

The Radiant City

Carlos Azeredo Mesquita

Foreword

In the summer of 2009 I moved from Porto to Budapest for what was to be one semester as an exchange student. I was determined to avoid, at all costs, the banal sins of Erasmus life, one of them being to treat the city one has moved to as a generic foreign place where to hang out with other foreigners, not truly engaging with the reality one is living in.

As someone who grew up in the West, and had always been curious about “the other side of the Wall”, I was already reasonably familiar with the clichés, so the quest to “hungarianize” myself included reading literature classics, watching cult films and cooking to grandmother standards. But also the rather ambitiously naïve pretension of understating the ghosts and testing the myths of what had been forty years of communist government and how it had “really” affected that society. Therefore, the block of flats, as one of those ubiquitous Eastern Europe trademarks, was quite obviously one of the first targets of my interest.

From the roots of Marxist philosophy comes the concept that a society must exist for the benefit of social orders that have historically done a disproportionately large volume of the total work. With the 1917 Revolution in Russia this is a principle that gets questionably implemented, and which eventually reached Hungary during its Communist decades. In an ideological system admittedly dedicated to workers and peasants, the most important structures could not be churches, skyscrapers or shopping centres, but residential areas that materialized the ideal of the common good. The result is about 170 million people, in the former Soviet area, living in what are “machines for living” taken to extreme.

I started wandering around the massive housing estates that dot the outskirts of Budapest. One day I came across a street where, lined side by side, were nine identical caravans that served as small shops and were not part of the original conception of the estate. Disbelief best describes what I felt, as this pretty much summed up my thoughts about these places: the idea that uniform housing would produce uniform citizens was proven wrong here, yet this non-planned occurrence was just as serial as the surroundings.

As I was fairly sure this couldn't be an isolated situation, naturally I had to visit every single housing estate in town, and to my fascination I quickly stumbled upon other very similar ones. They all fulfilled the same premise: non-planned elements that repeated themselves in a linear manner within the space of the housing estates.

During my incursions I started documenting these "anomalies", an exercise of observation and gathering, part photography part anthropology. Formally, it evoked certain principles of serialism and panoramic photography. Never was my intention to "criticize" or portray these places as "communist oddities", something I often see westerners doing when approaching Eastern Europe. I wanted to be as objective and respectful as possible; more than anything, I wanted to understand.

The result is "The Radiant City", the title an appropriation of Le Corbusier's "Ville Radieuse", a seminal book from 1933 whose ideas and utopias about urban development served as base, to an extent, to these and many other similar housing developments.

In 2010 this body of work was awarded the BES Revelação Award (given to photographers in Portugal under the age of 30), and object of a proper exhibition at the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, in Porto, but never got published and therefore wasn't accessible. This book now showcases eleven of the situations I documented, accompanied by an essay by Levente Polyák originally written for the exhibition catalogue, and which gives this project the context it needs.

What started as a way of coming to terms with a place, ended up with the one-semester exchange turning into three, and my connection to Budapest deepening to the point it now feels like another home. Life is shaped by circumstances and to what one assents to, rather than by meticulous decisions. In the end, all countries everywhere have small Hungarian-type specialties of their own.

Carlos Azeredo Mesquita

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Alacskai úti lakótelep (Alaska Road Estate)

The construction of another part of this housing estate was started, but halted because of the end of the regime, and never went further than the earthworks from which the regular "hill" is evidence. The rooftops on the back belong to recent houses, some still under construction, and all very identical.



Békásmegyer lakótelep (Békásmegyer Estate)

Concrete blocks used to prevent cars from parking on the grassed areas. Residents also use them as seats for when chatting by the entrances, an evidence of which is the worn out grass. Some blocks were moved, so that people can seat closer together.



MÁV lakótelep/Salgótarjáni utca (MÁV Estate/Salgótarjáni Street)

Caravans used as shops that are only open on weekends.



Havana utcai lakótelep (Havana Street Estate)

Caravans used as shops, and that open on weekends only.



Havana utcai lakótelep (Havana Street Estate)

Round precast-concrete flowerbeds that used to have a tree, from which only a stump survives.



Újpesti lakótelep (Újpest Estate)

Row of ping-pong tables in the area between two blocks of flats. They are a common feature on many other estates.



Józsefvárosi Piac/Kínai Piac (Józsefváros Market/Chinese Market)

Back of the Chinese Market viewed from the abandoned Józsefváros Railway Station. The shipping containers serve as makeshift establishments, in which the lower one is as a shop, while the upper one is used as storage. This market was torn down in 2013, and transferred to the opposite side of the street



Kőbánya-Kispest

Running alongside a road, this pipe is part of the district heating system that supplies hot water to the Kőbánya-Kispest Estate.



Rákoskeresztúri lakótelep/Újlak utca

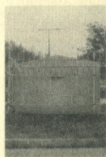
(Rákoskeresztúr Estate/Újlak Street [New Home Street])

Construction of this largely built estate was halted because of the end of the regime, but the foundations for the new buildings remain untouched.



Kőbánya-Kispest lakótelep (Kőbánya-Kispest Estate)

Many estates didn't originally feature garages, as car ownership only became widespread after the end of the regime. The solution was to build them later, normally at the edge of the estates, following this or other similar designs. On these ones, the graffiti read, among other identical slogans, "workers party" and "class struggle".



Erdősor úti lakótelep (Erdősor Road Estate)

Another solution for the same problem of lack of garages: covered parking space was created out of tents large enough for cars, installed at an open-air common area that got fenced for this propose.

Ready-made serialism: images of uniformity and transgression in the post-socialist city

by Levente Polyák

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the post-socialist urban landscape became an object of inquiry for a generation of artists. Sometimes seeking to find inspiration in unpredictable spatial configurations, but most often looking for remnants of a once imagined parallel future, these artists began discovering crumbling socialist housing estates as if they were purely aesthetic objects – or on the contrary, genuine folkloric artifacts. The fascination for traces of a failed utopia created a complex framework of perception that functions as a kind of new orientalism, often called as “ostalgia”: an optic that directs the ways post-socialist spaces may be seen and represented. Hijacking perception in the polarized realms of the aesthetic and the folkloric, this optic leaves not much space for the analytic regard.

When Westerners tour Eastern European cities, they often find their objects of interest either in the “architectural uncanny” or in the “architectural extraordinary”.¹ Frédéric Chaubin, whose photographs, taken at the peripheries of the former Soviet Union, of buildings that are most often described as “eccentric”, “sci-fi” or “cosmic communist constructions”, is one of the protagonists of the socialist architectural extraordinary.² Similarly, Ursula Schulz’s photographs of bus shelters in Armenia stage

1 See Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992.

2 See for example the introduction of Chaubin’s show at the Storefront for Art and Architecture, in New York City, available from http://www.storefrontnews.org/exhibitions_events/exhibitions?e=239 [accessed 8 November 2010].

their objects in fashion-show-like situations. Wolfgang Thaler, another photographer of the socialist architectural sublime, is an equally important mediator, in his case between the architectural history of the Balkans and the architectural scene of Central Europe.³ Be they sensationalist, it is with the help of these photographers and others whose images have been circulating across the art- and architectural world, that Eastern Europeans learned to appreciate a peculiar segment of their built heritage.

In a way, Carlos Azeredo Mesquita shares this fascination, setting himself to “test the myths and ghosts” of the existing socialism. However, assuming his determination to “place this project in the field of the observation and gathering, a hybrid of photography with anthropology and sociology”, the photographer avoids the traps of Ostalgia, resisting the seduction of both the ridiculous and the desperate. In The Radiant City series, Mesquita relies on his anthropological sensibility to make sense of the traces of informal and obsolete structures, and uses photography to capture, reveal, emphasize and organize them.

In contrast to the photographers looking for the architectural extraordinary in post-socialist countries, Mesquita's objects belong to the realm of the ordinary. Nevertheless, they are as important elements of the “socialist environment” as distinguished public buildings. As David Crowley and Susan E. Reid propose in their book on socialist spaces:

In Soviet discourse, ordinary spaces could become “Great Spaces” through a connection with the “grand spatial narratives” of socialism. [...] At the same time, “social justice”, as conceived by Marxist ideology, demanded the “democratization” of space. Even the “Greatest Spaces” [...] were “everyday” in the idealized sense projected by the socialist regimes that they were to be used and possessed by all.⁴

The tension between the objectivity of the camera's mechanical optic and the subjectivity of the human gaze, let alone the individuality of interpretation, has been discussed throughout the history of photographic practice. But the way Mesquita links this tension to the antagonism between the built environment and its uses brings us closer both to the key dilemmas of photography and to

3 See for example the travelling Balkanology exhibition “Balkanology: Neue Architektur und urbane Phänomene in Südosteuropa”, Schweizerisches Architekturmuseum, Basel, 4 October – 28 December 2008; Architekturzentrum Wien, Vienna, 22 October 2009 – 18 January 2010.

4 David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, “Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc”, in David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (eds), *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, Oxford/New York: Berg Publishers, 2002, p. 8.

those of urbanism. The geometrical precision and uncompromised frontality of The Radiant City series also highlights a very important element in Mesquita's approach: by joining his images into a folded panorama, he wants us to look at the ruined public facilities, abandoned construction sites and invented functions as remnants of an expired spatial order, or units of a past coordinate system aspiring to totality.

The Radiant City

The concept of a total environment, formulated by succeeding communist and socialist regimes, was based on understanding space as a "socializing project that undertook the formation of a new kind of person or moral subject. New ways of organizing the home, the workplace or the street would, it was claimed, produce new social relations that would, in turn, produce a new consciousness".⁵

Interior design and apartment structures were meant to support preferable family structures, neighborhood relations and ways of living in the same manner as public parks were designed to pacify co-existence and urban districts were planned to facilitate the distribution of work and the logistics of labor, as well as to create an inescapable dependence on the state. Architectural aesthetics and ethics were thus closely intertwined:

The main goal of the architectural appearance of these towns was to demonstrate the socialist principles and to show the people "the socialist modes of behaviour". One of the most important functions of socialist cities was to turn their inhabitants into "socialist people".⁶

Clearly, socialist town planning is not only a formal heir of Le Corbusier's modernist concepts: while the building shapes and urban forms of socialist towns and housing districts bear a close resemblance to the famous drawings of the Radiant City's cityscape (it is significant that Carlos Azeredo Mesquita chose this title for his series), they also reproduce the belief in architecture's determining force. The emancipatory project of the Radiant City is one of the most controversial missions in architectural history; especially if we take into account its most fundamental premise, the liberation of the human mind by modern architectural forms, emphasized by Le Corbusier himself:

5 Ibid., p. 15.

6 Sándor Horváth, "Urban Socialism and Everyday Life in Sztálinváros", in *Berliner Osteuropa Info*, vol. 23, Berlin: Osteuropa Institut, Freie Universität Berlin, 2005, p. 44. Available from http://www.oei.fu-berlin.de/media/publikationen/boi/boi_23/06_horvath.pdf [accessed 8 November 2010].

The house that can be built for modern man (and the city too), a magnificently disciplined machine, can bring back the liberty of the individual—at present crushed out of existence—to each and every member of society.⁷

Socialist architectural thinking eventually went farther than that. Design and planning here became tools not as much to emancipate the individual, as to reshape the human being in general. Tony Wood in his essay on Soviet avantgarde architecture describes the way Konstantin Melnikov, an eminent architect of the early years of the régime, created plans of buildings where sleeping was to be controlled.⁸ The Sonata of Sleep, as Melnikov called the building, was meant to provide for perfect sleep with sounds, scents, appropriate temperature, humidity and air pressure. This idea of a total environment represented an extraordinary example of the “fantasy of control over the entire sensory experience”⁹. Wood concludes his essay assuming that “communism, then, was to be not simply a shift in property relations, but a frontal assault on the confines of human nature”.¹⁰

However, planners’ control over urban development was clearly limited; socialist space had been formed in the “shifting and multi-layered interaction between spatial organization, expression and use.”¹¹ Contradictions between planning and everyday use were particularly spectacular in the case of Sztálinváros (now Dunaujváros) the par excellence socialist town in Hungary: from its early days on, the gap between plans and the mental geographies of its habitants had been progressively widening; urban nodes and commercial corridors were shifting away from where they had been planned. The town’s Bauhaus-trained planner, Tibor Weiner was entirely conscious of the degree to which political and ideological concepts of the town’s desired order were discordant from its actual life. In his description of the first years of the town, he started questioning the “possibility of planning”, the ability to plan for the depths organically provided by historical towns:

7 Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City: Elements of a Doctrine of Urbanism to be Used as the Basis of Our Machine-Age Civilization*, New York: Orion Press, 1967, p. 143.

8 Tony Wood, “Bodies at Rest”, *Cabinet Magazine* (New York), no. 24, 2007, p. 21-23.

9 Ibid., p. 21.

10 Ibid., p. 22.

11 Crowley and Reid, p. 4.

*Already in the first phase of planning, it became obvious that the notion of the “planned town” is, under these circumstances, false. It became clear that a town, built at once, in a transitional historical period – in the first years of socialism –, has its own laws of growth, just as other urban organisms do, which were born in a historical process. [...] The planned city should provide for at least the quality of life of the organic city, where the gradual evolution of times gave birth to the most diverse frames of moods: shining avenues with dizzying traffic, intimate homes, or corners of solitude and exasperation. If we plan a new town – is it possible to plan in these depths?*¹²

The crisis of the post-socialist city

The deviation of planned spaces by their users has accelerated since the fall of the Berlin Wall. If public spaces were a crucial component of the creation of socialist subjects and communities, logically, they also became the scenes where architectural concepts and spatial configurations were most spectacularly overwritten by everyday uses; especially after losing the legitimacy of their organizing principles. But first these spaces had to fail – permanently, as Carlos Azeredo Mesquita’s images substantiate. Ping-pong tables without a net, empty concrete tree planters, pipes running along the motorway, abandoned foundations of a building that never transcended its two-dimensional floor plans; these are all ruins of a parallel future, never to be achieved.

The notion of the future is a key element in the conception of housing estates: corresponding to the official egalitarian ideology of socialism, new socialist towns were to represent the official images of cities of the future, “where there will be no poverty, beggars, and periphery”.¹³ Designed to accommodate the future’s citizens, socialist cities, and especially the housing estates of the 1970s and 1980s, had developed a peculiar relationship to technology. They were sites of experimentation (the comfort of central heating and of the integrated water supply system made a very strong impression on their first inhabitants) but eventually became *culs-de-sac* of technologies gradually gone obsolete. Internal garbage collection systems, for instance, are hardly in use anywhere today, but still occupy a lot of room in various types of prefabricated buildings, like dead limbs attached to agonizing bodies. In buildings where every function

12 Tibor Weiner, “Sztálinváros”, in Aladár Sós (ed.), *Sztálinváros, Miskolc, Tatabánya: Városepítésünk fejlődése*, Budapest: Műszaki Könyvkiadó, 1959, p. 65.

13 András Sándor, *Sztálinváros*, Budapest: Népszava, 1951, p. 23.

is pre-conceived and prefabricated in the house factory, one quickly loses the awareness of how buildings and apartments operate, alienated from the technological supply framework one depends on. Technical systems become visible when they fail to deliver. As Kazys Varnelis writes about the architecture of crises: "To understand the technical systems that support a society – roads, bridges, water supply, wastewater, flood management, telecommunications, gas and electric lines – as one category, it was first necessary to see it fail."¹⁴

The technological crisis of prefabricated buildings has unfolded parallel to the social crisis of public spaces. Paradoxically, the socialist ideal of designing an equal society with the help of equally distributed resources and services has been partially achieved by the dynamisms that have worn out the public spaces in-between housing blocks: areas without specific spatial emphases failed to offer room for sociability; the playgrounds, parking lots, parks and abandoned construction sites have merged into an all-encompassing entropic field whose unity is only broken by the fences delineating lands recently annexed by expansive private property owners.

This homogeneity is enforced by the omnipresence of concrete. Concrete is the lingua franca of socialist-era housing estates: ping-pong tables, benches, parasols, parking platforms, tree planters, paths are all made of it; concrete is so ubiquitous that one gets the impression that it is a vital framework for islands of nature to survive. This illusion – the vision of a controllable nature – does however quickly give its place to the recognition that nature has, with the years, grown out of this framework. As we see in the images of Mesquita, weeds grow in the interstices of concrete steps, pavements and tree planters turning their ensemble into a landscape of ruins.

In a recent essay, Kai Vöckler points out that architectural thinking rediscovered the concept of ruins in the 1960s, and has been influenced by it ever since: artists and architects like Gordon Matta-Clark and Robert Smithson developed practices like "anarchitecture" or "de-architecturization" to intensify architecture's confrontation with the forces of nature.¹⁵ Artists' fascination for ruins has gone parallel to the decline of faith in modernism: ruins – with a sense of irreversibility embodied in them – are vehicles of modernity's "self-criticism", fuelled by a fear

14 Kazys Varnelis, "Systems Gone Wild: Infrastructures after Modernity", in *Volume C-Lab Issue* (Rotterdam), 2009, Available from <http://c-lab.columbia.edu/0162.html> [accessed 8 November 2010]

15 Kai Vöckler, "The Disappearance of Architecture as an Artistic Theme", in Sabine Folie (ed.), *Modernism as a Ruin: An Archeology of the Present*, Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2009, p. 150–153.

of nature taking over culture.¹⁶ Ruins remind us that “the idea of progress is always already in the state of catastrophe” and that only when such novel commodities, architectures and confident expressions to the idea of progress fall into ruin and decay does their initial promise reveal its hollowness and its frailty.”¹⁷ In fact, modernism’s most spectacular ruins are the ruins of the socialist city.

Rules and counter-uses

When the hardware of the city – architecture and urbanism – fails, it is the software – uses and dispositions – that has to create the framework for the city’s functioning. When the artificial separation of residential, industrial, commercial and leisure functions in the modernist city proves to be obstructive rather than unfettering, when the government abandons its poorest citizens, these latter have no other choice than reinventing themselves by transgressing regulations. Paths trodden across the lawn are traces of deviations from the prescribed spatial order; the containers piled into multi-storey kiosks or the caravans parked along the street are agents of an informal economy, while garages are spaces delineated and privatized from the no man’s land referred to as public realm. These practices are made possible by a logic highly different from that of the planned city: relying on their “anthropological, poetic and mythic experience of space”, the “ordinary practitioners down below (produce) the migrational, or metaphorical city (that) slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city”, as Michel de Certeau suggested in his highly influential essay “Walking in the City”.¹⁸

Carlos Azeredo Mesquita looks exactly at these practices: without romanticizing the subversive spatial practices he photographs (after all, many of these subversions are driven by a desire to expand one’s private property), he offers an objective look at the microscopic metamorphosis of post-socialist spaces. Obviously, private disposition of common land or buildings, as well as of informal vendors’ kiosks existed well before the fall of the socialist regime. From the 1970s on, the introduction of capitalist elements in the socialist economy contributed not only to the emergence of a new, consumerist lifestyle, but also to the development of a massive “second economy”: often criticized, blamed, but tolerated.

16 Andreas Huyssen, “Nostalgia for Ruins”, in *Grey Room 23* (Cambridge, MA), Spring 2006, p. 6-21.

17 Kevin Hetherington, “Memories of Capitalism: Cities, Phantasmagoria and Arcades”, in *Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, (Hoboken, NJ), 2005/1, p. 191.

18 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, p. 114.

The destiny of the caravans captured by Mesquita is exemplary. In the early 1990s, at the onset of a harsh economic crisis, informal food markets emerged in various locations of Budapest, as well as in many other significant towns. With their flexible, mobile homes or commercial units, vendors could position themselves where established market situations needed correction, contributing to a more balanced distribution and accessibility of resources, that is, in this case, food. For an important segment of society, markets became a veritable medium of survival, both in terms of selling and buying. With time, however, caravans also became permanent elements of the urban landscape: they found themselves frozen in newly constituted "streets", like remnants of a holiday trip turned permanent and stationary. Paradoxically, while breaking the codes of uniformity imposed upon dwellers by the rigidity of modernist planning, caravans also assemble into new patterns and new types of uniformity.

This "informal uniformity" is the basis of the serial dimension of Mesquita's work. In contrast to photographers' genuine folkloric interest in everyday uses of housing estates, he does not show these uses, but lets us imagine them, by displaying people's imprints rather than people. There is nothing in his images from the postcard-like anecdotic beauty and romantic disorder of Imre Benkő's or Károly Hemző's famous photographs of housing estates; Mesquita remains objective, frontal, close to the serial-conceptualist tradition of photography.

The rehabilitation of the ordinary: ready-made serialism

When modernism's confidence to fulfill its democratizing and emancipatory architectural mission began to tremble, theoretical concepts of transparency, sincerity and legible form also started to teeter. Parallel to the increasing critique of centralized planning and, consequentially, the dethronement of the planner and the architect, the architectural object also underwent dramatic mutations. Among a series of books, exhibitions and other events that participated at the ousting of exceptional buildings from the centre of architectural discourses, there were a few which were particularly inspiring for an audience larger than the usual public of architecture: Bernard Rudofsky's *Architecture without Architects* in 1964, Reyner Banham's *Architecture of Four Ecologies* in 1971

and Robert Venturi's *Learning Las Vegas* in 1972 undertook the rehabilitation of the ordinary and the banal in architecture.¹⁹

So far, architectural history had been mostly focusing on exceptional architectural structures. To expand this field to include advertisements, highways and vernacular buildings was a truly radical step in the redefinition of architecture, and consequentially in the redefinition of photography inspired by architecture. In his *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* and *Every Building on the Sunset Trip* projects, published respectively in 1963 and 1966, the American artist Ed Ruscha introduced the logic of "architectural inventory" in contemporary art: the act of assembling photographs of buildings of the same type was not only inspired by an aesthetic of serialism, and the conceptual task of researching and collecting, but also by an appreciation of the ordinary.²⁰ Similarly, the work of German photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher was influenced by their experience of analogous industrial structures scattered around the Ruhr region; in their book *Anonymous Sculptures: A Typology of Technical Construction*, published in 1970, they gave aesthetic value to derelict industrial constructions.²¹

Carlos Azeredo Mesquita's series are more straightforward: they are in fact panoramic reproductions of actual spatial configurations, with the depicted objects (ping-pong tables, tree planters, wall foundations, containers, garages) coexisting side-by-side. In the Radiant City, standards, types and repetition are not constructed but are found on-site: as elements of the geometry of everyday life, they constitute a *série trouvée*, a ready-made serialism. Mesquita investigates housing estates like an urban scanner moving along straight routes; by separating his objects and reducing each image to include only one object, the photographer positions his work on a fine line between panorama and serial photography, creating a delicate tension between the whole and the part, the serial format and the individual differences. This tension exists also in many other dimensions of his work: between the machine-like objectivity of the photographer's regard and the fragile, spontaneous nature of his objects, or between positions of documentary photography and conceptual inventory.

19 Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture without Architects: A Short Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture*, London: Academy Editions, 1964; Reyner Banham, Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies, New York: Harper & Row, 1971; Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972.

20 Ed Ruscha, *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations*, Los Angeles: National Excelsior Press, 1963; Ed Ruscha, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, Los Angeles: National Excelsior Press, 1966.

21 Hilla and Bernd Becher, "Anonymous Sculpture", *Art and Artists* (Düsseldorf), no. 5, 1970.

And these are the tensions that make Carlos Azeredo Mesquita an inspiring explorer of the existing Radiant City. For tensions of scale, of viewpoints, of uniformity and difference are at the heart of the Radiant City's inherent contradictions: those between plans and everyday life, where users permanently overwrite the rules encoded in space. As Tibor Weiner meditated about the future of new towns in 1958:

Life rounds off the edges of the crystal, softens its hard forms and shapes its surroundings. This is why we consciously have to leave room for evolution. The organism can not be as hard as to resist the perpetually moving, transforming life, because it then becomes inhuman.²²

Carlos Azeredo Mesquita (Porto, Portugal, 1988) is a visual artist working mostly with photography, as well as with printmaking, and the tools of graphic design. He is formally trained as a graphic designer by the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Porto, and was a grant holder at Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design in Budapest, where he studied photography. His work is being exhibited and awarded both internationally and in Portugal. He has a particular interest in the relation between the legitimating power of photography and the issue of perception of truth, fiction, staging and context.

Levente Polyák (Budapest, Hungary, 1979) is a researcher and urban planner. He studied architecture, urbanism, sociology and art theory in Budapest and Paris, and was a lecturer at Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Budapest University of Technology and Vienna University of Technology. He has worked on urban projects for the New York, Paris, Vienna, Budapest and Pécs municipalities. As a member of the KÉK – Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre, he has organized conferences, festivals and exhibitions dealing with various contemporary urban and architectural phenomena. He was a visiting fellow at Columbia University in New York City, Orange Labs and the École d'Architecture Paris-Malaquais in Paris. Currently he is a doctoral candidate at Central European University.

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