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# **Brasília. Photographing against the Image**

**MARKUS LANZ**

## **Biography**

Born in 1965, Markus Lanz is an architect BDA a.o., photographer, and urbanist that lives and works in Munich and Brasília. He is a founding member of Pk. Odessa Co. In addition to his artistic work, he devotes his photography, research, and teaching activities to the exploration and description of architectural spaces and urbanistic phenomena. Markus Lanz teaches at the Technical University of Munich, and he was a visiting professor at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya in Barcelona in 2011 and at the TUM in 2012. Publications and exhibitions include *Multiple City, Mumbai–Disclosing City, Theodor Fischer*, and *Lina Bo Bardi*.

This photographic work is motivated by an urbanistic interest. In a time without utopias, it explores the phenomena of democratic urban planning based on utopian thinking.

Brasília was meant to become a symbol for the development of a modern society. The Brazilian president Juscelino Kubitschek commissioned the architect Oscar Niemeyer with the initial planning. After an international competition, Lúcio Costa was entrusted with the master plan in 1957. The project of the new capital took on dramatic proportions when, in just under four years, a lake was dammed, the master plan—the Plano Pilot—was developed and large parts of the city were built. Brasília, still a large construction site, was inaugurated in 1960, and thus the myth of the planned city was born.

For sixty years now, endless similar photographs have shown us Brasília as a lifeless planned city of the modernist architecture of the exotic South. To this day, they provide the pictorial basis to place the city in the focus of a general critique of modernism. They freeze the utopia to its myth. After almost sixty years of urban development, it is possible to experience the plan of the city as a lived space; the everyday life of the city; and the multi-layered fabric of the spaces and the structures of the neighborhoods, such as the systems of community-building institutions, the specific connecting spaces between the public and private, and the near-natural and de-commercialized public spaces.

How can I narrate Brasília, a city in whose concrete spaces the short history is barely legible?<sup>1</sup>

I intend to return to the utopian moment of the city behind the myth and grasp the original ideas of urban planning and relevant social questions by perceiving them in the possibilities of appropriating spaces. The direct interrelation of *the discourse about space* and *the discourse in space* is a focal aspect of my work.<sup>2</sup>

I understand both the process of photographing the city and the process of precise perception as an urbanistic field study. Everything that is found, everything that can be perceived with all senses, combines in an overall impression of the space. The act of seeing is concentrated on the moment in space. It detaches itself from the goal of the visual identification of trained knowledge. Photographing develops a description of what is seen and what is perceived. Words are found. Yes, no, maybe. Words about the visible of space. Words about what is underlying the space.<sup>3</sup>

1. Cf. Schlögel, Karl. 2003. *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit*. München, Carl Hanser Verlag.
2. Cf. Lefebvre, Henri. 1974. *La production de l'espace*. Paris: Éditions Anthropos.
3. Cf. Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture*. New York: Basic Books.

My photographic work on Brasília presented here in a small section is a narrative composed of overlapping, non-simultaneous narrative levels on different observation scales. On the one hand, the work claims to eyewitness the city and makes the concrete spaces in the photograph visible. On the other hand, however, with the representation of fictional, partly staged interactions in space and the use of pictorial irritations, it negates this in order to dedicate itself to the imagination. The work always remains in process. It avoids the development of an unambiguous image of the city.

My observation of the city is structured according to the planning levels of Brasília; *Escala: Residencial, Monumental, Gregária, Bucólica*. The work focuses on an understanding of the phenomenological perception of an all-around space, on the comprehension of the specific urban space as atmosphere, as intellectual concept, as concreteness, and as complex situation.<sup>4</sup>

The work is framed by a prologue (socially relevant questions of urban production) and an epilogue (urban spaces in formal abstraction of specific buildings). Juxtaposed with the photographs, the texts are developed in collaboration with Ana Branco from long conversations with actors of the city. The notes below contextualize the sections of the work in the assignment of topic and narrative levels. The text changes the view of the image. The text extends or narrows the possibilities of visibility. The text degrades the image to pure illustration or stimulates its impulse to imagination. What ideas of a city do the images develop? What ideas of a city do we imagine?  
Utopia Brasília.

4. Cf. Böhme, Gernot. 1995. *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik*. Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag.



SQS 304, 104

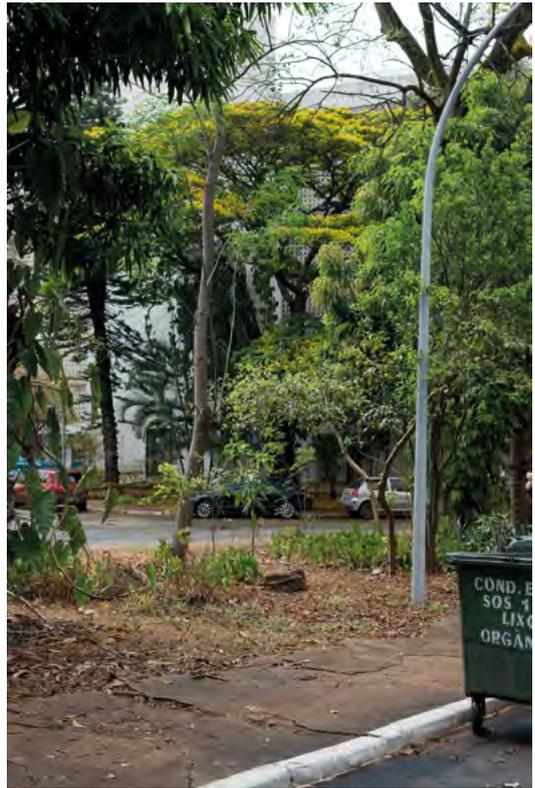
NOTE / TOPICS \_ Escala Bucólica. Canal cover in landscape. Different altitude grades \_ quickly built / Used as urban furniture / City as a grid of infrastructure \_ Continuous Landscape / NARRATIVES \_ Series of different objects, by night, vertical. Reference: SUPERSTUDIO, The Continuous Monument.





70 cm x 105 cm  
Eixo Monumental

NOTE / TOPICS \_ Escala Bucólica, Escala Monumental. Built landscape. Fundamental spatial principles \_ view into the diagonal, potentially passable in all directions / Relationship of the photographer to space and photo \_ partly part of the interaction, partly visible in the photo / NARRATIVES \_ Concreteness and complex situation / long shot, horizontal, single frames, rich in detail, individual stories partly staged (staged interactions in space with people on site is an essential part of my photography practice) / (Cf. panel painting) / Reference: Pliny the Elder, Naturalis historia.

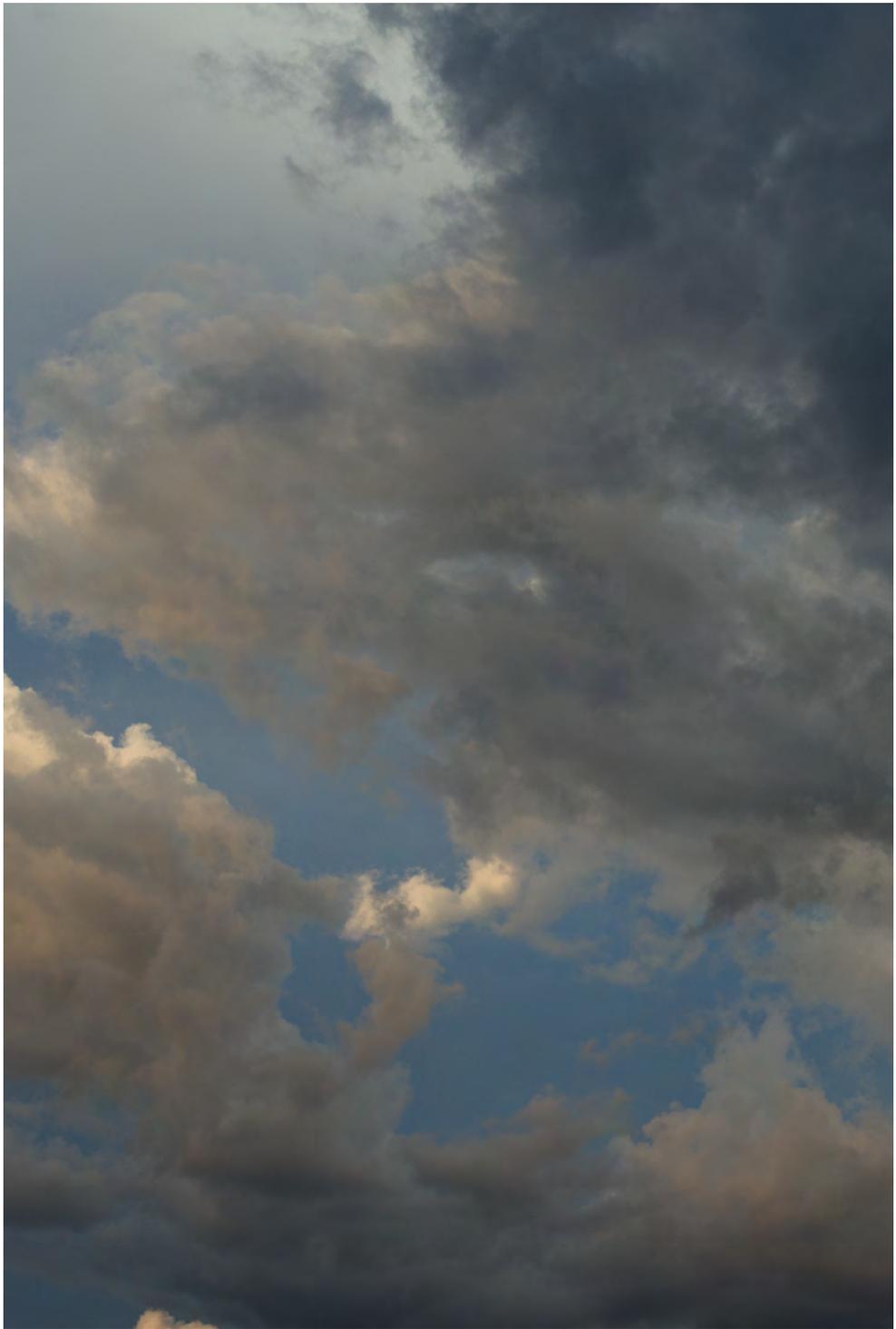


The tree in focus  
SQS 103



The tree in focus  
SQS 205, 405

NOTE / TOPICS \_ Escala Bucólica. One and the same tree seen from different perspectives. Confirmation of a place / Space \_ visibility of the spatial constitution through solitary position (possibility of movement), context (visibility of the banal everyday space), atmosphere (season, color...) / Mainly migratory plants \_ officially planned or simply planted / NARRATIVES \_ Series of pairs of images, vertical \_ botanical catalogue (with description) / Reference: Oswald de Andrade, Manifesto Antropófago.



1.172 m acima do nível do mar  
Inspiração não é loucura.

NOTE / TOPICS \_ Escala Bucólica. The upper urban landscape \_ dominant part of the urban space Brasília. Perception of space \_ the first moment is the perception of an atmosphere / NARRATIVES \_ Series of different cloud and sky formations \_ vertical / (Cf. Baroque ceiling frescos) / Reference text: Clarice Lispector, Joseph Conrad.



70 cm x 105 cm

SQS 108 \_ Planting a palm there where a friend of mine lives.

NOTE / TOPICS \_ Escala Residencial, Escala Bucólica. The green. Part of planning, part of appropriation / Fuzzy space \_ permanent self-location in space / Confronting the chaos \_ causative theme of a civilization and urbanization process / NARRATIVES \_ Long shot, horizontal, single frames / Individual stories \_ partly staged, inconspicuous, hidden, appear at second glance / (Cf. panel painting) / Reference text: Lúcio Costa, 1995.



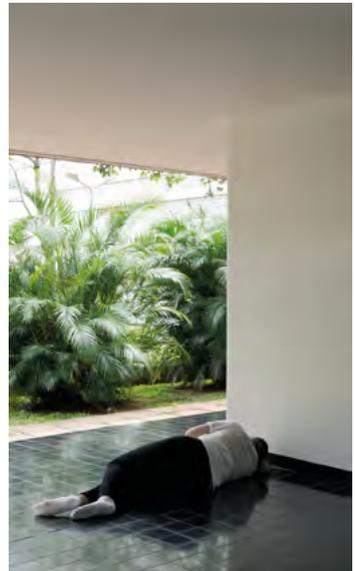
Setor Comercial Sul

NOTE / TOPICS \_ Escala Gregária. Perception of space / Working with prefabricated elements \_ ideas, assessments, images \_ conditions of space production / Processes of spatial perception and image production / Examples of different architectural movements in Brasília (Cf. Lelé) / NARRATIVES \_ Image pairs \_ the first determines the second after a few more steps.



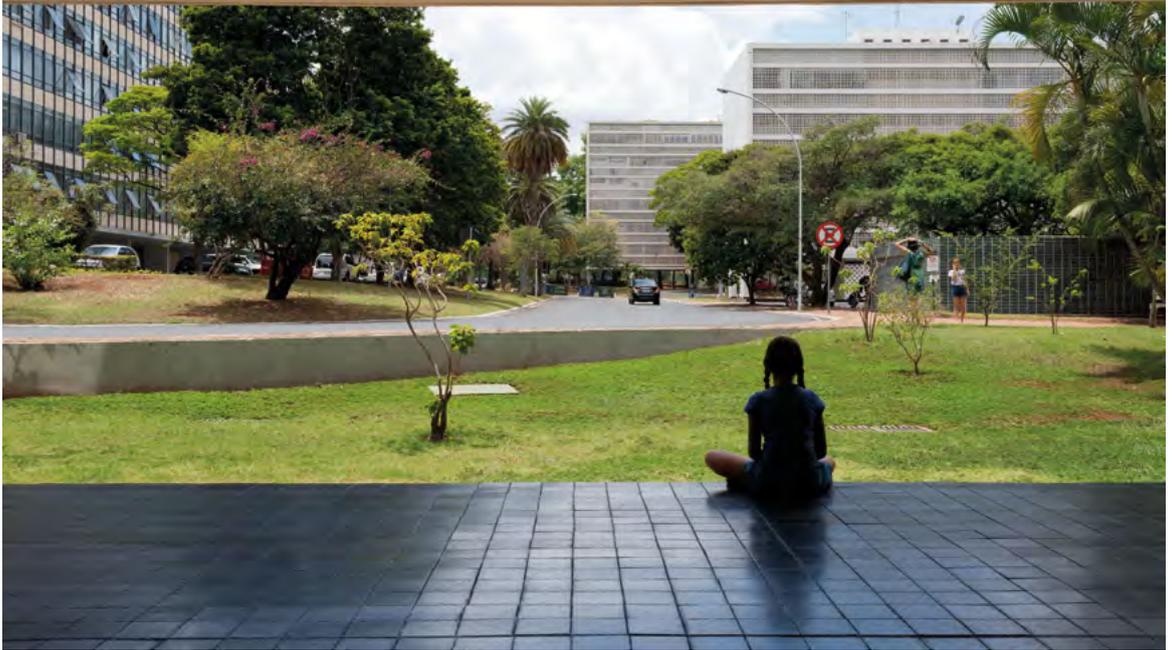
Rodoviária Plano Piloto, 3368\_Centro

NOTE / TOPICS \_ Escala Gregária, Escala Monumental. Centre and periphery / Dense simultaneity in wide spaces / Spaces of permanent discourse / Is the relationship between center and periphery based on a European self-conception? / NARRATIVES \_ Concreteness and complex situation / Long shot, horizontal, single frames / Individual stories \_ partly staged, space as a stage.



Bloco, Superquadra

NOTE / TOPICS \_ Escala Residencial. Piloti. Space \_ connecting private and public sphere \_ highly urban / A non-commercialized space \_ paid, cleaned, and protected from privacy and opened for public use / Planning security, protection of the planned / NARRATIVES \_ Series, situations of appropriation of the ground floor space of the Piloti \_ vertical.



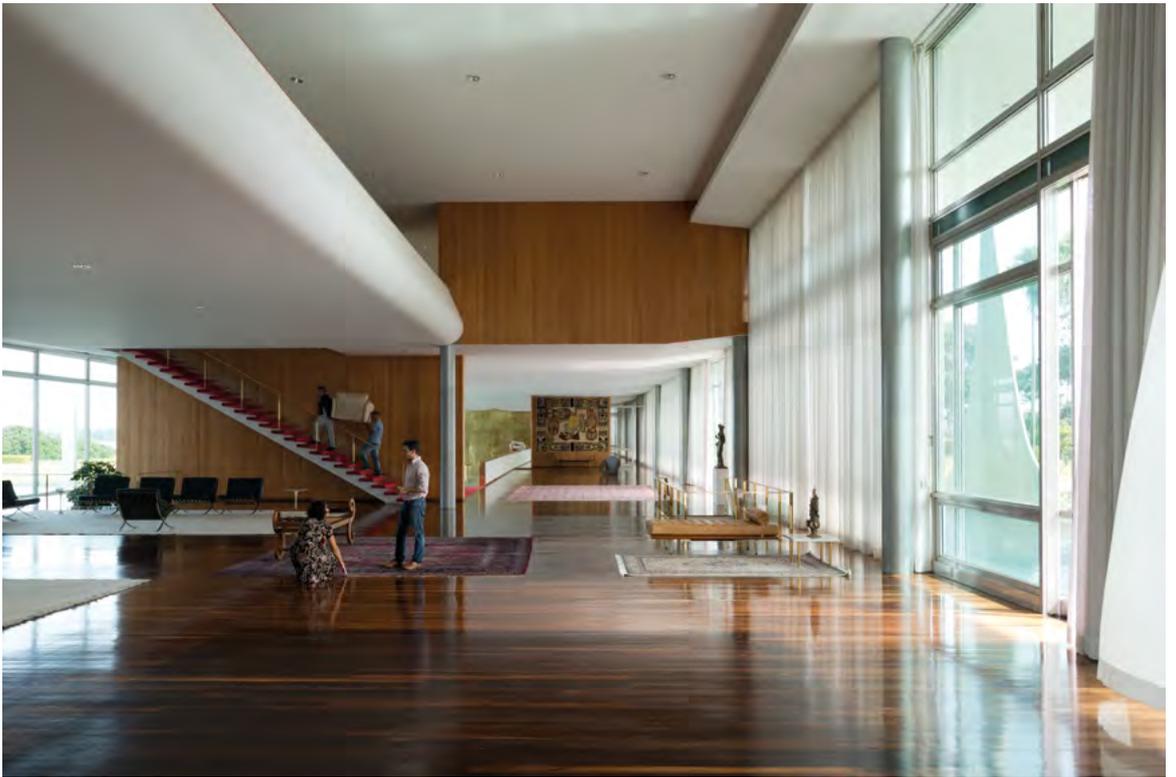
SQS 308

NOTE / TOPICS \_ Escala Residencial. Piloti. Space \_ Horizontal framing of the contemplated outside / The visual of modernity / Die Betrachtung / The protecting space (Cf. Cloister) / NARRATIVES \_ Long shot, horizontal, single frames.



#### Tree seeds and fruits

NOTE / TOPICS \_ Escala Bucolica. All-around space / Collecting what is perceived in an overall impression \_ sensual space / The found is part of the urban planning / Potential of urban development / NARRATIVES \_ Series of found plant parts, seeds and fruits, collected on colored paper, vertical / Reference: James Joyce, Putting Allspace in a Notshall.



Palácio da Alvorada  
24.12.2018

NOTE / TOPICS \_ Escala Monumental. Image and Space. "The residence of the President of Brazil"  
/ Government buildings that develop the known image of the city / Not a view of the objects  
but of interior space \_ abstraction of the spatial character of the city / Discourse about the  
political conditions of space production / NARRATIVES \_ Epilog / single frames / partly staged.



SQS 109 Bloco J

Part of a façade, view 6, 8 of 10

NOTE / TOPICS \_ Escala Bucólica, Escala Residencial. Habitation. Space \_ fuzzy, ambiguous /  
Photography \_ questioning the status of eye-witnessing / The single and the sequence \_ thinking about  
seeing / NARRATIVES \_ Sequence of individual views on a façade of a residential building \_ vertical /  
Reference: Michelangelo Antonioni, Blow Up.

# ALL FOR THE BEST

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