

**Fuzzy hard edge:**

**On Sára Sebestyén's minimalist building photographs**

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Hungarian born French photographer, Lucien Hervé (born as László Elkán) was photographing Le Corbusier's buildings after World War II. When he presented his shots about the *Unite d'Habitation* in Marseille Corbusier commented, "*Hervé, you have the soul of an architect*".

Hopefully it does not sound like a forced and inappropriate *bon mot*, yet something similar came to my mind by looking at her photographs: "*Sára, you have the soul and the eye of an architect*". One could say, of course, that it is easy as she arrived from interior design to photography; therefore, order and conceptual clarity are given qualities so to say. Those might indeed be necessary conditions for constructive photography yet are surely not sufficient.

If one has to describe Sebestyén's photographic art by a few keywords only perhaps the following words would be the best candidates: clear structure and colors, determined yet sensual lines and fields, classical and new proportions, edges that separate yet connect spaces. Surprise is certainly a notion that applies here. One could see that on the image "Random encounter" where proportion of the building and the sky follows that of the golden section. Yet as surprise elements some electric wires cut across the image randomly as very fine lines, certainly a reminiscent of Barbara Hepworth. Those lines make the composition subtly harmonic yet surprising as if meeting the dictum of Max Bense, the founder of information aesthetics, that "*beauty lies in the frivolous nature of chance*".

Philosopher Borbála Jász notes that the title of her works, "*Edges*", has a double meaning although they seem to be quite independent. "*Edges*" does have a clear geometric meaning; the outside limit of an object. "*On the edges*" at the same time has a somewhat different meaning, i.e. living in a precarious position, the danger of risk in life, and the edge that can separate life and death, for instance. Studying Sebestyén's photography an even deeper relation might surface. She reveals, "*The elements of my geometric and constructive compositions are common topics found on the street or in buildings. Following lines and curves shades, forms, light rays and EDGES drew me in*". The edge(s) of life in which we live, one might add.

Edges are indeed the outside limits of an object but beyond that they also are a one-dimensional space in between two adjacent spaces/bodies of higher dimension. This edge with a finite length is basically a discontinuity, a transition from one space to the other. From the state of a solid matter to the air, or the other way around. The edge is an inter-space even if it is infinitesimal. Not so much mathematically but from a visual perception point of view one can argue that it is the width of the edge determines whether it is just an interface, a line, or it becomes a visible space in itself. Where is the tipping point? And what is the relation between the inter-space and the two spaces defined by it? What is the aesthetical meaning of the inter-space? And what is the perception of the inter-space? The certainty, and the uncertainty at the same time, of the transition is certainly an imaginary boundary. That could be material but could also be the void itself.

The spiritual clarity, the strict yet painterly sensual logic of the images transpires like an algorithm in Sebastyén's art. This refreshing pureness and sensitivity at the same time is certainly not a feature of our times where almost everything is blurred and unclear, if not dirty, from art to politics, and the other way around. Looking at Sára's art I could not escape a *déjà vu* feeling. I already enjoyed sometime and somewhere this wonderful visual language that displays strict self-discipline yet refined sensuality. But where and by whom?

Was it the avant-garde photography of the thirties in the last century? Perhaps László Moholy-Nagy, or Jaroslav Rössler or Man Ray's photograms? Or György Kepes? The masters of the light-pendulum or the early works from the generative computer graphics? Gottfried Jäger and the concrete photographers? No, not really. Their photography is based on different principles. There surely is some continuity and intellectual kinship with all of them but not at the level of conceptualizing the image. Wondering over this all of a sudden works by Barnett Newman and Ellsworth Kelly came to my mind. Yes, indeed, they have created visual spaces, defined by the minimalism of *hard edge* and *color field* that are close to Sebastyén's photographic approach even if her point of departure was different. According to Newman the painter is the choreographer of space. In this choreography the edge, or *zip* as he calls it, is a critical element, a space organizers – the same way as in Sebastyén's photography. There is a huge difference, however. While in Newman's case the edge is a result of abstraction, even if some assign metaphysical meaning or some Zen notion to the zip, it probably is a result of a dual-feedback in Sebastyén's art.

Let me throw some light on this by referring to some of the early works by Ellsworth Kelly. Shortly before his death Kelly donated to the Pompidou Centre in Paris six works from the series entitled "Window" he made in 1947.

These drawings depicted one architectural detail of the Museum of Modern Art, namely a window. As a reflection to reality Kelly has gradually left out the less important parts and filled up with colors the remaining fields. He arrived to his *color field* reflection from the Window series. This became later the foundation of his concrete art that defined a new reality. This actually was a one-way feedback. A reflection to reality.

Sebestyén on the other hand develops her own *color field* and almost *hard-edge* photography in two steps by observing real buildings, positions and colors. It is “almost” hard edge because the edges here and there are not sharp but rather fuzzy providing thereby a deeply sensual shape. As if the photographer would say: I am living on the edge. The first step was to secure the scenery, followed by identifying and redefining the minimalist hard edge color fields and color fields. One could indeed call it dual-feedback for she arrives with a double coupling to the visual model that in any case is also a part of the reality of the moment although we have not noticed it. In this sense her photographs are not concrete although they look like that.

Sebestyén’s photographic art is organically connected to the progressive movement of Hungarian constructivist photography that commenced with Moholy-Nagy and still continues in our times. Works by Dóra Maurer, Péter Herendi, György Jederán and Anikó Robitz are examples to this.