – familiar and ubiquitous, yet strange and otherworldly nonetheless. Nicolas Grospierre's "subjective" – and, by necessity, incomplete – atlas of this repertoire, assembled on six continents, speaks to this conundrum. How might we unpack it? Is Grospierre's gaze on modern and modernist architecture indicative of a sense of nostalgia for the "ideological clarity … of the Cold War era", as the curator Dieter Roelstraete has argued, and thus of an "inability to grasp or even look at the present, much less to excavate the future"?[1] Or is this investigation rather to be understood as a productive mining of the ideological content of modernist utopias, in an attempt to reimagine our collectively shared spaces in the here and now? Or, in the words of art historian Claire Bishop, who, like Roelstraete, was not referencing Grospierre specifically, but rather a strand of contemporary art more generally: "Are these revisitations in any way political, a response to the limitations of postmodern eclecticism? Or should they be viewed more critically, as an avoidance of contemporary politics by escaping into nostalgic celebration of the past?"[2]

Wherever one may stand on this question, Grospierre is only one among many prominent contemporary artists working in a number of media who in recent years have turned to recovering modernism's aesthetics – and, by implication, ethics and ideologies. Indeed, Grospierre's photographs find good company in Goshka Macuga's archival research and monumental tapestries, or in the video works by artists such as Amie Siegel or David Maljković, to name just a few prominent examples.[3] It is worth noting that these artists not only work in a variety of media, but that they come from countries that were situated on both sides of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War, the period in which so many (if not all) of the buildings captured in Grospierre's atlas came into existence. We might conclude that this is a generational project, driven from a position of historical posteriority and by an inquiry into how architectural form might signify much more than built exuberance, and embody bold societal and utopian assertions that lent these structures their credibility in the first place.

Modern Forms presents highlights of Grospierre's expansive expeditions to the sites of modernist architectural production across the globe. This volume presents some 200 images of facades and exterior views of buildings of a wide variety of programmes and functions, yet most of them publicly accessible and erected for the common good.[4] While each of the buildings portrayed is presented as a remarkable structure in its own right, the artist features them as part of a carefully orchestrated sequence, where the end loops back at the beginning. If this speaks to Grospierre's taste for cyclical sequences – he references Jorge Luis Borges's *Library of Babel* as one of his favorite works of literature – it also underscores the artist's understanding that his atlas (and with it, architectural modernism more broadly) is essentially a potentially endlessly expandable yet self-contained entity. The emphasis indeed lies not so much on the individual buildings and their context, of which we learn relatively little, but rather on modernism as a larger, abstract category. While each of the photographs could possibly stand by itself, it is precisely this presentation in the form of a sequence that gives them their deeper meaning and resonance. It is a sequence carefully constructed on formal terms, starting out from circles, discs, and cupolas, moving on to prisms and from there to cubes and so forth, declining the whole arsenal of platonic figures and illustrating Le Corbusier's famous quote that serves as an epigram and prelude to this photographic essay: "Architecture is the learned game, correct and magnificent, of forms assembled in the light." To leaf through this sequence is a quasi-cinematic experience with its very own narrative that twists and turns, constructs intensities and moments of repose, accelerates, climaxes, and slows down again to produce a drama of multiple acts and with a cast of seemingly immobile and inanimate actors that are brought to life by the sheer fact of their propinquity.

That Grospierre calls his project somewhat paradoxically a "subjective atlas" is both telling and consequential. The selection of images of buildings is indeed somewhat arbitrary, given the vast number of similar structures around the world that might have caught Grospierre's attention if he had had a chance to visit. The term of the atlas conversely situates the project both within a scientific and scholarly convention and a specific genre of image-making that is intrinsically linked to the modern project, and particularly to the visual imaginaries in both theoretical thinking and artistic production of the twentieth century. As Benjamin Buchloh has reminded us in his thoughtful interpretation of Gerhard Richter's *Atlas,* this format came into use in the late sixteenth century and was defined as a book that compiles and organises geographical and astronomical knowledge in visual form.[5] In the nineteenth century, the term in German came to increasingly signify "any tabular display of systematised knowledge, so that one could have encountered an atlas in almost all fields of empirical science."[6] While the atlas was thus foremost a

representational medium of positivist science, Buchloh further reminds us that the term later on increasingly took on a metaphorical meaning, exemplified Aby Warburg's famous *Mnemosyne Atlas*. Developed in 1928–9 (yet remaining incomplete), the art historian sought to construct an image-based "collective historical memory" that would identify recurring motifs of gesture and bodily expression from antiquity to the Renaissance (the so-called "pathos formulas").

These distinctions are helpful to further articulate Grospierre's own "subjective atlas" in the history of the genre: *Modern Forms* is neither a tabular montage of the simultaneous presentation of images on a single plane (as in the case of *Mnemosyne*), nor is it concerned with the systematic presentation of knowledge as positivist science would have it. Rather, his is a consciously curated selection of images that are presented in a sequential, linear narrative more akin to a cinematic experience, perhaps aligned with Sergei Eisenstein's notion of the "Montage of Abstractions."[7] We may stipulate whether the formal predilections that are evident in Grospierre's atlas are indeed modernist architecture's pathos formulas, and whether it serves, in Buchloh's terms, as a "model of historical memory" for that architectural modernism. And further, to what degree this mnemonic dimension is suited to recall the ethical implications underlying the represented buildings.

The modernism under consideration in these pages is not to be understood as a stylistic denominator, but as a historiographical marker, for the vast majority (if not all) of Grospierre's images show buildings from the second half of the twentieth century, thus affirming the assumption that his project engages architectural production in the bifurcated world order of the Cold War. Exceptions to this chronological timeframe are few and far between, with Max Berg's iconic Centennial Hall in Wroclaw from 1913 and the Southwestern Bell Building in Saint Louis from 1925 by Mauran, Russell & Crowell with I.R. Timlin on the one end of the historical spectrum, and Oscar Niemeyer's 2006 National Museum of the Republic in Brasília on the other. Grospierre's project is further characterised by its inclusion of works both by prominent auteur-architects and little-known or even unknown architects and builders, suggesting a flow of formal ideas that stretches both ends of the high/low divide between Architecture with a capital "A" and its popularised, often anonymous counterparts. *Modern Form*s thus points to the existence of a truly vernacular modernism as much as a modernist vernacular. This vernacular is held together not so much by a shared set of stylistic criteria, as the selection of buildings span from Art Deco and the so-called International Style all the way to brutalism and even hints of postmodernism. Rather, the overwhelming majority of the depicted structures are public in nature and tied to ideals of social progress and egalitarian access to services such as education, health care, transport, or entertainment. Indeed, what many of the buildings in this selection eloquently express is a shared belief in the capacity to transform society according to such ideals, whether through the Welfare State in Western Europe, socialism principles in the East, or the politics of decolonisation and self-determination in recently independent countries in Asia and Africa. Grospierre's selection indicates that modernist architecture was by no means limited to a specific political system or ideology, but instead a global lingua franca for the politics of progress. The sense of historical distance or estrangement that these buildings exude for the contemporary viewer is a consequence of the realisation that these many of these idealistic tenets were plagued by inherent flaws. Nonetheless, Grospierre says he "cannot but be envious of this moment in time when humans, as a civilisation, were firmly believing that tomorrow would be better than today."

The international outlook of Grospierre's project is key to its understanding. The atlas includes buildings from countries in Western, Central, and Eastern Europe, the United States and South America, the Middle East, South and South East Asia, as well as North Africa and Australia; and even though a certain emphasis on Central and Eastern Europe, and in particular Poland (Grospierre's adopted place of living), is noticeable, the project is nonetheless remarkably global in its framing. As a matter of fact, *Modern Forms* serves as a radical proposition that requires a fundamental rethinking of how the dissemination of architectural modernism has traditionally been conceptualised and historicised. According to conventional notions of Eurocentric historiography, modernism was essentially a project that originated in Central and Western Europe and from there was exported across the globe. Grospierre's visual investigation of post-war modernism fundamentally questions this reductionist understanding of history. Modernisms, myths of origin and originality are not in focus, but what matters instead is how the formal repertoire of modernism became a universally accessible architectural language that was applied by architects around the world simultaneously and quasi naturally. Counter to a perceived primacy of the West, *Modern Form* demonstrates the global fluency and fluidity of this idiom; one that architects did not understand as a foreign import, but rather a valid tool for self-expression and even self-determination within a politics of emancipation, often in the service of a larger societal or political vision.

Grospierre's project encapsulates the notion that modernist architecture of the "three worlds" – the capitalist West as much as the communist East and the Non-Aligned Movement in between – had much more in common than conventional developmentalist hierarchies and narratives would have it. Post-war modernism was the result of a highly cosmopolitan and globalised architectural culture that resorted to a common language while at the same time allowing for the expression of local specificities in terms of materiality and iconography. Although, admittedly, the larger sociopolitical context of these buildings can only be guessed from Grospierre's photographs, the index in the back of the book allows the reader to arrive at a basic understanding of when and where and by whom these structures were built, and for what purpose. The proto-cinematic sequence of images is thus complemented by an apparatus of knowledge; a nod to the very origins of the meaning of the atlas.

1. Dieter Roelstraete, "The Way of the Shovel: On the Archaeological Imaginary in Art", *e-flux* 4 (March 2009), see https://www.e-flux.com/journal/04/68582/the-way-of-the-shovel-on-the-archeological-imaginary-in-art/ (accessed 17 May 2021).
2. Claire Bishop, "Modernist Revisitations" (2013), see https://www.fotomuseum.ch/de/series/modernist-revisitations/ (accessed 17 May 2021).
3. Claire Bishop recently worked on a project exploring contemporary artists who are revisiting modernism through their work, see ibid.
4. The artist has dedicated another volume to spectacular modernist interiors, see Nicolas Grospierre, *Modern Spaces: A Subjective Atlas of 20th-Century Interiors* (Munich: Prestel, 2018).
5. See Benjamin Buchloh, "Gerhard Richter's Atlas: The Anomic Archive", *October*, vol. 88 (spring 1999), pp. 117–14; 119.
6. Ibid., pp. 119–22.
7. See Sergei M. Eisenstein, "The Montage of Abstractions" (1923) in *Selected Works, Vol. 1: Writings, 1922–34*, ed. R. Taylor (London: BFI Publishing, 1988), pp. 33–8.

The Monogrammist "NG"

Adam Mazur

Nicolas Grospierre is an artist fascinated by the aesthetics and ideologies of modernism, as expressed through the architecture from this era. He has been photographing modernist buildings since the beginning of the twenty-first century, steadily building an extensive archive that currently includes almost 1,000 images of buildings scattered across the world – many of which have since been destroyed and can now only be seen in photographs. The artist has always had a particular interest in the modernism of the former Soviet bloc, an interest enabled by the fact that Grospierre, a Frenchman born in Switzerland, resides in Warsaw. The Polish capital's convenient location allows him to easily move through and study the former member states of the Warsaw Pact, in search of new, surprising forms.

The first years of the new millennium saw Grospierre create photographic series about specific architectural moments that ended up becoming stand-alone works such as *Hotel Visaginas* (2003), which explored a Lithuanian town – built between 1975 and 1976 to house workers at the nearby Ignalina nuclear plant – slowly becoming deserted after the power station was declared unfit to function. *Hydroklinika* (2005) documented the ornate architecture of the Balneological Hospital of Druskininkai, Lithuania, before it was turned into a water amusement park, and *Lithuanian Bus Stops* (2004) presented a series of brightly coloured, prefabricated shelters built in the 1960s and 1970s. It should be noted that some of the photography from this period has now formed part of this present atlas, *Modern Forms*.

With time, Grospierre's interest shifted from documentary to conceptual photography. He created several photography-based immersive installations, including *The Library* (2006) and *The Bank* (2008), which explored the nature of the institutions after which they were named. Several photographic objects were also realised, consisting of images which had been digitally manipulated. *Kolorobloki* (2005), for instance, comprises a series of photographs of buildings covered by colourful emalite glass – a system of facade-sheathing developed in the 1950s – reconstructed by Grospierre in a modular manner so that their facades have all the same proportions and the same number of floors, and *W70* (2007) celebrates Poland's most popular prefabricated multi-storey home system from the 1970s.

Over the years, Grospierre's art practice has matured, and his photographs of architecture have become simpler, yet equally powerful documents. "This could almost be called automatic photography, a reflex I had that meant that each time I saw a building that was interesting to me, I pulled out my camera and took a shot," Grospierre says, adding, "Sometimes I used the photographs I took in other works, like in the case of *K-Pool i spółka*, where they became the second part of a project that referenced Rem Koolhaas's concept of an imaginary floating swimming pool."

Grospierre's photographs, used in a purely functional way, or occasionally presented as part of larger exhibitions (such as "The City Which Does Not Exist", 2012, at Cracow's Bunkier Sztuki), became a collection that was increasingly extensive, but which still lacked its own distinguishable shape. While working on his picture album *Open-Ended* in 2012 and 2013, he made his first step towards isolating a collection of photographs that documented twentieth-century modernism. Those architectural photographs were then presented as a part of *A Personal Archive of Modern Architecture* (2013), a project that lay the ground for this present atlas. In 2014, the artist decided to gradually share online his collection of around 800 photographs of buildings, which included many images from the former USSR (Georgia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Crimea, Russia), but also from Lebanon, Israel, the USA, Brazil and, of course, Central Europe and Poland. His Tumblr site, titled *A Subjective Atlas of Modern Architecture*, gained popularity quickly, having built up almost 25,000 followers from around the world at the time of writing. This accumulation of images exemplifies the work of an artist who has long been interested in indefinite collections and complete classifications (see, for example, his work *Typologia* (2011), part of the "Skontrum" group exhibition at Warsaw's National Museum, or the *Kunstkamera* (2009) installation at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw).

When Grospierre began thinking about how to turn this collection into a book, he noticed an important problem – his images of buildings, which were constantly being reblogged on the internet, were very different from one another. They showed different countries, styles, periods and functions, not to mention the fact that the buildings were the creations of different architects. In addition to that, the photographs had been taken in different seasons and in different lighting conditions, and, of course, they were in different formats (some square, some vertical, some horizontal). "At that point I decided," Grospierre says, "that the key should be strictly formal, it should come from the form of the building, and a sequence of photographs

would look like a form gradation. We start from one building and slowly, picture by picture, find subsequent forms." This interest in gradations, clearly visible in this book, recalls other explorations of a single idea, typology or taxonomy that can be found in cycles such as *Oval Offices* (2013), *Lithuanian Bus Stops* and *Żory*, a photograph from the *W70* series. This string of images also brings to mind the way images are often presented on Tumblr and the internet generally, whilst simultaneously giving the impression of going through a flipbook. When leafing through the book we progress through a sort of formal circle – the last picture in the sequence is the same as the first one. In this sense, the crazy atlas of forms is like a globe that spins indefinitely. This notion is strengthened by the first/last image itself: a round, concrete, one-legged canopy. Grospierre has taken such an approach before, putting images in a loop and placing the viewer inside it; this was the case in *The Library*, *TATTARRATTAT* (2010) and *Kunstkamera*. The meaning behind such a course of action can be expressed by the title of one of Grospierre's works, *The Self-Fulfilling Image* (2009), in which placing the story shown in the photograph in a loop is the core concept.

Grospierre's photographs are carefully organised and give the impression of a topographical document. As art critic Łukasz Gorczyca notes, the artist is interested "not so much in the spatial characteristics of the photographed objects as in their iconicity." Iconic for Grospierre does not mean finished and beautiful, or even easily recognisable. As Łukasz Gorczyca writes, "the photographer is not interested in eye-pleasing visual effects in the form of blue skies, surprising highlighted structural elements or the spectacular integration of a mass into a well-kept, natural landscape." Grospierre is a compulsive voyeur of modern ruins and vernacular architecture, which he confronts with classic buildings by Eero Saarinen or Oscar Niemeyer. In that sense, *Modern Forms* is a kind of biographical record, a sequence of intimate encounters with buildings rather than a soulless typology of concrete, glass and steel objects.

As an example, the photograph on the cover of the small edition of the original *Modern Forms* publication, reproduced here on page 33, showing the facade of the House of the Soviets in Kaliningrad, Russia, is a typical Grospierre axial shot that presents the entire building at a ninety-degree angle. The photograph recalls at the same time the tale about the complex history of the place and the meanders of progress. The brutalist building, designed by Yulian L. Shvartsbreim, is large and heavy, its sheer mass being emphasised by the cars parked in front of it and the boy in a sweatshirt and shorts standing next to it. In addition to the scale of the building, the juxtaposition of a dilapidated lower floor and relatively renovated upper floors draws attention. Missing windows, damp patches on the raw concrete and stairs, and the car park indicate that the House of the Soviets is abandoned. The upper part of the skyscraper, painted in a light blue – an optimistic colour – stands out against the grey sky. This is the result of a superficial renovation carried out in 2005 on the occasion of Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Kaliningrad, which was celebrating its sixtieth anniversary. Putin could see the central building from street level in his limousine, so the local authorities decided there was no point in renovating the lower part, which was out of the president's sight. Planned as a symbol of Soviet power, the House of the Soviets thus also illustrates the facade transformation of post-communist Russia. To Grospierre, it reminds us of Potemkin villages built by subservient officials so as not to irritate the tsars with the brutal truth about the state of the country. On top of that, Kaliningrad's icon of Soviet modernism is nicknamed "the buried robot" by its inhabitants. The association of concrete bay windows with eyes and mouths is self-explanatory. Nothingness shines through the large concrete surfaces of the dilapidated structure. It seems that everything has come to an end and nothing will ever start again. There is some heroic and icy beauty in the crumbling House of the Soviets. It is as if a gigantic animal was dying, having come from space to earth on its last journey.

Another name for this structure dominating the city centre is "Prussian's revenge". Deciphering this nickname requires a look into history. Königsberg, which had been part of the Kingdom of Prussia, the German Empire and the Reich since the middle of the seventeenth century, surrendered after a siege of more than two months on 9 April 1945. The Red Army entered the ruined city, which, according to the Potsdam Conference of July 1945, passed under Soviet control. It begins with a name change in honour of Mikhail Kalinin, a Bolshevik apparatchik faithfully serving Stalin, who died in 1946. The Soviet authorities had no plans to rebuild the ruined city. On the contrary, after the expulsion of the German population in 1948, they systematically demolished the remains of the historic urban fabric and built new housing estates. Sovietisation was supposed to erase the memory of Königsberg's German history. However, the ruins of the castle still stood above the canals along which Immanuel Kant strolled, with the castle spire towering at 84.5 metres high. It took a personal decision by Leonid Brezhnev to blow up the medieval castle, considered a symbol of Prussian militarism, and to build the House of the Soviets in its place. The construction never ended, however, due to subsidence problems, as the structure was built on the castle's ruined foundation. After the collapse of the USSR, there were discussions about adapting the Soviet House for commercial purposes, demolishing the impractical structure, or even rebuilding the Teutonic castle. None of the ideas came to fruition, as if everyone was waiting for the next turn of history. "My works can be received as a form of a critique of modernism, but I must emphasise this is not a critique that comes as a result of reluctance," Grospierre writes. "It is, rather, a contestation, an attempt to demonstrate what had gone wrong."

Nicolas Grospierre's atlas of modern forms can be seen in relation to a number of topographical and artistic projects, by artists from Bernd and Hilla Becher to Luis Jacob. But what seems more interesting is reading Grospierre's proposition in the context of the ideas of Aby Warburg, well known to art historians as the author of the *Mnemosyne Atlas*. If Warburg was interested in the seeping of antiquity's art forms into Renaissance and contemporary times, Grospierre has a similar approach to modernity. The artist doesn't use the architecture itself – that would require an absolute decontextualisation of those objects – but images of it and associated ideas. The buildings, reduced to photographs printed in the form of figures on the pages of a book and scaled so as to match each other, not only show the movements of a photographer who travels across continents and countries, but can also function as an illustration of the universalist aspirations and untamed imaginations of modernist architects. The artist's archive, presented in the archaic form of a printed book, brings to mind the movement of a wheel in perpetual motion. The concrete forms, put into a spin every time the book is opened, momentarily break away from topography and allow for the establishment of a new relationship between objects – simultaneously stronger and looser, and all the more intriguing for its purely formal nature. Grospierre also manages to break the monotony of Becher typologies, while escaping the completely arbitrary character of Jacob's collections.

Looked at today, Grospierre's collection of photographs appears as a cohesive whole, even though the pictures were taken intuitively, and not following a preconceived plan. This body of work can be understood in the context of Siegfried Kracauer's theory that photography acts as a "monogram of history". "The last image of a person is that person's actual history," said the *Theory of Film* author. "That history is like a monogram that condenses the name into a single graphic figure which is meaningful as an ornament." In other words,

when looking at any given photograph from Grospierre's atlas, we can see a condensed form of the history of twentieth-century modernist architecture, but also – as Grospierre himself noticed – all of the forms that came before and after that one particular image.

This atlas also functions as a flipbook that can be enjoyed like a film carefully cut from various shots or stills. Grospierre's montage of attractions makes the distance between buildings located hundreds or thousands of kilometres apart, created by different architects and for different purposes, disappear. Putting the spotlight on form brings to mind the "madness" of Warburg's collections of Giotto and Ghirlandaio, which don't take into account the influence one artist had on the other and eliminate the chronological order of the history of art. In Grospierre's atlas, instead of airy, ethereal movements of Botticelli's nymphs, or the Bacchic motifs of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Florentine art, we see the motion of architectural forms, typical of the twentieth century, and easily recognised in today's concrete-, glass- and synthetic-fibre-dominated world.

Warburg's concept of *pathos formulae* from the 1920s – expressed in the emotional gestures and poses found in the paintings he chose for his unfinished magnum opus, *Mnemosyne Atlas* – is nowhere to be found in the architectural objects photographed by Grospierre. While one could mention the "poetry of concrete", the "distinct shapes" or the "symbolism of the details", doing so doesn't change the fact that the modern architecture in Grospierre's atlas is firmly detached from clear emotions and noticeable expression. Even the most bizarre forms, captured by Grospierre in faraway and often exotic locations, don't speak as clearly as the theorists of *architecture parlante*, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux and Étienne-Louis Boullée, would have wanted them to at the dawn of modernity. The photographic atlas constitutes a particular collection that allows for iconological studies, but its meaning remains unclear (or is perhaps still waiting to be explained). Meanwhile, the artist arranges his pictorial archive in an intuitive manner, creating surreal landscapes. The architectural forms collected by Grospierre and arranged in a *dynamogram* in the shape of a book resemble Warburg's mnemic waves (*mnemische Wellen*), in that they are a flow of visual energy that might be difficult to decode, but that can nevertheless be seen as a logical sequence.

Many pictures from Nicolas Grospierre's atlas show buildings – and therefore modernity – in disrepair. Decaying structures overgrown with grass and shrubbery, sometimes decorated with people who function as mere staffage, resemble eighteenth-century etchings of Roman ruins. They are one of the artist's recurring motifs – in 2008 he was awarded the Golden Lion at the Architecture Biennale in Venice for an exhibition titled "The Afterlife of Buildings" (a joint undertaking with Kobas Laksa, and curated by Grzegorz Piątek and Jarosław Trybuś). While the Venetian exhibition featured futuristic fantasies of the fall of modern architecture by Laksa, *Modern Forms* shows a future that was predicted by modernism, and that has already ended. In other words, the modernity presented in this volume is for Nicolas Grospierre what antiquity was for Renaissance and Enlightenment artists. The curators of documenta 12, Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, posed the question, "Is modernity our antiquity?" Grospierre's atlas gives a clear, affirmative answer.

This is a revised and expanded version of a text originally written by Adam Mazur for the first edition of *Modern Forms*.

Architecture is the learned game, correct and magnificent, of forms assembled in the light.

Le Corbusier, *Toward an Architecture*

Bus Stop, Koreiz, Crimea, Russia

Space Museum and Heliport, International Fairgrounds, Tripoli, Lebanon

Organ Console, Stone Mountain Park, Atlanta, Georgia

Cross-City Line Powiśle Station Lower Entrance, Warsaw, Poland

Tehran City Theatre, Tehran, Iran

Aviation Museum, Belgrade, Serbia

Slovak Radio Building, Bratislava, Slovakia

State Government Office, Geelong, Australia

Hotel Onogošt, Nikšić, Montenegro

Ciech Headquarters Building, Warsaw, Poland

Swiss Medical Research Foundation, Geneva, Switzerland