The New, the Old, the Modern.
Architecture and its Representation in Socialist Romania, 1955-1965

By

Juliana Maxim

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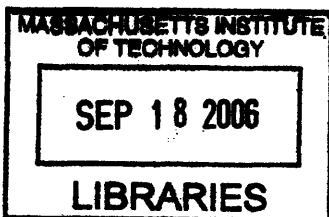MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

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Submitted to the Department of Architecture on August 11, 2006, in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how the architectural culture of postwar Romania participated
in the socialist regime's attempt to construct a new and collectivist environment. The
dissertation works from a close reading of examples drawn from three different domains
of architectural practice: the architectural and urban design of the Floreasca housing
district in Bucharest; the writings of the architectural historian Grigore Ionescu; and the
photography of architecture in the magazine *Arhitectura*. A consistent set of aesthetic
and discursive practices emerged from the interrelation between words, images, and
actual buildings in each of these examples: the city as new unit of production,
standardization, an attack on subjectivity and individualism, technological essentialism,
and abstraction were all attributes of the architecture enlisted by the socialist regime in
order to establish and consolidate its ideological identity.

The dissertation challenges the received descriptions of the postwar artistic context of the
Soviet Bloc as one dominated by anti-modernist tendencies, as well as the
complementary assumption that, in Romania, the thriving modernism of the interwar
years was brought to an end by the postwar socialist regime. On the contrary, this
dissertation shows that many practices characteristic of the Modern Movement and
Soviet Constructivism not only persisted, but also reached an unprecedented scale and
intensity in the architecture of socialism in the late 1950s and 1960s.

By considering the processes through which specific modernist tenets of the 1920s and
1930s migrated or persisted inside socialist Romania, the dissertation highlights the
paradoxical condition of socialism's architectural culture: on one hand, socialism
required its culture to be revolutionary, and therefore unprecedented; on the other hand, it
heavily relied on undesirable capitalist precedents. The dissertation investigates how the
tension between old and new was negotiated, thus exposing the ways in which aesthetic
meaning was produced and controlled under totalitarian socialism.

Thesis Supervisor: Stanford O. Anderson
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Last but not least, my gratitude goes to Can Bilsel, who contributed to this dissertation in more ways than I can tell; the fact that this project is finally complete is as much his accomplishment as mine. And to Alin, who during many long writing months, showed the wisdom of Mr. Badger, the good nature of the Mole, and the patience of the Water Rat.

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Introduction

1955-1965: Modern Architecture and Socialist Romania

By 1955 Romania had experienced an extraordinary range of political regimes, from democratic to dictatorial, monarchic to military. After the annexation of the provinces formerly ruled by the Habsburg Empire in 1918, a democratic state governed for the first time over a unified Romania. A turbulent process of political reforms (such as universal suffrage) and uneven capitalist development followed until 1937, when King Carol II seized power with a coup. His authoritarian monarchy was in turn overthrown by Marshal Ion Antonescu in 1940, under whom Romania entered World War II as a military dictatorship, fighting on the Axis' side.[1] As with most East-European states, Romania fell under Soviet influence in 1944, when a leftist coup overthrew the dictatorship, and installed a highly volatile government that finished the war in the camp of the Allies. The change coincided with the entry of the Russian troops to Romanian territory, where they maintained a significant presence until 1958. At the same time, the Communist Party of Romania, until then a small and illegal political entity, started to build up support and influence. At the end of 1947, the new socialist government proclaimed its rule, thus completing the full sovietization of Romania.[2] Notwithstanding the instability of the regimes before and during World War II, the pro-Soviet regime constituted a radical

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[1] In his speech of June 1941 Marshall Ion Antonescu instigated Romania's entry to World War II: "Soldiers, I order you: cross the Prut [river that marks the border between Romania and the USSR]! Crush the enemy from the East and the North [Communist Russia]. Free our enslaved brothers from the red yoke of Bolshevism..." Cited in Ioan Scurtu and Gheorghe Buzatu, *Istoria Românilor în secolul XX* (Bucharest: Paiedeia, 1999), 402.

[2] Two particularly detailed accounts of the progressive Stalinization of Romania are to be found in Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2003; and Ioan Scurtu and Gheorghe Buzatu, *Istoria Romanilor în secolul XX (1918-1948)* (Bucharest: Editura Paideia, 1999).

imposition for a country that had been, until then, deeply hostile to Russian imperialism, and whose recent history of nationalism and modernization contradicted the internationalist and proletarian credos of socialism and communism. The hostility that the socialist regime initially encountered in Romania not only instigated the violence and oppression of its first years in power, but also necessitated throughout the regime's existence, continuing instruments of legitimization among which architecture and urbanism were to figure prominently.

Focusing on the years between 1955 and 1965, I examine in this dissertation the architecture and urbanism of the Romanian capital, Bucharest, as they underwent what can best be described as a return to modernism under the socialist regime. Three interrelated aspects of architectural culture reveal a powerful reactivation of the formal, constructive, and theoretical principles that are usually associated with the European modernism of the 1920s and 1930s: standardized and prefabricated mass housing projects assembled into new urban districts, the writing of histories of architecture, and the photographic representation of architecture in professional publications. The return to architectural modernism under a postwar socialist regime, though rarely described in those terms, raises nevertheless the question of the meaning and implications of 'return:' Understood as a historically circumscribed aesthetic phenomenon, in what ways did modernism accommodate a radically different political and historical context? And if we are to understand modernism as the product of its own age, then isn't its return a contradiction in terms?

The period under study corresponds to the de-Stalinization of the Soviet Block, initiated under Nikita Khrushchev, which effectively brought to an end socialist realism in architecture. In one of the rare historical instances in which a transformation in architecture prefigured wider cultural and political transformations, Khrushchev first formulated his iconoclastic rejection of Stalinism as an attack against its architectural manifestations, more particularly its historicism. In a speech at the All-Union

Conference of Builders, Architects, and Workers in the Building Industry in December 1954 – a setting in itself meant to underscore the need to define architecture less like a fine art and more like a technical discipline geared to the needs of construction – Stalinist architectural culture was promptly relegated to the dustbin of history.[3] In so doing, architecture not only served as a bellwether of political shifts, but its deep transformation also struck a contrasting note among all other artistic practices, which were to shake off the socialist realist dogma only slowly and partially, towards the end of the 1960s.[4]

Broader plans for the de-Staliniziation of the Soviet Union were fully formulated and announced at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1956, during which Khrushchev denounced Stalin's crimes in front of a

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[3] In his speech entitled "Remove Shortcomings in Design, Improve Work of Architects," Khrushchev argued that "Architects, like builders, must make a sharp turn toward problems of construction economy." First published on the front page of the newspapers *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, 28 December 1954 and cited in English translation in Joan Ockman and Edward Eigen, *Architecture Culture 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 184-188. See also a summary of the 1954 "Builders' Conference" in *Soviet Studies* 6, no. 4 (1954). Another translation can be found in *Khrushchev Speaks: Selected Speeches, Articles, and Press Conferences, 1949-1961*, ed. Thomas Whitney (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963).

Other speakers joined Khrushchev in articulating a well-coordinated critique of the Stalinist architectural culture, which was deemed individualistic, subjective and uneconomical. Critics contended that Stalinist architecture not only failed to achieve standardization, but also was unable to keep up with new industrial materials and technologies. This criticism was linked to a denunciation of historicism in Stalinist architecture and its failure to respond to the needs of the age. It was not appropriate, the speakers argued, "to give light modern walls the appearance of massive stone – a thing is beautiful when it does not give rise to doubts about its genuineness." It was also argued during the same meeting that new materials demanded an engineer's approach to building, as well as a new aesthetics. See R. W. Davies, "The Builders' Conference." *Soviet Studies* 6, No 4 (April, 1955), 443-457.

[4] As late as 1987, a move to strike down "Socialist Realism" from the statute of the Union of Artists of the USSR was vehemently rejected during a session of the "All Union Conference on Art History," held in Moscow. See John E. Bowlt, "Some Thoughts on the Condition of Soviet Art History," *The Art Bulletin* 71, No. 4 (December, 1989): 542-550.

stupefied audience.[5] However, Romania's political class, under the leadership of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, resisted, for the entirety of that decade, the wind of (relative) liberalization, and remained obstinately attached to Stalinist models of power and party control. In that context, Romania's eager architectural embrace of Moscow's call for the de-Stalinization of the discipline appears strangely, and doubly, out of tune, first with the fixity of the rest of socialist aesthetic practices, and second, with the regime's own skepticism towards Moscow.

This dissertation comes to an end in 1965 with the rise to power of Nicolae Ceausescu, who was to reign over Romania in an increasingly despotic and paranoid manner until the regime's demise in 1989. Ceausescu rose to power on an anti-liberalization, anti-Khrushchevism platform, and his dictatorship ultimately signified the full retreat form the liberalization reforms of the Khrushchev years, and a return to a Stalin-like oppressive state apparatus and cult of personality. What was called Ceausescu's "dynastic communism" constitutes its own, well-defined and highly idiosyncratic universe, which, in the case of architecture, translated into a search for increasingly nationalist expression and a distancing from the universalist and rationalist discourse of the decade here under examination. The historicizing monumentality favored under Ceausescu, however, occurred gradually: the late 1960's were the culmination of postwar modernism in Romanian architectural culture.

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[5] A wave of political rehabilitation had already started by 1954 when hundreds of thousands of prisoners were liberated from the Gulag. Tismaneanu, 137-142.

Historical Method and the Problem of Historical Agency:

The problem of modernism cycling within socialism warrants some remarks on existing, and often implicit, periodizations. By considering the socialist postwar as the most significant chapter of modern architecture in Romania, the dissertation re-writes the received line of development of 20th century architecture in that country. The emphasis on postwar modernism runs counter to the current periodization according to which the architecture of Eastern Europe in general, and Romania in particular, participated in the European modern movement primarily, if not exclusively, through the productions of the interwar years. The socialist regime that was installed in 1947 is considered to have brought modernist practices to a halt. In addition, the prevalent sentiment is that socialism, as a larger political and social system, was imposed from the outside and had little to do with Romania's own intrinsic character, and that, therefore, the socialist period should be discussed (or even discarded) as a mere historical aberration. After the regime's fall in 1989, a flurry of publications equated 45 years of socialism with an imposed order that had never been fully internalized.[6] Thus we read, in an otherwise highly nuanced historical work on 20th century Romania, that "The political regime established in Romania in 1945 was not the natural result of an internal evolution, but that of external factors, first and foremost that of the Soviet occupation. Thus Stalin's notion, according to which an army occupying a territory imposes upon it its own political system, was materialized."[7] Accordingly, the communist decades remain, almost two decades after their end, a blind spot in the history of modern art and architecture in Romania. By contrast, the pre-socialist avant-gardes have been the object

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[6]This is, for instance, the thesis of Mihai Botez, *Intelectualii din Europa de Est* (Bucharest: Editura Fundatiei Culturale Române, 1993).

[7] Scurtu and Buzatu, 563.

of avid, even nostalgic, rediscovery.[8] And though the unearthing of the artistic legacies that have been largely blurred by decades of communist disinformation is an imperative task, it has often been done with an agenda: that the 1930s represent the natural, true, untainted face of Romanian modern art, in contrast with a heavily compromised, imposed, un-authentic art under socialism.[9]

The notion that socialism was an incongruous occurrence within the natural course of national history is also reflected in the writings that appeared, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, on the relationship between postwar socialism and architecture. Scholarship on Eastern Europe has often emphasized instances of national resistance or

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[8] Among the most important books on this subject we may list the catalogs of a series of exhibitions that, after the fall of the socialist regime in Romania, aimed at re-discovering the modernist past of Bucharest : *Centenar Horia Creanga* (Bucharest: Union of Romanian Architects, 1992); *Bucharest in the 1920s-1940s: Between Avant-Garde and Modernism* (Bucharest: Simetria Publishing House, Union of Romanian Architects, 1994); *Marcel Janco in Interwar Romania: Architect, Artist, Theorist* (Bucharest: Simetria Publishing House, Union of Romanian Architects, 1996). Another representative work is Luminita Machedon and Ernie Scoffham, *Romanian Modernism: The Architecture of Bucharest, 1920-40* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), published first in English. The recent and finely nuanced work of Carmen Popescu does much to redress the balance in showing that it was the search for national expression, much more than internationalist modernism, that characterizes the first half of the 20th century in Romania. Carmen Popescu. *Le style national roumain. Construire une nation à travers l'architecture, 1881-1945* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, et Simetria, 2004).

An important exception to the recent tendency in scholarship to idealize the interwar decades and dismiss the postwar era is *Artele plastice în România, 1945-1989* by Magda Cârneci, who has shown, without playing down the brutal nature of the socialist regime's cultural policies, the consonance of some of the cultural dictates of totalitarianism with pre-war social and cultural traditions, such as, for instance, an enduring interest in realism.

[9] A similar preconception structures the Western art history of the Soviet world. Its best-known scholars (such as Leah Dickerman, Maria Gough, Christina Lodder, Catherine Cooke, Jean-Louis Cohen) work almost exclusively on the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period, that is, on an avant-garde that openly shared its aesthetic paradigm with its counterparts in Western Europe and America.

reaction to a centralized and uniform design culture that was imposed through the prefabrication of mass housing and the standardization of urban experience.[10] And if a scholarship that closely adheres to national boundaries is crucial in recovering the various nature of the socialist experience, it has often resulted in an implicit activation of the antagonistic categories of heroic resistance and complicity.

The binary of resistance and collaboration, either between individual practitioners and totalitarian regime or between national states and Moscow, is always close at hand in the study of aesthetic practices under socialism.[11] In the case of a regime based on conformity, abolition of subjectivity, and massive and open ideological manipulation, can one speak of artistic agency, and in what terms? And even though there is, indeed, the

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[10] See, for instance, John V. Maciuika, "Baltic Shores, Western Winds: Lithuanian Architects and the Subversion of Soviet Norms," *Centropa* 1, 2 (May, 2006): 108-116; or Virar Molnar, "Tulips and Prefabrication: Hungarian Architects in the Bind of State Socialist Modernization in the 1970s." *The Contours of Legitimacy in Central Europe: New Approaches in Graduate Studies* (Oxford: European Studies Center, St. Antony's College, 2001); Dijana Ali and Maryam Gusheh, "Reconciling National Narratives in Socialist Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Bascarsija Project, 1948-1953" *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 58, no. 1 (Mar., 1999): 6-25.

One important exception to an otherwise overwhelmingly insular scholarship is Anders Aman, *Architecture and Ideology in Eastern Europe during the Stalin Era: An Aspect of Cold War History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992). The book takes a broad stance not only geographically, but also in its ambition to address the question of ideology. Aman nevertheless agrees with the notion that art, and especially architecture, constituted a way to impose the hegemony of the Soviet system over a range of other culturally independent traditions. See discussion in Paul Wood, "Regarding Soviet Culture." *Oxford Art Journal* Vol. 18, No. 1 (1995): 165-170.

[11] John V. Maciuika, for example, writes that, in the case of Lithuania, architecture needs to be understood as a form of resistance against Moscow: "The cultural nationalism expressed through architecture during the Soviet era can be understood as a kind of substitute for the political nationalism that was repressed until the glasnost period of the 1980s. Today these architectural expressions of political and cultural identity may provide an important index of pent-up thoughts, feelings, and energies of Lithuanians during [the 1950s and 1960s]." In "Baltic Shores, Western Winds: Lithuanian Architects and the Subversion of Soviet Norms," *Centropa* 1, 2 (May, 2006): 109.

legitimate need "to extricate the best architects and their architecture from a thoroughly

discredited political system" – much like scholars proceeded to do with the 'other'

totalitarianism of the 20th century – this should not obscure the extent of the entanglement

between Moscow's orders, local traditions, and individual practices. [12] If one is to

salvage agency from the crushing anonymity of socialism, then this should expose not

only instances of resistance, but also of genuine collaboration; indeed, at least in the case

of Romania, the vast majority of the architectural profession responded with ardent

support to socialism's call for a new city and a new architecture. Moreover, the attempt

to recover artistic agency (individual or national) corresponds not only to the desire to

come to terms with a traumatic history of ideological, and sometimes territorial,

occupation, but also to restore intact the tropes of traditional art and architectural history,

such as the one in which artistic individuality and subjectivity exist outside contextual

determinations.[13] Thus the underlying assumption of these studies is that beneath a layer

of totalitarian manifestations lies an artistic practice indistinguishable, in its subjective

economy, from that of the democratic world. Therefore, what is proposed is not really a

recovery of artistic autonomy, but instead a swapping of influences, between the detested

Soviet pressures and a much preferable Western artistic authority.[14] Interestingly, this

recent trend within the art historical and architectural scholarship reactivates, at least in

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[12] Diane Y. Ghirardo, "Italian Architects and Fascist Politics: An Evaluation of the Rationalist's Role in Regime Building," *JSAH* 39, 2 (May, 1980): 109.

[13] The attempt to rescue "authorship" is evident in the monographs of architects who worked under (and for) the socialist regime in Romania. One example is the monograph of Cezar Lazarescu, which unnproblematizes the entanglement between architecture and politics, despite the fact that Lazarescu had been one of the regime's favorite architects in the late 1950s and the 1960s. Ileana Lazarescu and Georgeta Gabrea, *Vise în piatra: în memoria prof. Dr. arh. Cezar Lazarescu* (Bucharest: Capitel, 2003).

[14] A perfect example of this is Maga Cârneci's conclusion to her momentous study of Romanian art under socialism: "Art refuses constraints and develops specific strategies of self-defense against political pressures and injunctions. Thus, after the initial shock of the Socialist Realist period, during which it seemed as if the model of ideological art had destroyed once and for all the *normal modern evolution of artistic production*, one finds a progressive catching-up with the international artistic course." (my italics). 174.

part, the "severance" thesis that had dominated the very first generation of scholars on the Soviet avant-garde (such as Camilla Gray and Alfred Barr) and according to which the avant-garde had little to do with the Soviet revolution and was the victim rather than an integral part of the revolutionary process.[15]

An opposite, and equally influential, methodological paradigm assumes that the visual artifacts of totalitarian regimes are best understood not as authentic practices distorted by political imposition, but as the direct result of political circumstances (in this case, the many ways in which the Communist Party exerted its control over Romania's cultural life), and that therefore they functioned less like artworks and more like illustrations of the historical and political context. The assumption is that, for instance, socialist realist paintings are aesthetically minor, but worth analyzing insofar as they indicate a larger political and historical reality: their form served as mere carrier, a judgement complicated by the fact that this is how socialist realism conceived of itself. The devaluation of the formal aspects of socialist artifacts, with its corollary depreciation of artistic agency, is even more acute in the case of architecture:

> "Large-scale standardization, the limited number of available elements without variety, and their poor quality resulted in depressing rows of blocks of flats made out of concrete panels. Architects, as employees in mammoth state design offices, had no say in the actual design and were reduced to draftspeople whose role was to draw site plans of the predesigned blocks of slabs and point towers to house a maximum number of residents picked from long waiting lists and crowded into a cookie-cutter housing estate. However, the creative freedom in the site planning design was strictly dictated by the runs of the construction cranes lifting the heavy concrete wall panels."[16]

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[15] See Wood, 165-67.

[16] Peter Lizon, "East Central Europe: The Unhappy Heritage of Communist Mass Housing," *JAE* 50, no. 2 (November, 1996): 109.

An important shortcoming of this model is that, in the case of Romania, it is not borne out by the evidence. The 1960s and early 1970s are considered to correspond, in Romania, to a general relaxation of the regime's control over cultural matters, and to a relatively increased political independence from Moscow. Accordingly, the common assumption is that a freer, and more authentic artistic activity unfolded during those years. But if one compares the architectural culture with the field of visual arts, one gets a strikingly different sense of when 'relaxation' occurred: for Romanian art historians, for instance, visual arts 'caught up' with the West in the early 1970s, while architecture, by that time, was already rapidly retreating from its engagement with modernist paradigms.[17] If, indeed, artistic practices were merely indexed to the political cycles of relaxation and oppression, then why is it that the return to modernism in architecture occurs a good decade before the visual arts? Finally, the formal poverty of the socialist architectural language is an omnipresent, but rarely substantiated premise, and therefore warrants some discussion about the type of relation that can exist between form and context under authoritarian regimes.

The dilemma of the primacy of the artistic versus the primacy of the political is often played out chronologically: the Soviet avant-garde practices of the teens and twenties firmly belong to the discipline of art history, and as such have been submitted to close formal analysis; while the (rare) studies of Stalinist and post-Stalinist art subsist instead at the margin of the discipline, methodologically and content-wise. Thus, most texts on post-1930s socialist art (assumed to be no longer avant-, but rear-garde) pay little attention to stylistic, or formal aspects of the art, and instead explain them away by emphasizing the particularities of the historical situation. The problem in doing so is that

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[17] Carneci has written, "The process [of overcoming the figurative in favor of non-figuration] occurs progressively, towards the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s." 85.

they "transfer the political assessment to the art wholesale."[18] Within the paradigm of political essentialism, the avant-garde itself ceases to be distinct from the later, regressive artistic forms of socialist realism, and instead leads to them, and is complicit in the rise of totalitarianism.[19] In the case of Romania, a similar conservative reading considers the continuity between European architectural modernism and socialist architecture as proof that architectural modernism had a totalitarian impulse at its core.[20] The best demonstration of political essentialism lies in the many books that lump the art and architecture of all totalitarian regimes into a single category. Thus for instance are the numerous parallels between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia or even between the French Revolution and Soviet Russia.[21] In particular, the late years of the socialist regime in Romania under Ceausescu's brutal dictatorship seem to have proven once and for all that a transparent, direct and predictable relationship exists between autocratic regimes and a well-defined set of aesthetic practices: a study of the urban operations under the Ceausescu regime

> "...identifies the motives, the planning process and the effects of such urban operations and compares it with selected examples carried out by various types of autocratic regime. These examples include Napoleon III's Paris, Stalin's Moscow, Hitler's Berlin and Mussolini's Rome. A historic pattern consisting of

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[18] Wood, 167.

[19] See, for example, Boris Groys, according to whom Stalinist architecture is but a continuation of the project of the Soviet avant-gardes. Borys Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism. Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[20] Augustin Ioan, "Un discurs funebru la capatâiul realismului socialist," in *Teme ale arhitecturii din România în secolul XX*, eds. Ana-Maria Zahariade et al. (Bucharest: Editura Institutului Cultural Român, 2003), 133-149.

[21] See Helmut Lehman-Haupt, *Art under a Dictatorship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954); and Adolf Max Vogt, *Russische und Franzosische Revolutions-Architektur 1917/1798* (M. DuMont Schauberg, [1974]).

common characteristics underlying the urban reconstruction of a historic center as carried out by autocratic regimes is identified."[22]

Thus Napoleon III's Paris, Stalin's Moscow, Hitler's Berlin and Mussolini's Rome provide the natural historical context for Ceausescu's Bucharest.

The only book to tackle the problem of aesthetic practices in Romania in the second half of the 20th century, Magda Cârneci's *Artele Plastice în România 1945-1989,* struggles similarly about the weight that should be granted to political determinations, and the extent to which the aesthetic sphere maintained its own, internal and formal, rules. The book opens with the contextualist paradigm:

> "The premise of this study is that, along with Romania and other Eastern European countries' entrance under communist rule, the artistic field was drastically subordinated to a mode of existence deeply marked by the repression of totalitarian ideology. From that point onward, the artistic evolution in this region became, in a certain measure, distinct from the evolution of international modern art."[23]

However, the contextualist stance of the introduction is turned on its head in the conclusion, where the author contradicts the explanatory primacy of the political and affirms instead the ultimate autonomy of the artistic domain:

> "In the drastic conditions of a totalitarian political regime, which submits art to powerful ideological constraints, the artistic domain, despite all obstacles, tends to progressively recover the norms that are specific to aesthetic production and its own evaluation criteria."[24]

Ultimately, the dilemma of two explanatory paradigms is resolved into an innate characteristic of modern art in general:

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[22] Maria de Betânia Uchôa Cavalcanti, "Urban reconstruction and autocratic regimes: Ceausescu's Bucharest in its historic context," *Planning Perspectives,* 12 (1997): 72

[23] Cârneci, 5, translation mine.

[24] Ibid., 171.

"From its beginnings, modern art has been attracted and "pushed" between two opposed poles, the *aesthetic* – individualist, antiauthoritarian, even nihilist – and the *engagé* – politicized, collectivist, impersonal even, conceiving art as a means to model life and the reality of modern society entirely."[25]

The fundamental shortcoming of this methodological binary (which, in many ways, mimics the binary of collaboration and resistance) is that each of these opposed models excludes the other and fails to see the potency of their encounter. This dissertation tries to overcome the political-versus-aesthetic dilemma in at least two ways: in Part One, I take issue with the apparent aesthetic and symbolic poverty of the stripped-down architecture of the housing block by showing that symbolism is displaced from the form of the individual object to that of the city. Part Three addresses the problem methodologically by showing that attention to form (or formal analysis) reveals, rather than obscures, political messages. Taken together, both chapters argue that it is precisely when visual expression is at its most successful and free (thus apparently claiming its formal autonomy from the political message) that it becomes truly ideological, and vice versa. In other words, aesthetics under socialism *is* an ideology, and ideology, an aesthetic.

Important questions emerge from the project of locating socialist products into the aesthetic realm, the most important one being that such project a seems to contravene the professed desire to remain outside the aesthetic. The housing block, from its industrialized construction with prefab panels to the photographs documenting it, insisted on qualities of objectivity, factuality, and transparent political meaning. One could therefore rightfully wonder if there is anything more to know about these objects that is not already given, and if one is not running the risk of reading 'too much' into them? And in the case of artifacts that claim to have abolished the need for interpretation – so clear is their message and technique – what constitutes the role of the historian? Paradoxically, this type of material that bears its formal and ideological message on its

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[25] Ibid., 185.

sleeve, so to speak, is a puzzle for the art or architectural historian of modernism whose interpretative tools were developed in relation to aesthetic practices often defined by formal and semantic opacity. The apparently crystalline socialist art seems to be more difficult to interpret, for the historian finds herself in need of re-inventing the parameters and the modes of questioning of the subject – a problem brought to bear especially in Part Three, where the architectural photographs first need to be framed as aesthetic objects before even attempting their analysis.

If the socialist architectural object does not fit comfortably within a history of modernism, it is not only because of its apparent refusal of the aesthetic, but also because it is, in many cases, anonymous. Nested within the question of the anti-aesthetic, one finds again the problem of artistic authorship, which remains stubbornly irrelevant under socialism. Even when it is possible to retrace the designers (or the photographers or the writers), their names add devastatingly little to the story. For where is one to locate the true moment of creation within the labyrinthine and multiple genesis of any project under socialism: in the tightly scripted commission? In the set of regulations followed? In the choice made among a variety of standard solutions? In the multiple revisions by various committees? In the carefully orchestrated representation of the finished project for the public?[26] Socialist anonymity is also fundamentally different from the kind that modernism closely followed throughout the 20th century in the folk, the vernacular, or the everyday. The very act of reinscribing these objects within the narrative of modernist history threatens to deny them their potential to remain at odds with it.

This dissertation explores, especially in Part One and Three, the possibility of a history, so to speak, 'without names.'

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[26] This anonymity is, already, the de facto condition of discussions on socialist architecture: in a survey of postwar writings about architecture, the only text on socialist building culture is not by an architect but by Nikita Khrushchev. See Joan Ockman and Edward Eigen, 184-188.

What I propose here is to conceive of the formal qualities of the housing block and its photographic image as a kind of political content in themselves. Also, and perhaps more importantly than the attention to form, the dissertation explores the possibility that socialist artifact did possess a certain degree of historical autonomy, but not by setting it free from the political, nor by allowing it to revive the mythology of the subjective, the personal, the authentic; on the contrary, because the urban, the architectural, and the photographic forms showed their capacity to migrate from one context to the other, from democracy to totalitarianism, thus constituting their own kind of history and revealing their aptitude at carrying different political meanings at once. Socialist artifacts are historically and politically inflected, but in ways that could diverge, if even so slightly, from the official straight line. Therefore, instead of tracing the ways in which architecture and its image reflected, illustrated, or reinforced official political agendas, the dissertation explores the possibility that they actively, rather than passively, articulated the political.

The New, the Old, the Modern: Constructing Obsolescence

It has been the guiding motivation of this dissertation that the sort of architectural modernism practiced under socialism is not only specific, but also addresses the definition of modernism itself. Therefore, the dissertation's structure does not follow a strictly linear progression, but instead, aims at discursive proliferation – that is, at laying out several possible theoretical and methodological avenues for the study of the material. Consequently, each chapter is thematically distinct, summons a different type of evidence, dictates its own form of inquiry, and constructs its own argument, ultimately converging, in the conclusion, into a larger discussion on the relationship between ideology and representation. However, as announced in the title, this dissertation is organized around questions of temporality and periodization, and repeatedly asks the question of how various artistic, architectural, and philosophical traditions – among

which that of 'the modern' figures prominently – lead to the cultural construction of an a-historical and revolutionary "new" within socialism. Each chapter privileges one of the three temporal categories of the new, the old and the modern, while at the same time showing how each of them was actively constructed through its interrelation with the other two. Or, to put it in other terms, this is the story of how the 'modern' under socialism oscillated constantly between the two extremes of the New and the Old, at once promising perpetual renewal and in the act of fulfilling that promise, becoming a mere repetition of a previous self.

The dissertation reflects upon the nature of the break between pre- and post-socialism, not only by pointing to the existence of important cultural continuities between the two periods, but also by showing that the division that permeates the scholarship on 20th-century Romanian architecture between a modernist and a socialist period is in fact the legacy of socialism itself. And while in Part One and Three I show how the socialist postwar produced an architectural culture heavily informed by the themes and ideals of interwar modernism, the Part Two, which is dedicated to the writing of history, considers how socialism produced a visual and written discourse that obscured the ties between the new modernism and the old. Opposing the historicity of its own architectural production, the socialist regime vilified modernism because of its association during the prewar years with capitalism and the ruling bourgeoisie. As a result, a rhetorical but forceful distinction was introduced in the 1950s, and propagated through the 1960s, between socialist architectural practices, qualified as merely "new" and prewar modernism, considered obsolete. How did the writing of history establish socialism's unsullied novelty, how did it liberate the socialist present from the memory of its architectural past, and through what maneuvers was the present extricated from the 'old'? Through which (highly paradoxical) mechanisms could architectural history at once invoke the past and discard it as irrelevant?

Part One: The New

Bucharest: The Socialist City

The Transfiguration of the Slum

"*Floreasca* – where a real town stands by the park which replaced the abject pit of yore."[1]

"I walk along lines of housing blocs, through the courtyards filled with flowers. [...] In the faraway other blocs are being built. There are plans for 80 of them... Already 15 are inhabited. A small town.
I enter bloc number 7, by chance.
Fancy that! You need only to turn a screw to heat the radiator. You light a match and the gas-cooking stove warms up. You light another match, down in the laundry room, and the water heater starts boiling. You turn a faucet, and warm water fills the ceramic tub. You turn another one and hot water reaches the dishwasher in the kitchen. You press a button, and garbage disappears, down to the incinerator.
Thus live now workers leading the production lines, along with their families. Or even the functionaries. Or the intellectuals."[2]

"Soviet-style apartment blocks are abundant [...]. They are gray and gloomy, the structural equivalent of a cloudy, motionless sky. We visited one [Bucharest] community where families were living in such apartments. No water. No electricity. Garbage spread out thickly across the courtyards, its stench hovering on the breeze. [...] No one on earth, not a single one of God's children anywhere, should ever have to live in arrangements anywhere close to what I found in this urban slum of Bucharest."[3]

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[1] Constantin C. Giurescu, *History of Bucharest, abbreviated translation* (Bucharest: The Publishing House for Sports and Tourism, n.d.), 110. Originally published as Constantin Giurescu, *Istoria Bucurestilor din cele mai vechi timpuri pînà în zilele noastre* (Bucharest: Editura pentru literature, 1966).

[2] Ioachim Botez, *Prin Bucuresti, odinioara si azi* (Through Bucharest, Before and Today): (Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1956), 74-75.

[3] Habitat for Humanity® International website, May 9-10, 2006 entry. (website visited on May 30, 2006).

Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, the West's encounter with the socialist built environment has been shaped almost always by a sense of horror and an urge to remedy it: "Solutions are sought for fixing, improving, recycling, adapting, and humanizing these drab, gray, uninspiring bedroom communities."[4] For the historian, however, such negative perceptions of the socialist city offer a poignant paradox, since the socialist city had emerged, in its turn, from quasi-identical outrage and repulsion toward the urban problems under capitalism. As the socialist housing projects came to equate, in the West's urban imagination, one of the ultimate examples of the modern slum, it is necessary to tell the story of how the socialist urban project took shape in the early 1960s through an equally forceful criticism of the misery, filth, overcrowding and social and material injustice that the capitalist city had spawned for almost a century. In the case of Bucharest, the socialist regime that came to power immediately after World War II inherited a capital with a dramatically increased population and one of the most severe shortages of housing in Europe, a situation that had turned Bucharest, indeed, into a city of slums. Architecturally and rhetorically, the socialist city was built around the denunciation of the slum and the claim to reverse its process of appearance and growth. This chapter shows that socialist Bucharest owes as much to modernist urbanistic principles as it does to a culturally diffused fear of urban misery and the desire to overcome it. In fact, as I hope to demonstrate, the socialist city, or at least the parts of the city built or re-built under socialism, situates itself (rhetorically and geographically) in the wastelands of capitalism, which it ultimately claims to alter and eradicate.

One project, the Floreasca Towers, completed in 1963 on the northern edge of Bucharest (by architects Rodica Macry and Margareta Dumitru), illustrates the close relationships that existed, within socialism, between the modern discipline of urban planning and the anxiety about the presence, within the city, of the filthy and of the irrational. Erected on

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[4] Peter Lizon, "East Central Europe: The Unhappy Heritage of Communist Mass Housing," *JAE* 50/2 (November 1996): 104.

the site of an infamous shantytown that had grown around a garbage dump (the 'Floresca pit'), the towers were meant to conjure a quasi-alchemical transmutation of garbage into garden. Photos of the time show the six identical towers neatly aligned at the edge of a park: what had been until then a place of dejection is now trimmed green lawn spreading at the feet of the towers, which further monumentalize the transformation. (Figs. 1, 2) Indeed, converting mud into flowerbeds, slums into apartment buildings, and ultimately dirt into cleanliness, constituted the central metaphor of the socialist conception of the city in the 1950s and 60s. Eventually, Floreasca towers would also come to illustrate the socialist city's circular trajectory from victor over, to victim of, urban dereliction, thus pointing to the proximity between the utopian and the distopic imaginations, in the discussions of socialism. Poorly maintained, the towers have begun to peel and rust. Today, their smooth facades are poked through with antennas and air conditioners devices, the orderly rhythm of loggias interrupted by screens, curtains, canopies. The lawn is scrawny and soiled with garbage. Nature itself seemed to have taken its revenge, drowning the geometrical clarity of the towers into overgrown masses of greenery. (Figs. 3-6).

Thus is the socialist city trapped between images of radical clean-up and ultimate dereliction, between utopia and its failure. But if we are to escape the binary of model city/slum, we should then ask, what is a socialist city, or is there such a thing? The structuring metaphors of order and disorder, hygiene and disease, collectivity and anonymity that dominate both socialism's self-representations and Western views of it, firmly situate the socialist city within industrial capitalist urban models and their corresponding bourgeois ideology of progress and rational dominion over the future. Many links tie the socialist city to earlier discussions on the nature of modern urban experience that occupied the first half of the 20th century not only in Western Europe, but also in pre-socialist Romania, and ultimately show socialism as the culmination of a project that had been enunciated much before its rise to power.

"Geometry and Straight Line": *Retour a l'ordre* in interwar Bucharest

A generation before the vast urban operations of the 1960s, the pre-socialist discourse about Bucharest had been also dominated by anxiety in front of the disorderly aspect of the city's development, and by visions of strict urbanistic discipline. What is read today as the monotonous and oppressive regularity of socialist architecture was in part an answer to a half-century-long tradition of vilification of the unruly character of the old city, and to the shock of its rapid and wild growth. A socialist architecture structured on standardization and rational planning is better understood against the background of a strong reaction to the interwar experience of confused urbanization and the associated problem of the periphery. When seen as the fulfillment of the promise of radical modernization which had been formulated by several previous generations, the compliance, even eagerness with which Romanian architects embraced Moscow's call to standardization in 1956 can hardly be interpreted anymore, as is usually done, as a demonstration of architectural culture's subservience to a totalitarian regime.

After World War I, Bucharest underwent a period of rapid development. Under weak governmental control and regulation, the city's density increased and its territory expanded rapidly. Romania's industrialization, coupled with the decline of the agricultural sector, drew enormous rural crowds to the city where they swelled the ranks of the urban poor. Between 1912 and 1941, the built territory of Bucharest expanded by 50%, from 5,614 to 8,480 hectares, thus becoming one of the largest cities in Europe.[5] At the same time, the population grew by 130%, from 382,000 inhabitants in 1918 to 870,000 inhabitants in 1939.[6] Thus the city not only expanded, but also became

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[5] Luan-Irina Stoica, "La banlieue bucharestoise de l'entre-deux-guerres. *Mahalaua* – topos et réalité sociale," *New Europe College Annual Proceedings* (1997-98), 383.

[6] Constantin Giurescu, *Istoria Bucurestilor din cele mai vechi timpuri pînă în zilele noastre* (Bucharest: Editura pentru literature, 1966), 86. All subsequent citations are from this Romanian edition.

significantly denser. Many of the new neighborhoods around the capital (which, in
Bucharest, since the 18th century, bore the Ottoman name of *mahala*) were born from the
pressures of overpopulation, with the high cost of housing in the center pushing
Bucharest's poor to marginal areas. "Housing there and in the peripheral *mahalale* has
been aptly described [in the interwar years] as a misery belt. [...] New arrivals scavenge
the scattered construction sites of the building societies for leftover lumber and tarpaper
in order to erect their own shack, etc."[7]

Exacerbating the problem has been the fact that, after World War I, soldiers returning
from the front lines had been given land on the outskirts of the capital. In 1933, we read:

> "Who doesn't know that belt of squalid houses sitting on garbage or in swamps,
> erected after the war as demobilized soldiers became landowners? [...] Thus we
> have solved the problem of the lack of cheap housing like in no other country.
> We estimated ... that we would solve the crisis by giving out small plots of land,
> along muddy roads, to people without means and without education. With their
> titles in hand but without any money, the wretched landowners were constrained
> to collect empty sardine cans, broken bricks, tin boxes of oil, and with such rich
> material, to erect on their plots a shanty. Thus rose around the city a plague of
> hovels leaning on dirt, a spreading illness that greets – to our shame – the foreign
> visitors entering Bucharest."[8]

Such accounts of the *mahala* abound in the interwar years, and one cannot but fail to
notice that their tone would be closely replicated in later, socialist writings:

> "...Si on voulait traduire *mahala* par banlieue ou par zone, on ferait naître une
> idée fausse; Bucarest n'est pas comme Londres, Vienne ou Paris, une grande
> ville entourée d'un collier de petites villes qui sont ses banlieues; on dirait plutot
> un phénomène physique décroissant, une vive couleur qui se degrade jusqu'au
> blanc, une onde qui d'affaiblit et se perd. Les maisons très serrées et très hautes
> du centre s'en vont vers la périphérie en s'espaçant et s'abaissant graduellement

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[7] John R. Lampe, "Interwar Bucharest and the promises of urbanism," *Journal of Urban History*
9, no. 3 (1983): 283-84.

[8] C. Argetoianu, *Bucurestii de azi si de mine din punct de vedere urbanistic* (n.p., 1933), 39.

jusqu'à se fondre en masures et finir dans le sol en bouges à tziganes. La ville europénne s'évanouit et l'Asie commence. La route devient piste, la poussière dore les maisons; sans transition l'horizon s'ouvre sur l'infini."[9]

"All around the city, amidst fields, lots are subdivided and rudimentary houses are constructed on streets without paving, with plenty of holes filled with water and mud in winter and dust and garbage during summer. These lots, laid out without any plan, on the edge of the city, at the will of developers and land speculators, cover a surface of thousands of hectares, with streets that are hundreds of kilometers long, without infrastructure, without even the type of sewers one can find in the countryside."[10]

Already in the 1920s, one the most infamous *mahala* was Floreasca. Despite being relatively close to the city center, it was without water and sewer, and its unpaved streets were lined with humid, dark, and poorly ventilated lodgings, often situated beneath the street level. In wintertime, the garbage pit housed the gypsies, the ultimate *mahalagii*. Year-round residents were workers, small artisans or functionaries, and those who, unable to afford a room of their own, used dorm-like rooms where 10-15 people slept.[11]

In the interwar discourse on the city, the apocalyptic image of the periphery was compounded with the rapid and oftentimes haphazard modernization of the center city, which triggered an intense search for identity and self-definition. The uncontrollable and eclectic building frenzy of the 1930s, during which time architecture was produced in all styles, dimensions, and standards, left a powerful impression on the citizens' imagination, palpable in the newspapers and architectural publications of the time, and fueled fears that Romanian architecture had not yet found its own language. Article after article complained about the uninhibited use of style, and ended in a request for regulations on

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[9] Paul Morand, *Bucarest, avec deux cartes.* (Paris: Plon, 1935).

[10] Archival document from 1945, cited in Stoica, 384.

[11] Stoica, 385.

the urban scale and in the architectural language. [12] The Romanian Society of Architects itself, formed in 1925, was an important voice to this effect: indeed, its founding declaration was a manifesto in favor of regulations. [13] Ten years later, the architect George Matei Cantacuzino was still calling with urgency for an organized building practice: "Time has come for a decision: Bucharest will either become a capital through the affirmation of authority and organization; or it will become an urban settlement, where mass housing, villas and institutional palaces will alternate in a monstrous disorder." [14] And further down: "Bucharest, where every owner and institution has it its own way, presents us with a collection of examples where a common building spirit is reduced to nothing. [Regulations] will oblige the citizen of Bucharest to follow the common interest of all." [15]

The call to order was in fact so strong and so pervasive that it allowed the opposite philosophical and political camps of the traditionalists and the modernizers to form a rare alliance. During the interwar decades, the debate among politicians and intellectuals regarding the direction of Romania's future development had grown into a deadlock between the adoption of a European model for all spheres of life (internal and external politics, education, culture, and of course architectural style) or a retreat within Eastern roots and traditions, between Westernization and anti-Westernization. The importance of this debate for understanding the cultural life of the interwar years in Romania has been widely recognized and analyzed. Artists, architects, writers, and all aesthetic productions before WWII are generally classified by historians and art historians according to such pro-Western, pro-modernization / anti-Western, traditionalist dichotomy. These two

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[12] *Tribuna Edilitara*, July 13, 1934.

[13] *Arhitectura* (1925): 42.

[14] George Matei Cantacuzino, "A Capital," in *Revista Fundatiilor Regale*, 1 December 1934, reprinted in George Matei Cantacuzino, *Scrieri* (Paris: Fundatia regala universitara Carol I, 1966), 47. Translation mine.

[15] Ibid., 50.

positions, precisely because of their opposite philosophical tenor, were concerned, obviously, with different aspects of architectural and urban practices, and remained irreconcilable in more than one way. And yet, despite different concerns, they came to agree on one thing: the 'laissez-faire' city as a site of disorder.

Both positions expressed strong repulsion for the Bucharest of the 1930s. As one could expect, the modernizing position formulated its ideal in terms of hygiene, economy of materials and decorations, as well as urban planning. Marcel Janco opened his essay, "Bucharest's utopia," with: "I see the urgent need to redo Bucharest." Such ostensibly "Westernist" authors contrasted their ideals with what they called Bucharest's "orientalism," a term heavily charged, as in this 1934 newspaper article, with negative connotations: "ancestral dirt, half-ruins, crowded spaces," "social anarchy," "lack of discipline," and "corrupt politics.".[16] Needless to say the 'oriental' parts of Bucharest were precisely the *mahala* , which, through the Western eyes of someone like Paul Morand, were seen as 'the beginning of Asia.' For the Westernists, a return to order would result in a functional city, directly inspired from Le Corbusier's urban proposals: "Geometry and the straight line are the only ones, the beautiful ones, because only they belong to art and intelligence, only they express a clear goal and a clear will. We stand for the new construction that uses or expresses the functional aesthetics of the century of the machine. [...] We stand for bringing our capital into step, as soon as possible, with our epoch, with the new style and its place in modern urbanism."[17]

Equally indignant was the traditionalist camp, but this time over elements of style and of architectural language. The magazine *Arhitectura*, which, in the interwar years,

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[16] Dem I. Dobrescu, "Viitorul Bucurestilor" (The future of Bucharest), *Tribuna Edilitara*, October 5, 1934.

[17] Marcel Janco, "Bucharest's Utopia," in *Towards an Architecture of Bucharest* (Bucharest: Tribuna Edilitara, 1934), 20.

represented a clearly conservative position, published numerous articles openly opposing the development of "modern style" architecture in Romania, the main argument being modernism's inability to express a national character. The modern style's rigid, industrial, and uniform appearance could match, so it argued, a style that should be communicative and picturesque.[18] It also pointed that the modern style was also unsuited for Romania's climate.[19] Finally, embracing an openly anti-Semitic tone, the magazine observed that many of modernism's practitioners in Romania were Jews, and, therefore, should be rejected as ethnically alien.[20] The concern for style, and, in fact, for expression, directly refers to the slogan of the traditionalist position, which deemed Romania's attempts at modernization as superficial imitations, as "forms without content." In this formulation, form stands for occidental ideas, and content, for the Romanian national character, sometimes also called "soul," "spirit."[21] For the traditionalists, the nation's capital should be at the forefront of an effort to formulate a Romanian national style, obtained by transposing vernacular and religious building traditions into urban forms, both residential and institutional: "What is our program? To strive towards a new physiognomy of Romanian civilization. This will be possible only by coordinating all efforts within a State architecture."[22]

Thus opposite aspects of Bucharest's development (on one hand, the persistence and expansion of the traditional, organic structure of the *mahala*; rapid modernization, on the other) triggered a similar sense of horror, and carried a common assumption: that a truly

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[18] Ioan D. Traianescu [Trajanescu], "Arhitectura romaneasca in fata curentelor moderniste," *Arhitectura* (1931-1933): 16-18.

[19] Arta Cerchez, *Arhitectura* 10 (1937): 22-25.

[20] *Arhitectura* 11 (1938): 3.

[21] The slogan had emerged from the work of the historian Titu Maiorescu and of the historical society Junimea, which had provided theoretical validity to a strong and enduring distrust for western ideas such as "modernity."

[22] Cantacuzino, 107.

modern capital would come with the dominance of a single building style, with architectural homogeneity and a consistent ordering of urban space, and under a strong, centralized authority. The modernists and the traditionalists had found a common cause.

Debates between modernists and traditionalists were common in the opening decades of the 20th century; however, in the case of Romania, its formulations enjoyed a particular longevity, uninterrupted by the advent of the socialist regime. And since antagonism cannot exist in a socialist world of universal consensus, these prewar positions and formulations were carried over without any memory of their original opposition, and subsisted side by side, in the unstable synthesis provided by socialism. Indeed, elements of both modernist and traditionalist positions were reproduced and combined within socialist historiography and architectural criticism. From the traditionalist side, the "form without content" interwar slogan survived within socialism's denunciation of the modern movement as formalism and as stylistic imitation – which will be discussed in Part Two; from the "Westernist" side, there remained a profound longing for rationalization and geometry. From both ideological traditions the socialist years inherited the urgency to reform the city and its architecture.

Romanian ideas for urban planning in the 1930s were also heavily influenced by the evolving French discipline "*urbanisme.*"[23] Romania's educated elite, typically trained in Paris, or at least in the French language, endorsed the French tradition of emphasis on the geometrical layout of streets and parks and of marginal interest in housing. France was then very much the model in the numerous calls for the material and symbolic regeneration of the capital. In 1927, for instance, C. Argetoianu, (an important political figure and once minister of interior) argued in favor of a Haussmanian intervention in

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[23] A book on the uses of Bergsonism in the understanding and development of cities by the French urban historian Marcel Poëte was published only in Romania. Poëte, *Des plans d'amenagement et d'extension des villes.* Bibliothèque de l'Institut des sciences administratives de Roumanie no.35, (Bucarest: Fundatia Cultural, Voevodul Mihai Imprimeria, 1931).

Bucharest: "The narrow streets in the center [of the capital] must absolutely be widened. As a consequence we must demolish certain houses. We have to realize that this is the last moment for undergoing such works of systematization, of cutting open new streets. We are already late. We need to do in Bucharest what Haussmann did in Paris in the 1860s, we have to remake Bucharest according to a new plan, we need to tear down and to rebuild."[24] The most influential figure of interwar Romanian urbanism, Cincinat Sfiintescu, Chair of Urbanism at Bucharest's School of Architecture, and Chief of Technical Services for Bucharest's municipal government, is also to be found squarely within the French mainstream: he vehemently denounced the French avant-garde and Le Corbusier's urban proposals as 'socialist.'[25] His distaste for high-density, high-rise inhabitation very closely replicated the French popular opinion of the 1930s, according to which tall residential buildings made out of concrete were exerting a "bolshevizing" influence over society.[26] Though some modernist manifestoes had also circulated in Romania in favor of Corbusier-like proposals, it is mostly Sfiintescu's conservative ideas that were eventually formalized into a Master Plan for Bucharest.[27] Devised in 1935 by

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[24] Argetoianu, 25.

[25] Lampe, 271.

[26] "Des maniaques qui veulent nous bolchéviser en nous imposant leurs termitières de béton, leurs cellules de fer, de verre et de ciment," wrote Camille Montclair, critic at the newspaper *Figaro*, in 1933. Cited in Jean-Louis Cohen, "L'architecture en France. Entre le spectre de l'urbanisme et le halo des recherches soviétiques," in *Paris Moscou*, Exhibition catalog, compl. Pontus Hulten et al. (Paris: Le Centre Georges Pompidou, 1979), 272.

[27] Simultaneously with the 1935 Master Plan, the newspaper *Tribuna Edilitara* (*Constructions Tribune*) issued a book with counter-master plan, a manifesto-like publication signed by three of the most prominent architects of the day, all of them declared modernists: Marcel Janco, Horia Creangă, and Octav Doicescu. *Catre o Arhitectura a Bucurestilor* (Towards an architecture of Bucharest) announced, already through its title meant to paraphrase Le Corbusier's *Towards an Architecture* of 1925, a militantly modernist stance. Clearly under the spell of Le Corbusier's urban proposals, the texts embrace utopian visions, in contradistinction with the measured language of the Master Plan. Marcel Janco, for instance, calls for high-rise buildings located in the midst of gardens. Unlike the Master Plan, which called for streets as narrow as possible to minimize their cost, Janco calls for extremely wide streets (40-70m) lined with concentrated and collective housing blocs surrounded by immense gardens (p. 14). Janco also specifically takes

the architects Duiliu Marcu, G.M. Cantacuzino, R. Bolomey, Ion Al. Davidescu and the engineer T. Radulescu, it constituted the most comprehensive attempt to date to regulate the city. It reflected many of Sfiintescu's principles, most importantly a call for a low and uniform density across the city.[28]

The 1935 Master Plan sees of the inordinate spread and growth of the city's peripheries as the most important problem in the development of Bucharest. Because they formed more or less spontaneously, fed by an acute lack of affordable housing within the city, the new marginal settlements had low densities and irrational, scattered layouts that led to a proliferation of streets and a proportional rise in the required maintenance. The Master Plan's main goal was thus to find ways to stop the city's expansion, and started by assigning clear geographical limits to Bucharest's territory. These limits were to be enforced, in coordination with a policy of mass housing regulated by the municipal authorities. The 1935 Master Plan also indicated the individual, two-story house, with common parting walls on both sides and with a garden at the back, as the most appropriate residential type for the poor. Although the Master Plan mentions the apartment building as a possible solution to urban crowding, it nevertheless declares it unfit for the Romanian workers' mentality and habits, which it deemed still essentially rural. Echoing directly Sfiintescu and, through him, the anxieties of the European middle class, the text warns that apartment living influences its tenants in favor of communism,

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issue with private property, which he sees as an important impediment to urbanism (Bucharest: Tribuna Edilitara, 1935).

For another take on interwar urbanism, see also Duiliu Marcu, *Problema sistematizarii oraselor in Romania,* Extract from *Arhiva pentru Stiinta si Reforma Sociala* 1-3 (1930).

[28] Even though C. Sfiintescu's disdain for 'socialist' architecture and his thoroughly francophile professional orientation are representative of the Romanian elite of the interwar, one should not preclude interest for, and knowledge of Soviet developments, from having existed among Romanian architects. No scholarship exists on the circulation of Soviet ideas in interwar Romania. But one important, though indirect, example is the activity of the Romanian Jean Badovici who published in France in 1923-33 the architectural review, *L'Architecture vivante* in which the Soviet architecture is often and favorably discussed.

and that instead, the ownership of individual lots, by creating a bond between the citizen and the land, contradicts communist tendencies and is therefore preferable.[29] With weak municipal authority and with little economic power, interwar Romania made little progress in expanding access to housing, and the 1935 Plan remained a document on paper, and later proof, in the eyes of the socialist government, of the bourgeois state's inability to solve the problem of the urban poor.

Cartier and *Mahala*

It is also the early 20th century that produced an important semantic shift in the language used to designate city parts and especially in the definition of *mahala*, a shift which not only remained intact, but was magnified and worked through under socialism, and which testifies to the larger cultural embrace of ideals of organization and regularization.

In his important *History of Bucharest*, the socialist urban historian Constantin Giurescu traced the history of various words used to designate the parts of the city.[30] *Mahala* had been the term used since the 17th century to designate the city's various districts, were they central or peripheral. The *mahala* was circumscribed by its relationship to a church, of which it often bore the name, and, therefore, could carry religious connotations; or it was associated with a certain trade, such as the goldsmiths', or the fishermen's mahala , etc.[31] It was only in the early 20th century, that *mahala* came to bear distinctly negative connotations, of slum and lack of civilization. Instead, to designate the various (and civilized) parts of the city, emerged the word *cartier*, borrowed from the French *quartier*

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[29] Duiliu Marcu, G.M. Cantacuzino, R. Bolomey, I Davidescu, T. Radulescu, *Planul Director de Sistematizare. Rezumat al memoriului colectiv* (*Systematization Master Plan. Synopsis of the collaborative memoir*) (Bucharest: Institutul Urbanistic al Romaniei, 1935).

[30] See Giurescu. It should be pointed that the book's translation as *History of Bucharest* in 1969 conveniently omitted the discussion and illustrations of the city's "*mahala*."

[31] See "Mahalale, cartiere, microraioane," in Giurescu, 359-60.

in the late 19th century, and set against the *mahala*. Increasingly, *mahala* denoted the peripheral, the marginal, while the central parts of the city were newly referred to in terms of *cartier*.[32]

The socialist rhetoric about the city exploits fully this contrast between *mahala* and *cartier*. For socialism, *cartier* no longer stands as a precious neologism, and instead *becomes* the most usual term for neighborhood, defined as a small sector of the city, with an integrated community and provided with its own shops and other facilities. By the 1950s, *cartier* was fully enrolled to indicate, according to Giurescu, the new urban reality of the socialist constructions. In Giurescu's book (which is representative of the general acceptation), *cartier* designated a group of new constructions within the city, which provided "all that is necessary to modern life," from shops to schools, hospitals, cinemas, sports facilities and green spaces, and which constituted the "capital's jewels."[33] Thus, the *mahala* /*cartier* pair perfectly illustrates the discourse of polarities that, first formulated between the wars, come to dominate the socialist thinking about the city: while *cartier* connoted a part of the city distinctively modern in style and comfort, and (not least because of its resonant French etymology), on par with Western living standards, *mahala* represented its reverse image, the realm of urban poverty, chaos, and ultimately of vulgarity, impropriety (by extension, the inhabitant of the *mahala* , or *mahalagiu,* designated a person who engages in gossip or in undignified behavior, scrappy), all traits socialism deemed to be the consequences of capitalism. *Mahala* was also deemed backward and vulgar not in small part because of its Ottoman etymology, which connotes, as in other Balkan contexts, the opposite of modernity and of the desire of Westernization associated with it.[34] Short photo-essays of the time abound, making

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[32] ibid., 364.

[33] Ibid., 364.

[34] Cf. Michael Herzfeld's anthropological study of Greece, in which he argues that many Greek words of Turkish origin have come to signify the embarrassing aspects of Greek popular

full use of the before-and-after format. (Figs. 7, 8, 9) The story of Floreasca itself is that of the passage from *mahala* to *cartier*.

Socialist Urbanism

The development of socialist urbanism in the 1950s and 1960s should thus be seen, at least in part, as an anti-mahala project. While the postwar architectural culture in the West was increasingly interested in the sort of cultural particularisms and spontaneous or organic systems that had distinguished the *mahala*, the impulse towards large scale, standardized methods of housing design that swept the Soviet Bloc found particular resonance in socialist Romania. A vast system of cheap and rapid housing construction was developed and promoted by the states of the Soviet Bloc from the late 1950s onwards, leaving behind the emphasis on national and classical tradition that had characterized Stalinism. Romania swiftly turned away from its own vernacularism (fig. 10) in favor of a stripped down architecture of plain concrete. Under the pressing demand to produce as rapidly and inexpensively as possible, the socialist architects abandoned the problem of giving form to single elements, and instead embraced the city as the real unity of production. (Fig. 11) In addition, methods of design and construction were rigorously standardized, leading to a deep transformation of the entire architectural discipline.[35]

As had been insistently requested in the 1930s, architecture, from construction details to urban form, became centrally commissioned and regulated. The first attempt at regulating the form of the city put forward by the newly-installed socialist regime in

character, those that cannot be spoken about openly or in the presence of foreigners—but known by the participants of a "culture of intimacy." Michael Herzfeld, *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982).

[35] During 1960-65, 300 000 apartments were erected with state funds in Bucharest. The projections were an acceleration of the rhythm of 80 000 – 100 000 apartments a year, in the hope to fully meet the need for housing in the capital by 1975. Grigore Ionescu, *Arhitectura '44-'69. Arhitectura in Romania in perioada anilor 1944-1969* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste Romania, 1969), 107.

Romania was through Resolution 2448/November 1952 of the Central Committee of the ruling Workers' Party of Romania (later the Socialist Party of Romania) titled *Cu privire la planul general de reconstructie socialista al orasului Bucuresti* (Concerning the general plan for the socialist reconstruction of the city of Bucharest). Besides being meant to govern all development and construction in the city of Bucharest, the Resolution also defined a central authority, the State Committee for Architecture and Constructions, that would control all architectural and urban projects, with the goal to "ensure the application of a unitary line of principles throughout the field of architecture and the systematization and construction of cities and constructions of all nature throughout the territory of the Socialist Republic of Romania."[36] The text also regulated both the scope and organization of architects' work: the architect is to produce a master plan devised at the state level, and to work within design units defined by the State Committee for Architecture and Constructions. More importantly, the Resolution opened with a stark denunciation of the capitalist city as the physical manifestation of class conflict:

> "Towns and settlements throughout our country's territory have inherited a heavy burden from the bourgeois exploitative regime. Anarchically developed, according to the narrow-minded interests of the bourgeoisie and the landowners, our country's cities offered a striking contrast between the rich districts of the ruling classes and the poor ones, in which the workers lived in misery, in crumbling houses, without water, sewer, or light." [37]

From the onset, the Resolution thus draws a direct link between the wretched life of the slum and capitalism. Building socialism, in that context, literally meant to give form to the reversed notion of the slum.

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[36] Comitetul Central al Partidului muncitoresc roman, *Cu privire la planul general de reconstructie socialista al orasului Bucuresti*. Resolution 2448 (Bucharest: Editura pentru literatura politica, November 1952), 1912.

[37] Hotarirea Comitetului Central al P.M.R. si a cosiluilui de Minisitri al RPR cu privire la planul general de reconstructie socialista a orasului Bucuresti (Bucharest: Editura pentru literature politica, 1952), 7-8.

The Resolution laid down principles and prescriptions for the development of the city. The capital was to be scientifically and systematically planned to respond to the needs of the workers, and the plan should cover a 15 to 20-year period. It was conceived as finite and unified, and its built territory was to be limited to correspond to a projected population of 1.5 to 1.7 millions. In other words, the size of the city should be controlled, and its perimeter established in advance. The city should also be architecturally homogeneous, and a general architectural solution should be applicable throughout. The Resolution also introduces the notion of complex residential districts, generically named *cvartal*. These districts should range between 5-10 hectares in size, should contain gardens and green spaces, and should as much as possible preserve existing buildings. Their density should be of 300 inhabitants per hectare (1 hectare equals 2,5 acres), and in no instance should the built surface exceed 25-30% of the entire surface of the *cvartal*. The Resolution calls for 6-story high residential buildings within the *cvartals*, with the exception of the buildings lining the main arteries, which can reach 8 to 10 stories. Heavy industry should be situated only on the outskirts of the capital, and the industrial production already within the city should be progressively relocated. The Resolution also calls for erasing the contrast between center and periphery, in terms of the quality of construction, infrastructure, and services. For that purpose, daycare centers, schools, medical facilities, stores, markets, post offices, etc, should be distributed 'rationally' and equally throughout the city. Finally, the creation and planning of green spaces is the object of extensive attention, and a complex system of parks, from small neighborhood squares to a botanical garden, connected into a continuous green zone that served the "recreation needs of the workers," was prescribed.

Between the 1935 Master Plan and the 1952 Resolution, important differences emerged, particularly regarding the typology of the workers' housing: while the first insisted on the single-family house and the quasi-ontological importance of private property, the second advocated groups of high-rise collective residential blocs. Nevertheless, the two

documents share important notions: the city as a finite and unified territory, the urgent need to provide affordable mass housing, and the necessity of a centralized planning authority within the government's oversight.

The Resolution remained the legal document regulating all development in Bucharest until 1974, but its application remained open to discussion, evolving and changing throughout the 1960s.[38] The story of the Floreasca district illustrates some of the successive interpretations that were given to the notion of "scientific and systematic planning of the city" between the 1952 Resolution and the erection of the six towers in 1963. The towers were indeed only the last stage in a series of earlier experimentations with the notion of the cvartal. The socialist Floreasca had begun in 1956, with a series of apartment buildings of four and five floors that constituted one of the first and best-known applications of the cvartal of the 1952 Resolution. (Figs. 12, 13) Although praised for its capacity to achieve density, the cvartal is quickly criticized for the monumental character of its layout, of its buildings, and of its geometrical grid, for its failure to address the problem of parking, and ultimately for the failure to fully and rapidly adopt standardized and industrialized construction methods.[39] (Fig. 14) As a consequence, the design principles that had determined the Floreasca of the 1950s were revised and 'upgraded' several times before reaching the formula of the 1963 towers.

The 1952 Resolution resonated with debates that reach well beyond local continuities. Socialist urban design constituted one of the many spatial and temporal migrations of the architectural culture developed in the 1920s at once in Europe and in the Soviet Union, and therefore offers insight into the ways in which architectural knowledge was re-

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[38] Several sketches were drawn by the successive head architects of the city of Bucharest: Pompiliu Macovei (from 1953 to 1957), Horia Maicu, Tiberiu Ricci, and Mircea Dima, but none of these sketches were approved nor translated into law.

[39] See discussion of the inadequacies of the cvartal in Cezar Lazarescu et al., Urbanismul în România (Bucharest: Editura Tehnica, 1977), 46.

distributed, and meaning reinvented to accommodate radically different political and social contexts. Indeed, the Soviet model for the socialist city that Romania had started to follow almost to the letter from the mid-1950s onward, had been conceived in large part through close collaboration between European and Soviet architects between 1930 and 1934. During the first Five Years Plan (1928-1932) that marked the Soviet Union's grand turn towards industrialization, the government had systematically sought out and invited foreign specialists, architects and engineers, to assist with the planning and building of new industrial centers and new socialist towns. In the case of industrial developments, it was American and British technological know-how that was primarily sought out.[40] However, when it came to mass housing and urban planning, the government of the Soviet Union preferred specialists from Germany, where some important modernist residential complexes had been realized. (The United States did not have diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union until 1933, while Germany had recognized the revolutionary state and established trade relations with it through the Rapallo Treaty in 1922.) While in the West, the economic crisis significantly slowed building activity in the early 1930s, the USSR offered interesting and abundant work, and many western architects followed the Soviet call.

Besides the Dutch J.B. van Loghem, the French André Lurçat, and the Czech Jaromir Krejcàr, two German teams arrived at the end of 1930. The first one, under the direction of Hannes Meyer, was composed of six young architects from the Bauhaus in Dessau. The second team, under the direction of Ernst May, had been officially invited by the Soviet government and was composed of about twenty engineers and architects from Frankfurt. Many in the team had collaborated with May for the Stadtbaumat for the city of Frankfurt: Kaufman, Walter Schwagenscheidt, Werner Hebebrand, Margarete

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[40] See the account of the way in which American technology was transferred to the Soviet Union in the early 1930s in exchange for the Hermitage paintings in Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 164-172.

Schütte-Lihotzky, Leitsikov. Other members of the May team were the Dutch Mart Stam, the Hungarian Fred Forbat, and the Swiss Hans Schmidt. All of them had accepted to work in the Soviet Union for five years.[41] After 1930, the May team worked alongside a large number of soviet architects at the newly formed central planning institute called Gorstrojprojekt (Gostroi designates the State Committee on Construction Affairs). There, the problem of planned towns, theories of the elements that compose a city, the conception of residential districts that contain social and cultural institutions and aim at forming a functional whole, the relationship between city and region, became matters of systematic research and debate. (Projects of new towns, such as Magnitogorsk, and projects for the reconstruction of Moscow, emerged from this collaboration).[42]

The important American and German professional contribution, during the 1920s and 1930s, to Soviet planning, meant that Romania's socialist urbanism of the 1960s, despite (or precisely because) its strict alignment with Moscow, was in fact establishing, one generation later, important continuity lines with interwar modernist thought. Ironically, it is under Moscow's impulse that postwar Romania eventually embraced the rational urbanism of the avant-garde of the first half of the century, renouncing its own pre-socialist tradition of skepticism for the avant-garde's ideas about urbanism, inhabitation in high-rise, abstract cells and the abolition of decoration . Indeed, the official architectural culture of the authoritarian socialist regime proved to be much closer to the interwar modernist avant-garde than a democratic pre-socialist Romania, which had

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[41] Hans Schmidt, "Architettura sovietica e paesi occidentali," in *Socialismo, città, architettura: URSS 1917-1937. Il contributo degli architetti europei* (Rome: Officina Edizioni, 1971), 265.

[42] Ibid, 266-67. It is interesting that the 1936 turn towards socialist realism in the architecture and urban planning of the Soviet Union was primarily a rebuttal of May's team's projects. The criticism concerned the schematic and uniform design of residential districts and of new towns, and the entire notion of 'functional city.' For instance, when the workers encountered the early housing built by Mart Stam at Magnitogorsk, they unfavorably compared the spare modernist housing without balconies to the tsarist ornated architecture, a terrible political verdict, ibid., 271.

followed, as seen in the 1935 Master Plan, a conservative view of the city and of urban dwelling.

Buildings in a garden

Socialist urbanism is also linked in essential ways to the Charter of Athens, a link that becomes increasingly clear in the interpretations that the 1952 Resolution receives in the early 1960s. Indeed, after the 1956-58 phase in which Floreasca was built according to the *cvartal* model, the construction of new residential ensembles was revised, and the influence of the Charter of Athens formalized into the new concepts of the superblock and the *microraion*, defined as follows:

> "When a group of constructions consists of thousands of apartments – a fact that is more and more frequent in the last decade [the 1960s] – then a new term is used, that of 'microraion,' or small 'raion.' The term illustrates the significant proportions of the ensemble, which stands, in terms of surface, in between the neighborhood or the suburb and the 'raion.' Such 'microraioane,' equipped with all that is necessary to modern life – from stores of all kind to schools, medical clinics, movie theaters, sport fields, and green spaces – constitute the capital's jewels. We here cite Floreasca, erected on the edges of the bygone foul garbage pit, guarded by six imposing towers."[43]

(Both *raion* and *microraion* are directly borrowed from the Russian *rayon* and *microrayon*,)[44] In 1948 the socialist regime, by transforming small, privately owned parcels into state-owned large land holdings on which the new socialist, high-rise and high-density inhabitations were to be erected, had already fulfilled an important principle of the Charter. ("The social organization based on relationships of socialist production makes possible the application of systematization plans that aim at a harmonious general

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[43] Giurescu, 364.

[44] For a (identical) definition of *microrayon* in the Soviet Union, see Bater, 102.

development and at the creation of optimal conditions of life for the workers."[45]) In the early 1960s, the provision of green areas in all residential districts became a central issue, as important, perhaps, as technological innovation and rational disposition of buildings. The idea of large green open spaces, either as green belts around the city, or as the setting for widely-spaced apartment blocs, appears in all writings about the socialist city, and, very much like in the Charter, seems to have been used to balance an overly-controlled built environment. More importantly, and also in close agreement with the Charter, green areas were to function as the new collective spaces of the new districts, as housing was removed from traditional relationship with the street and turned inward, towards surrounding gardens and parks. People and cars followed separate paths, and often, residential buildings were not reachable by car, but only by pedestrian alleys winding through green spaces. (Fig. 14)

The superblock and the related category of *microraion* integrated the prescriptions of the Charter with those of another, parallel but related model, the neighborhood unit. The neighborhood unit had been formulated initially in Britain at the beginning of the 20th century in direct continuity with the 19th century garden city model, subsequently put in practice on a wide scale in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, and eventually had migrated back to the capitalist West in the postwar, where it had been applied systematically in Britain's new towns and council estates.[46] Thus, Romania's turn towards the superblock and the microraion in the 1960s should be seen not only as the direct influence of Soviet practices that had been based on the concept of the superblock since the 1930s, but also as synchronous with Western Europe's revived interest for similar planning solutions.

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[45] Ibid, 10.

[46] Alison Ravetz, *The Government of Space: Town Planning in Modern Society* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 53.

The superblock (or neighborhood unit, also sometimes termed "complex de locuit," or living complex) was to constitute the socialist city's basic planning unit.[47] In the Soviet Union, it had been designed to accommodate around 1,000 – 1,500 people, and to include, within walking distance, all the necessary day-to-day facilities like schools, and shops.[48] The *microraion* (a term directly transposed into Romanian from the Russian *microrayon*), was the next highest organization unit composed of several suberblocks (up to 12,000 inhabitants), and provided higher-order services not required on the level of the superblock, such as basic medical services, sports facilities, or a cinema.[49] In Romania, the superblock acquired larger dimensions, but preserved the original intention to create a sense of neighborhood that had been essential not only for the Western neighborhood unit but also for the Soviet superblock: "The living complex can be defined as a clearly delimited part of a residential area, which accommodates a tightly-knit and relatively autonomous collectivity."[50]

The superblock differed in important ways from the vaguely-termed cvartal prescribed in the 1952 Resolution. Though similar in size to large superblocks (the cvartal could contain 1500-3000 inhabitants, the superblock slightly more than 1500), the cvartals were not meant to aggregate in order to form the totalizing organization of the microrayon. Nor were the cvartals conceived to integrate services, and therefore to function autonomously. Instead, the 1952 Resolution had stipulated only the rational distribution of basic services throughout the city, without linking these services necessarily to the erection of the cvartals, which only required the presence of green spaces. In practice,

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[47] Superblock also refers in the literature to residential buildings of significant size (such as Le Corbusier's 12 stories-high residential towers in his "Contemporary City for Three Million Inhabitants," for instance. See Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*, 149). Here, I use superblock in the more common sense of a basic planning unit.

[48] James H. Bater, *The Soviet City: Ideal and Reality* (London: Edward Arnold, 1980), 28.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Lazarescu, 63.

the cvartals of the 1950s, mostly composed of bar-shaped residential blocs, were characterized by monumentality and axiality, two characteristics that were severely criticized and discarded later in the superblock / *microraion* system. More importantly, the cvartals were to function as punctual interventions throughout the city, while the superblock/microraion hierarchy was expected to produce a new city within the city. (Figs. 14-16).

The Floreasca towers are apt illustrations of the transition between the *cvartal* inserted in the city, and the urban autarchy of the superblock. Indeed, whereas the model of the superblock and the *microraion* offered self-enclosed, fully autonomous residential environments that could be added to the city's perimeter with minimal connection to the original urban fabric, by contrast, the Floreasca towers are latched onto a pre-socialist street grid and depend on the old neighborhood for services. Conversely, the surrounding Floreasca park is meant to be used by the entire neighborhood, thus establishing a mutual dependence between the towers and the old city. (Fig. 17) (On the contrary, the green spaces within the superblocks are clearly scaled and configured for the sole benefit of their direct inhabitants.) But the Floreasca towers also powerfully anticipate the superblock principle of the green space as the symbolic and physical center of the housing districts, announcing the new autonomy of the socialist districts from the pre-existing city. Despite having quasi-identical four faces, subtle differences express the fact that the towers' public face has been oriented away from the city that borders them to the south, and towards the park that opens on their northern edge. The plan shows that the functional façade containing the staircase is the one facing the street, allowing for the maximum number of loggias to open onto the vista of the park and the lake. (Fig. 18) The entrance to each tower is also removed from what is perceived as a 'back' street and located on the western side. By making themselves accessible only to pedestrians, the towers further underscore their aloofness from the hustle and bustle of the city's traffic. Even if it amounts to solutions for releasing the towers, functionally and visually, from the surrounding city, the Floreasca project of 1963 remained a rare attempt to provoke

and to think the encounter between socialist and pre-socialist visions of the city. Unlike the superblocks that were to follow almost immediately (such as, for instance, those gathered into the two most important *microraione* of Bucharest, *Balta Alba* and *Drumul Taberii,* both from 1965), the towers were unusual in their relative proximity to the surrounding neighborhood, and as such exposed with acuity the conflicts, physical and symbolic, that the socialist urban idea had triggered within the existing city. Although they share a Corbusian vision of the modern city in which housing blocs float within vast expanses of parkland and where there is little differentiation between front and back spaces, the towers also clearly express an orientation away from the city and towards the park. As I will show below, the strong sense of orientation that results from juxtaposing the towers to the old city fulfills an important representational function. Nonetheless, the *Floreasca* towers oscillate between indeterminate open space, as demonstrated by their square footprint and the repetition of a quasi-identical facade on each of their four fronts, and a clear directionality..

The departure from the monumentality and classicism of the *cvartal* in favor of the free plan of the superblock corresponded to a generalized movement, throughout the Soviet bloc, towards the standardization of architectural production and the re-embrace of modernist abstraction. At the 1955 Congress of the Union of Architects in Moscow, the Central Committee's message stated: "the central and deciding features of Soviet architecture are simplicity, austerity of forms, an attractive appearance combined with cheapness, and attention to living conditions."[51] The intense revival of modernist preoccupations in the socialist architecture of the late 1950s and 1960s is usually linked to Khrushchev's speech of 1954, sometimes termed "the missing modernist manifesto" because of its direct criticism of socialist architecture from Stalinist decorative excesses,

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[51] R. W. Davies, "The Building Reforms and Architecture," *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Apr., 1956): 418.

and its call for the intensive rationalization and industrialization of construction and the standardization of design solutions:

> "Widespread use of reinforced concrete parts, sections, large blocks and new and effective materials is a new element in building techniques which imperatively requires us to give up obsolete design methods. (Applause)"
>
> ...
>
> "Certain architects have been carried away with putting spires on buildings, with the result that such buildings resemble churches. Do you like the silhouette of a church? I do not wish to argue about tastes, but in apartment houses, such an appearance is not necessary. The modern apartment house must not be transformed by architectural design into a replica of a church or a museum. This affords the residents no comfort, and only complicates the utilization of the building and raises its cost. Yet certain architects do not take this into consideration."[52]

The move away from ornamentation and towards rationalism is apparent in the differences that exist between the first Floreasca cvartal of 1956-58 and the Floreasca towers of 1963. In the case of Floreasca's early stage, small residential blocs on four levels were rigidly aligned along a preexisting street grid. (Fig. 12) Windows and doors were framed in relief, the upper edge of the buildings ended in a projecting cornice, a plinth suggested by concrete molding wrapped around each building, and the surface, made out of the concrete, imitated the joints of stonework. (Fig. 13) All these elements signified, albeit in a simplified form, the persistence of the classical vocabulary of building parts, which was to be fully discarded in the Floreasca towers. After 1958, the emergence of *microraion/superblock* system was associated with radical efforts to standardize architectural production, of which the towers were meant to be a clear demonstration through their innovative constructive system. Indeed, Floreasca also constituted an important moment in the history of construction technologies under socialism. On the path towards total industrialization of the building process, the six

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[52] Nikita Khrushchev, "Remove shortcomings in design, improve work of architects" in J. Ockman and E. Eigen, *Architecture Culture 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 185-88.

towers are the first to employ reusable concrete casts that would slide upwards as lower portions were completed. (Fig. 19.) (The term "systematization" was used to describe the rationalization and standardization of both the design and building process.)

It appears, therefore, that the thinking on urban form in Romania in the 1950s and 1960s stands at the confluence of three different practices, all of them filtered through the Soviet experience: British town planning, which derived from the idea of the garden city; the Charter of Athens; and finally the Soviet Union's own revival, after 1954, of the architectural rationalism of the interwar decades. It remained, however, strikingly impermeable to the postwar revisions that these urban doctrines underwent in the West, such as those brought on by Team X, systems theory, Dutch structuralism, and Megastructural forms, to name some of the most important 1950s and 60s critiques of modernist functionalism. As the Romanian urban imagination became, and remained, a stronghold of the modernist Cartesian schema, the conception of the city, presupposed by the 1952 Resolution, as a closed hierarchy of discrete parts controlled by a center was partly transformed into a conception in which the historical center was undervalued, and symbolic predominance was given to the new, socialist peripheral neighborhoods.

Representing the City

Not only had the socialist state made the construction of the socialist city into an object of intense efforts on the part of the architectural profession, and invested unprecedented financial resources into it, it had also enlisted its realization as the protagonist of a vast propaganda campaign. The state, concerned with demonstrating that an important qualitative leap had occurred from capitalism into socialism, came to rely heavily on the

building campaigns as key evidence of this transformation.[53] New neighborhoods such as Floresca thus had a presence that extended well beyond their physical territory and into vast 'representational spaces' that were mapped relentlessly in photographs and in writing. (Figs. 20, 21, 22) As such, the contrast between the Floreasca towers and the pre-socialist neighborhoods should be read not only as the physical product of new urbanistic models, but also as the culmination of a quest to symbolically substantiate and confirm the difference between capitalism and socialism, providing socialism with a sense of self.

Although the regime had answered with a resounding 'yes' to the question that Henri Lefebvre would later ask, "Has state socialism produced a space of its own?", the specificity of socialist reality proved stubbornly difficult to grasp in abstract terms.[54] The propaganda texts emphasized instead the physical, quantifiable, transformation of the urban environment, which it obsessively tracked down in numbers, in the counting of kilometers of paved streets and new apartments. Thus, the tempo of socialist construction provided an important measure of accomplishment: "The numbers, on this matter, are definitive: 6517 apartments were constructed in 1957 and 1958; 7031 in 1959; 7770 in 1960; 15,144 in 1961; 12,925 in 1962; and 13,623 in 1963."[55]

Or:

> "Through the use of large prefabricated panels for residential construction, not only the building time is shortened, but also vast possibilities for the industrialization of production emerge. Thus, [the construction brigade] I.C.M. no 5 built block no 2, with 84 apartments, on the Boulevard May First, in only 76

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[53] On the problem of the "qualitative leap" from capitalism to socialism, see Benjamin Robinson, "Socialism's Other Modernity: Quality, Quantity, and the Measure of the Human," *Modernism/modernity* 10, no. 4 (2003): 705-728.

[54] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Reprint, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 54.

[55] Giurescu, 226.

days; and five other blocks with 60 apartments each in the district Jiului-Scînteia, in 45-75 days, instead of the predicted 4-5 months."[56]

The passage of time is also relentlessly celebrated and numeric milestones are attributed quasi-mystical value: 5 years, 15 years, 25 years, etc. of communist rule are reached with fanfare (testifying of an anxious quest for historical depth) and given meaning in further quantitative terms:

> "15 years ago almost 60 per cent of the city's buildings were made out of dried mud and straw (paianta si chirpici), and 18 per cent of brick, all in poor state. Just above 20 per cent of buildings were constructed out of bricks and concrete and appeared in good state."[57]

In another example, a 1969 book celebrating 25 years from the "homeland's liberation from fascism" describes the transformation of the Romanian society as "Hundreds of factories and plants, thousands of apartment buildings, hundreds of socio-cultural buildings, dozens of new or reconstructed towns, have been erected over the entire country, with a speed and variety that the architecture of our country had never known in the past."[58]

The architects of the Floreasca towers describe the project's accomplishments in similar terms:

> "We reached the following conclusions: [in this project] we have reduced the execution time by 30% compared to other current building systems; we have reduced the use of wood by 35%; [...] we have significantly increased the degree of industrialization, shown by a 25%increase of productivity of labor; [...] we have reduced the cost of construction by 3%."[59]

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[56] Petre Daiche, "Noi constructii în capitala patriei," *Material de istorie ale orasului Bucuresti* 2 (1965): 147.

[57] *Construim* (1959): 2

[58] Ionescu, *Arhitectura '44-'69*, 8.

[59] *Arhitectura* 3 (1963): 21.

The question of building height – so central to the symbolic preeminence of the Floresca towers among a multitude of contemporaneous housing projects – provides a particularly telling example of the way social or even philosophical transformations (in this case, the passage from individual, single story inhabitations on land plots to collective, elevated living cells) are formulated into quantitative terms. Typical of a model that claims to provide quantitative answers to complex social problems, the obsolescence of the single-family housing is established beyond doubt, and the cultural consequences of its disappearance defused, by mathematically demonstrating the inefficiency of low densities. Single story, single-family houses were a waste of buildable land, as these numbers argue: "As far as building heights, 86 per cent of the built surface [in an interwar neighborhood of Bucharest] was occupied with single-level houses, 10.3 per cent with two stories, 2.7 percent with three stories, and only 1 per cent with buildings with more than three stories." Instead, under socialism, "In the place of old buildings that were in most cases insalubrious and offered minimal and unsatisfactory dwelling capacity, 9 blocks with 8 to 15 stories are being built, which contain altogether 900 apartments, each with 2-3 rooms and other functional spaces."[60]

A second descriptive alternative consisted in the use of superlatives that tautologically defined the socialist revolution as 'revolutionary.' Revolution was at once sudden and ongoing: "The revolutionary transformations that took place in our country during the years of popular power are mirrored, with uncommon forcefulness, in the makeover of the city of Bucharest, which is occurring at a rhythm never seen before in its history."[61] The transformation is "dizzying," "impetuous," and ultimately ungraspable, since no single spectator can encompass it at once: "It is impossible, as much as one tries, to keep up with the knowledge of all the modifications that occur in Bucharest's landscape.

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[60] *Construim*, (1959): 9.

[61] Petre Daiche, *Aspecte din reconstructia orasului* Bucuresti (Aspects of the reconstruction of the city of Bucharest) (Bucharest: Muzeul de istorie al orasului Bucuresti, 1962), 5.

Works of infrastructure, urban transformations happen at such a rhythm and scale that one has to forsake the hope of knowing them and admiring them first hand."[62]

The Battle Against Filth

Besides emphatic quantification and superlatives, the third and most important trope used to express the "leap" from capitalism to socialism was the canceling out, even the reversing of, the contrast between a modern urban city center and the poverty-stricken outskirts. The 1952 Resolution had inaugurated one of the most enduring – and persuasive – socialist motifs: a devastating critique of the ways in which the industrial capitalist city had forced its workers into conditions of crowding and lack of hygiene, thus provoking illness, immorality and crime. It is necessary to remind of its opening words:

> "The towns and settlements throughout our country's territory have inherited a heavy burden from the bourgeois exploitative regime. Anarchically developed, according to the narrow-minded interests of the bourgeoisie and the landowners, our country's cities offered a striking contrast between the rich districts of the ruling classes and the poor ones, in which the workers lived in misery, in crumbling houses, without water, sewer, or light." [63]

The omnipresence of shantytowns in and around Bucharest at the end of WWII and the juxtaposition between opulence and misery constituted, in the eyes of the new socialist regime, indubitable evidence of the shortcomings and obsolescence of the previous, capitalist order.

> "To the city's visitors, the center would appear with large boulevards bordered with elegant villas and tall buildings, while the periphery lacked all infrastructure. An extraordinarily striking contrast existed between the old Floreasca pit, with its shanties, and, less than 30 meters away, a luxurious neighborhood where

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[62] Ibid., 6.

[63] Hotarirea Comitetului Central al P.M.R., 7-8.

bourgeois owners and the upper classes lived lives of leisure. This characteristic of the built environment and infrastructure in Bucharest perfectly represents the regime of exploitation. Between center and periphery, the bourgeoisie had erected insurmountable barriers."[64]

It is precisely in these shantytowns, in these *mahala* , that socialism found its definition and raison d'être: socialism claimed the triumph over urban misery as strictly its own.

In the context of socialism's effort to distinguish itself from life under capitalism, Floreasca towers functioned as a demonstration of socialism's power to reverse capitalism's urban inequity: the 'luxurious neighborhood' of the 1930s are now juxtaposed to the striking silhouette of the towers, and thus come to be read as the pale backdrop of luminous socialist architecture. Indeed, the towers sit between a park and a lake on one side, and, on the other side, a grid of streets that had been traced out between the wars to accommodate an upper-middle-class neighborhood of villas. The towers' rigorous alignment functions, on the territorial level, as a partition between the existing streets and the ex-garbage-pit park. The drawings and photographs of the 1960s insist on the towers' sentinel-like silhouettes, and on their capacity to mark the moment when the existing city ends and a different realm starts.[65] That the towers are used to signal a daring departure from the existing city is revealed in the aerial photographs that show the towers shooting up above the profile of the surrounding neighborhood. (Figs. 20, 22). The position, alignment and scale of the towers thus offer an explicit contrast between an archaic city and a new urban vision. The two realities differ in almost every way: while the towers inhabit vast open spaces, the old neighborhood is compact and low. (Fig. 23)

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[64] Alexandru Cebuc, "Aspecte din viata unor mahalale bucurestene din perioada 1900-1944," (Aspects of the life in some Bucharest mahalale in the years 1900-1944) in *Materiale de Istorie si Muzeografie* 1 (1964): 101.

[65] The notion of limit, or edge, holds a particularly important place in Romanian imagination. Romania perceives itself as situated on the edge of western civilization, and cherishes its in-between location because it supposedly confers to it privileged perspectives over the West, as well as a particular spirituality.

The terrain surrounding the towers appears free of trees, while the streets of the preexisting neighborhood are submerged in a greenery that signals the passage of time, in contrast to the timelessness of the towers' landscape (a condition that one finds reversed forty years later). The photographs and architectural drawings show exclusively the lakeside, often suppressing the old city altogether (Fig. 24). In many instances, the water lies in between the viewer and the towers, as if they were situated entirely within the pristine realm of the park and the lake. (Fig. 25) When, in some images, the towers overlap with the city rather than with the park, the bold strokes of the new speak of victory over the faint silhouette of the old. (Fig. 26)

But socialism's heavy reliance on the 'horror' of industrial urbanism to assert its essential difference from capitalism proved to be paradoxical. Indeed, reactions against the disorder and distress within the city had, as we have seen, a long tradition under capitalism itself. Trying to express an essential difference by denouncing the capitalist city, socialism re-enacted with striking precision the late 19th and 20th century critique of the industrial city's ills.[66] In the same way in which the writings of Matthew Arnold and Charles Fourier, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Thomas Carlyle, Friedrich Engels and John Ruskin, had denounced the deplorable physical hygiene of large industrial cities, often using vivid metaphors of disease, so did a chorus of socialist authors rise to provide dramatic depictions of the living conditions of the poor, and their quarantining from the privileged, in what had been capitalist Bucharest.[67] Socialism's response to Bucharest's overcrowding and its conception of urban planning as instrument of social reform are cast in the mold of 19th century's reflections on, and representations of, the problem of the urban poor. The need to abolish poverty appeared fused with the call to reorder the city

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[66] See Francoise Choay, L'urbanisme, utopie et réalités. Une anthologie (Paris: Seuil, 1965), 14.

[67] Friedrich Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844, translated by Florence Kelley Wischnewtzky (Reprint with preface written in 1892, London: Allen and Unwin, 1952).

by expelling from it the filthy and the irrational. In direct continuation with the notion that social reform would come through environmental remedies, socialism defined its city as an antidote to capitalism's ills, at once moral and physical, all of which were to be found, fused together, in the mahala . Three of these ills stand out from the descriptions (both pre- and post-war) of the mahala: first, the disorder of unplanned settlements (the 'anarchy' denounced in the 1952 Resolution); second, the moral decay they fostered; and third, their physical dirt, filth, and the grossly unsanitary conditions caused by lack of sewers and running water.

In terms of order, the *mahala* was depicted as a stubbornly irrational place, the most organic, primitive, and uncontrollable part of the modern city, and a threat to the structure of the urban system. "Precision troubles the life of the mahala ."[68] It functioned as the (imaginary) terrain of entropy, an inchoate space void of all modern social orderings: it followed neither zoning nor plan. In other words, *mahala* offered the opposite of the clarity of the socialist settlement, so well embodied in the rigorous alignment of the Floreasca towers. And while the order of the latter was put on display incessantly, in writing and in photographs, the chaos of the former, by definition formless, remained beneath representation. Indeed, descriptions of the mahala are supremely imprecise and the few photographs of mediocre quality in the publications seem to further define it as a makeshift space unworthy of memorialization. (Figs. 27, 28)

In terms of moral standards, the mahala corresponded with a loss of self:

> "In these mahala crawls a larval world, with its horizon reduced to the limit. Swallowed day after day by the factory that squeezes out of them not only their strength but also their vital impulses, men grind all their inner possibilities,

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[68] Oliver Velescu, "Bucurestii anilor '20. Contributii la istoria structurilor citadine. Innoiri si mutatii în mentalul si comportamentul urban dupa primul razboi mondial," in *Bucuresti. Materiale de Istorie si Muzeografie* XII (1997): 157.

become dazed, renounce to everything that is meaningful, uplifting, sublime. Existences repeated according to the same formula, the stereotyping of life, the uniformity of destinies that all follow the same decline, create with increased tyranny the certainty that all generations will perpetuate the same tragedy. Hopes are shattered every day."[69]

It is also in relation to the *mahala*'s lack of moral integrity that socialism's insistence on building height finds its full significance. Indeed, many descriptions of the *mahala* revolve around the way in which the shacks fuse with the ground: they are lower than low, they cannot qualify as architecture because they fail to resist gravity, either because they subside and slump as a result of their poor construction, or because they were constructed as half-buried from the beginning. By contrast, the height of socialist housing in general, and of Floreasca towers in particular, becomes more than an efficient way of using land; height is the ultimate symbol of moral rectitude triumphing from the horizontality and psychological disintegration of the *mahala*.

The *mahala* also, ultimately, exposed human waste, thus breaking a fundamental taboo of modern society. To add one more quote to an endless stream of descriptions: "[With the lack of sewers,] puddles formed at the intersection and in the middle of dirt roads, in which pigs would freely bathe. The water, filled with waste, sweltered under the sun and exhaled pestilent smells, making malarial fevers endemic in these peripheral districts."[70] (In the case of the socialist Floreasca, there is a clear effort to reverse the neighborhood's previous "dirty" identity. For instance, Giurescu's *History of Bucharest* dedicates a long passage to a recently opened cooperative in Floreasca called "Hygiene".[71]) The *mahala* points to the association between capitalism and the production of material and social

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[69] Getta Savescu, "Tipuri bucurestene oglindite în literature din deceniile 3 si 4 ale veacului XX," *Materiale de istorie ale orasului Bucuresti*, 6 (1968): 341.

[70] Petre Daiche and Ana Bene, "Aspecte ale dezvoltarii edilitar-urbanistice ale capitaliei între cele doua razboaie mondiale," *Materiale de istorie ale orasului Bucuresti*, vol. 1, 1964: 133-4.

[71] Giurescu, 289.

waste (in the form of its dehumanized inhabitants), or, in other words, the association between capitalism and abjection, an association that allows socialism to perform toward capitalism the type of disgust that modern societies reserve for filthiness and stench.

The *mahala* provided a convenient pole of repulsion that served to prove and reinforce socialism's purity. While in the early 20th century, the *mahala*, albeit abhorred, was still very much an integral part of the life in Bucharest (and provoked ethnographic interest), under socialism, the *mahala* became the perfect "other" at once in political and temporal terms, and is emptied of any redeeming features.[72] But precisely because of its negativity, the *mahala* turned out to be an essential constituent of socialist modernity, at once in imagination and in material reality: it provided a structural basis upon which socialist culture could make fundamental distinctions, and thus fundamental claims about its identity. In other words, it is the capitalist past that constitutes the ultimate 'abject' element within socialism, therefore underscoring the regime's symbolic attachment to it.[73]

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[72] In the case of pre-socialist Romania, the filth of the mahala is dangerously close to the picturesque of the ethnic, to the good and intimate filth of the self, a type of filth that triggers not only repulsion but also curiosity. Indeed, descriptions of the mahala in the 1930s always oscillate between its simultaneously appalling and attractive character. The mahala is, on one hand, a places of open ditches and generalized material decomposition; but it is also, on the other, a place of traditional trades such as copperplaters, flower sellers, or of popular entertainment, drinking places and dancing bears.

[73] A similar claim about the importance of conflict can be made about the ideological economy of socialism at a much larger scale. In the realm of international relations, for instance, Marxist-informed approaches understand the Cold War as a producer of 'useful' conflicts. Thus, on each side, the appearance of a threat from the other side of the Iron Curtain reaffirmed the internal existing order. Instead of challenging capitalism, as it did in 1917, "The struggle against the worldwide communist threat provided America with the necessary ideological raison d'être to mobilize its people behind the great task which lay ahead, whilst legitimizing its imperialism abroad." See Michael Cox, "Western Capitalism and the Cold War System," in *War, State and Society*, ed. M. Shaw (London: Macmillan, 1984), 146. The exact same remark could be made from the Soviet point of view, for on both sides, the Cold War functioned thus less as an international conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States, and more like "a relationship that facilitated each side in its attempts to realize its goals within its own sphere of influence." Richard Saull, *Rethinking Theory and History in the Cold War: The State, Military*

New, Old, Modern: Rationalism versus Functionalism

There exists at least one other layer to socialism's negation of the capitalist city: the negation of modernism itself, or at least of the traits that modernism had assumed in pre-socialist Romania. Despite strong elements of continuity between capitalist and socialist urban and cultural models, and between Romania's pre-socialist and its socialist architectural culture, the standardization of design and the accent on urban solutions that characterize the Floreasca towers point to a dramatic break. Indeed, the socialist architectural ethos manifest in Floreasca reversed, in many ways, Romania's prewar practice centered on private residences, exercises of architectural authorship, formal playfulness, and national stylistic identity. (Figs. 29, 30, 31, 32 show the range of interpretations of the modern movement in the 1920s in Bucharest). By contrast, the socialist system of values rejected aestheticism, elided nationalistic anxieties, and forcefully placed individual creation and sensibility under the control of technology and mass production. This rupture in the history of the Romanian modern movement reflects the shift from a capitalist to a socialist society, and seems to activate two fundamentally different understandings of modernism: on the one hand, architecture as the personal creation of unique works of art that aimed to achieve symbolic and aesthetic meaning; on the other hand, architecture as the production of repeatable forms conceived for the requirements of society as a whole, which claimed to have eradicated all recourse to the affective and the symbolic.[74] In other words, the split between prewar capitalist, and

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Power and Social Revolution, (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 16. External conflict constituted a necessary tool for domestic stability and repression of internal class conflicts.

[74] See Alan Colquhoun, "Symbolic and Literal Aspects of Technology," in *Essays in Architectural Criticism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971), 26-30. See also Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 169.

postwar socialist modernisms in Romania echoed the failed relationship within the modern movement between, to use the words of Adolf Behne, romantics and rationalists.[75]

The *Floreasca* towers illustrate how, under socialism, prefabrication and standardization led to a general shift in scale from the design of single objects to that of large neighborhoods based on the repetition of one building type, or from the singular to the collective. The project's six identical housing blocks are rigorously aligned on an axis, rather than freely distributed throughout the green space (Fig. 1, 2). The vast terrain, the square footprint of the towers, similar elevations on all four sides, all this could have allowed for rotations, deviations from the axis, or a more flexible scattering throughout the site. Instead, exact alignment in height and position was not only chosen, but also visually exalted in drawings and photographs. The images celebrate the clock-like regularity with which the towers find their place in the landscape; the blocks are not individual objects, but identical and interchangeable parts inside a larger order. The endless variety of interwar Modernism made way for formal fixity.

Despite having a strongly cultivated visual presence (which I address in the third chapter in relationship to photography) the towers are not acknowledged as aesthetic objects. This is made quite clear in the article about the towers that appeared in the magazine *Arhitectura* in 1963. Written in a matter-of-fact, almost prosaic style, it concentrates on extensive technical facts. Aesthetic, even symbolic meaning (in the treatment of the

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[75] "As a creator he works from the whole to the individual, or from the individual to the whole! According to this, two clear types can be distinguished: at their extremes are the rationalist and the romantic. In the context of architecture we have identified the consistent functionalist as representing one of these types, the romantic. His opposite is the consistent rationalist who has congealed into functionalism." Adolf Behne, *The modern functional building*, trans. Michael Robinson (Santa Monica, CA : Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1996), 129-130.

façade, for instance) is systematically discussed as technical solutions to objective demands.

> "We reached the following conclusions: [in this project] we have reduced the execution time by 30% compared to other current building systems; we have reduced the use of wood by 35%; [...] we have significantly increased the degree of industrialization, shown by a 25%increase of productivity of labor; [...] we have reduced the cost of construction by 3%."[76]

But it would be a mistake to accept – as the publication asks us to do – the argument that design was determined uniquely by pragmatic concerns for speed and economy. The pragmatic attitude towards architecture under socialism was in fact powerfully ideological, supported through many important rhetorical acts; while socialist architecture no longer produced meaning in traditional ways, through symbolic uses of ornamentation or rich materials, it still harbored the conviction that built form has the power to express social and political ideals, and still aimed at finding ways to represent – outside the affective, the expressive, the symbolic – progressive social development. Producing architecture at an urban scale convincingly embodied a collectivist ideal, while standardization and technological process constituted a complementary attack on individualism and subjectivity: both aspects being made visible in the way in which the housing blocks are fully submitted, from their constructive process to their situation in space, to the inexorable logic of the series. The ideological underpinnings of architecture as a collective act also extended beyond the realm of political doctrine, to reach into the heart of the definition of the work of art. By defining the design process as production, with its connotations of economy, speed and repeatability, and the neighborhood as its module, socialist architecture aimed to undermine what it saw as the bourgeois values of authenticity and uniqueness.

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[76] *Arhitectura* 3 (1963): 21.

There is, within socialist architecture, a connection between, on one hand, the critique of the individual dwelling and the laissez-faire city of the interwar period and, on the other hand, the criticism of the *mahala*, the latter now being seen as a severely degraded form of the first, authenticity having decomposed into abjection, and uniqueness into chaos. But what goes around comes around, for the departure from the capitalist architectural values that had degenerated into the *mahala* turned the socialist city itself into a new form of slum, this time embodied not through chaos and collapse, but through the opposite trope of repetition and oppressive height (as in "the motionless sky" of the opening quote.) And indeed, socialist housing has been much maligned in the western popular imaginary precisely because of the uncompromising embrace of collectivity and standardization, which had emerged as an antidote to the unbridled dwelling forms of the *mahala.*

Moreover, the call for an architecture oriented towards the satisfaction of collective needs, the concern for the multiple and for the universal program, and the reconceptualization of architecture into a set of procedures, are all principles that should be seen not only as having turned socialist architecture into a failed attempt to eradicate the slum; the same principles also had held an important role within the Modern Movement since the 1920s. In fact, through standardization and radical urban engagement, socialist architecture, at an unprecedented scale and with extraordinary energy, put in practice and tested the reality of rationalist ideals such as the destruction of the 'aura' and the transformation of the creator into the producer, as it had been formulated by modernist architects of an earlier generation. When reading through the pages of the periodical *Arhitectura,* the main architectural publication of the time, one is reminded, for example, of Ludwig Hilberseimer's idea of the architect as deviser of

models of organization; or of Hannes Meyer's attempts to de-subjectify the design process:[77]

> "We need to go from building piece by piece to the serial execution of constructions. [...] In this period during which new forms of construction appear, we need to verify our attitude towards architecture, and to reorganize in en entirely new way the problem of design; [...] we need to liquidate the rift between execution and design."[78]

> "[Our years] mark the departure from design methods that were based on an archaic and narrow understanding of the relationship between form and content, both in architecture and in urbanism."[79]

> "Houses are not built to be looked at!" [...]
> "Therein lies the essential difference between socialist and bourgeois architecture: while the latter bears the mark of endlessly variable tastes of individual patrons, in our architecture, everything must be established with precision, through objective calculations. When the principles of such calculations will be established, there will be no place left for individual, arbitrary taste, for forever-changing fashions, for ephemeral distractions."[80]

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[77] Francesco Dal Co offers the only discussion, to my knowledge, of the relationship between Ludwig Hilberseimer's *Groszstadt* – a "city without qualities" – and the Soviet aspiration toward a fully rationalized city: "At this point, it becomes impossible to detach the Soviet case from the context of Western contemporary architecture, and to accept its theoretical premise that all tradition has been overcome, its meta-historical aim. Such tradition, which we will find in the proposals of the mature Soviet avant-garde, is at the same time present in the West. ... It is to [Hilberseimer's Groszstadt] that we need to refer at the moment in which the socialist city can become a possible reality, in the second half of the 1920s. ... In Hilberseimer's scheme, the uniform bars, always the same, constantly face the streets. Their image, reduced to sign, varies only with the variation of the orientation of the street grid, in a system that, by perpetuating the rule, cancels all exception." Francesco Dal Co, "Unione Sovietica 1917-'34 – Architetti e città," in *Socialismo, città, architettura. URSS 1917-1937. Il contributo degli architetti europei* (Rome: Officina Edizioni, 1971), 107.

[78] *Arhitectura* 1-2, (1958).

[79] Ionescu, *Arhitectura '44-'69*, 59.

[80] *Arhitectura*, 1-2 (1958): 43. There is more to say about the theme of machine: in the writings of the time the socialist city was presented as a product of total standardization. As in the case of the modernist movements of the 1920's, the city was thought to have the structure and image of a machine.

Or, in a direct attack on the Romanian pre-war modernism:

"We are no longer designing luxury villas, tenement housing or other sorts of
buildings meant for speculative purposes that benefit an exploitative minority.
[...] Architectural work today is no longer the personal problem of a creator, but a
collective work supported by the state." 1959

The presence of interwar modernist principles within socialist architecture is not in itself
surprising, and has been one of this chapter's assumptions; what constitutes the
particularity of this revival is that while on one hand, socialist architecture is over-
determined by the Modern Movement, it is, on the other hand, equally concerned with
canceling out any visible continuity between a Western, bourgeois, decadent architectural
heritage, and a socially revolutionary present conceived as pure, and a-historical. The
(rhetorical) suppression of prewar modernism as theoretical and formal precedent will be
discussed in the next chapter, but already, the *Floreasca* residential towers point to the
fact that their conception at once espoused urbanistic and rationalist principles directly
derived from the interwar modernist generation, and proclaimed all things modern,
including Bucharest's own pre-socialist modernism, as obsolete. At a time when, in the
West, the modern movement was undergoing extensive revisions but remained the
principal paradigm for both postwar architectural culture and historiography, socialist
architecture was structured in reverse, assimilating the aspirations of the early modern
movement while refuting all connections with an architecture it deemed inherently
compromised by its alliance with capitalism.[81]

This tension between prewar and postwar modernism (and through it, between
functionalism and rationalism) is powerfully played out in spatial terms in the case of the
Floreasca towers. Despite the fact that discussions of socialist urban operations

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[81] Goldhagen, Sarah Williams and Réjean Legault, eds. Introduction in *Anxious Modernisms*
(Montreal and Cambridge MA: Canadian Centre for Architecture and The MIT Press, 2000), 15.

incessantly call for the elimination of the contrast between center and periphery, the towers work towards consolidating, even reverting such a contrast: it is the older (and more central) neighborhood that is signified as obsolete, and made marginal to the new urban condition asserted by the towers. While the towers illustrate the claim to abandon the subjectivity and aestheticism of the individual building, and are strongly representational of a new, collective and vigorous order, the old neighborhood offers a definition of modernism as an architecture of private, often intimate, individual residences, unique, non-repeatable buildings whose forms were shaped around functions and expressive solutions. (Figures 23, 33, 34 show houses situated a few blocks away from the towers, and give a good idea of the grain of the old neighborhood.) In fact, the Floreasca towers offer a striking illustration of the conflict between the rationalism underlying socialist architecture and the "functionalist" modern movement that had partly shaped the prewar city. But this clash between proletarian housing and bourgeois neighborhood had more at stake than the definition of modernism. What socialist architecture attempted, was to exit outside modernism itself. As the second chapter will show, Floreasca tried to stage a confrontation between the modernism of the old regime, and something entirely new, unprecedented, something that went beyond modernism. In this confrontation, the "modern" is dislodged from its traditional association with "new' and relocated into the category of the "old."
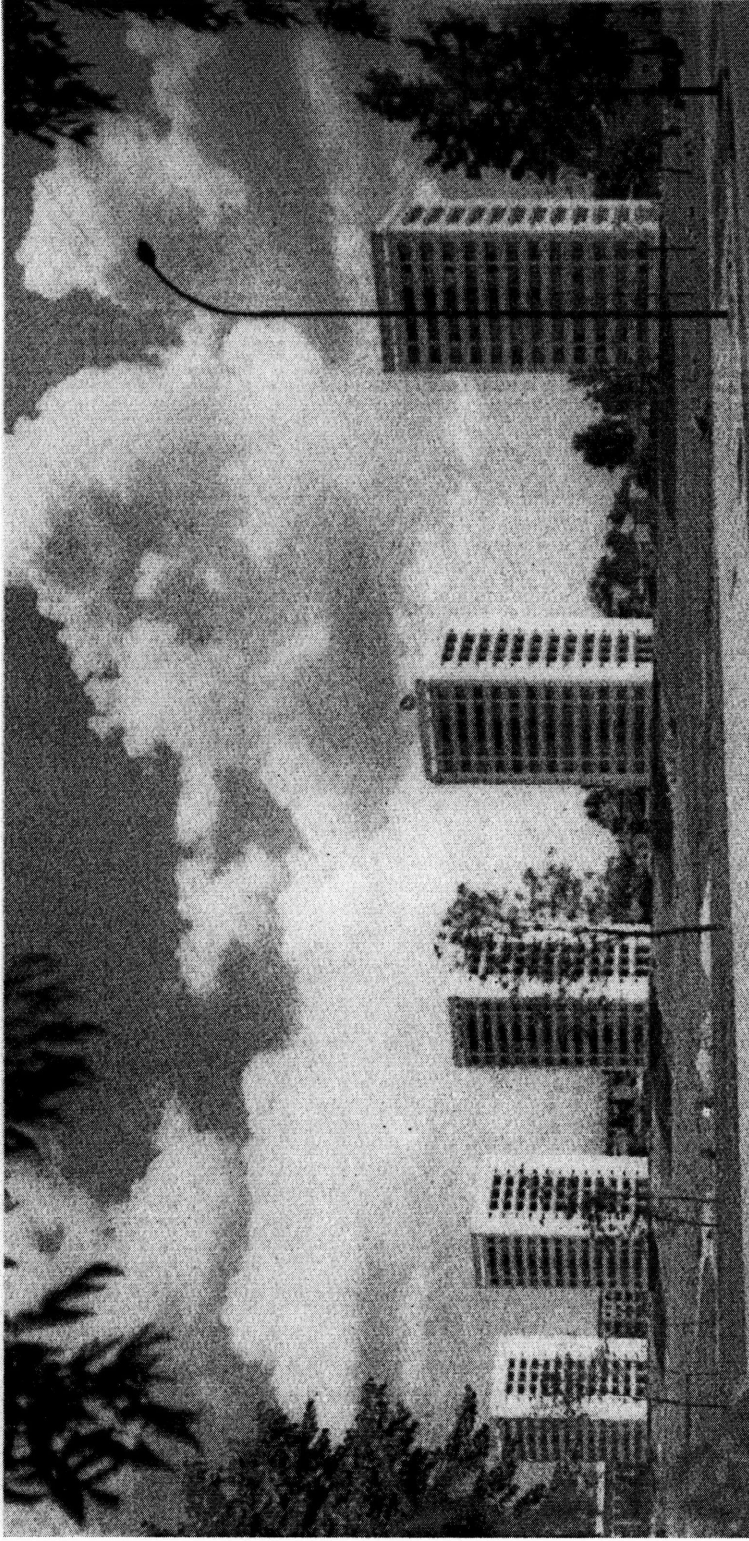
Fig. 1. Floreasca Towers, Bucharest, 1963 (Rodica Macry, Margareta Dumitru, architects).   From *Arhitectura 3*, 1963.

Fig.2. Floreasca Towers, Bucharest, 1963 (Rodica Macry, Margareta Dumitru, architects). From Grigore Ionescu, *Arhitectura 1944-69*, 1969, p. 137.

Fig. 3. Floreasca Towers in their present, dilapidated, state. Photo by author, 2004.

Fig. 4. Close-up of one of Floreasca towers in its current state. Photo by author, 2004.

Fig. 5. In contrast with the representation of the towers in the 1960s (see Fig. 1), the Floreasca towers now barely emerge from the overgrown park. Photo by author, 2004.

Fig. 6. Pedestrian access to one of Floreasca towers. Photo by author, 2004

Fig. 7. Houses in the Floreasca pit, 1935. "...the so-called 'rooms for rent' were mere shacks out of wood planks and whitewashed on the inside. Living in conditions that did not satisfy even the most basic sanitary needs, overcrowded in unhealthy ways, thousands of people were falling ill." From Petre Daiche, Ana Bene, "Aspecte ale dezvoltarii edilitar-urbanistice ale capitalei între cele doua razboaie mondiale," *Materiale de istorie ale orasului Bucuresti*, vol. 1 (1964): 131.
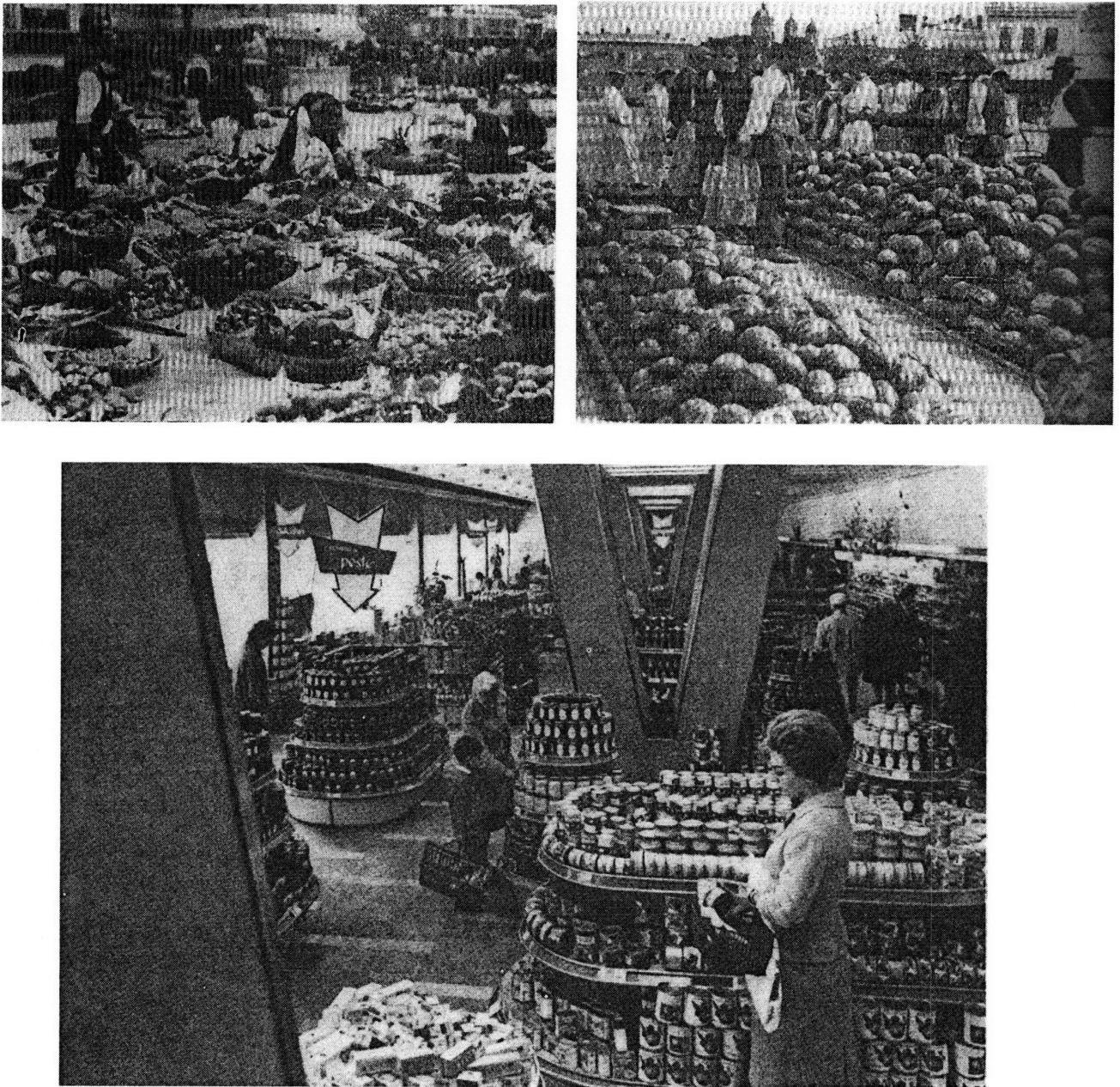
Fig. 8. Scenes from the Main Market (Piata Mare) in the center of interwar Bucharest, in contrast with "Comaliment" supermarket in the center of socialist Bucharest. "Trade in Bucharest and in the entire country is based on socialist relationships, excluding all intermediary between producer and consumer. Trade occurs within the framework of the state and of cooperatives. ... One should mention the new special markets that opened in the recently built apartment blocs; they are large, elegant, well furnished, staffed by well-trained personnel, they are the pride for the city and for socialist trade." Giurescu, *History of Bucharest*, p. 308-9 (images from 170, 389)
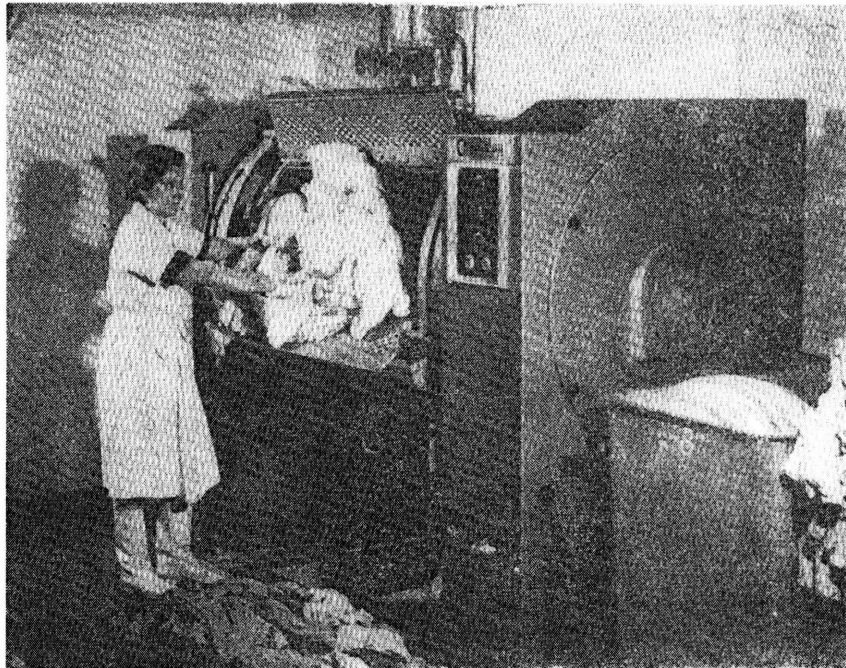
Fig. 9. Above, the river Dîmbovita in 1868 in a watercolor by Preziosi. Below, "One of the branches of the cleaning and laundry company "The Water Lily." From Giurescu, *History of Bucharest*, pp. 285 and 289. The text establishes the contrast between promiscuous old Bucharest (such as bathing among animals while also collecting the water for drinking) and the mechanized cleanliness of the socialist city.

Fig. 10. Octav Doicescu, housing complex in Bucharest, 1955. From
Grigore Ionescu, *Arhitectura 1944-69*, 1969, p. 84. This project, by an
important interwar modernist architect, illustrates the socialist realist
appeal to local traditions, which will be left behind after 1956.

Fig. 11.   New residential units around the train station, Bucharest, 1963. From *Arhitectura* 4, 1964.
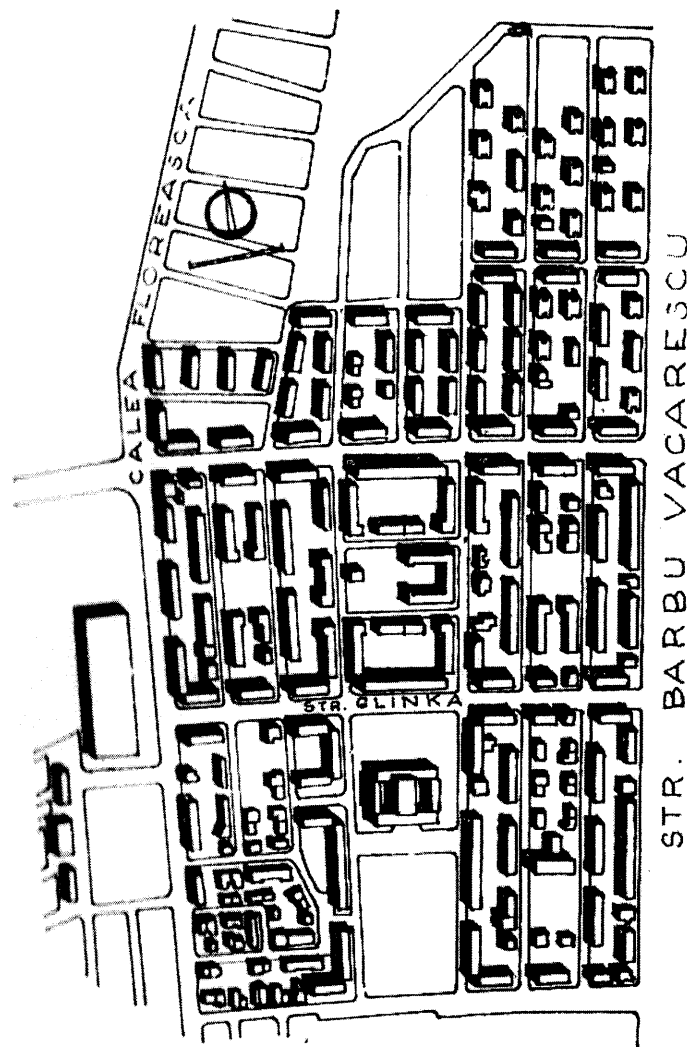
Fig. 12. Early phase of the Floreasca district, planned according to the *cvartal* notion. 1956-58, architect Corneliu Radulescu and associates. "The new neighborhood (*cartier*), which is by itself a small town able to accommodate 11,000 inhabitants, consists of 5 main groups in which the residential buildings are oriented linearly, along the pre-existing streets of the old parcels. Most of the 84 buildings are built from standardized elements, have uniform height (ground level + 3), and occupy 30% of the land, which results in a net density of 450 inhabitants per hectare. Collective services – most of which have been located in the central garden – consist of 2 schools, 4 preschools, a public bath, a laundry, a cultural center with club and library, a movie theater, and a general store." From Grigore Ionescu, *Arhitectura 1944-69*, pp. 66 and 68.
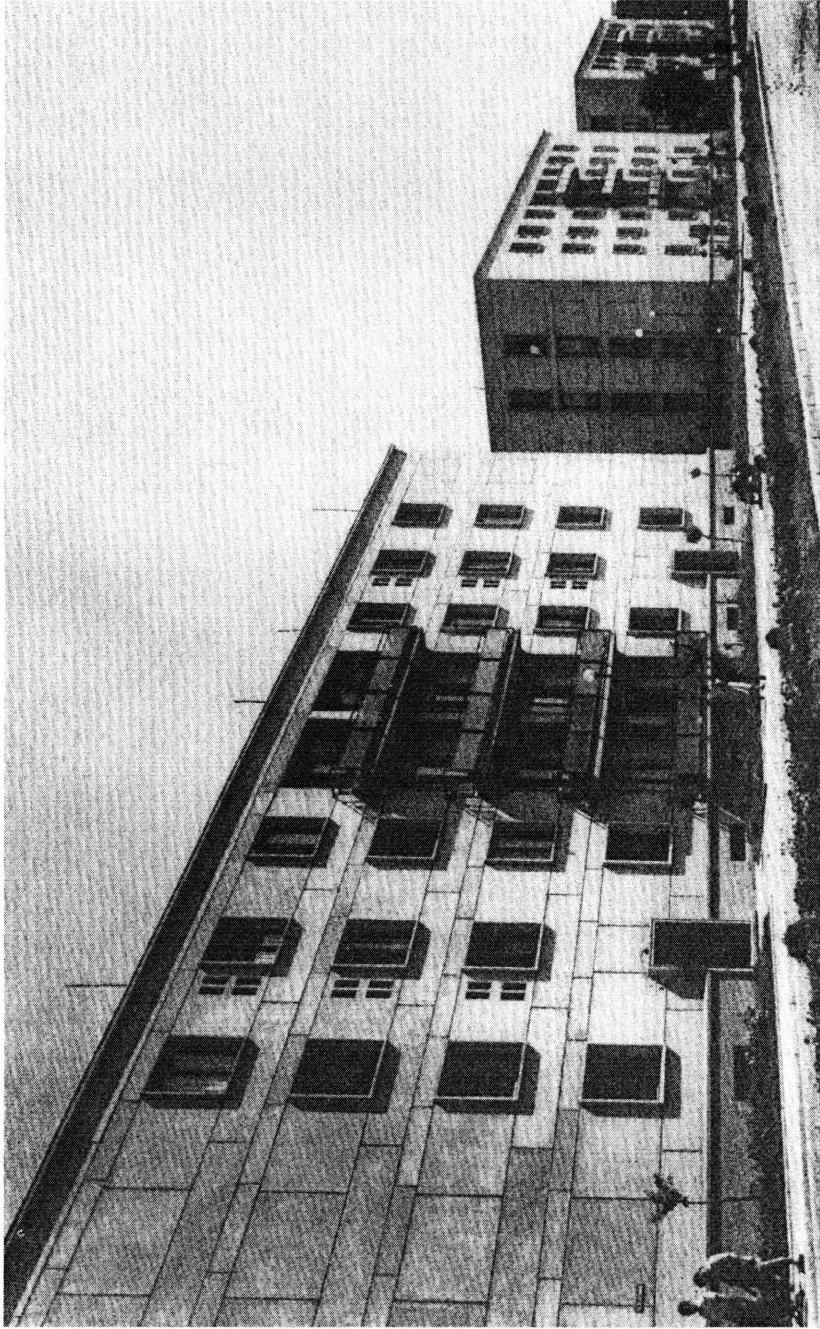
Fig. 13. Early residential buildings in the Floreasca district, 1956–58. From Grigore Ionescu, *Arhitectura 1944-69*, p. 69.
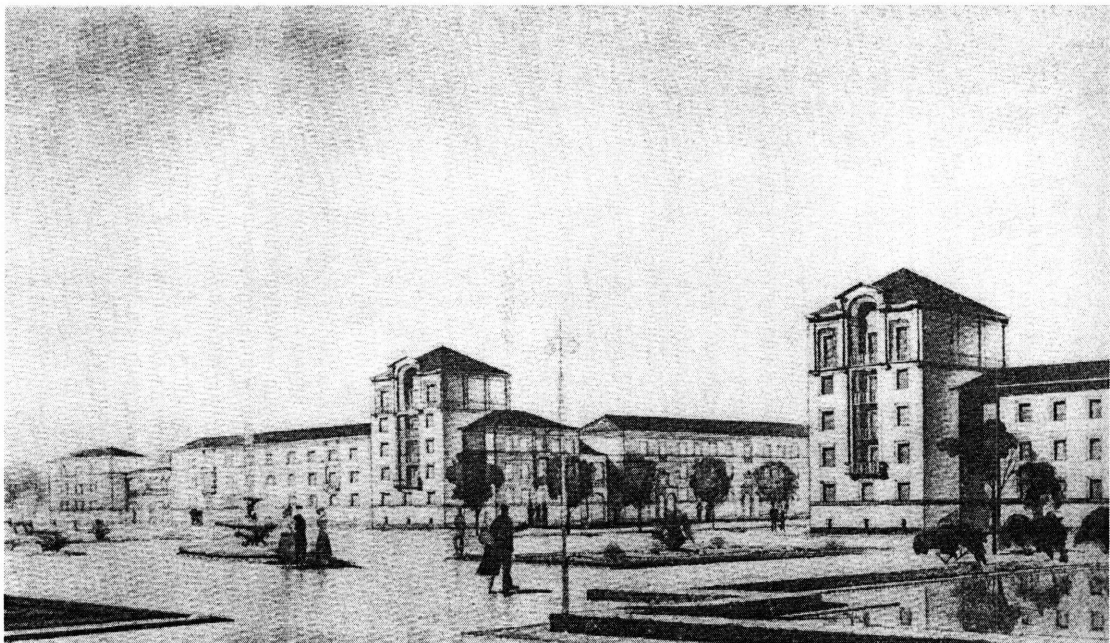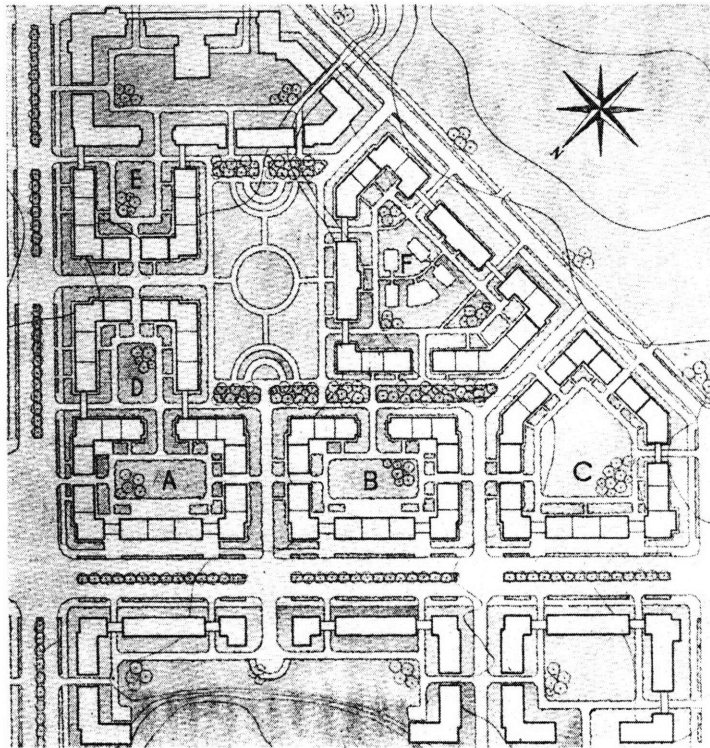
Fig. 14. Plan and perspective view of a projected *cvartal* in the city of Bacau. 1954, Clement Stanescu and design team. The Beaux-Arts rendering corresponds to the neocalssicism of the architecture and plan. From *Arhitectura* 4 (1955):24
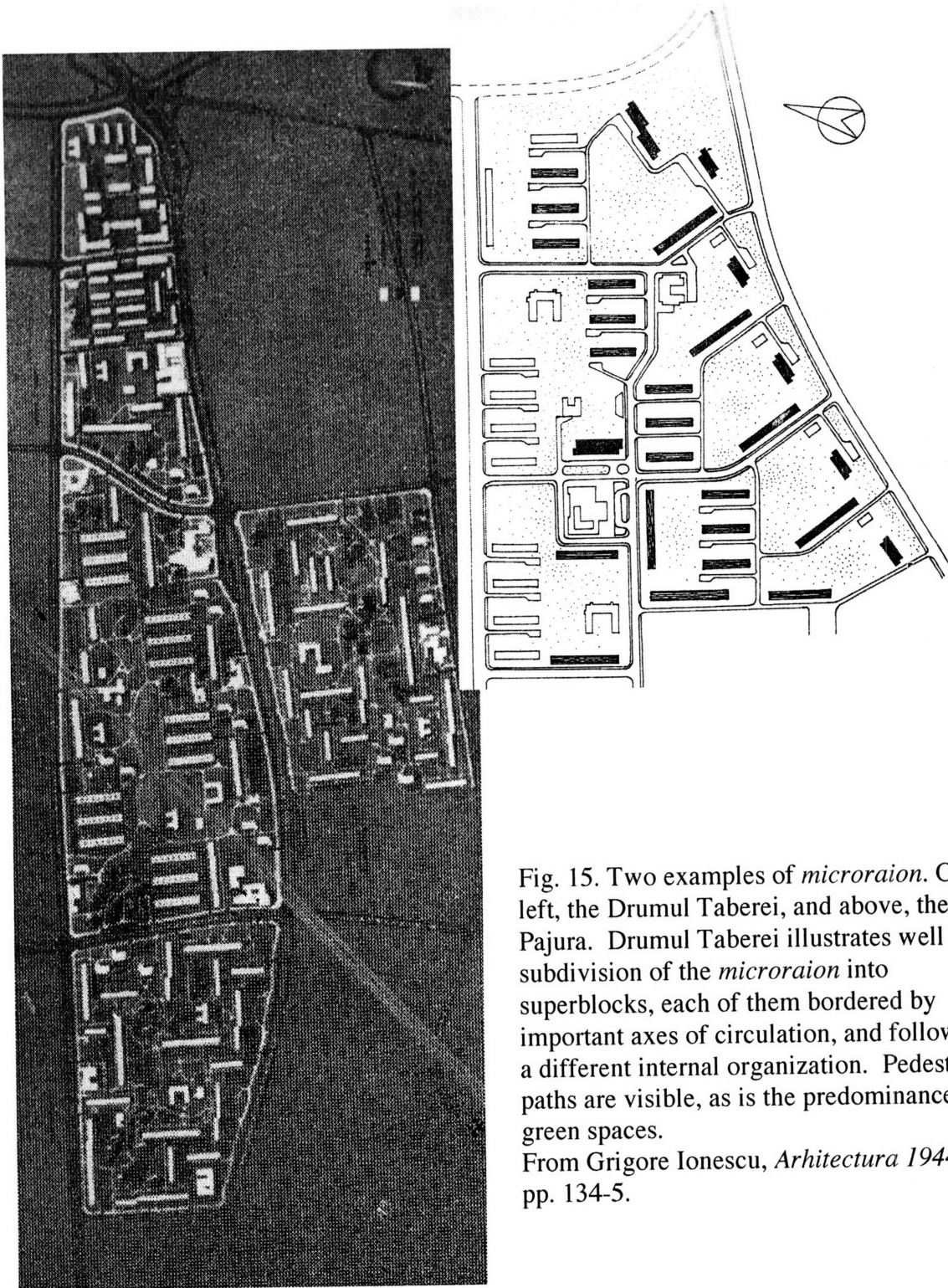
Fig. 15. Two examples of *microraion*. On the left, the Drumul Taberei, and above, the Pajura. Drumul Taberei illustrates well the subdivision of the *microraion* into superblocks, each of them bordered by important axes of circulation, and following a different internal organization. Pedestrian paths are visible, as is the predominance of green spaces.
From Grigore Ionescu, *Arhitectura 1944-69*, pp. 134-5.

Fig. 16. Aerial view of the Pajura *microraion*, Bucharest, c. 1963. From Ionescu, *Arhitectura 44'-69'*, p. 136.

< NORTH

Fig. 17. Site plan of the Floreasca towers showing the pre-exiting street grid to the south, and the park, to the north. From *Arhitectura* 3, 1963.

<NORTH
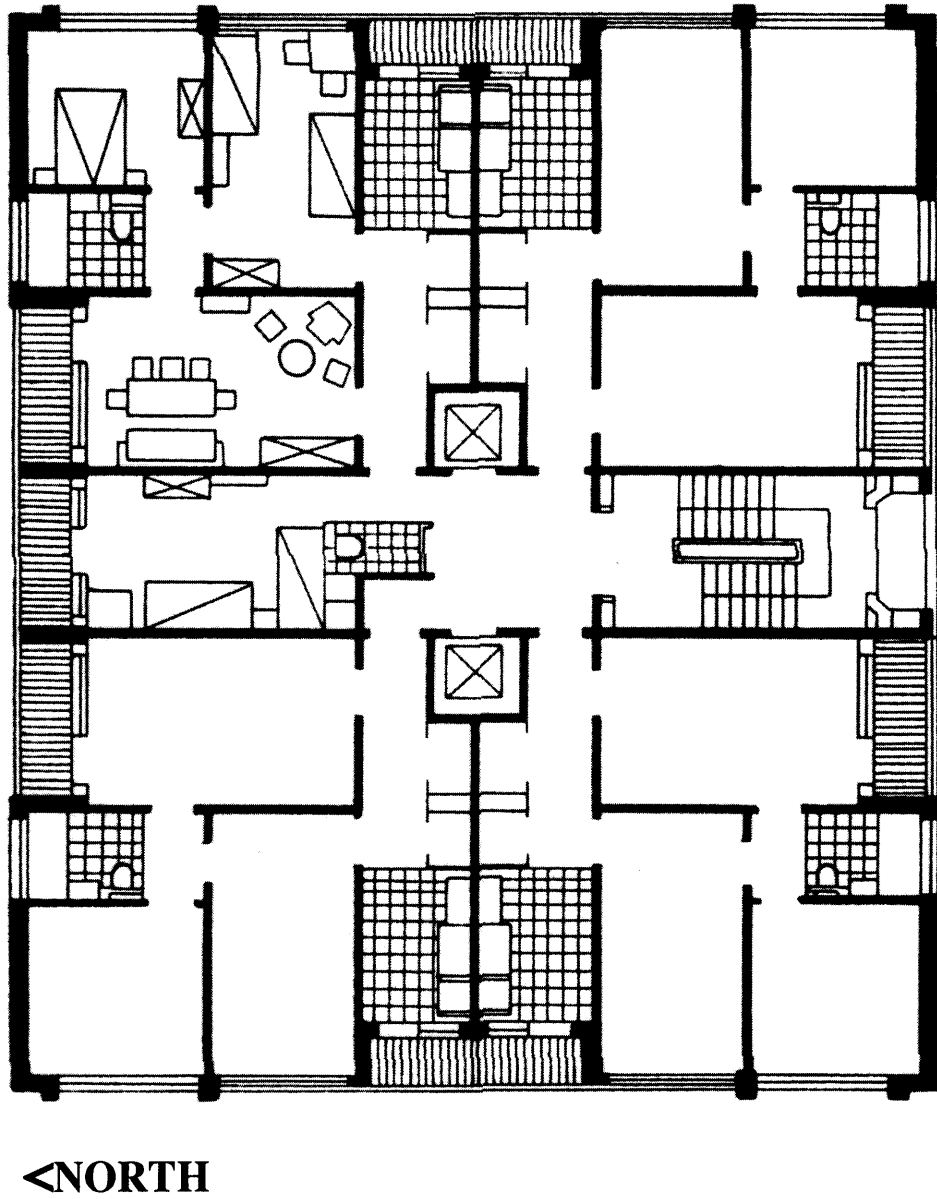
Fig. 18. Standard floor plan of the Floreasca towers. From
Arhitectura 3, 1963, p. 20.

Fig. 19.   Floreasca tower under construction, showing the
upward-sliding casting frame. From *Arhitectura* 3, 1963, p. 21.
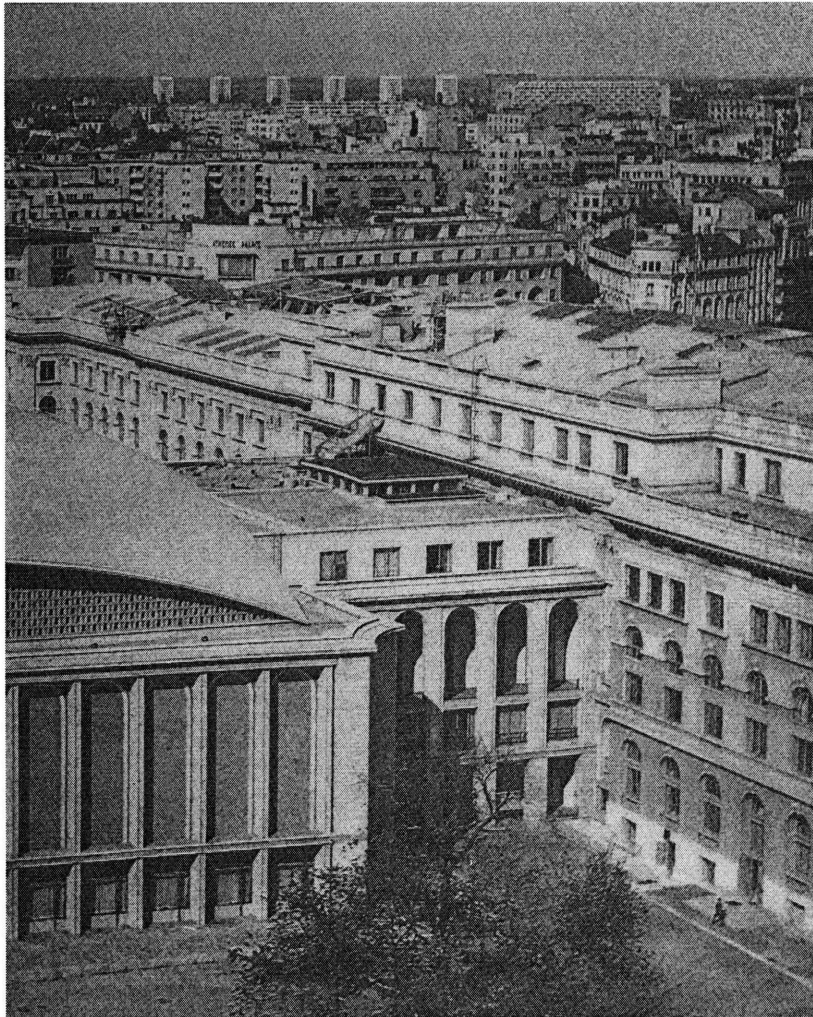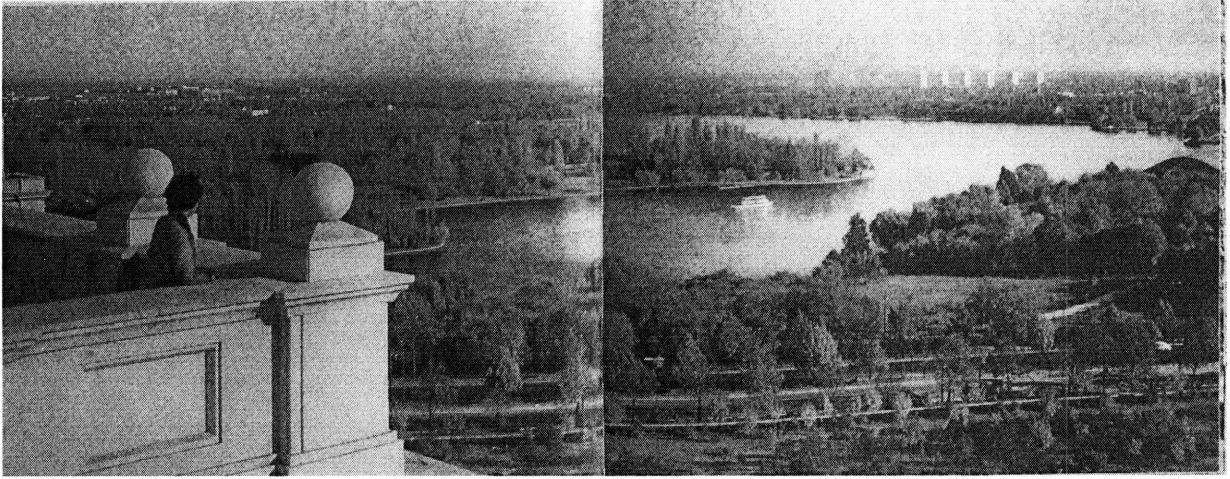
Fig. 20. Views showing in the distance the Floreasca towers. In the image above, the woman's gaze surveys Bucharest from the balcony of one of the most important landmarks of socialism, the Scînteia (The Star) newspaper headquarters.
Both images from Ion Marin Sadoveanu, *Bucarest* (Editura Meridiane, 1964).
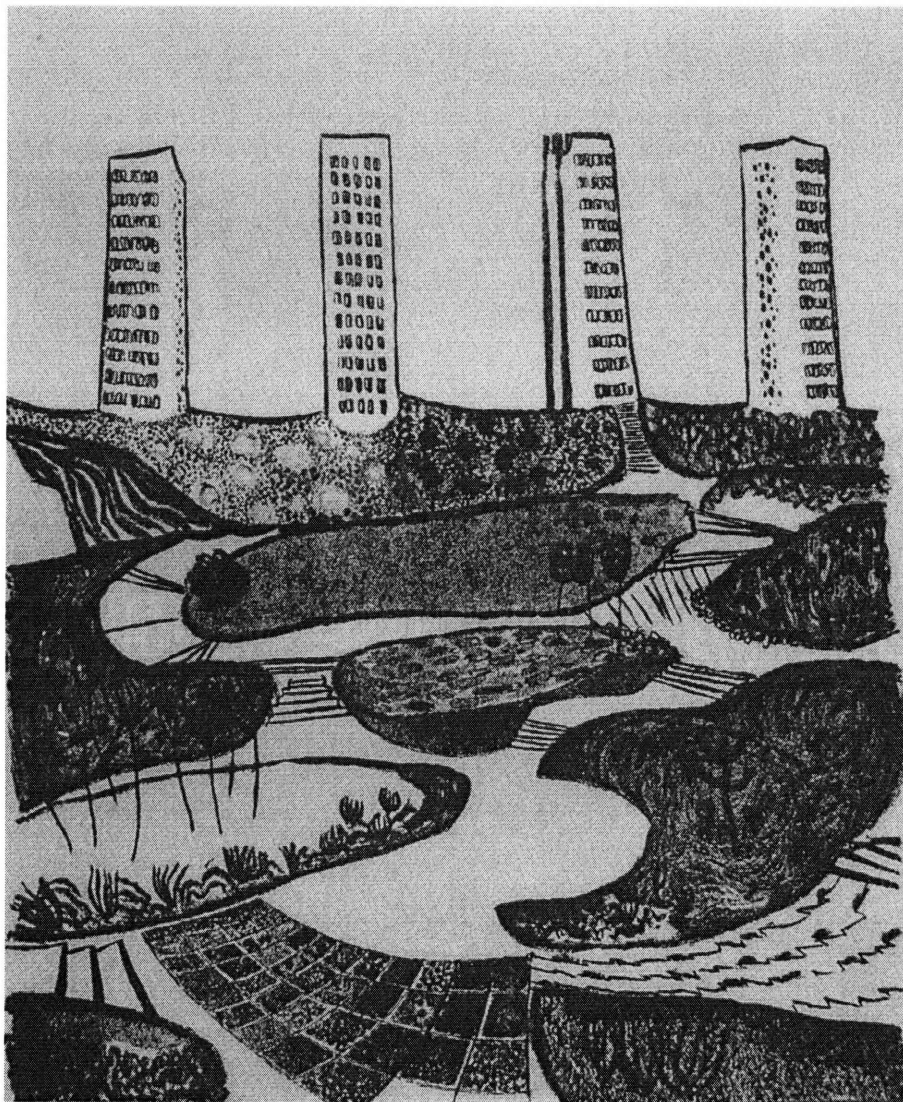
Fig. 21. Ileana Micodin, "Blocuri în Floreasca" (Residential blocs in Floreasca), Linoleum, 1964. From *Arta Plastica* 10-11, 1964. The image naturalizes the towers into a petrified continuation of the landscape. The old neighborhood that should have been visible in the background is suppressed.

Fig. 22. Panoramic view of Bucharest with Floreasca towers in the distance. From Radu Boureanu, *Bucarest* (Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1966): 10-11.

Fig. 23. 1930s street adjacent to the Floreasca towers (visible at the back.) The two houses in the foreground illustrate the stylistic range of Romanian interwar architecture. On the right, the large brick house harbors neo-Byzantine motifs, while the small house to its left illustrates the "cubist" style defined by simplified geometric volumes and decoration. Photo by author.
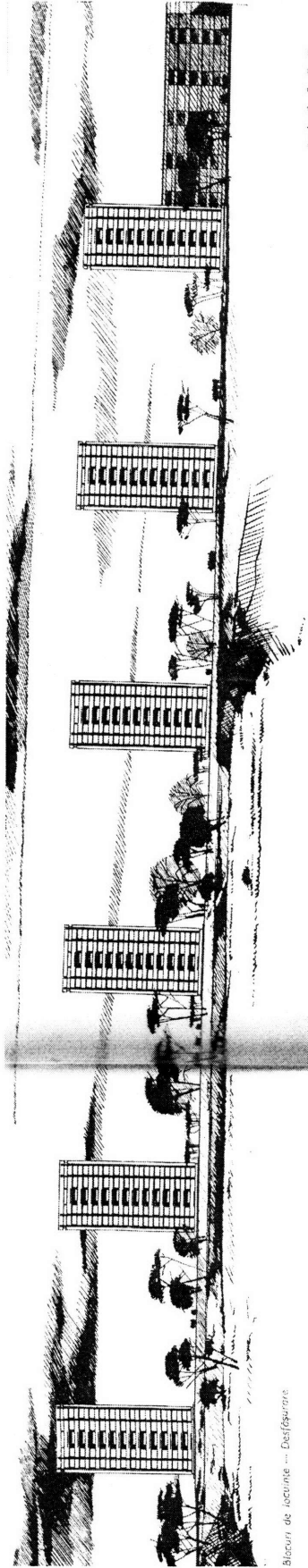
Fig. 24. Floreasca towers, elevation. From *Arhitectura 3*, 1963.
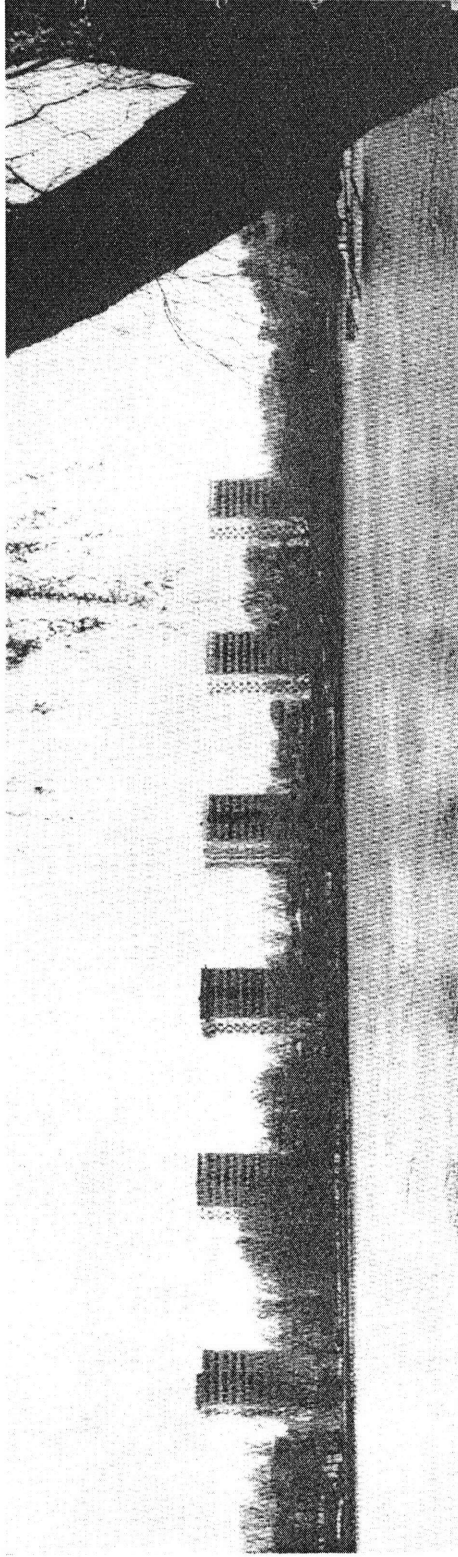
Fig. 25. Floreasca towers seen from the lake. From *Arhitectura* 3, 1963.

Fig. 26. Floreasca towers. Caption reads: "On the edge of the former garbage pit rise the Floreasca towers." The bottom left corner provides a glimpse of the roofline of the adjacent old neighborhood. From C. Giurescu, *History of Bucharest*, p. 224.
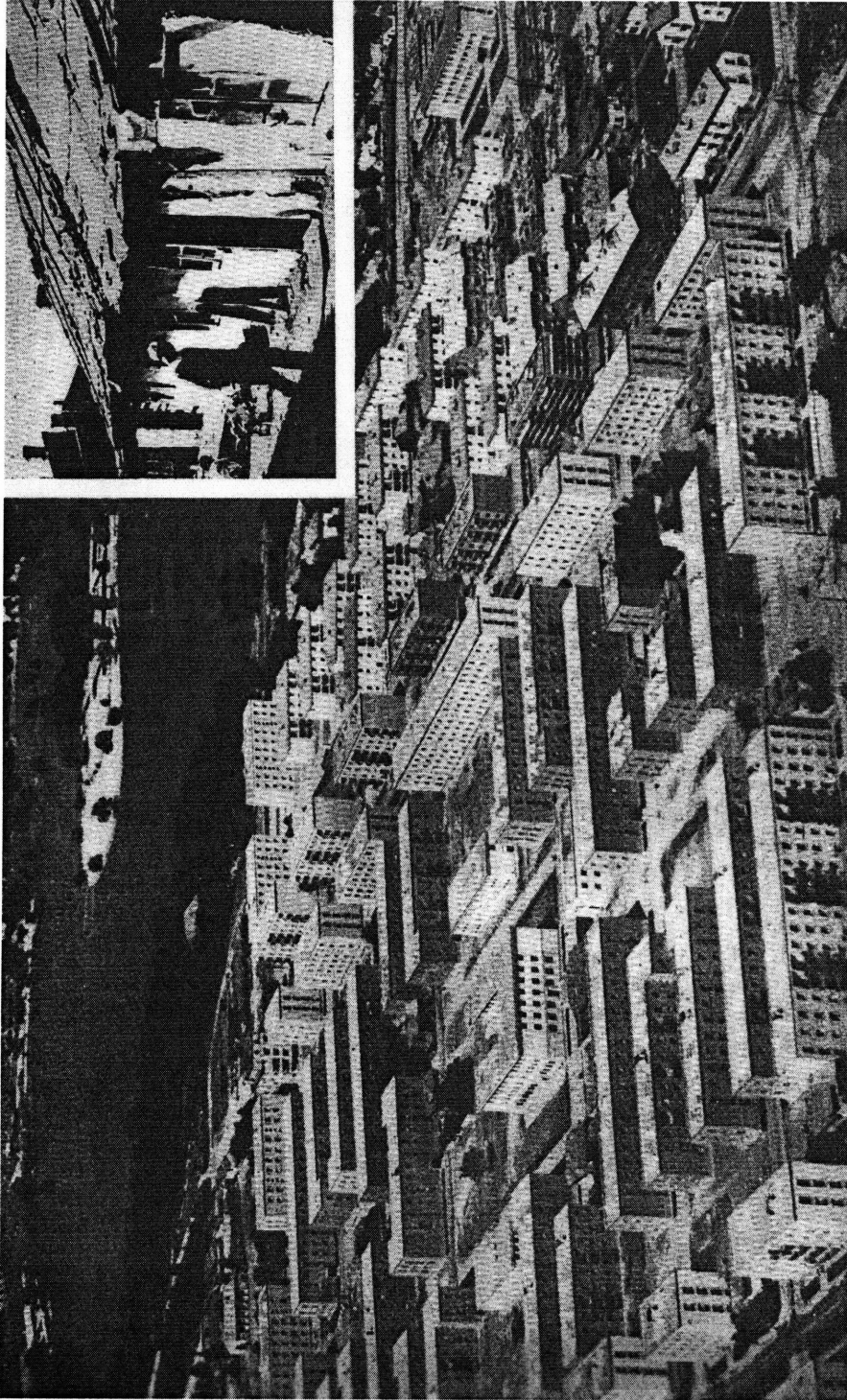
Fig. 7. "The Floreasca district, before August 23 [1944] and today." From *Arhitectura R.P.R.* 5, vol. 60 (Sept-Oct 1959): 11
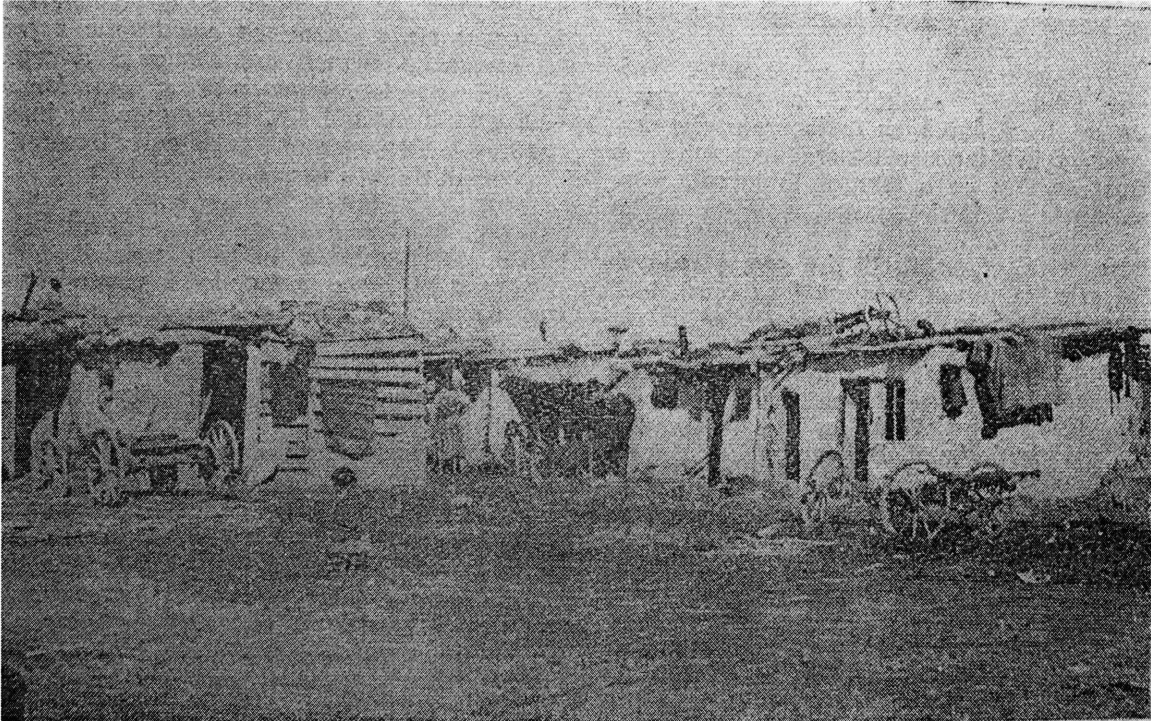
Fig. 28. The Crîngasi *mahala* , from R. Laurian, "Reconstructia socialista a orasului Bucuresti," in *Arhitectura si urbanism* 12 (1952): 6.
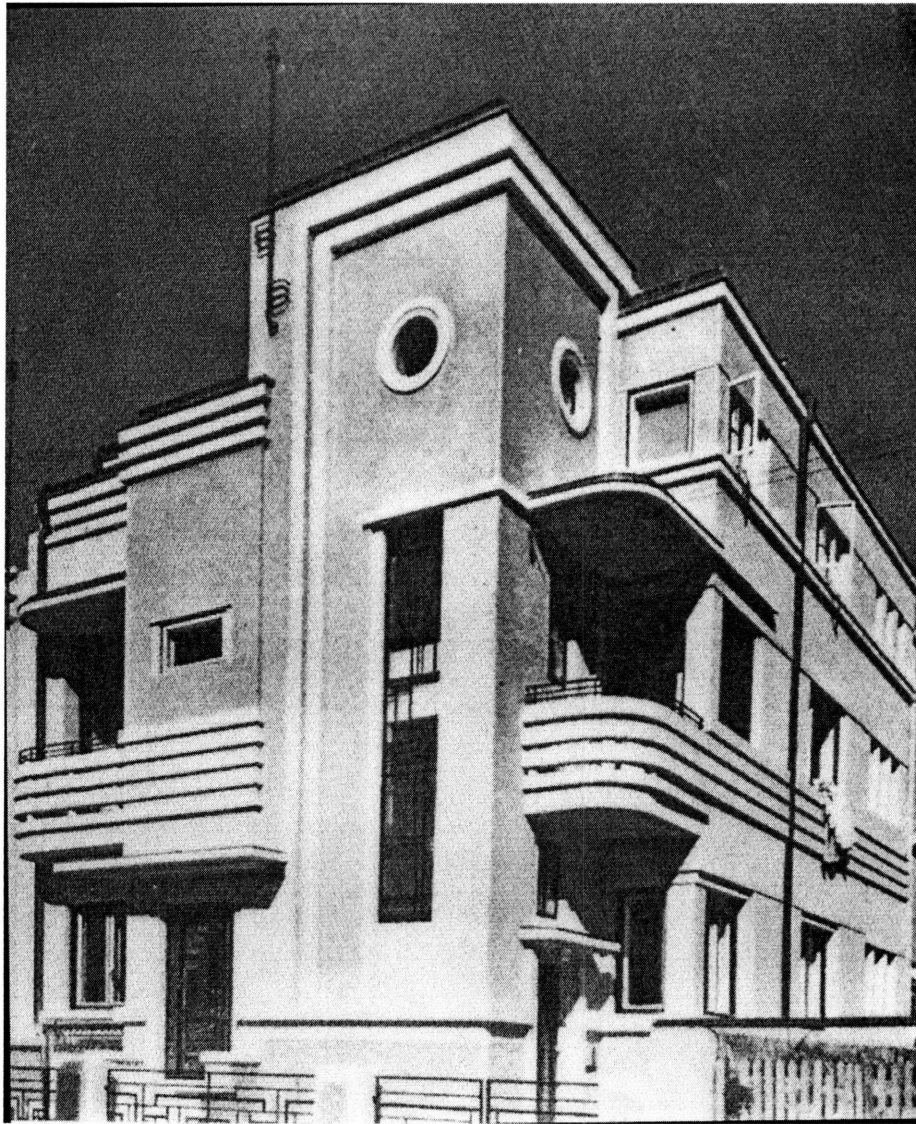
Fig. 29. Emil Gunes, Zissu Villa, Bucharest, 1933. From L. Machedon and E. Scoffham, *Romanian Modernism. The Architecture of Bucharest, 1920-1940,*, p. 153.
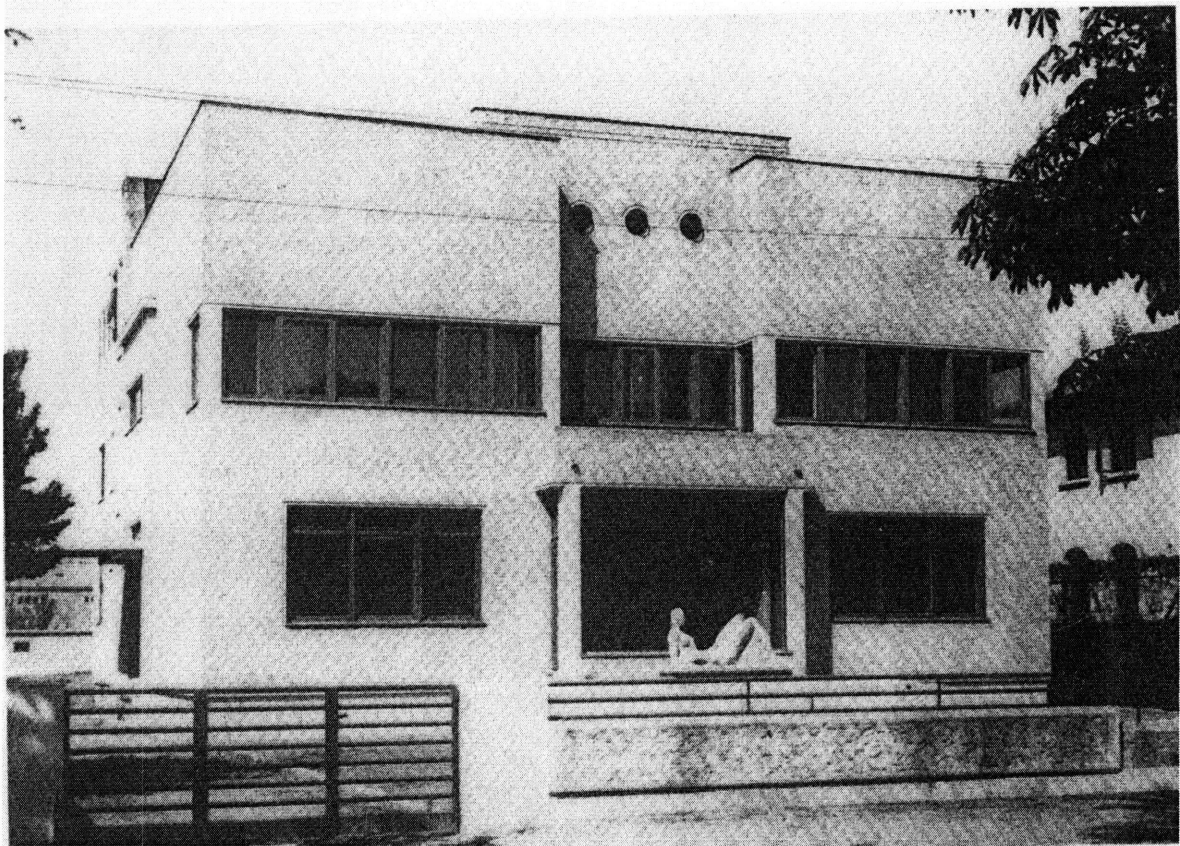
Fig. 30. Jean Monda, Salcola Apartments, Bucharest, 1934-36. From L.
Machedon and E. Scoffham, *Romanian Modernism. The Architecture of
Bucharest, 1920-1940,*, p.213.
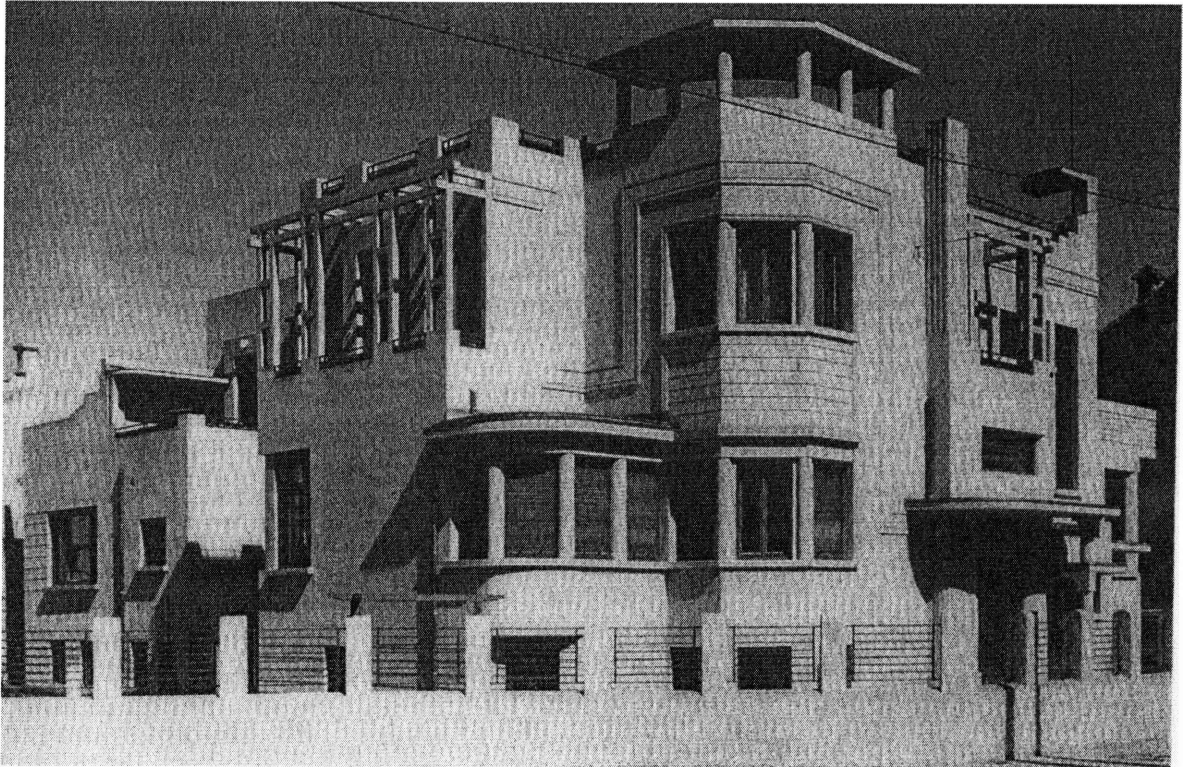
Fig. 31. Arghir Culina, Prager Villa, Bucharest, 1931. From L. Machedon and E. Scoffham, *Romanian Modernism. The Architecture of Bucharest, 1920-1940*, p.152.
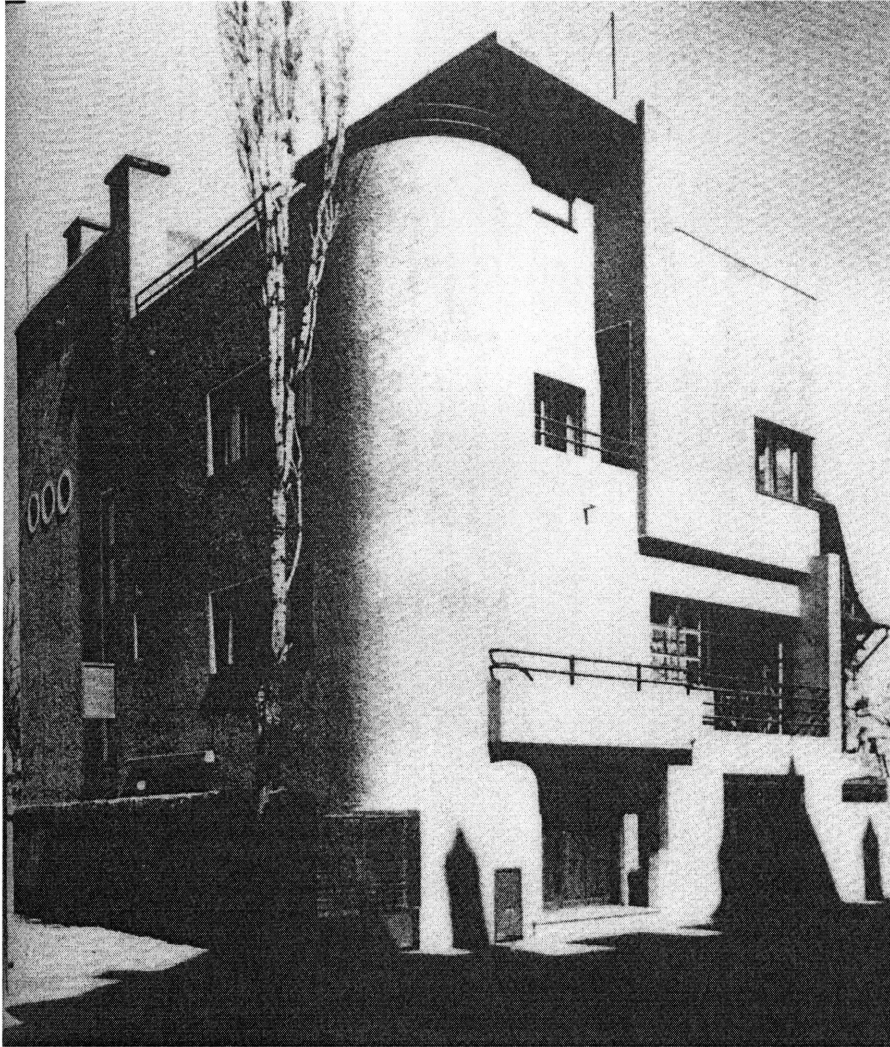
Fig. 32. Marcel Janco, Juster Villa, Bucharest, 1931. From L. Machedon and E. Scoffham, *Romanian Modernism. The Architecture of Bucharest, 1920-1940*, p. 131.
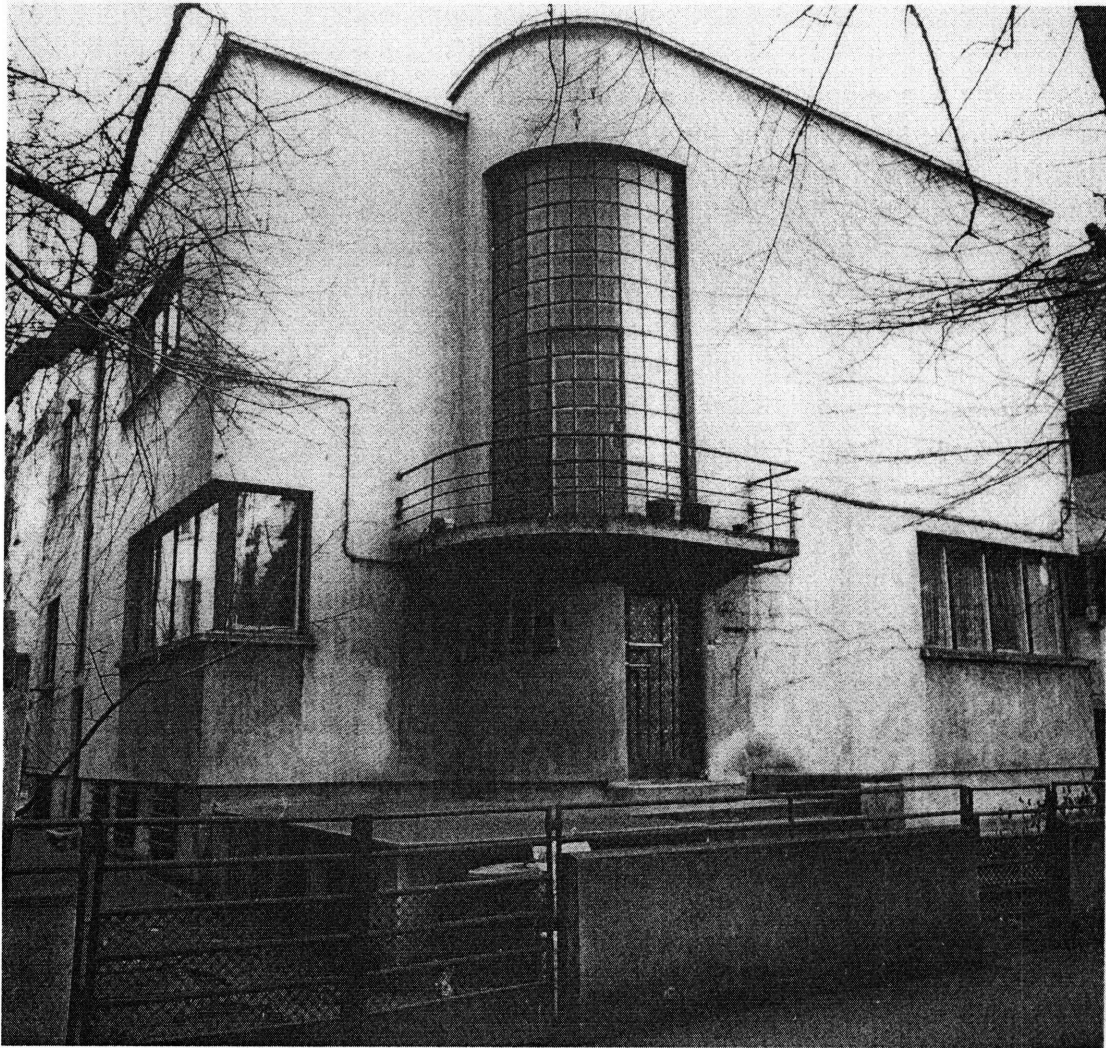
Fig. 33. Henriette Delavrancea, Valcovici Villa, Bucharest, 1932. From L. Machedon and E. Scoffham, *Romanian Modernism. The Architecture of Bucharest, 1920-1940*, p. 144.

Fig. 34. Marcel Janco, Chihaescu Villa, Bucharest, 1930. From L. Machedon and E. Scoffham, *Romanian Modernism. The Architecture of Bucharest, 1920-1940*, p.152.

Part Two: The Old

The Paradoxes of Revolutionary Historiography

History Under Socialism: Between Nation and Revolution

The socialist regime left its mark on the architectural landscape of Romania not only through its gigantic building campaigns, but also through an intense concern with historiography. From the late 1950s onward, the party, proceeding towards a form of government that was at once native and anti-Soviet, and deeply Stalinist, supported a variety of historiographic projects meant to assert and promote the idea of a Romanian nation throughout time, among which there is the colossal *Istoria României* in five volumes initiated in 1960.[1] Anxiety about history originated partly from the fact that communism in Romania had, so to speak, none: in 1944, when a coup d'état toppled the Fascist regime and established a coalition government with communist participation, the Romanian Communist Party was a marginal political entity with only a thousand registered members.[2] Part of the attempt to provide socialism with historical legitimacy was a comprehensive history of Romanian architecture, the *Istoria Arhitecturii în România* in two volumes (1963 and 1965) that constituted the first scholarly examination of Romanian architecture as a whole, and greatly resonated throughout the Romanian architecture scene.[3] The work has in fact remained to this day the reference point for the

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[1] Petre Constantinescu-Iași ed., *Istoria României*, vol. 1 *Comuna primitiva. Sclavagismul. Perioada de trecere la feudalism*; vol. 2 *Feudalismul timpuriu* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Romîne, 1960); Andrei Otetea, ed., vol. 3 *Feudalismul dezvoltat în secolul al XVII-lea. Destramarea feudalismului și formarea relațiilor capitaliste* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1964). Andrei Otetea, ed., vols. 4, 5.

[2] This, for instance, stands in contrast with neighboring Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, or Hungary, where leftist politics played an important role in interwar politics. Trond Gilberg, *Nationalism and Communism in Romania: The Rise and Fall of Ceausescu's Personal Dictatorship* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), 39.

[3] The only precedent was Ioan D. Traianescu's inaccurate and fictional *Arhitectura. Privire generala asupra arhitecturii antice, medievale, moderne și românești. Scrisa pe înțelesul obștesc. Ediție de popularizare* (Architecture: General Survey of Antique, Medieval and Modern Romanian Architecture. Written for the Public's Understanding. Popularizing Edition.) (Bucharest: Avântul – Institut de Arte Grafice, 1916). For a critical assessment see Carmen

study of Romanian architecture, as well as the essential textbook for generations of architectural students,

The book was the magnum opus of Grigore Ionescu (1904-1993). Trained as an architect at the Architecture School of Bucharest (1924-1929), Ionescu embraced history while studying Byzantine religious architecture in Italy, as a fellow at the Romanian Academy in Rome. After his return from Italy in 1934, Ionescu more or less abandoned his Europeanist interests and dedicated himself exclusively to the study and teaching of Romanian religious and vernacular architectural traditions, locating his writings at the center of a romantic nationalist project. But it might come as a surprise that this, the most important architectural book published under socialism, turned out not to include the socialist years. In a context where control over history was one of the party's paramount priorities, it could not be by accident that the writing of such a definitive interpretation of architectural development was entrusted to the scholar most clearly associated with the nation and its traditions, and who had until then little to say about socialist achievements.

The existence of a relationship between socialism and nationalism is by now well established in the scholarship, and its paradoxical nature widely observed.[4] So uncomfortably did the two terms sit together that the tension, within the history of the Soviet Union, between a discourse of international proletarian movement and a practice of endorsing nationalist movements, even when socially reactionary, became the principal argument for many Western "unmaskings" of soviet socialism's opportunistic

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Popescu, *Le style national roumain. Construire une nation à travers l'architecture, 1881-1945* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, et Simetria, 2004), 156.

[4] A few recent titles are: Katherine Verdery, *National Politics under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceusescu's Romania* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1991); Walter A. Kemp, *Nationalism and Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union: A Basic Contradiction?* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999). Peter Zwick, *National Communism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983). Hans Günther, ed., *The Culture of the Stalin Period* (London: Macmillan, 1990). See also Gilberg.

and cynical understanding of political doctrine. On the other hand, Soviet political theory denied that a contradiction existed between internationalism and nationalism within the official ideology, and saw it in turn as the fabrication of "anti-Soviet and anti-communist propaganda."[5] In fact, many of the Soviet publications distributed in the West in the 1970s constituted attempts at showing that propositions on nations and national relations were integral parts of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine: "Marxism-Leninism is in large measure a study of nations and national relations, because radical social change is inconceivable if national problems, and relations between nations in general, are not drawn into the picture." And although nationalism and socialism ultimately fused within a single political discourse on the official level, disjunctions always resurfaced in the models of history that accompanied each of these ideologies. Indeed, the fundamental ambivalence between the "workers of the world" and the people of the nation, between revolution and continuity, between progress and the fixed time of tradition, becomes particularly clear in the writing of history, where the underlying opposing models of identity and temporality are most fully deployed.

The postwar historiography of architecture in Romania posed with particular acuity the problem of what kind of history is the history of a socialist nation. Indeed, while the writing of architectural history continued, as I will show, the themes and models of the nationalist project initiated at the end of the 19th century, the practice of architecture itself was entirely dominated by the practical and theoretical demands of the recent socialist revolution. The discourse of the Nation enduring in the midst of socialist ideology translated into an apparently irreconcilable split between a discipline of history that

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[5] See, for instance, Institute of Marxism-Leninism, CC CPSU, *Leninism and the National Question* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979); R.A. Ulyanovsky, ed., *The Comintern and the East: The Struggle for the Leninist Strategy and Tactics in National Liberation Movements* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979). The quote comes from G.Z. Sorkin, "Bourgeois and reformist historians on the Comintern's policy in the national and colonial question," in R.A. Ulyanovsky, ed., *The Comintern and the East: The Struggle for the Leninist Strategy and Tactics in National Liberation Movements*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979), 256.

described and promoted the Romantic tradition of the folk, and an architecture that explicitly did away with the past, embraced a proletarian rather than a national character, and adopted a formal language derived from a Soviet model of an internationalized and prototypical modern movement.

Architectural history not only ran against the grain of contemporary practice, but also appeared to be oblivious to it. While in the Western world, the architectural historiography of the 1960s was marked by attempts to come to terms with modernism, the overwhelming majority of historical scholarship in socialist Romania stopped at the threshold of the 20th century, refusing to engage not only the socialist decades, but also the first half of the century.[6] The socialist question, consistently skirted by an architectural history that concerned itself almost exclusively with the remote past, was thus addressed outside the historical discipline, in a specific and autonomous genre of writings that developed around the need to promote the architecture of the present. These writings, which I will investigate in the second half of the chapter, followed interpretive models of their own that could not easily be subsumed into a historical project, even after socialist architecture had accumulated its own, decades-long, history. By operating independent of both history and nation, these texts make explicit that the socialist present was the object of its own type of commentary, fundamentally distinct from the historical investigation of the remote past. However, despite the fact that the accounts of socialist architecture provided a strong counter-narrative to a prevailingly nationalist and traditionalist model of history, the two types of texts should, nevertheless, be read together, for the seemingly distinct discussions of a nationalist architectural history and of socialist expressions of the present, were, I argue, continuously and fundamentally disrupted by each other. In the case of Ionescu, his antiquarianism did not prevent the ideological and representational demands of Soviet Marxism from seeping inside the

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[6] Short notices about the prominent figures of the Modern Movement in the magazine *Arhitectura* constitute an exception.

writing of architectural history, and his *Istoria Arhitecturii în România* is best understood as harboring two clashing models of history, one meant to assert the organic unity of the nation, the other aiming at exposing and intensifying class conflict, one based on temporal continuity, the other on revolution. Despite its retreat into the architecture of the remote past, it is conflict with the ethos of a socialist and modernist present that best characterizes this historiographic project, thus exposing the ruptures and discontinuities within a totalitarian system that has often been described in terms of its completeness, lack of conflict, and full semantic control over reality.[7]

The tensions that haunt socialist writings about architecture find a compelling theoretical echo in the writings that have emphasized and elucidated the ideological ambivalence inherent in the nation. That ambivalence is formulated as one between the novelty of the idea of nation and its insistent projection into the past, or, in the words of Benedict Anderson, as "The objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists."[8] Alternatively, it is articulated as the ambivalence between the universal and cohesive idea of the nation and its particular manifestations, a point made by Ernest Gellner, for instance: "The cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary historical inventions. Any old shred would have served as well. But in no way does it follow that the principle of nationalism is itself in the least contingent and accidental."[9] But it is the model of a clash between

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[7] See especially Vaclav Havel's definition of "actually existing socialism:" "our system... commands an incomparably more precise, logically structured, generally comprehensible and, in essence, extremely flexible ideology that, in its elaborateness and completeness, is almost a secularized religion." Havel "The Power of the Powerless," in Vaclav Havel et al., *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Central-Eastern Europe* (New York, Palach Press, 1985).

[8] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* (London: Verso, 1983), 5.

[9] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil and Blackwell, 1983), 56.

two economies of time that is the most productive for a discussion of the encounter

between Romanian history and Soviet present. In the words of Homi Bhabha:

> "We then have a contested conceptual territory where the nation's people must
> be thought in double-time: the people are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist
> pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or
> constituted historical origin in the past; the people are also the 'subjects' of a
> process of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of
> the people as contemporaneity. [...] In the production of the nation as narration
> there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the
> pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative."[10]

Bhabha's metaphor of the nation as a double narration, at once 'pedagogical'

(representing the rationality, certainties, objectivity of the nation) and

'performative,'(embodying its multiple, concrete, and present forms) shows that it is not

only the disjunction between past and present, but also the different experiences of time

embedded into each of these categories, which are constitutive of the nation. In the case

of Romania, a similar split between pastness and contemporaneity describes not as much

the idea of nation, as the encounter, within socialism, between "the nation" and the

opposed temporal dynamics of revolution. This requires two remarks. First, I would like

to suggest that since the conflicting realities and internal contradictions within official

socialist dogma are best captured by nationalism's theorizations, socialism should be

read, in the case of Ionescu, as one particular instance of nationalism, and that it is

nationalism that constituted the country's real ideological and political horizon

throughout the 20th century, with socialism as one of its most important manifestations.[11]

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[10] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 145.

[11] Katherine Verdery argues that nationalism came to disturb a Marxist discourse under
Ceausescu's rule, after 1965: "Although Ceausescu may have brought the national discourse
back into public usage, he assuredly did not do so from a position of dominance over its
meanings. Rather, he presided over the moment when the Marxist discourse was decisively
disrupted by that of the Nation. From then on, the Party struggled to maintain the initiative in the
use of this rhetoric. If national ideology struck outside observers as the most salient feature of
Romanian politics, this was not because the Party emphasized nothing else but because the
Nation was so well entrenched discursively in Romanian life." 125. I argue that in the case of

Second, I would argue that the fact that the 'double and split' time of national representation has become that of socialism itself, suggesting that within socialism, the discourse of the nation has ceased to be the dialectical and holistic entity described by Bhabha and others, and instead has become the static counterpoint to a socialist present defined by class and revolution. The process through which socialism came to conceive of itself as old relies primarily on the nation, but a nation that never manages to inscribe itself in the revolutionary present of socialism. In Ionescu's book, the meticulous exposing of the traditions of the past fails to yield up, despite a few reluctant attempts, architectural expression of socialism, and thus is cut from its dialectical relationship with the 'performative' narration of the present. Similarly, the revolutionary present of architecture remains dangerously close to a mere enunciation, without recourse to the affective (and stylistic) antiquity of the nation. In the second half of my discussion, I will show how the 1960s texts championing the socialist identity of an international modernist architecture inhabit a present strangely devoid of chronology and agency, primarily because they cannot find legitimacy in an architectural history that is exclusively organized around affirmations of nationhood. In the case of architecture, the claim that the socialist present constitutes the final stage in the teleology of progress, that it stands as history fulfilled, is intensely at odds with the narration of that history.

Because the narrative of nation surrendered its dialectical and holistic nature to the new dominant narrative of socialism, and became the reified past of a reified present, the trope of nationalism as resistance to Soviet socialist imperialism needs to be revisited. Ionescu's case itself is particularly illuminating of the way in which scholarship, despite evidence to the contrary, often corresponded to, and cannot be distinguished from, the production of dominant ideology. In a culture in which architectural production, built or written, was in most cases a collective and standardized process, and in which the names

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Ionescu, it is rather Marxism that came to disrupt a nationalist project that was never really interrupted.

of individual architects add little to our understanding of the works, it is indeed tempting to construe Ionescu as 'the author' and to read the nationalism in his works as a personal strategy of resistance, deposited beneath the language of official ideology. However, I would argue, following Vaclav Havel's account of "actually existing socialism," that such a reading would miss the point about the condition of intellectual work under socialism, where buildings and books often functioned as external rituals and practices through which ideology acquired material existence, and were not expected, by the intellectuals producing and reading them, to be invested with sincere beliefs.[12] In other words, both the regime and the writer tacitly recognized official ideology to be performative rather than spontaneous, a formalized pattern of actions and words that not only tolerated but also required a certain degree of ritualized pretense. One could argue that under socialist rule, the writing process exposes with striking clarity precisely what Michel Foucault considered to be the hidden function of the author, who "[...] is a certain functional principle by which one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition and recomposition of fiction."[13] The socialist author is the primary remedy to the regime's fear of the "uncontrolled proliferation of meaning." In other words, it is not the content but the function of writing itself that makes the writer a supporter of the mechanics of power, in the same measure as he is its victim.

On the same ground, Ionescu's *Istoria* should not be dismissed too easily as a work of propaganda. Indeed, the book contains many of the usual slogans of praise for the socialist regime, as when Ionescu talks of "unprecedented realizations achieved by

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[12] Under totalitarianism, ideology becomes "a world of appearances, a mere ritual, a formalized language deprived of semantic contact with reality and transformed into a system of ritual signs that replace reality with pseudo-reality." Havel, 32.

[13] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in Paul Rabinov, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984): 119.

Romanian architecture in the years of the people's rule," etc.[14] Given the fact that Ionescu's book was bound to set the standard for the teaching and general dissemination of architectural history, it is likely that *Istoria arhitecturii* was written under close watch from the political leadership and held in a strong ideological straightjacket. It would be easy to pick at, for instance, the book's mechanistic application of a Marxist definition of history (the bibliography, for instance, emphatically quotes as its sole theoretical sources a long list of titles by Marx, Engels, and Lenin). However, any discussion of the book, and of similar texts written under socialism, indeed need to go beyond the narrow duality of dissidence and collaboration; the point being, instead, to understand how the book, which contains at once lucid reflections on methodology and passive applications of ideological dictates, subtle historical interpretations and reified narratives, reveals the wider logic of the relationship between architecture and ideology in Romania, as well as the importance of history's mobilization in defining that relationship.

The Role of History in Defining Socialist Architecture

A comprehensive national history of architecture seems to have been Ionescu's life-long undertaking. By 1963, when Ionescu started work on his two-volume *Istoria*, he had already established himself as the scholar of synthetic projects. Indeed, the first book he wrote upon his return from Italy in 1937 was *Istoria arhitecturii românesti*, an account that ended in 1900 and which will become the preliminary to his postwar *Istoria*.[15] In 1957, he published *Arhitectura populara românesca* (Romanian Folk Architecture), much of which was incorporated into the second volume of *Istoria arhitecturii*. In 1969,

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[14] Grigore Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii în România*, 2 vols. (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1963-65), vol. II, 501.

[15] The 1937 book opens with a foreword by Nicoale Iorga, one of the most important Romanian historians, and an ardent actor of nationalist history and discourse. A great number of Iorga's books figure in the bibliography of the 1965 edition, among which Iorga's influential *Istoria românilor* (History of Romanians), 10 vols. (Bucharest: n.p.,1936-39).

Ionescu published an overview of contemporary Romanian architecture, *Arhitectura in Romania, 1944-1969*. In 1982, Ionescu revisits one last time the project of a total, unified history of Romanian architecture, with a revised edition of *Istoria arhitecturii in Romania* that combines the previous edition of 1963-65 with his book on the socialist years, and is gathered under a modified title, *Arhitectura pe teritoriul României de-a lungul veacurilor* (The Architecture on the Romanian territory throughout time).[16]

To understand the scale of Ionescu's contribution, one should observe that prior to the 1960s, literature on the history of Romanian architecture was relatively scarce. The first essays on indigenous art and architecture, as well as on historical monuments, date back to Romania's first architectural magazine, *Analele Arhitecturii*, that appeared between 1890-93.[17] The interest for previous architecture was intertwined with the lament that Romanians didn't yet have a mdoern art and an architecture of their own, and the ensuing call to create one, thus firmly situating historical investigation into the realm of practice. Architectural history was the search for an answer to the question of how should one build, and thus emerged primarily as an operative tool, as a method meant to gather the elements for a true Romanian architecture. The study of indigenous architecture, religious and vernacular, was seen as a first necessary step in the development of a Romanian style for present-day building. Architects, rather than art historians, therefore, acted as the first architectural historians (unlike the case in Germany and Austria, for instance.) The other sign of a primarily instrumental architectural history is that few architects seemed to have published their studies, considering them as personal tools for

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[16] Grigore Ionescu, *Arhitectura pe teritoriul României de-a lungul veacurilor* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1982). Similarly, one has to wait until the 1980s to see another effort at integrating socialism with the past, in Gheorghe Curinski-Vorona, *Istoria arhitecturii în România*, (Bucharest: Editura Tehnica, 1981).

[17] Popescu, 78.

their practice more than free-standing essays that participated in the distinct discipline of architectural history.[18]

It is only under socialism that the relationship between architectural history and contemporary practice seems to have been suspended. Ionescu's work illustrates how, under socialism, architectural history had become fully disengaged from the concerns of practice. The many factual and even-handed analyses that characterize his historical accounts are strikingly different from the passionate tone of the earlier writings on Romanian architecture. Compare, for instance: "Folk art is not contrived, it has no defined aim, it is as elementary as life itself, as pure as the elements of nature" with "Adapted to the terrain, to the environmental and geographic conditions and to the peasant's way of life, the vernacular house presents, within the boundaries of each natural geographic divisions... numerous appearances and specific types."[19] While the first quote, written before 1914, discusses folk art in such a way that its principles carry an inevitable appeal, the latter quote, from Ionescu, provides scientific argumentation to the vernacular's inapplicability (given its environmental determinations) to modern, urban conditions. The impossibility to translate Ionescu's text into practical advice was a sign of the professionalization of the historical discipline under the socialist regime. But it mostly spoke of the fact that the processes through which architecture found its forms had been extricated from architecture's historicity, and that history's relevance had migrated from the practical realm of building into the ideological one of nationhood. A de-instrumentalized history, disconnected from the question of how to build, found its counterpart in an architecture detached, at least in narrative terms, from its own history; their disengagement, the "pedagogical" split from the "performative," left both sides much more vulnerable to ideological control.

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[18] Ibid., 155.

[19] Zagoritz archival fund, "Din arta taraneasca româneasca. Uși de biserici în lemn." Cited in Popescu, 156. And Ionescu 1965, 265-66.

Although Ionescu's initial intention had been that of an overarching book that would integrate the socialist period into his global view of history, he yielded to the common approach of separating the pre-socialist narrative from that of socialism into different books. The general introduction that appeared in the first volume of *Istoria* in 1963, mentioned the socialist period as part of his project, and outlined a temporal framework very much in line with the Marxist notions of stages of development and teleological progess: "...we divided the material used to illustrate the development of the art of building on Romania's territory, from the most ancient times to today, into four major sections: the first corresponds to the old times (the settlement of the primitive commune; the second, to the feudal period; the third, to the modern (capitalist) period; and the fourth, to the regime of popular democracy."[20] His second volume, however, ends in 1944, stopping ostensibly short of including the socialist period within a unified vision of history. Instead, he published an overview of socialist architecture 5 years later, as a separate book, *Arhitectura '44-'69*, a book that bears no trace of the historical scheme developed in *Istoria*, a fact I will address in the last part of this chapter. Ionescu did not fulfill his promise to include a discussion of socialist architecture into his *Istoria* until the last edition, of 1982. Even then, the chapter on socialism is simply a condensed version of his *Arhitectura 1944-69*, and stands clearly at odds with the rest of the book.

Ionescu himself embodied the split between history and practice. During the same years in which he was writing his influential book on Romanian folk architecture, he designed architectural works in which he clearly embraced the lingua franca of high modernism, and remained impervious to the expressions of the nation and its traditions. Indeed, there is a striking dissonance not only between Ionescu the historian, steeped in nationalist searches, and Ionescu the architect, with a respectable list of built accomplishments, all clearly working in the idiom of abstract forms and pure volumes. This is particularly true

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[20] Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii,* vol. I, 7

of Ionescu under socialism. His last significant work of architecture, the pediatric hospital Emilia Irza, was built in Bucharest in 1953 as socialist realism held in a tight grip all important state commissions. (Figs. 1, 2) But when compared with other hospitals built in the same years, one is perplexed at the uncompromised modern style of Ionescu's production. (Fig. 3) While other buildings awkwardly comply with the compulsory classicism, by using columns, arches, and rusticate first stories, until a hospital's façade resembles that of a Roman Renaissance palazzo, Ionescu's modernist work powerfully contrasts the architectural culture of the time.

Continuity and Unity

The two-volume history opens with the theoretical premise of the continuous existence of a category of Romanian architecture. "... Romanian architecture maintained throughout its entire development the quality of continuity. ... Under the circumstances of local realities, Romanian architecture borrowed some new methods, some new structural and decorative formulas from the art of other people with which it came in contact, but it appropriated and reworked creatively only that which responded to the need and taste of the epoch, and only that which fit and could be integrated within the specific forms of national art."[21]

Unification occurs as the vast corpus of architectural examples and vestiges available on the territory of what had become in the 19th century the Romanian nation, is bound together into a single family and presented as various actors of a single story. At a time, in the 1960s, when linear models of history came increasingly under attack, Ionescu followed such a model strictly: he established and emphasized causal kinship between chronologically successive phenomena, and he posed without a trace of a doubt the

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[21] Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii,* vol. I, 5.

existence of an early origin in which lay dormant all the traits that the artistic phenomena will exhibit in their development.[22]

To temporal continuity corresponded also geographical unity. Ionescu treats the three provinces of Walachia, Moldavia and Transylvania synchronically, and ties together tightly the vast architectural corpus available on the various territories of what was to become the Romanian state only in the 20th century. However, Ionescu's socialist audience also required him to do obeisance to the Marxist historical model and to recognize in the architecture the reflection of political and economical contexts. How, then, to accommodate, within the transcendent unity of one nation, for instance, the gap between, on the one hand, the westernized architecture of the Habsburg empire in Transylvania, and, on the other, the architecture of the two other relatively autonomous provinces where different political structures allowed ottoman and Russian influences to predominate? How does one write a socialist and a nationalist history at once?

Ionescu's solution for preserving the possibility of the organic harmony of the nation, despite the important diversity that characterized the historical material, was to construct a two-tiered history. On the one hand, his book writes the history of the "ruling classes," whose architecture had been erected with the profits of the exploitation of the peasant population and was open to foreign influences and fashions, and which Ionescu dutifully analyzes through Marxist lenses, such as scientific stages of development and class struggles. On the other hand, in the same book, Ionescu writes the history of vernacular architecture, which he considers to be the repository of the real specificity of Romanian architecture. In his discussion of folk art, Ionescu, brushes aside not only the sort of stylistic distinctions that he emphasized while analyzing the high architecture of each of the provinces, but temporality itself. While the high architecture is heavily

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[22] See discussion of 'linear history' in Porphyrios, *On the Methods of Architectural History*, 97.

contextualized in time, space and political circumstances, the vernacular is made to evade most historical categories and periodizations, and thus also Marxist teleology:

> "The kinship between the rich and varied repertoire of constructive forms and the elements of decoration, as well as the striking similarity between artworks that remain from the 17th and 18th century and the more recent ones from the 19th century, testify to a permanent link with the past, to a continuity, and to the maintaining intact of the originality and the indigenous character of the entire popular artistic production [through time]." [23]

The section on popular architecture stands on its own, and is exempt from the periodization that organizes the rest of the book. It is so deliberately and unapologetically: "[Given] the extremely slow rhythm of its transformations and its unitary character, popular architecture could not be compartmentalized within the relatively short historical periods followed by the architecture of the ruling class."[24] It is in this section that Ionescu is most clearly seen bringing together, through visual and narrative harmonization, the separate architectural realities from a variety of regions and epochs. From pages 268 to 286, the reader is taken through a rapid and vivid discussion of the characteristics of rural, vernacular dwellings from various regions. The text traces the diversity of architectural solutions available throughout the different regions, but all within a framework that ultimately promotes a unitary reading of the dwelling customs.

> "... the vernacular dwelling presents [...] numerous appearances and types, often with marked specificities. But besides these differentiations, in terms of the general configuration of the plan and the volume, houses of all regions subscribe to a unique and regulated form: a prism with a rectangular section, or at most two such prisms juxtaposed, the dimensions of which vary, in plan, from 4 to 8 m in width and 7 to 14 m in length."[25]

> "With rare exceptions, peasant houses of all types have in front, and often on the sides, an open gallery bordered by sculpted posts and rail; in Moldavia and

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[23] Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii*, vol. II, 265.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 266.

Muntenia, it is called "prispa;" in Oltenia, "sala," in southern Transylvania "fruntariu" or " tirnat," and in Maramures, "satra."[26]

The drawings that accompany the text are particularly eloquent in promoting commonality and uniformity of experiences. Their rapid succession through the pages gives a strong impression of regularity in scale, type, interior division, materials, and overall stylistic and ornamental expression. The drawings illustrate rural houses from a variety of regions, but in a linear sequence that precludes cross-references, comparisons, and therefore assertion of differences. (Figs. 4, 5, 6.)

Ionescu's nationalist agenda is made even more explicit in his discussion of the 19th century. He sees the emergence of a true and self-consciously national style in the second half of the 19th century, when

> "In parallel with the fulfillment of the historical process that led to the constitution of the Romanian nation, comes the formation of a specific and superior national culture. In our country, as in other European countries, men of culture, progressives, raised their voice against the cosmopolitan character of the arts, and considered that the only way towards a specific artistic creation could be a search for new forms that rested on the traditions of the people."[27]

In a book that devotes little place to individual architects, Ionescu makes an important exception about Ion Mincu, to whom he devotes long passages, identifying him as "the first architect who tried to oppose cosmopolitan eclecticism of the architecture of the time with new works that asserted specifically national features."[28] These passages are the only ones where the reader senses the author's excitement and pleasure, in contrast with the much more restrained, even at times wooden writing style in the rest of the book. Writing about Mincu's Lahovary House of 1886, Ionescu states that it truly combines the qualities that are specific to Romanian folk architecture (Fig. 7):

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[26] Ibid., 268.

[27] Ibid., 437.

[28] Ibid., 439.

"...the building is characterized by a rational distribution of the rooms in relationship with their function, by a judicious use of materials and constructive techniques, and, more importantly, by a clear vision of the plastic qualities of architecture accompanied by good taste in the balancing of proportions, in the recourse to decoration, and in the harmonization of colors.[29]

To this, Ionescu adds:

"At a time when a servile and imitative fashion dominated most minds, when the authorities and the private clients were attracted by the dubious fame of an eclectic architecture that was foreign to the traditions of the land and to the progressive spirit of the epoch, Ion Mincu dared to love and call back to life the architectural legacy of his country's past."[30]

Nationalism and the Soviets

Ionescu's nationalist narrative was not only difficult to reconcile with a socialist present, but its theoretical and historical origins were in themselves antagonistic. By the 1960s, Romanian nationalism stood at the intersection between two important sources in thinking and writing about the nation, and which occupied the two poles of the political spectrum. On the one hand, Ionescu's history was derived from the cultural politics of presocialist Romania and its search for a national "essence;" on the other hand, nationalist impulses were also sanctioned by a Soviet anthropological doctrine centered on the concepts of ethnicity and ethnogenesis.

For a variety of concurring reasons, the decades before the advent of the socialist regime in Romania were completely dominated by the problem of the nation. Verdery writes, for instance, that

"...from 1900 on, there was scarcely a politician, regardless of party, and scarcely a thinker, whether in economics, psychology, sociology, ethnography, philosophy, literature, or art, who did not directly or indirectly have something to say about

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[29] Ibid., 440.

[30] Ibid., 447.

Romanians' essential character. For nearly all of them, the objective was to create a strong national polity, economy, and culture. Much of this writing took off from the 'form without substance' theory of Titu Maiorescu, which criticized the corrosive effects of 'cosmopolitan borrowings' and aimed to promote the organic development of a Romanian culture and society, suited to the people's innate character."[31]

An important reason behind the intensification of the preoccupation with the Nation was the new fear of the spread of Bolshevism. In the wake of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, a Romanian Communist Party had been formed which promoted unmitigated internationalism and openly supported minority rights against the integrity of the state; it also considered the newly formed Romania "an imperialist creation and an oppressor of its newly acquired minorities."[32] In other words, nationalism from the 1920s onward came to coincide, in Romania, with a clearly anti-communist and anti-Soviet political position, permanently marking the relationship between nation and socialism with ambivalence. And it is precisely a discourse of the Nation that had been previously defined as an antagonistic response to Marxism that is paradoxically revived in Ionescu's work in the socialist years.

However, in the 1960s, the mobilization of archaeology and the study of the vernacular in the writing of a Romanian architectural history were also operations in direct line with the officially sanctioned Soviet conception of ethnicity. Ionescu's interest for the prehistoric past, as well as his a-temporal treatment of vernacular architecture, should be understood in relationship with the primordialist conception of ethnicity and the corresponding search for origins (ethnogenesis) that had been predicated since the late 1930s by Soviet ethnology, anthropology and archaeology.[33] Thus, Ionescu's definition

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[31] Verdery, 46

[32] Ibid, 44.

[33] Philp L. Kohl, "Nation-Building and the Archaeological Record," in *Proceedings of the International Symposium Nation and National Ideology: Past, Present, and Prospects* (Bucharest, New Europe College, April 6-7, 2001),188-89.

of popular architecture stems directly from the officially-advocated definition of an ethnic group through its attachment to "supposedly objective, relatively fixed criteria, such as language, racial group, dress, house forms, and other cultural traditions or time-honored ways of doing things."[34] Ionescu's nationalist interpretation of the prehistoric past, visible in his effort to locate modern ethnicity in the remote traces of specific archaeological cultures (a narrative also insistently advocated since the 19th century by Romanian voices, thus also resonated strongly with the Soviet-mandated concept of ethnogenesis.[35] Ionescu and the Romanian Communist Party's concern with Romanianness, while apparently forging expressions of autonomy within an internationalist Soviet realm, nevertheless fulfilled Soviet notions of socialist statehood.

In the wider history of socialism, nationalism's position within the Soviet official doctrine had fluctuated between rejection and embrace. In the late 1930s, Stalin reversed the long-standing Marxist denunciation of nationalism as a bourgeois project and gave preeminence to the idea of the Russian nation. Stalinism promoted love of fatherland to such an extent that by the end of the World War II, Soviet Communism and Russian nationalism had dissolved into each other.[36] The definition of socialist realism as an art that is "national in form and socialist in content" is indeed attributed to Stalin.[37] (The paradox of such definition of socialist realism being that it resulted in the mobilization of a classical, Eurocentric architectural vocabulary.) However, after Stalin's death in 1952, the soviet regime made considerable efforts to turn the chauvinistic political climate around: it significantly toned down nationalist and anti-Western rhetoric and called for a

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[34] Ibid.

[35] For instance, the notion of "dacianism," according to which modern-day Romanians could trace their direct and uninterrupted filiation to the pre-Roman Dacian tribes, gained currency both in the 1930s and in the 1960s and 1970s. Se discussion in Verdery, 36-40.

[36] Richard Pipes, *Communism* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 72-73.

[37] Cited in Paperny, Vladimir. *Architecture in the Age of Stalin: Culture Two* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 168.

return to the original revolutionary Marxist-Leninist doctrine of the 1920s. In the realm of architecture, this meant, as discussed in the previous chapter, an unspoken, but nevertheless real rehabilitation of much of the constructivist ideals.

Nationalism in Romania did not follow the same cycle. The decade after the communist takeover was marked by an overbearing Russification of Romania's culture and education that allowed little space for explorations of Romanian nationhood.[38] The few buildings erected in Romania in the socialist realist manner do make perfunctory use of Romanian ornamental motifs, but are in reality little more than copies of Soviet buildings or neo-classicizing exercises, and are far from the pre-socialist sincere searches for a national style. It is, paradoxically, only when de-Stalinization was well under way in the Soviet Union that the Romanian socialist leadership made nationalism into a central component of its ideology. The re-habilitation of national history thus took the meaning of an anti-Soviet stance, despite nationalism having been for decades a principal feature of hard-core Stalinism.[39] In other words, despite the fact that nationalism had been advocated for decades by the Soviet socialist dogma, a national communist government primarily meant, in Romania, a rejection of Soviet control over the economy and national affairs.[40]

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[38] Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2003, 147.

[39] The most striking historiographic construction related to the Romanian communist leadership's pursuit of political and economical independence from the Soviet Union is the myth of a pre-war Romanian Communist Party with national, rather than Soviet roots, which led to the purge of some of the founding figures of the RCP like Ana Pauker and Vasile Luca, who were accused of having been too close to Moscow and therefore alienated from national realities. See Tismaneanu.

[40] The most visible sign of Romania's distancing from "internationalism," which really meant the Soviet sphere, was its "refusal to bow to the decision of the COMECON [Communist economic consortium] to institute supranational planning board for all the economies of the region and, secondly, to allot to Romania in the new regional planning the parts of permanent agricultural and light industry producers." Ghita Ionescu, *The Politics of the European Communist States* (New York: Praeger, 1967), 185-6.

Ionescu's book was one important example of the party's newly-found nationalist stance and of the accompanying effort to reassess and rewrite the past. In a cultural context deeply concerned with Romanianness, and in which all disciplines were called to task, it is important to remind what a discordant note architecture struck.[41] Architecture, the most dynamic and visible aspect of socialist culture, remained, unlike most other aesthetic practices, and at least until the late 1970s, stubbornly impervious to the expressions of the nation and its traditions, causing a nationalist history of architecture to be particularly troubled by contradictions.

Ionescu's emphasis on continuity seems to have one more, quite paradoxical origin, which further testifies to his suspended position between the Nation's past and socialism's present. Perhaps the more unexpected historiographic model for Ionescu's writings is Auguste Choisy's *Histoire de l'architecture*, the only architectural survey cited in Ionescu's extensive bibliography, and one of the book's few western sources (the other ones are two French interwar publications on Byzantine and medieval architecture). Choisy is a surprising model for a national history, given his belief in the capacity of construction techniques to transcend ethnicity and nation, and his emphasis on construction over character, and of structural rationalism over style. Nevertheless, it is Choisy who provided Ionescu with a convincing method for representing continuity. *Istoria Arhitecturii* closely reproduces Choisy's method of presentation and analysis of architectural examples. Ionescu is certainly in line with the rationalist French school of architectural history, especially in its enthusiasm for cataloguing and studying national achievements. He also follows the deliberately unengaging tone, the materialist and scientific approach to styles, and the placing of emphasis on the history of construction,

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[41] As Walter A. Kemp has shown, in the early 1960s, "Links to Romania's ancient Latin culture where stressed in philology. Phonetic changes which had been made in the 1940s and early 1950s in an effort to make the language more Slavonic [closer to Russian, *my remark*] were dropped, and archaeology was used to prove continuity between the past and the present." 152.

which had been the features of the historical writings of Viollet le Duc and Choisy.[42]As in Choisy, Ionescu's text is set out in short, descriptive paragraphs that refer to the illustration on each page. As in Choisy, continuity (but within Romanian territory) was also Ionescu's aim; as in Choisy, Ionescu expresses the idea of continuity of architectural practice, and suppresses diversity and particularites, through the systematic use of terse, single-line, abstract drawings of elevations, sections and, more important, isometrics in an invariable formula applied equally to the middle ages and to the 20th century.[43] (Figs. 8, 9)

Ionescu and Romanian Modernism

It is Ionescu's negative assessment of the interwar modern movement in Romania that eventually resolves the book's inherent tension between its nationalist and traditionalist mission and the notion of a socialist revolution. Modernism turned out to constitute the perfect foil for both national and socialist claims (and as such, fulfilled a role equivalent to that which the *mahala* held within socialist architectural propaganda.)

Ionescu's account of modernism is radically foreign to the vocabulary of modern architecture developed in the West, from Adolf Platz in 1927 all the way to Leonardo Benevolo in 1960. Absent are such epistemological categories as the pioneer architect, the avant-garde, the rejection of academic tradition, the rhetoric of a new age, and the aesthetic of the machine, etc. Instead, in the book's last chapter, Ionescu sets out to demonstrate that the modern movement in Romania may have had the appearance of a progressive architecture but failed to be truly revolutionary, not only because it was

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[42] David Watkin, *The Rise of Architectural History* (Reprint, London: Architectural Press, 1983).

[43] For a discussion of Choisy see Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (Reprint, Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1980), 24-25.

imported from abroad and, therefore, foreign to the spirit of a Romanian architecture, but also because it was patronized by capitalism. Ionescu goes one step further and defines modernism as just one manifestation of the eclectic historicism that characterized much of the architecture of the 1930s in Romania. Most histories of the early 20th century would have interpreted the overlapping of different architectural expressions that occurred in the 1920s and 1930s in the light of ulterior developments, as a faltering historicism giving way to a rising modernism. Instead, Ionescu treats them as synchronous and interchangeable parts of a single bourgeois architectural plurality and defines modernism as just one among many available styles on loan from the West.

The conflation of the development of modernism in Bucharest and the return to eclectic historicism into a single category of bourgeois capitalist architecture is one of Ionescu's most striking historiographic operations. In his chapter called "The architecture between the two wars," years and dates are almost entirely absent, and the illustrations alternate between one style and the other, effectively establishing a discursive equivalence between historicism and modernism. For instance, examples of modernism are woven seamlessly in-between various "interpretations of historic styles, as shown in figures 10-14. In doing so, Ionescu succeeds in seamlessly inserting modernism into the continuous flow of history, flattening out the vivid conflicts between different architectural positions.

The operation is not only visual. In writing also, the two styles are rebuked with similar arguments, and in so doing, Ionescu's narrative comes strikingly close to the Marxist critical apparatus: both modernism and eclecticism developed under private patronage, equally perpetuating the interests of the ruling class. Both emerged in Romania under the impact of European influence. Both were excessively concerned with plastic expression, and therefore equally formalist. "The ideological basis of the modernist movement, which dominated Romanian architecture in the fourth decade of our century, consisted in following, in a servile and uncritical way, the artistic and cultural products of developed

capitalist countries."[44] Relentlessly, Ionescu argues that both historicism and modernism were the two sides of the same reality, opposed only in appearance.

By subsuming all interwar architectural practices into the single category of a doomed formal eclecticism, Ionescu maintains the fabric of the pre-socialist past without the usual ruptures of modernity. Because pre-war, capitalist modernism was derivative and imported, it failed in its ambitions to restructure and transform the unity and continuity of the culture of the nation, and could therefore be relegated into historical secondariness. The claim of unprecedented transformation is thus protected from historical precedent, and preserved as the exclusive privilege of postwar socialist revolution. Indeed, more than preserving the continuity of the past, the collapsing of the pre-war modern movement into historicism allows the book to uphold the possibility for the socialist present to produce a truly revolutionary (and socialist) architecture, entirely free of formalist or stylistic or even historical frailties. In other words, true modernism, in the sense of an architecture that had overcome formal imitation and other obsolete aesthetic positions, could only be fulfilled under socialism.

Another remarkable aspect of Ionescu's critique of modernism is that it provided him with a rare opportunity to achieve historiographic synthesis between nationhood and class struggle: indeed, the failure of Romanian prewar modernism is due, in Ionescu's writings, as much to its lack of national authenticity as to the regressive politics of capitalist exploitation that sponsored it. However, the coincidence between nationalist and Marxist critiques of formalism in architecture only displaces the paradox, which now resides between a history openly denouncing modernism and a socialist present deeply indebted to modernism for its architectural expression. I would like to suggest that nationalist and

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[44] "Baza ideologică a curentului modernist, care în arhitectura românească a devenit dominant începînd din al patrulea deceniu al veacului nostru, a constat în preluarea servilă si necritică a realizărilor artistice si culturale din tările capitaliste dezvoltate." Grigore Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii*, vol.II, 481. Translation mine.

socialist discourses, by cooperating in their rejection of the modern movement of the 1930s, allowed in fact for a modernist critique to emerge against modernism itself. Or, perhaps better said, it is modernism's critical apparatus, with its fundamental bias against style and its denunciation of architecture's involvement with form that allowed the nationalist and socialist standpoints to merge in one single protest against Romanian modernism's lack of authenticity. The ultimate socialist history of the nation is, perhaps, one based on a modernist notion of good architecture.

The Epic of the Socialist Present

Ionescu recoiled from integrating socialist architecture into the historical narrative developed in his *Istoria arhitecturii*. Nevertheless, there existed a persistent, if unresolved, attempt to situate socialist architecture within history. It is to be found primarily in the efforts to distinguish socialist architecture from interwar modernism, which unfolded not only at the level of building practice, as shown in Part One (where the Floreasca towers where represented in contrast to presocialist architecture), but also, equally importantly, at the level of written discourse. The writings on socialist architecture oscillated in-between a reactivation of modernist theoretical principles, and their condemnation. In the following pages, I will explore the ways in which the official discursive formations, by denouncing modernism, paradoxically fulfilled its ideals.

Ionescu's bitter criticism of interwar architecture had been phrased in strict compliance with a well-established official discourse that dismissed the modernism of the interwar decades as the doomed emanation of a regressive stage of history. Such a discourse was rarely to be found in history books – very few socialist historians seem to have tackled

the sensitive problem of the interwar years.[45] Instead, the task of severely criticizing modernism was taken up by the many propagandistic or doctrinaire writings about socialist architecture that abundantly populated the 1950s, '60s, and early '70s. Much of that writing was organized comparatively, with the pre-socialist production providing a dark backdrop against which a luminous socialism was cast. Indeed, prewar modernism is always discussed as a moralistic preface to the virtues of socialism. This indicates, as I also suggest in the first chapter with the question of the *mahala*, that the official denunciation of interwar modernism indirectly provided a way of coming to terms with the problematic architectural identity of the socialist society. Similarly, Ionescu's chapter on interwar modernism in Romania should be read not only as a stark rebuttal of the architecture of the 1930s, but also as a commentary on the architecture of his own socialist present. Indeed, by exposing the failures of pre-socialist architecture, he firmly establishes the notions and values with which good architecture should comply. First among many haunting analogies, the condemnation of interwar modernism in Romania served the same formative role, in the promotion of socialist architecture, as the cries against the "morphological chaos of the nineteenth century"[46] did for the modernist manifestoes of the 1920s. By conceiving its architecture as a revitalizing rift with old practices, socialism returned to the historiographical foundations of the modern movement.[47]

Because socialist architecture was in reality a direct continuation of prewar modernism but could not possibly acknowledge its own capitalist roots, modernism as a historical category posed a fundamental problem inside the socialist interpretation of architectural

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[45] The only other example I am aware of is Gheorghe Curinsky-Vorona, "Tradiţionalismul şi modernismul în arhitectura României burghezo-moşiereşti şi gîndirea estetica a epocii," unpublished work, 1960, cited in Ionescu, vol. II, 481.

[46] Gustav Adolf Platz, *Die Baukunst der neuesten Zeit*, 1927, cited in Panayotis Tournikiotis, *The Historiography of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 8.

[47] See Tournikiotis, Chapter 8.

development. Therefore, I suggest that the repeated efforts to disprove modernism played a necessary part in a larger historiographic maneuver meant to preserve the fiction about the purity of socialist architecture's revolutionary condition, about its possibility to constitute the first architecture of its genre, and about the fact that socialism was the originary force through which one came to know such architecture *for the first time*. It was difficult, in fact impossible, to reconcile the official claims of the revolutionary nature of the socialist present with the existence of an architectural past that had already claimed the revolution for itself.[48] Romanian interwar architects such as Horia Creanga, Marcel Janco, and many others had spoken in their own time of a revolution in architecture. Threatened to appear as a "stale" revolution, socialism had to reject as fraudulent modernism's earlier claims to revolution, and silence any recognition of the continuity of modernist practices. Thus, for instance, by discarding all presocialist practices as outmoded formalisms, someone like Ionescu could restore the possibility that a mythical architecture entirely free of formalist, stylistic, auratic concerns might actually occur within socialism. Historiography's aim, in those years, was, paradoxically, to liberate socialist architecture from the residues of its own history, and to present it as an absolute present, fundamentally removed from the past. Socialist histories realigned the beginnings of good, true, new architecture with the beginnings of the socialist regime after the war.

The dilemma of history writing was much more acute than that of the choice of an architectural language: it is the dilemma first formulated by Hannah Arendt about Marxist theories of history: what does one do once the proletarian revolution has

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[48] Not only had interwar Romanian modernism already claimed revolutionary status, it had also been associated (albeit negatively, by its nationalist critics) with Soviet politics: one can read, for instance, in the magazine *Urbanismul*, a 1934 article on the "bolshevik-like architecture" referring to the appearance of high-rise buildings in Bucharest. Quoted in Oliver Velescu, "Bucureștii anilor '20. Contribuții la istoria structurilor citadine," in *București, Materiale de Istorie și Muzeografie* XII (1997): 161.

occurred, since proletarian revolution corresponds, in Marxist and ultimately in Hegelian terms, with the end of history? Because history itself comes to a stop, because socialism can be talked about only as an extended present, postwar architecture could not be recognized as what it truly was: the continuation, repetition and transformation of a modernist tradition that originated before the war, and before socialism. When considered within the larger context of a socialist culture obsessed with the writing of history, the anti-modernist discourse reveals the existence of a deeper antagonism towards history itself.[49] In other words, anti-modernism constituted a particularly virulent form of anti-historicism.

The Scholarship of Anti-history

Socialism's antagonism toward history came from the fact that, in order to construe its aesthetic production as unprecedented and therefore revolutionary, that production nevertheless needed to be put in relationship with the past, and historicized. How then to establish the historical importance of socialism without turning it into yet another episode of history? A new genre of books, freed from the methods and notions of architectural history (such as development and influences), arose from the need to situate the architecture of socialism at once inside and outside of history. Those publications, almost exclusively written by practicing architects rather than by historians, appeared regularly from the mid-1950s onward, and, even at times when printing paper was scarce, always

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[49] This "memory crisis" has been analyzed by Leah Dickerman in the context of the new Soviet state, during the late 1920s: "The revolutionary rhetoric of total break with the past coexisted with a series of historical reversals to create what must have been experienced as a form of temporal chaos. For Soviet intellectuals, history itself became problematic." Leah Dickerman, "Camera Obscura: Socialist Realism in the Shadow of Photography," in October 93 (Summer 2000), 193.

appeared in lavish, abundantly illustrated hardcover editions, often with French or English translations, clearly meant to address foreign audiences.[50]

Ionescu himself stood up to the task, and produced an important sample of the genre with *Arhitectura '44 – '69* (Architecture, '44 – '69).[51] While his *Istoria arhitecturii* occupies a unique place in the historiography of Romanian architecture, his *Arhitectura '44-'69* is typical of the wave of writings meant to celebrate the architectural achievements of the socialist regime in Romania. Put side by side, these two books neatly show the editorial and methodological adjustments required when writing about socialism, and how distinct methods were at work in differentiating the present from the past. Ionescu's *Arhitectura '44-'69* eliminated the word "history" from the title; the shape of the book becomes elongated, to resemble that of a magazine; an abstract, sans serif font replaced, on the cover pages, the deliberately antiquated, medieval-like writing of the titles within *Istoria arhitecturii*, stylistic arrangements all meant to signify that the book should be read as an enticing catalog of a vast body of architectural realizations rather than a historical work. (Figs. 15, 16, 17). In addition, the small playful elevations at the beginning of each chapter and the dramatically increased accent put on the illustrations emphasize the fact that architecture is to be grasped primarily through its formal, graphic qualities, rather through its historical value (Figs. 18, 19).

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[50] Some of the most important titles of that genre are: Comitetul de Stat pentru Arhitectura și construcții al Consiliului de Miniștrii, *Arhitectura în Republica Populara Româna* (Bucharest: Editura de Stat pentru literatura și arta, 1952); Jean Monda, *Arhitectura noua în R.P.R.* (Bucharest: Consiliul pentru raspîndirea cunoștințelor cultural-științifice, n.d.); Gustav Gusti, *Arhitectura în România. L'architecture en Roumanie* (Bucharest, Editura Meridiane, 1965); Grigore Ionescu, *Arhitectura '44-'69. Arhitectura în România în perioada anilor 1944-1969.* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1969); Cezar Lazarescu, Gabriel Cristea and Elena Lazarescu, *Arhitectura româneasca în imagini* (Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1972); Cezar Lazarescu, *Arhitectura româneasca contemporana.* L'architecture roumaine contemporaine (Bucharest, Editura Meridiane, 1972).

[51] See Grigore Ionescu, *Arhitectura '44-'69.*

For all its anti-historicism, this genre of publications is nevertheless cast in the mold of the founding texts of the modern movement of the late 1920, such as those by Gustav Platz, Adolf Behne and Walter Kurt Behrendt. As for many of its prewar precedents, the important body of illustrations carried by the socialist books is a much more effective propagandistic tool than the text itself; in the same way in which the 1920s publications founded the image of the modern movement, so do the 1960s ones establish the visual identity of socialist architecture. In both cases, the discourse of the image has catalytic significance.[52] As much as the seminal writings of the twenties, the socialist books clearly respond to architectural rather than historical concerns, and their pages are dominated by topics such as materials, functions, building and design processes, dimensions, and floor plans. However, unlike their prewar precedents that often doubled as impassioned manifestoes, socialist picture books followed a strictly objectivist tone, and the authors seem removed, even when discussing their own buildings (as in the case of Ionescu, for instance.) The effort to explain the production in extensive detail and with clinical accuracy and the excessive degree of objectivity functioned to repress all acknowledgment of historical lines of influence.

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[52] Tournikiotis, 9.

The Modernism of Anti-modernism I: the Return of the "New"

But perhaps the most fundamental rhetorical device meant to ensure a sense of pure contemporariness is the elimination, from all discussions of socialist architecture, of the words *modern, modernism, modern movement*, and their replacement with the term *new*. While photographs speak, page after page, of Romania's total embrace of some of the elements most integral to the modern movement (abstraction, standardization, and a celebratory attitude towards new materials such as concrete are just a few), the texts alternate between obtuse factuality and uncritical praise of the "new architecture." Two terms that relentlessly punctuate the official discourse on socialist architecture are particularly revealing of its specific prewar pedigree. Indeed, "new architecture" and "realist architecture" carry striking echoes of the German architectural debates of the 1920s.

In her introduction to Adolf Behne's *The Modern Functional Building*, Rosemarie Haag Bletter observed that the German proselytizers of Modernism tended to endorse "new" and to downplay "modern" in their writings about architecture, a choice of vocabulary that socialist propaganda closely followed a generation later. Far from dismissing it as a superficial problem, she considers that the terminological preference for *new* represented a fundamental theoretical position that rejected a stylistic approach to architecture, and stood in opposition to the aesthetic understanding of architecture characteristic of the Anglo-American sphere:

> "Because German proselytizers of Modernism tended to downplay the aesthetic aspects of architecture, their criteria depended less on visual elements than did Hitchcock and Johnson's work. Reinforcing this attitudinal difference was the fact that contemporary architecture was commonly referred to in Germany as 'Neues Bauen.' "[53]

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[53] Rosemarie Haag Bletter, Introduction, in Adolf Behne, *The Modern Functional Building* (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1996), 2.

In addition to implying a reluctance to formally describe and stylistically circumscribe architecture, *new* also clearly suggested a break with the past. Indeed, the author remarks that while *modern* was understood as a "neutral chronological marker synonymous with *contemporary*," *new* spoke much more strongly of change.[54]

By selecting the term *new* and by omitting all reference to *modernism*, narrative accounts of socialist architecture in Romania unwittingly aligned themselves with the earlier denunciation of a formalist, stylistic understanding of modern architecture, as well as with its implication of departure from all precedent.[55] And while the historical link to early German debates might have been lost on the readers (and perhaps on the author as well), it is clear that Ionescu and other socialist historians were resuscitating the slogan of the *new* with the similar aims of diverting the attention from stylistic judgments and of signifying an attitude of rupture.

One important difference nevertheless persists. *New* in Germany was overtly associated with the political language of the Social Democrats and thus would have been read as politically charged, while *modern* would have had a more politically indeterminate meaning. In Romania, by the 1960s, the political connotations of the terms *modern* and *new* had been reversed. [56] As a result of the anti-modernist campaign, it was instead

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[54] Ibid., 3.

[55] It is difficult to assert with any degree of certainty if the German precedent was recognized in the 1960s in Romania. While many important architects of the interwar had direct knowledge of German architectural debates – Marcel Janco was trained in Zurich and maintained a correspondence with Hans Richter, for instance – such knowledge, while not impossible, is much less probable for the architects who wrote and practiced in the socialist period. Ionescu, for one, did not read German, and his international contacts were with Italy.

[56] Even when confronted with the difficulty of finding a language unsullied by historical precedents, it is interesting to observe that the official discourse was nonetheless reluctant to coin an entirely original term for the architecture of its time. For instance, *socialist architecture* is never used but rather, the architecture of socialism, the architecture of our times, etc. (Nor was *socialist painting* a term in circulation.) Indeed, *socialist architecture* implies a circumscribed,

modern and *modernism* that carried political connotations (of capitalism and its associated evils of eclecticism and foreignness) and would have conveyed a direct link with a historical precedent, while *new* would have been perceived by the leadership (probably unaware of the term's occurrence in German architecture) as free of all associations. But, unlike the *Neues Bauen* of the 1920s, the socialist architecture of the 1960s was not new, and rather was just hollowed out of any memory or referent. Even if unaware of the homonymy within the notion of *new architecture,* Ionescu and other socialist architects or historians could not fail to see that by the 1960s, the architecture of which they claimed the novelty was in fact burdened with precedents, in Romania and abroad. Therefore, while the socialist usage of *new* replicates the *Neues Bauen* desire to convey rupture, it is also at the same time the deliberate cover-up of a lack of novelty. *New*, in order to function as such under socialism, subsisted as an empty carrier, as a repression of all that had foregone.

The Modernism of Anti-modernism II: Realism

The application of socialist realism to architecture has always posed a problem in its definition, not only at the time of its formulation but also in current analyses of its occurrence. Realism, one of the most heavily used concepts in socialist aesthetics, dominated the writings on architecture in the 1950s and 1960s (it almost disappeared from the architectural debates afterward, while still remaining central to all discussions about art well into the 1980s). [57] A major obstacle in fully settling the meaning of

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homogeneous and stylistically confined architecture, much more so than *the architecture of socialism,* which merely presents a temporal and perhaps philosophical correspondence between architecture and socialism. One can speak of a general unwillingness (or incapacity) to denote in finite, definitive ways, architecture's character in socialist times.

[57] Almost no critical attention has been given to the important developments that the notion of realism underwent inside Soviet aesthetic discourse. Adrian Forty's imposing book on the use of words in modern architecture barely mentions the appropriation and exploration of the term by

socialist realism in architecture has been the fact that before being imported into architecture, it functioned primarily as a literary theory that had been extended only afterward to include other non-literary forms. However, by reframing the discussion of socialist realism so as to include non-soviet precedents, the notion of realism in socialist architecture becomes not only more meaningful, but also compellingly demonstrates that the two worlds that have been antagonistically construed – that of a Western modernism, based on abstraction, versus that of socialism, based on realism – are in fact intertwined. While the realist slogan in Romania has always been exclusively related to the soviet-imposed notion of socialist realism, I argue that the problem of realism in socialist architecture – not only in Romania, but throughout the Soviet-dominated context – bears direct parallels with the German considerations on the notion of *Sachlichkeit* at the beginning of the 20th century, and thus constitutes yet another instance of modernism coming full circle.

It is the First Soviet Writers' Congress that took place in Moscow in 1934 that officialized the adoption of socialist realism as a new aesthetic. A close reading of the discussions at the time show, however, the lack of consensus over the term, which for a while existed as just one among other alternatives, such as communist realism and monumental realism.[58]

> "To the end, it never becomes clear whether socialist realism is a style, a method, one possible method among others (the preliminary drafts of the statutes of the [Writers'] Union mention 'methods' in the plural; the eventual shift from plural to singular marks with uncertainty the restriction of possible aesthetic theories in 1934), a trend, a form, a thematics; nor is there clarity as to the nature of its relation to the old realism, naturalism, modernism, or factography, or how it integrates into its own aesthetic a certain romanticism, the return of the epic and the monumental."[59]

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the socialist realist doctrine. Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings. A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000).

[58] Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*, translated by Catherine Porter (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 40-41.

[59] Ibid.

It is in this fluid state that, at the 1937 Congress of Soviet Architects, the socialist realist doctrine was applied to architecture, and received its ambiguous, yet final formulation, which required the incorporation of neoclassicism: socialist realism was to be "the mastering of the classical heritage as well as of the best that had been achieved by contemporary architecture, but in a manner that answered the spirit of the times." It also entailed educating "the broad working masses in the spirit of communism."[60] Indeed, during the debates over the true architectural language of the revolution, the embrace of a 19th-century Eurocentric neoclassicism came to play a central role in the nascent notion of socialist realism, by providing the Party with a formula through which socialist building could explicitly reject the modernist and constructivist agenda that had dominated architectural production in the early years of the Soviet Union.[61] It is, I argue, by reactivating precisely that academic tradition around the dismissal of which the modernist architects had rallied, that socialist realism could provide the party with an anti-modernist alternative to the Soviet architectural culture.[62] However, the association between "classical heritage" and socialist architecture left the latter particularly vulnerable to the critique of anachronism, a threat that was countered, I suggest, by investing the notion of *realism* with the reverse temporal charge of contemporariness and the capacity to mirror the present. Thus we read: "An artwork is generally valuable when it is realist, when the artist mirrors in it the essential problems of its time, when it is

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[60] From the Soviet Central State Archives of Literature and Art, cited in Hugh D. Hudson, Jr., *Blueprints and Blood: The Stalinization of Soviet Architecture, 1917-1937* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 193.

[61] The best account of that takeover can be found in Hudson, *Blueprints and Blood*.

[62] One of the primary goals of the congress was to make clear that "the architecture of state awe, one that recalled the neoclassicism of the 19th century, was now the only viable socialist style." Hugh D. Hudson, *Blueprints and Blood: The Stalinization of Soviet Architecture, 1917-1937*. Princeton University Press, 1994: 193.

based on the most advanced worldview available at its historic moment, that is, the ideology of the most revolutionary social class."[63]

Indeed, as is the case with many other theoretical positions within socialism, socialist realism was cast from conflicting impulses. On one hand, the endorsement of socialist realism translated into an architecture privileging the workers' experience, the continuity of traditional forms, and a rejection of the depersonalized machinery of modernism. On the other hand, one of the principal functions of 'realism' within socialist realism was to counter such a nostalgic and eclecticist position with the (fundamentally modernist) call for an harmonious and organic unity between all the cultural phenomena and the socialist age, and to offer a critique of formalism.

Romania was only shortly under the influence of socialist realism as an architectural aesthetic, less than a decade: between 1947, the moment of installation in power of the socialist regime, to the death of Stalin, in 1954, after which Khrushchev fundamentally revised the terms of Soviet architecture by reorienting it towards standardization and rationalization. Following a cycle that had characterized modernism itself in the 1920s, socialist architecture shed after 1954 much of its romanticized emphasis on craft and its abhorrence of technology and the machine. Like Adolf Behne, or like the Bauhaus school in their own time, post-Stalinist architecture shifted from preindustrial craft to industrialization, both in the organization of the design process and the building techniques. However, even if socialist realism did not exercise a lasting influence on Romanian built environment, I want to suggest that socialist realism as a theoretical apparatus, with the notion of realism at its heart, marked more profoundly and more durably Romania's understanding of what a good, socialist architecture ought to be. Ionescu, for instance, when writing in the 1960s, makes frequent recourse to the notion:

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[63] Nicolae Badescu, "Impotriva cosmopolitismului și arhitecturii burgheze imperialiste" (Against cosmopolitanism and bourgeois imperialist architecture), *Arhitectura* 1, 1950: 9.

in his *History of Architecture*, the main argument in favor of the work of the architects of a national style (such as Ion Mincu and Petre Antonescu) is their realism. Similarly, some interwar modernist architects (such as Horia Creanga and Octav Doicescu) are rescued from a general formalist debacle by their 'realism,' their understanding of the 'reality of their times.'[64]

In his essay "*Sachlichkeit* and Modernity,"[65] Stanford Anderson reconstructs the meanings of the concepts of realism and rationality in their relationship with the notion of *Sachlichkeit* in turn-of-the-century Germany. He points out that important differences emerged between realism and rationality, and that all sources considered realism in architecture as going beyond mere rationality. Indeed, while rational architecture signified a complete satisfaction of need, "the generation of form from need, health considerations, materials, and construction," realism included and exceeded the rational:

> "[The realist] program in architecture sees as the most desirable goal of artistic truth the development of the character of a built work not solely out of a determination of needs [*Zweckbestimmung*] but also from the milieu, from the qualities of available materials, and from the environmentally and historically conditioned atmosphere of the place."[66]

From this discussion, two elements emerge as constitutive of realism in architecture, both of which can be found living a second life in the socialist usage of the term. One of them is a call for architecture to grapple with the conditions of living and dwelling of its own time, with its "historically conditioned atmosphere." As Adolf Loos would put it: "The primary problem should be to express the three-dimensional character of architecture

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[64] Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii*, vol. II, 508.

[65] Stanford Anderson, "*Sachlichkeit and Modernity, or Realist Architecture,*" in *Otto Wagner: Reflections on the Raiment of Modernity*, ed. Harry Francis Malgrave (Santa Monica, 1993), 322-60.

[66] Richard Streiter's text of 1896, cited in Stanford Anderson, 339.

clearly, in such a way that the inhabitants of a building should be able to live the cultural life of their generation."[67] The second element is realist architecture's extension beyond the mechanical satisfaction of needs and into the realm of symbolic communication, an operation that, while refusing to collapse into style-making, requires the consideration of both affective experience and formal convention. "Reason is imperative but reason guided by our affections. Sachliche Kunst, a realist architecture, unlike 'pure' Sachlichkeit, is an interactionist realism."[68]

These two aspects, a transcended rationality and a direct link to contemporary society, are central to the definition of realism inside socialist theoretical texts. Thus we read that "The most important task of soviet architects in the current stage of history is to create architectural forms that ensure a high degree of comfort for the workers while expressing at the same time through artistic forms, the ideas of the soviet society."[69] Or that 'objectivism,' by which socialist literature meant the false impression of political and subjective neutrality, is an "anti-realist manifestation."[70] Socialist writings also contain a strong critique of functionalism, which emerged from "the uncritical adoration of materials and construction methods, the idolatry of the machine that is specific to the first decades of the [20th] century."[71] Realism is also often defined as the exact contrary of formalism understood as style-making: "Equally foreign to the communist spirit in art is formalism."

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[67] Adolf Loos cited in Stanford Anderson, 348.

[68] Stanford Anderson, 341.

[69] M. Ilin, "Despre tradiție și spiritul de inovație" (On tradition and innovation spirit), *Arhitectura si construcții* 4 (1955): 5.

[70] Badescu, 10.

[71] Ibid., 11.

A cherished demonstration of realist architecture was mass housing. Responding to an accusation that architecture, unlike the artistic image, cannot reflect reality and therefore cannot be truly art, the magazine *Arhitectura* published an impassioned discussion of architecture's claim to realism and, through it, to artistic status. The argument stated that, while architecture's aim was to satisfy practical needs rather than procure "aesthetic moments," it was able to surpass its utilitarian definition and reach into the desired "ideological and artistic realm" through collective compositions, at the city scale. While each standard house, for instance, might seem devoid of artistic qualities, it nevertheless collectively reaches expressive attributes that exceed the materiality of each of its components: "In mass constructions, the dialectical unity between the utilitarian side and the ideological-artistic one manifests itself not in each single construction – which, taken separately, might not be a work of art – but in the comprehensive solution to urbanistic problems."[72] Realist architecture carries such a strong connection to society, so it was argued, that it can purportedly only emerge if society itself has been transformed through revolution. According to the socialist commentators, unlike other artistic forms that can adopt the appearance of revolutionary stances even within 'decadent' societies, no good architecture can come out of a 'regressive' bourgeois context. Therefore, realist architecture is defined through a tautological relationship with socialist society, and ultimately assumes its temporal fixity.

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[72] G. Minervin and M. Fedorov, "Despre calitațile estetice ale construcției de masa." *Arhitectura* 5, 48 (1958): 23-25, first published in *Architecture USSR* 2 (1958).

Arrested Time

An important characteristic indicating that the publications of socialist architecture clearly operated outside the art historical model is the static, almost paralyzed, temporality in which they unfold. All offer sweeping panoramas of the endless socialist present - even if, by the 1970s, that present was spanning across three decades. Most books organized their corpus according to function (residential, commercial, industrial, leisure, etc.), rather than chronologically, thus undermining all sense of historical development and transformation, and presenting socialist architecture outside any dynamic duration. Exact dates for buildings almost never appear, even in Ionescu's book, where time is organized in 5-year increments (corresponding to the quinquennial plans) within which there is no detailed chronology. It is as if progression has stopped and history has ended. What came first is a meaningless notion within the perpetual "now" of socialism.[73]

Nor is there a hint of past or present influences, not even soviet ones. Instead, everything in these books concurs to give the impression that socialist architecture emerged as a natural extension of socialist times, as an emanation of the political condition, without trials and errors. Since there are no traces of variation in time or space, there are also no conflicting alternatives, no divergent paths, no comparisons, no differences, only the endless landscape of socialist architecture. Architecture is described like a vast geological phenomenon, in which causes and motivations lie beyond human reach.

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[73] Several authors have commented on the paralyzed time of "actually existing socialism." Verdery has written, "Through various means time was flattened, rendered motionless – despite all the Marxism-inspired slogans about progress and the forward march of history. ... A time was being constructed that was timeless, that did not pass, and in which the Party was ever-immanent," 249. According to Pavel Câmpeanu, "Becoming is replaced by unending repetition. Eviscerated of its substance, history itself becomes atemporal. Perpetual movement gives way to perpetual immobility." In *The Origins of Stalinism: From Leninist Revolution to Stalinist Society* (Armonk N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1986), 22.

The motionless time of socialism was not without historical resonances, however, given the timelessness in which historians like Ionescu had projected the architecture of the folk. In the same way in which the anonymous artisan had created spontaneously in the spirit of Romanianness, so did socialist architecture arise as pure reflection of a new society: in both cases, the meaning of architecture did not depend on the memory of past developments, and therefore bypassed all need for historical interpretation. Furthermore, a present detached from the past also meant it was separated from the future, since a lack of history forestalled progress and transformation at once before and within the eternal moment of folk and socialist architecture. Socialist history is thus located between a simultaneous repression and desire of continuity. On one hand, official rhetoric had posited the existence of a-historical periods of absolute architectural truth – the past of the folk and the present of socialism; on the other, it had required history to be a continuous and inevitable evolution toward the socialist telos, two interpretations of history that seem irreconcilable.[74]

The Absent Subject

By being defined under socialism as a direct correspondence between the artistic form and the political message, a realist production implicitly evacuates the need for interpretation around which the art historical method is built. In the case of socialist realism, there is an assumption that a transparent relationship exists between form and content, and that form carries an immediately accessible meaning. The message of the socialist artwork is considered to be an unquestionable part of the creation process, rather than something that partially emerges after it has been produced, and that can be

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[74] Alan Colquhoun termed these two interpretations as the normative and the relativist view of history. Alan Colquhoun, "Introduction: Modern Architecture and Historicity," in *Essays in Architectural Criticism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1981), 11.

transformed by subsequent interpretation. Absolute consensus over the meaning of the realist work is supposed to precede the work, therefore making interpretation altogether redundant. The purported clarity of the message in socialist art and architecture determines the style of the narrative constructed, under socialism, around aesthetic production. Such narrative is, for a reader used to western art historical methods, strikingly restrained, factual, descriptive. The socialist texts on art and architecture, by retreating either into description or into a dichotomy of approval/disapproval, reinforce the idea that the work's meaning is clear enough on its own, and should not require interpretation.

The texts strike the reader indeed less through their content and more through lapses and omissions. Apart from architects' names and dates, missing also is the organizing of the corpus of buildings and projects by stylistic or formal affiliations, schools, and movements. Instead, the reader is presented with strings of dry descriptions:

> "The great ensemble Balta Alba is located in the eastern part of the city, close to the strong industrial zone that continues to develop in that area. It occupies a terrain of 590 hectares that is bordered by several boulevards – to the north, Bulevardul Muncii, to the south, Bulevardul Sulea. More that 36 000 apartments will house over one hundred thousand inhabitants, grouped in 6 neighborhoods arranged around [the lake] Balta Alba. Each neighborhood varies in size from 80 to 120 hectares and comprises two to four large neighborhood units (microraioane) with a population of 8 000 to 10 000 inhabitants each. Besides a large socio-cultural and commercial center, each neighborhood and neighborhood unit benefits commercial, educational, health, cultural and entertainment structures required by the norms."[75]

Sentences are constructed in ways that evacuate authorship and individual intention in favor of a generic and disembodied benevolent power: "In the struggle for the betterment of living conditions of the working people, the problem of housing, now a problem of the

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[75] Ionescu, *Arhitectura '44-'69*, 120

state, has been posed with urgency right after the establishment of the power of the people."[76] The passive voice is omnipresent, even when architects are mentioned: "Sports complexes such as the Dinamo Club in Bucharest were created (architects H. Stern and N. Medilanschi.)" and signals a relinquishing of creative individual agency, in favor of the Party's will.[77]

Subjectivity disappears on both ends of the narrative. On one end, the voice describing architecture dissolves into factual descriptions; on the other end, architecture emerges outside the creative individual vision of the architect. In another example, Jean Monda manages to write an entire book on the "new architecture of the Popular Republic of Romania" without naming a single architect or a single date.[78] Words of praise go to the buildings themselves rather than to their architects, for buildings lay outside authorship, like elements of the natural environment. A case in point is Monda's discussion of the resort architecture built on the Black Sea coast in the late 1950s, and which constituted a first and dramatic break from the strained neoclassicism of the early 1950s, and which triggered the subsequent return to modernism. The buildings were the work of the architect Cezar Lazarescu, a well-known public figure regarded with favor by the regime. This is how Monda discusses his architecture:

> "Within just a few years, the Romanian seaside was totally changed by the new ensembles of constructions full of architectural elegance, through the development of the infrastructure and the landscape, and through the implementation of touristic facilities. ... The architecture of the seaside is characterized by contemporaneity, by a sincere expression of the buildings' function. In general, the theme of the seaside holiday allows for invention, and for an audacity otherwise inconceivable in a usual urban setting."[79]

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[76] Grigore Ionescu, *Arhitectura '44-'69*, 41.

[77] Ibid.

[78] See Monda.

[79] Ibid., 50-51.

Not only is the name of the architect suppressed, but the radical shift that the buildings represented for postwar Romanian architecture is attributed instead to a generic, disembodied sense of freedom that accompanies a seaside holiday. as if architecture had materialized, unassisted, from the atmosphere.

Although the architecture described in these publications had been freed from the anachronistic stylistic constraints of socialist realism, the language describing it remained tightly corseted by the requirements imposed on language and narration. The particular stiffness and constrained character of the language of official socialist publications has been discussed in the context of a socialist realist attitude towards language. For instance, the absent subject of socialist architecture could be seen as echoing Georg Lukacs' work on the historical novel and his search for ways to accommodate in artworks the voice of the people, in which he postulated a leaderless historical novel based on the Hegelian view of history as a process without a subject. [80] Language, from a socialist realist perspective, needed to be planned, to make use of a contemporary terminology of scientific words, and to become the contrary of an uncontrolled, spontaneous (and therefore subjective) expression, mostly in order to ensure the regime's control over it.[81] The particular condition of communication under totalitarian socialism is one that precludes the natural possibility of language of hosting multiple meanings.[82]

The publications on socialist architecture had emerged from the simultaneous search for historical permanence and radical renewal, which had warped time into a frozen present.

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[80] Bernd Uhlenbruch, "The Annexation of History: Eisenstein and the Ivan Grozny Cult of the 1940s," in Hans Günther, ed., 266-287.

[81] See Robin.

[82] Verdery, 90.

Similarly, subjectivity was to remain suspended and the individual subject, either as writer or as architect-protagonist, erased.
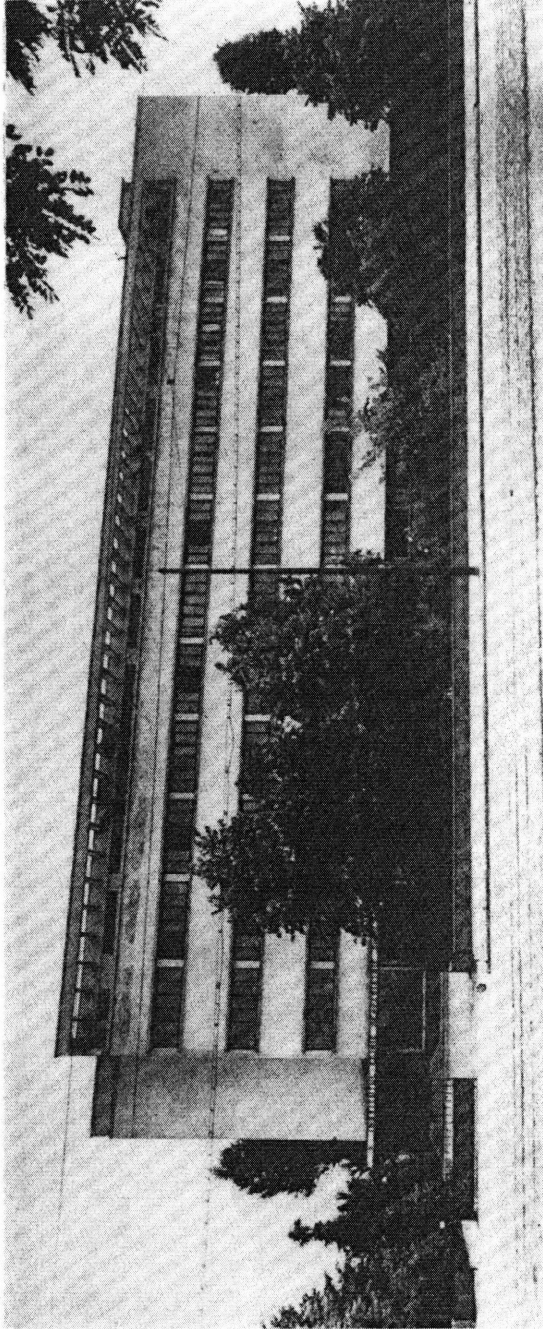
Fig. 1. Emilia Irza Hospital, Bucharest, c. 1953. Grigore Ionescu, architect. From Ionescu, *Arhitectura '44-'69*, 44.

Fig. 2. Emilia Irza Hospital, Bucharest, c. 1953. Grigore Ionescu, architect. From Ionescu, *Arhitectura '44-'69*, 44.
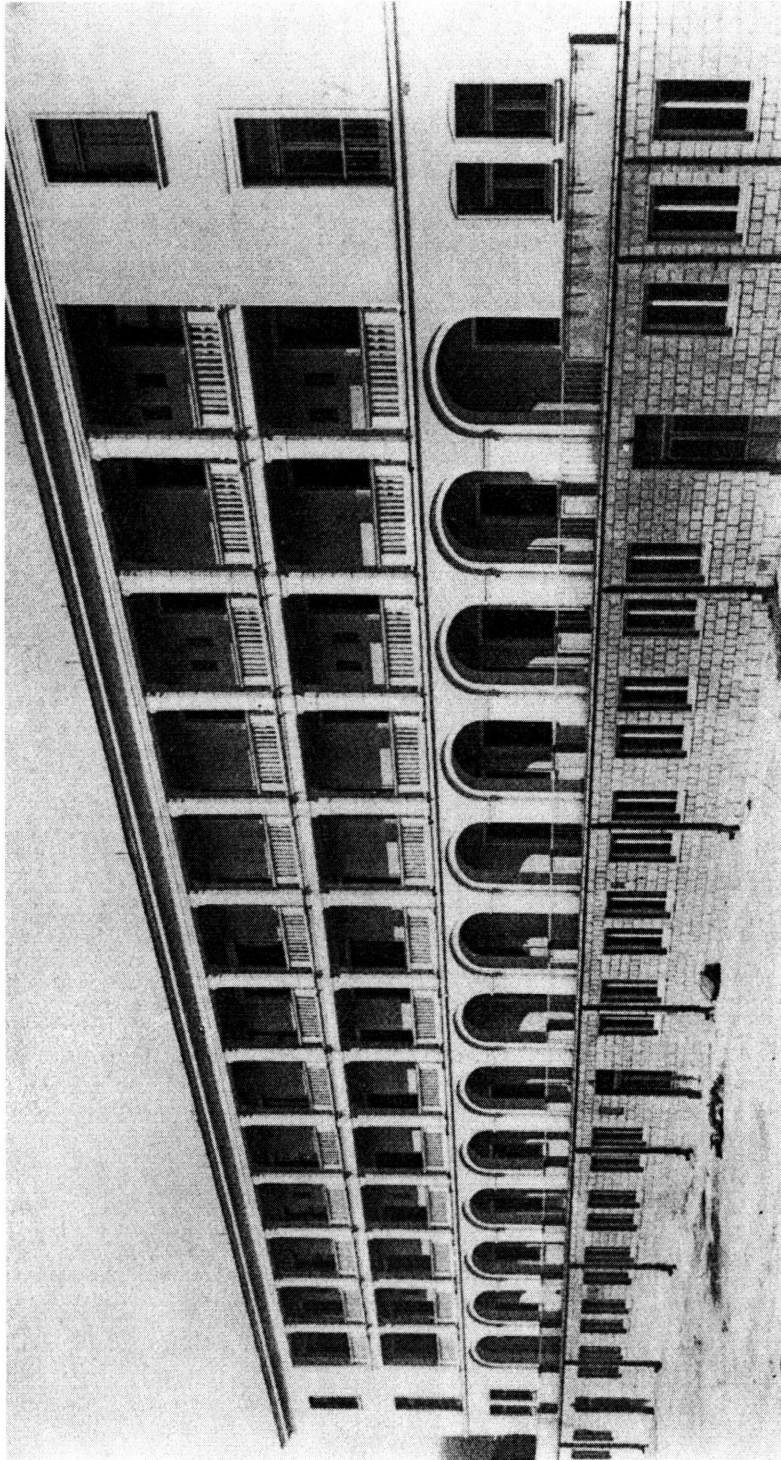
Fig. 3. Ghelber and Berindei, architects. Hospital in Hunedoara, c. 1953. From Ionescu, *Arhitectura '44-69'*, 43.
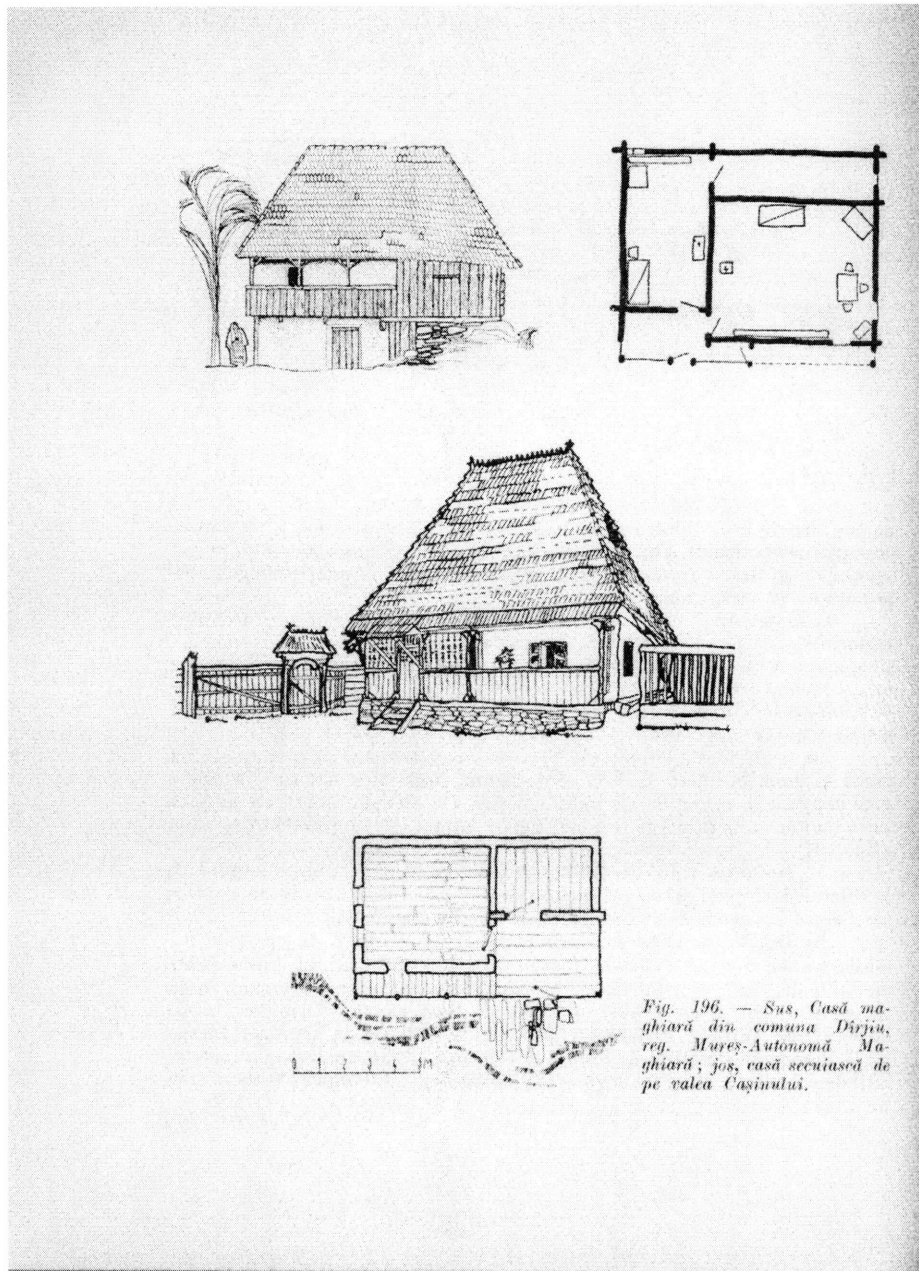
Fig. 196. — Sus, Casă maghiară din comuna Dîrjiu, reg. Mureș-Autonomă Maghiară; jos, casă secuiască de pe valea Cașinului.

Fig. 4. Vernacular architecture from the Mures region. From Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii* vol. II, p. 270
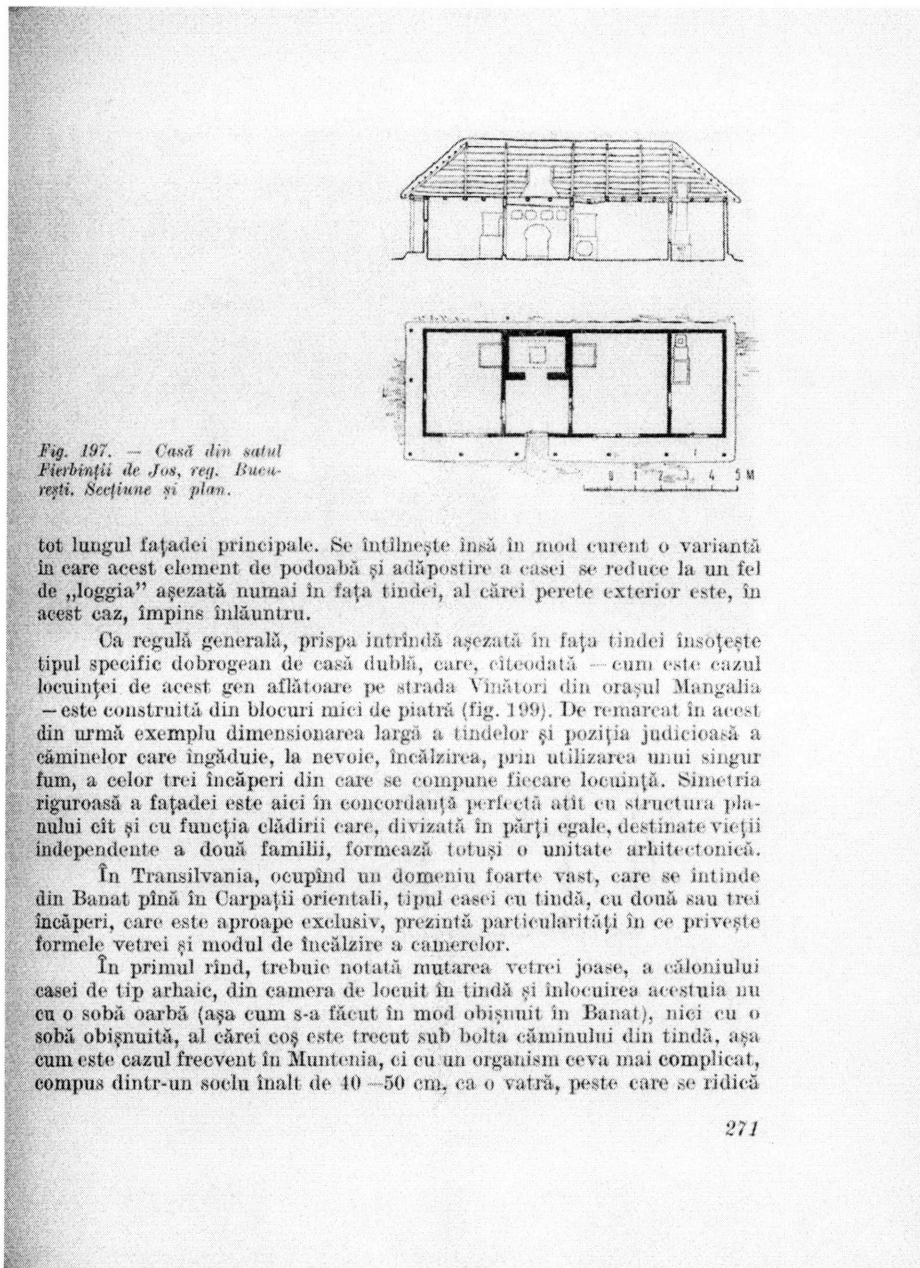
Fig. 197. — Casă din satul Fierbinţii de Jos, reg. Bucureşti. Secţiune şi plan.

tot lungul faţadei principale. Se întîlneşte însă în mod curent o variantă în care acest element de podoabă şi adăpostire a casei se reduce la un fel de „loggia" aşezată numai în faţa tindei, al cărei perete exterior este, în acest caz, împins înăuntru.

Ca regulă generală, prispa intrîndă aşezată în faţa tindei însoţeşte tipul specific dobrogean de casă dublă, care, cîteodată — cum este cazul locuinţei de acest gen aflătoare pe strada Vînători din oraşul Mangalia — este construită din blocuri mici de piatră (fig. 199). De remarcat în acest din urmă exemplu dimensionarea largă a tindelor şi poziţia judicioasă a căminelor care îngăduie, la nevoie, încălzirea, prin utilizarea unui singur fum, a celor trei încăperi din care se compune fiecare locuinţă. Simetria riguroasă a faţadei este aici în concordanţă perfectă atît cu structura planului cît şi cu funcţia clădirii care, divizată în părţi egale, destinate vieţii independente a două familii, formează totuşi o unitate arhitectonică.

În Transilvania, ocupînd un domeniu foarte vast, care se întinde din Banat pînă în Carpaţii orientali, tipul casei cu tindă, cu două sau trei încăperi, care este aproape exclusiv, prezintă particularităţi în ce priveşte formele vetrei şi modul de încălzire a camerelor.

În primul rînd, trebuie notată mutarea vetrei joase, a căloniului casei de tip arhaic, din camera de locuit în tindă şi înlocuirea acestuia nu cu o sobă oarbă (aşa cum s-a făcut în mod obişnuit în Banat), nici cu o sobă obişnuită, al cărei coş este trecut sub bolta căminului din tindă, aşa cum este cazul frecvent în Muntenia, ci cu un organism ceva mai complicat, compus dintr-un soclu înalt de 40—50 cm, ca o vatră, peste care se ridică

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Fig. 5. Vernacular architecture from the Bucharest region. From Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii* vol. II, p. 271

Fig. 195. — Casa „Bădanei"
din Cornești, reg. Oltenia. Fa-
țadă și plan.
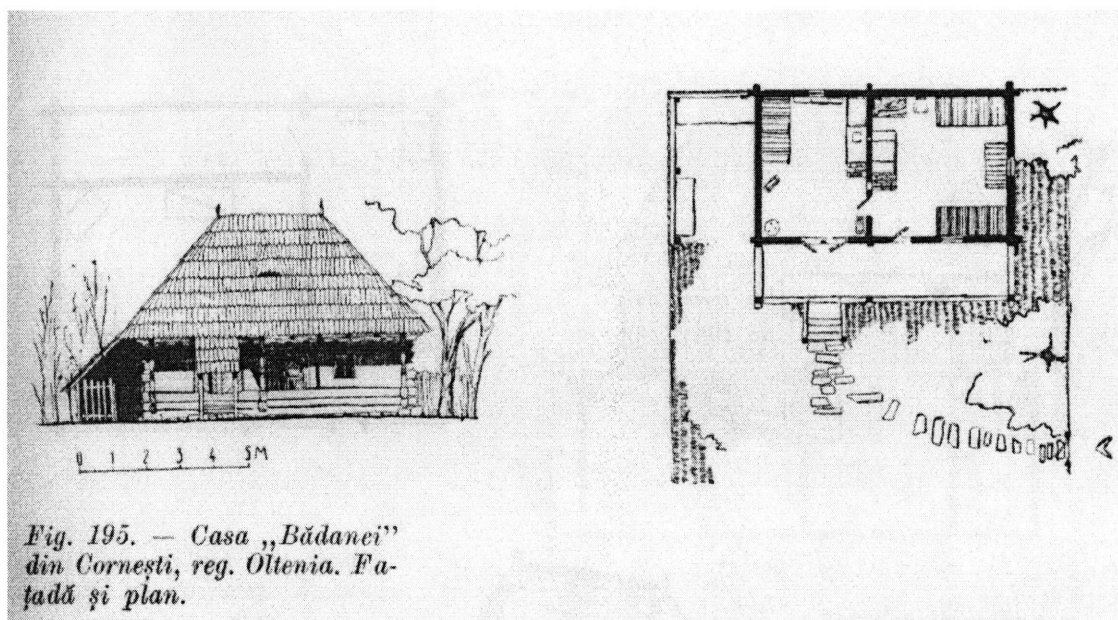
Fig. 6. Vernacular houses from the Oltenia region. From Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii* vol. II, 269.
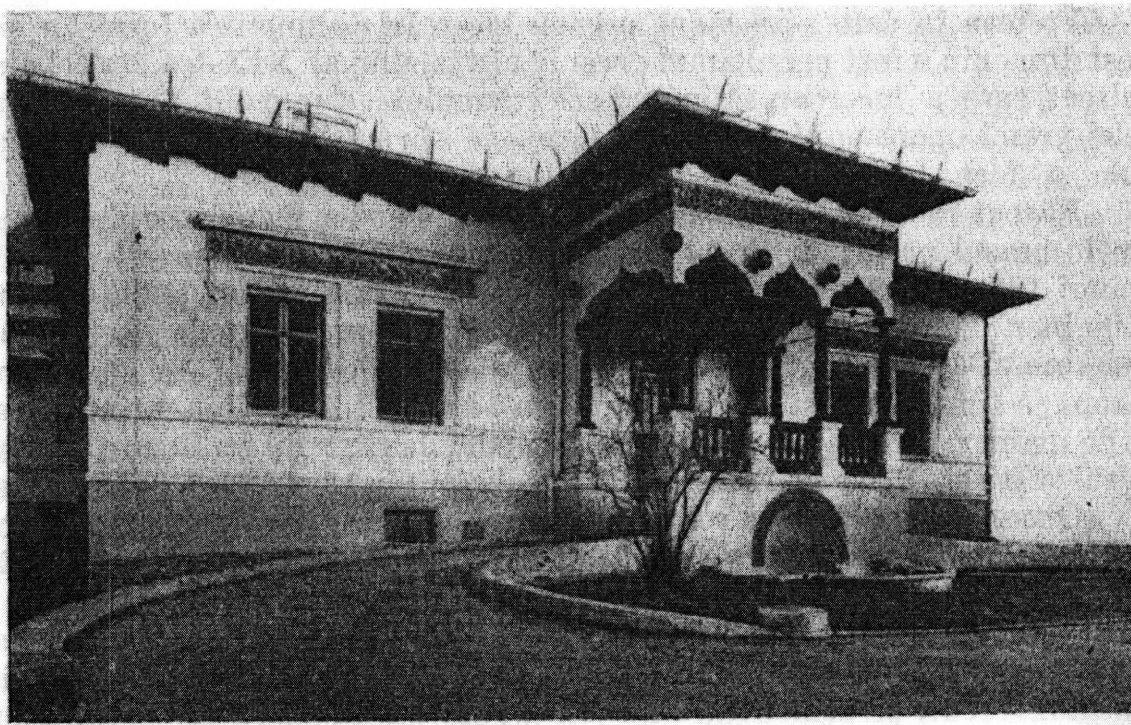
Fig. 7. Lahovary house, Bucharest, 1886. Ion Mincu, architect. From Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii* vol. II., 440.

adesea cu un stîlp octogonal, iar la colțuri, unde împingerile arcelor se cereau neutralizate, cu stîlpi robuști sau coloane angajate în stîlpi (fig. 108).

Capitelul putea fi format dintr-o lespede de piatră dreaptă sau cu muchiile profilate și colțurile teșite. Forma aceasta, dacă va fi fost folosită, a constituit de bună seamă o excepție. În exemplele ce ni s-au păstrat, capitelul este construit din cărămizi dreptunghiulare obișnuite și are, ca și baza, înfățișarea unei prisme, fie drepte, fie cu muchiile dinspre fus

Fig. 108. — Coloane și stîlpi de cărămidă, cu arătarea procedeelor de construcție.

160

Fig. 8. Construction and decoration techniques in the 17th century.From Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii,*, Vol. II, p. 160.

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Fig. 108. — Coloane și stîlpi de cărămidă, cu arătarea procedeelor de construcție.

160

Fig. 8. Construction and decoration techniques in the 17th century.From Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii,*, Vol. II, p. 160.

Fig. 3. — Biserica mănăstirii Galata — Iași. Epura bolţilor pronaosului.

Fig. 9. Axonometry of the Galata monastery, Iasi. From Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii în Romania*, vol. II, 15.

Fig. 350. — Catedrala orto-doxă din Cluj. Arhitecţi: C. Pomponiu şi G. Cristinel.

Fig. 10. From Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii*, Vol. II, p. 471.

Fig. 355. — Halele centrale
din Ploiești. Fațada principa-
lă și secțiune longitudinală.

482
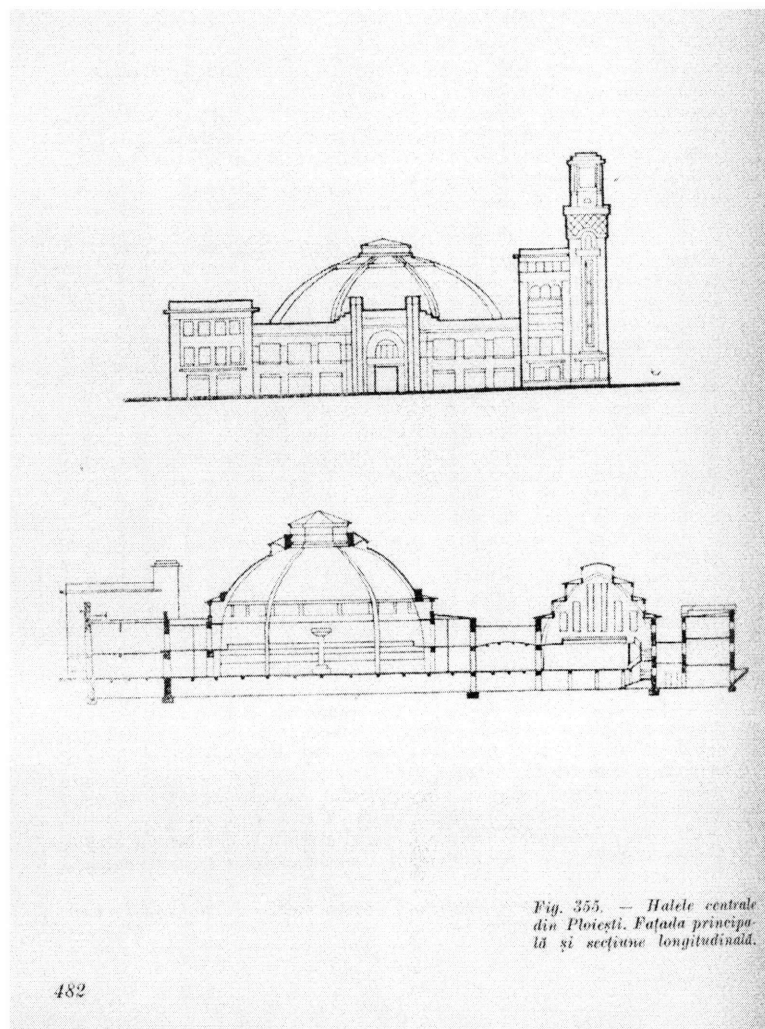
Fig. 11. Market Hall in the city of Ploiesti, first half of the 20th century. From Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii*, Vol. II, p. 482.
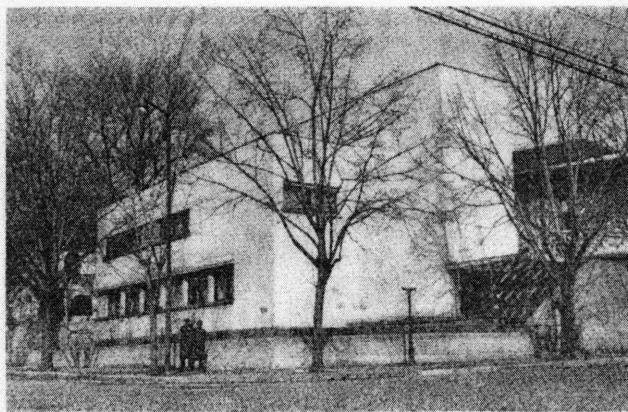
Fig. 356. — Casă pe Aleea Alexandru în București. Arhitect Horia Creangă.

1—2 etaje, cuprinzînd apartamente de închiriat, și blocurile înalte cu zeci de apartamente.

Casele-vilă ridicate în București, ca și în orașele de provincie pentru reprezentanții burgheziei înstărite ce aspirau la un lux și un confort ridicat, sînt mai totdeauna retrase de la stradă, au grădină în jur și cuprind de regulă la parter cîteva încăperi de primire, o sală de mîncare cu dependințele ei, un birou cu anexe etc., iar la etaj camerele de locuit cu toate anexele necesare. Lucrările de finisaj sînt executate cu grijă și adesea cu lux : placaje de piatră, pardoseli de marmură, de parchet ales și de gresie, uși exterioare bogate din fier forjat, uși interioare de panel furniruit cu lemn de esențe alese, ferestre metalice, tapete de mătase etc.

Pentru a ilustra genul, menționăm cîteva din cele mai reprezentative locuințe de acest fel :

— Casa-vilă construită pe Șoseaua Kisseleff (la nr. 49) în 1930— 1931 după planurile arhitectului Marcel Iancu ; casa de pe Aleea Alexandru nr. 1 din fostul parc Bonaparte, construită după planurile arhitectului Horia Creangă, remarcîndu-se printr-un plan clar și fațade de bune proporții și de extremă simplitate (fig. 356) ; casa-vilă de pe Aleea Modrogan

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Fig. 12. From Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii*, Vol. II, p. 484.
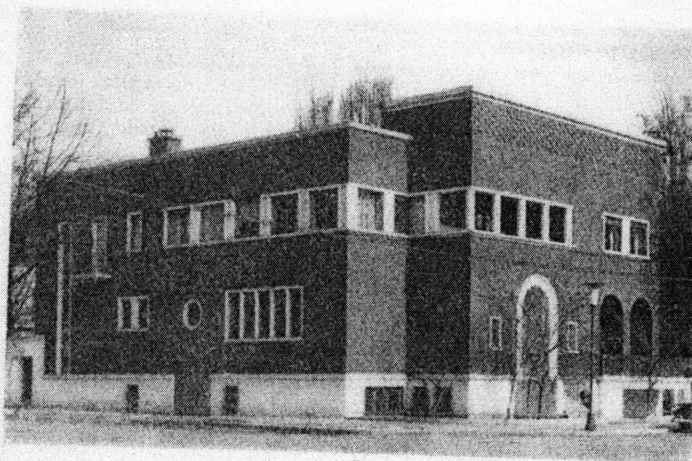
Fig. 357. — Casă pe Aleea Modrogan în București. Arhitect Duiliu Marcu.

nr. 1, construită în anii 1932—1933, amplă ca plan, de o foarte îngrijită execuție, cu fațadele placate cu cărămidă aparentă, ancadramente de piatră la uși și ferestre, grile de fier forjat, operă a arhitectului acad. Duiliu Marcu (fig. 357).

Deși criza de locuințe se accentua, deși marea masă a populației orașelor trăia în case insalubre, pe străzi nepavate, necanalizate, fără apă și lumină, care contrastau în mod flagrant cu cartierele de locuințe luxoase ale vîrfurilor clasei dominante, înzestrate cu toate dotările edilitare, regimul burghezo-moșieresc n-a fost capabil să ia nici o măsură de îndreptare a acestei situații. Abia dacă unele administrații mai importante au încercat să amelioreze criza de locuințe pentru salariații proprii, dar și aceasta s-a făcut într-o măsură infimă. Astfel, administrația căilor ferate, care în 1940 avea un număr de cca. 40 000 de salariați, nu a putut construi timp de un deceniu decît 3 325 de apartamente (mai puțin decît 10% din necesar) pe întreaga țară, din care 1 235 în București. Parcelarea cu 567 de loturi pe 15 ha în cartierul Vatra Luminoasă, cca. 75 de vile în cartierul Cotroceni și cîteva grupuri de case cuplate pentru 2—3 familii în parcelarea Hipodrom-Floreasca, constituie aproape întregul bilanț

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Fig. 13. From Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii*, Vol. II, p. 485.
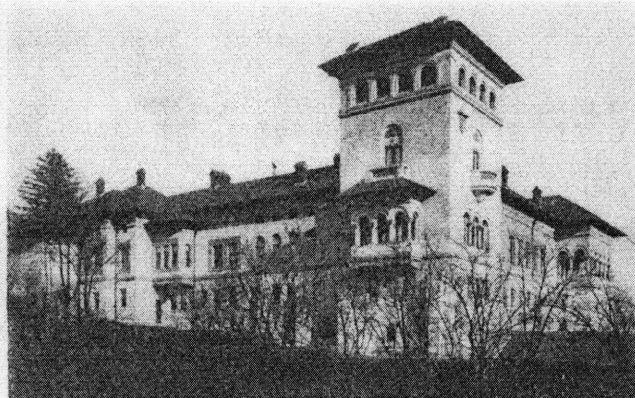
Fig. 365. — Palatul patriarhiei din Bucureşti. Arhitect Gh. Simotta.

clădirile acestui cartier, situat în regiunea lacurilor din nordul capitalei, sînt dispuse izolat, retrase de la stradă şi înconjurate de multe plantaţii. Linia dominantă a întregului ansamblu arhitectural este orizontala. Casele au numai două niveluri : parter şi etaj. În ansamblu ca şi în detaliu specificul naţional respiră aici la tot pasul, fără ostentaţie, el fiind rezultatul unei judicioase compoziţii de volume simple, agrementate cu elemente plastice de inspiraţie tradiţională : acoperişuri relativ înalte, cu pantele adesea îndulcite spre poale, streaşini proeminente, „loggii", foişoare, colonete şi balustrade de lemn sau de zid etc., adică părţi de clădire care au un pronunţat caracter funcţional şi constructiv totodată. Înfăţişarea fiecărei case, ca şi a întregului cartier luat în ansamblu, sugerează imagini familiare vechii arhitecturi pămîntene, în care surprindem, alături de trăsăturile originale, specifice măiestriei arhitectului modern, şi două din calităţile de bază ale creaţiilor valoroase ale meşterilor noştri din trecut : optimismul şi dragostea de viaţă (fig. 367—368).

Printre clădirile care recurg la interpretarea stilurilor istorice, cele mai valoroase sînt :

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Fig. 14. From Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii*, Vol. II, p. 496.

ARHITECTURA

'44 '69

EDITURA
ACADEMIEI
REPUBLICII
SOCIALISTE
ROMÂNIA
București
1969

GRIGORE IONESCU ✳

ARHITECTURA ÎN ROMÂNIA
perioada anilor
1944 ~ 1969

au colaborat la întocmirea lucrării
PETRE DERER și DINU THEODORESCU
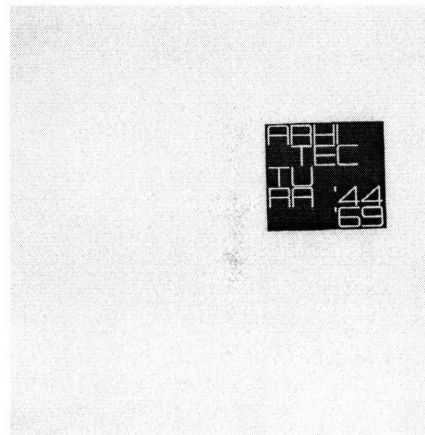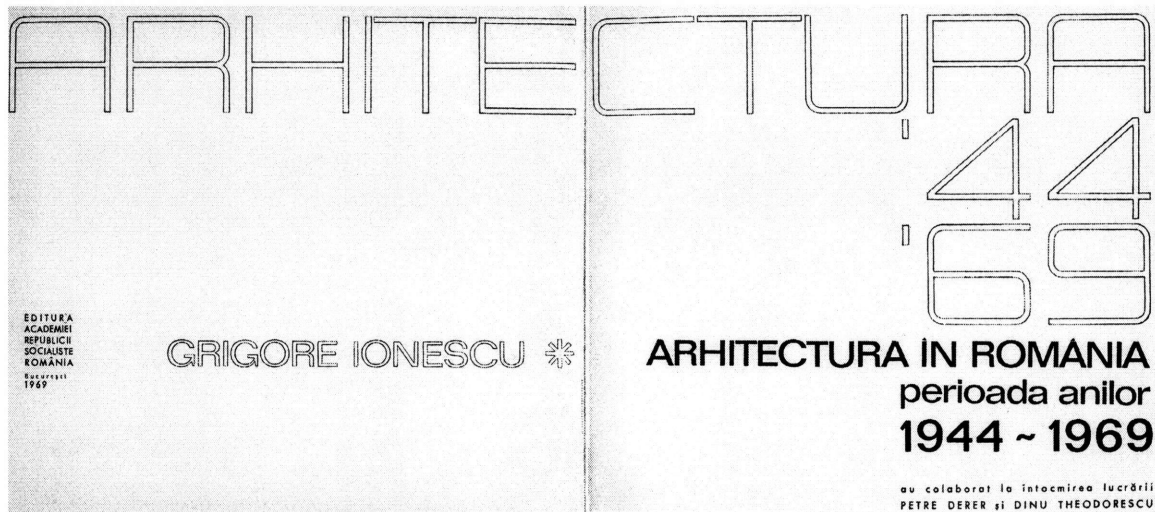
Fig. 15. Title pages from Grigore Ionescu's *Arhitectura 44'-69'*.

GRIGORE IONESCU

ISTORIA
ARHITECTURII
IN ROMINIA
I

De la orînduirea comunei primitive
pînă la sfîrșitul veacului al XVI-lea

EDITURA ACADEMIEI REPUBLICII POPULARE ROMÎNE
1963
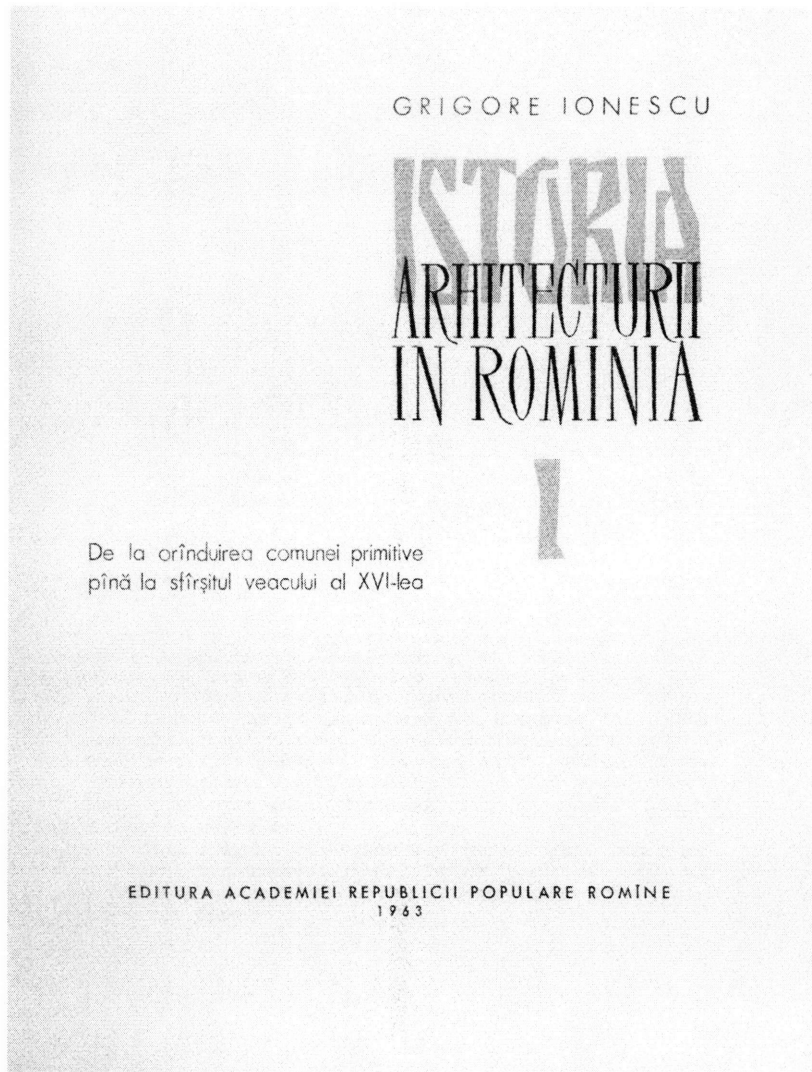
Fig. 16. Title page from Grigore Ionescu's *Istoria arhitecturii*, Vol. I, 1963.

GRIGORE IONESCU

ISTORIA

ARHITECTURII
ÎN ROMÂNIA

II

De la sfîrșitul veacului al XVI-lea pînă
la începutul celui de al cincilea deceniu
al veacului al XX-lea

EDITURA ACADEMIEI REPUBLICII SOCIALISTE ROMÂNIA

BUCUREȘTI — 1965
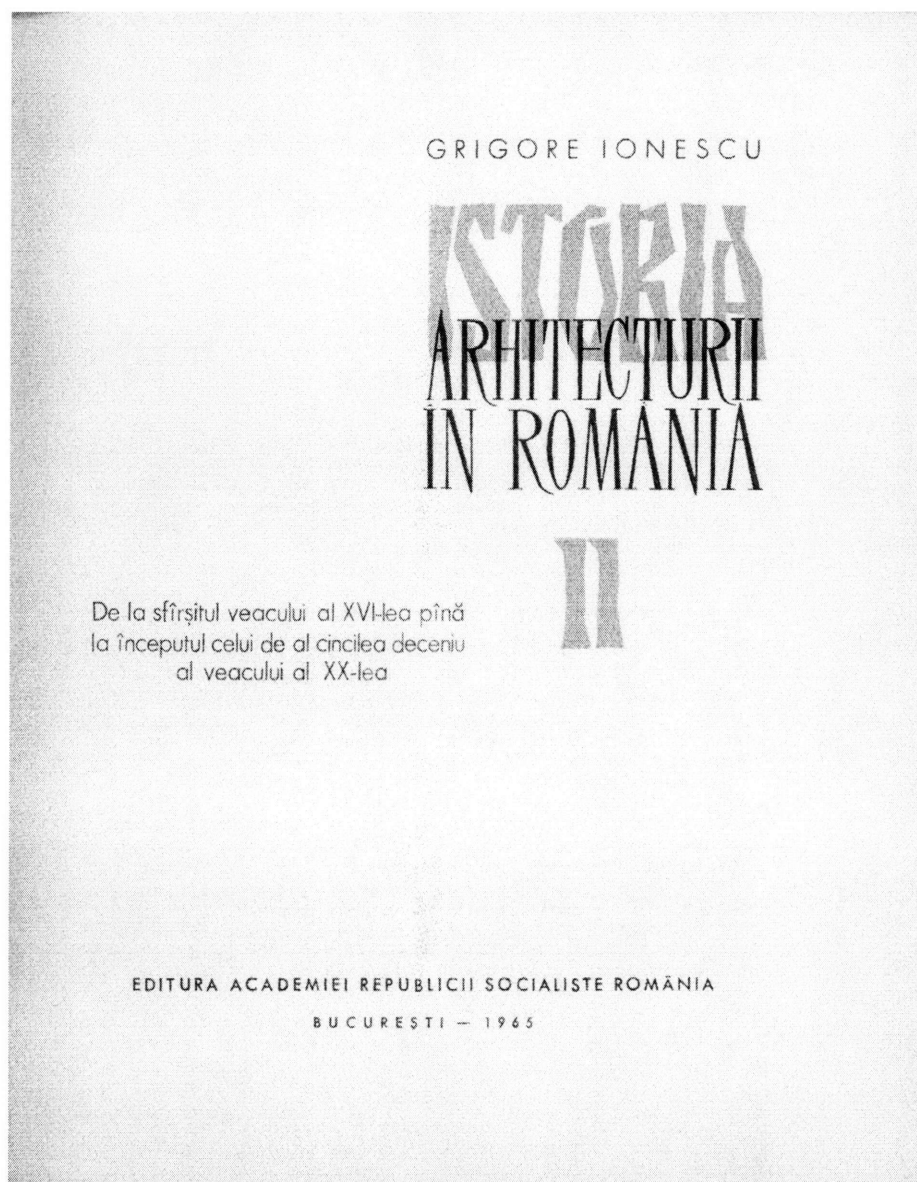
Fig. 17. Title page from Grigore Ionescu's *Istoria arhitecturii*, Vol. II, 1965.

...ransformările revoluționare săvîrșite în România după instaurarea puterii populare sînt de o importanță co-vîrșitoare pentru toate domeniile de activitate ale oamenilor muncii.

Teritoriul României, care are o suprafață de 237 000 km² și se caracterizează printr-o mare varietate a reliefului solului său, a fost împărțit din punct de vedere adminsitrativ în 39 de județe. Noua formă de organizare a statului este corespunză-toare structurii social-economice a țării, în care proprietari ai mijloacelor de producție sînt statul și cooperativele.

Planificarea economiei, care urmărește consecvent dezvoltarea multilaterală a tuturor regiunilor țării potrivit, pe de o parte cu necesitățile și posibilitățile locale, pe de alta cu interesele generale ale economiei naționale și cu folosirea rațională a tuturor resurselor, a dus la mărirea producției în toate ramurile ei, precum și la sporirea continuă a venitului național. Rezultatul cel mai important al acestei noi politici economice se reflectă în dezvoltarea industriei care, cuprinzînd multe ramuri, noi, inexistente în trecut, a atins în 1965 un volum de producție de opt ori mai mare decît acela din 1938. Paralel cu industria și într-un ritm aproape asemănător s-a

7

Fig. 18. From Ionescu, *Arhitectura '44-'69*, 7.

Fig. 19. From Ionescu, *Arhitectura '44-'69*, 136-137.

Part Three: The Modern

Socialism Through the Looking Glass:

the Use of Photography in *Arhitectura*

Photography and Socialism

In the late 1950s, the Romanian magazine *Arhitectura* initiated a series of editorial and graphic transformations aimed at a complete reformation of the publication's role and appearance. Simply put, the transformation can be characterized as an extraordinarily sudden rejection of the classicist tradition in favor of a modernist, and photographic, vocabulary, a change clearly expressed, for instance, in the cover pages that renounce their single decoration of an embossed composite capital in favor of colorful graphics and abstract photographic studies of rhythm and light (Figs 1, 2).[1] In this essay, I will study the ways in which *Arhitectura,* from 1959 to 1965, by a forceful metamorphosis of its most important features, contributed in essential ways to Romanian socialist architecture's sweeping realignment with the modernist ethos and aesthetic. What were the mechanisms and consequences – aesthetic and political – of *Arhitectura*'s embrace of modernist formalism in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, and more specifically, what role did photography play? If each medium invites certain kinds of communication while obstructing others, what was the message that came along with *Arhitectura*'s embrace of photography?

Arhitectura, the oldest and historically the most important architectural periodical in Romania, had served, since its first appearance in 1906, as the mouthpiece of successive official ideologies. Once a nationalist tribune for the pre-war Society of Romanian

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[1] The capital on the cover page had stood for many years as sole counterpart to the word "Arhitectura," thus establishing a striking visual synonymy between the fixity of the classical tradition and architecture itself. The elimination of the capital signals not only modernized techniques of representation, but also a reorientation of architectural culture from one that recognizes and proclaims tradition's authority to one that rejects tradition's influence over the foundation of form.

Architects, *Arhitectura* had accommodated, after the war, the many mutations of the visual culture of socialism, from the Stalinist socialist realism of the 1950s to the modernism of the 1960s, to the resurgence of nationalism in the 1970s.[2] Fully enlisted by the regime as the official architectural publication of the Union of Architects of the Socialist Republic of Romania, *Arhitectura* was assigned to report faithfully on the building practices under socialism, and as such could not but mirror in its pages the extraordinarily rapid shift, in the late 1950s, from the strained neo-classicism imposed throughout the Soviet Bloc after the war, to fully modernist typologies and idioms, such as large-scale urban developments, mass housing and standardization. After decades of setting the stylistic standards for socialist architecture in the USSR and in the rest of the Soviet Bloc, the Soviet Academy of Architecture was openly denounced in 1954, one year after Stalin's death, by Khrushchev, who accused it of "not [being] interested in costs per square meter of living space, but instead indulge themselves with unnecessary ornamentation of facades, and permit all manner of excesses." Romania followed closely the Soviet architectural turn, and opened wide the path to an architecture based on standard industrialized design, prefabricated components, large-block and large-panels construction systems.[3] The mutations in the pages of *Arhitectura* therefore correspond to a sea change in the actual production of architecture, of which the magazine was to be the indexical register. (Figs. 3, 4.)

Arhitectura's transformation, however, went beyond a passive recording of new Soviet models. As the quick example of the title pages suggests, new architectural forms corresponded, in the magazine, to a full change in medium: at the core of the magazine's

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[2] For an account of *Arhitectura's* involvment in the early 20th-century nationalist debates see Carmen Popescu, *Le style national roumain. Construire une nation a travers l'architecture, 1881-1945* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2004).

[3] Khrushchev's discourse, 1954, cited in Catherine Cooke, "Socialist Realist architecture," in Matthew Cullerne Bown and Brandon Taylor, eds., *Art of the Soviets. Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in a One-Party State, 1917-1992* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 103-104.

reformulation of itself during the early1960s lies the use of photography and its newly-found ascendancy over previous forms of description based on the written word and the hand drawing. In the same way in which architecture's migration towards modernism was based on the embrace of the industrialization of design and building processes, similarly, the magazine's insistence on mechanical reproduction corresponded to a shift in the definition of representation itself. In other words, photography, in *Arhitectura*, not only recorded the modernism of another medium, that of architecture, but fulfilled its own modernist impulse, by fully exploiting the logic of its own domain, and by claiming architecture as the material of its own autonomous visual order.

However, in an authoritarian socialist context in which photography was used as the medium of objectivity, neutrality, even passivity, coming across photographic formalism and abstraction is surprising. While in the West, photography's artistic claims had become, by the 1960s, widely accepted and as such, fully assimilated into mainstream culture,[4] Romania's artistic sphere, tightly controlled by the socialist state and structured according to the socialist realist doctrine, still considered photography as a transparent recording process, with no declared artistic ambitions.[5] Despite sharing photography's strong documentary aspirations and a desire to reach out as a medium of mass-communication, socialist realism (socialism's central aesthetic doctrine from the 1930s to the 1980s) expressed nevertheless "a profound skepticism about the cultural effects of photomechanical reproduction" and banned it from the realm of official art.[6]

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[4] See here John Szarkowski, *The Photographer's Eye* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966).

[5] Interestingly, at the end of the 1960s, one can find a few attempts to include photography within the aesthetic realm, by pasting them into larger paintings. Even then, photographs documenting real events were chosen precisely because of their documentary value, in the hope to bring the paintings closer to the "springs of reality." See Magda Cirneci, *Artele plastice in Romania, 1945-1989* (Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 2000), 102.

[6] Leah Dickerman, "Camera Obscura: Socialist Realism in the Shadow of Photography," *October* 93 (Summer 2000): 139-154. The author discusses socialist realism's deep ambivalence

Accordingly, in *Arhitectura*, replacing the handmade elevations and perspectives that accompanied the Palladianism of the 1950s with the mechanized reproduction of the massive building campaigns of the 1960s was not done for the sake of photography in itself, as *Arhitectura* certainly did not have a photographic agenda, but an architectural one.[7] It was the need to affirm the new interest in standard forms and economic building and to denounce stylistic concerns, which found a natural ally in a medium primarily valued, under socialism, for its anti-expressionist restraint. Moreover, photography was chosen also because it was much more apt in revealing the gigantic scale and radical nature of the architecture of the socialist city. Photographic formal strategies such as aerial views, vertiginous perspectives and suggestions of endlessness were essential in achieving a convincing ideological reading of architecture, such as the totality of socialist experience, its triumphant scale, its new, rational, and clear order. (Figures 5, 6, 7).

However, I suggest that a gap unexpectedly opened between the official assumptions about photography as a quiet amplification of the reader's experience of socialist architecture, and the eventual status of the photographic image within the magazine. In *Arhitectura*, the documenting enterprise went beyond, and slipped away from, photographic truthfulness to architecture, and assumed a new role and value: the relationship between project and its representation was transformed, and *Arhitectura*, with the help of photography, no longer merely recorded architecture, but became the very medium in which the meaning of a project was constituted and fully unfolded, laying open internal conflicts and dual readings.

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toward the photographic image: at once banned as an artistic practice in favor of a regressive pictorial idiom, photographic sources were nevertheless heavily and openly relied upon in the production of history paintings and portraits of Lenin.

[7] It is important to remark that the names of the photographers who worked for *Arhitectura* throughout the 1960s were never mentioned in the publication.

If photography of architecture remained, for a brief period, outside the strict canon through which the regime scripted the creation of all images, thus unwittingly providing a glimpse of the complicated and conflicted process of ideological production and control under socialism, it is precisely because of the presupposition that photography would merely expose with docility the qualities of a visual realm other than its own. Because these photographs were understood as a medium subordinated to the representation of buildings in the pages of the magazine, they escaped the "interpretative superstructure" borne by all visual production in socialist culture, thus achieving and maintaining an exceptional freedom at once in the formal language and in their political connotations. Because of their deemed lack of self-expression, photographs succeeded in expressing much more, revealing an intrinsic capacity to destabilize, to stress the fortuitous, to suggest that the reality represented is provisional,[8] eventually becoming the full-fledged emblem of the problematic condition of modernism under socialism.[9] In this way, façade close-ups and aerial views of new towns, meant to suggest the enlightened geometries of socialist planning, could slip, for instance, into expressions of disorientation and confusion; or the socialist imagery of the urban crowd would, in its photographic manifestation, emanate at once collectivity and a sense of alienation.

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[8] Many scholars have offered acute descriptions of the particular nature of the "photographic." I obtained many of my insights from Sigfried Kracauer, "Photography," in *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1960). Reproduced in Alan Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays on Photography* (Stony Creek, CT: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 245-268; and from Richard Bolton, ed., *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

[9] Leah Dickerman shows how, in the Soviet Union of the 1930s, the "semantically malleable" and thus uncontrollable nature of photography, threatened socialist control over the meaning of images, and was therefore countered by a re-monumentalizing and stabilizing of the photographic image through the use of painting. A similar reasoning can be extended to the photography of architecture in *Arhitectura*. There, indeed, the subject matter - the buildings themselves - seems to have stood as a sufficient guarantor for a stabilized, unfluctuating meaning.

It is true that *Arhitectura*, marked by a history of political volte-faces, seems to have functioned more as a pliable organ of ideology, rather than of resistance and subversion.[10] However, among the magazine's many incarnations, the photographic episode, while perhaps one of the most enthusiastic formal and thematic embraces of official architecture in the magazine's history, seems nevertheless to have elicited the deepest ambivalence about architecture's relationship to power, at once forcefully conveying socialist ideals and unsettling them. It turned out that the camera lens offered, as in Alice's story, a looking-glass view of socialist reality, perturbing its positive message while striving to represent it closely.

One last consideration concerns the methodological focus on the formal aspects of architectural photography. In the highly politicized context of socialism, it may indeed seem myopic to look for meaning primarily in the materiality of the object rather than in the social practices and relationships to power that underlie it. However, I argue that in the case of the magazine *Arhitectura*, the political significance of particular aesthetic practices emerges precisely from within the specificity of the medium, from its essential duality, and from its capacity to escape full semantic control. In other words, under socialism, formalism assumed multiple, contradictory, but nevertheless clear political connotations. Concentrating on the photographic medium also means shifting away from the photographic author, thus breaking free from the difficult quest of artistic agency and its various mediations of ideology under socialism, and from the frozen categories of dissidence and collaboration that paralyze many discussions of artistic practices under totalitarian regimes. Moreover, I suggest that not centering the meaning of these photographs around the biography of their authors fits better the nature of these images, which were not regarded by the magazine's editors as manifestations of artistic

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[10] Thus, for instance, before becoming a socialist publication, the *Arhitectura* of the 1920s and 1930s had professed a nationalist and anti-modernist agenda. See Popescu, 150.

authorship, since it is not until the 1970s that the opening credits mention the photographers' names.

Arhitectura's Transformations

The changes initiated in 1959 permeated and transfigured the entire publication, from its editorial content to the style of its layout. Throughout the 1950s, the tall and narrow proportions had constrained the layout of the page in two rigid columns, one of text and one of images, which in turn limited the size of the images. Relatively small hand-made images were vertically aligned across from the text they compliantly illustrated, and the pages thus organized according to a clear separation between text and image offered to the reader a predictable and repetitive rhythm, and a clear and didactic correspondence between the written description and its visual illustration. (Figures 3 and 8.)

This binary layout exploded in 1962, when the magazine went from a vertical to a horizontal format that gave way to quasi-square pages. Wide, rather than tall, pages, and a graphic composition that felt free to spill onto the opposite page allowed the introduction of larger illustrations and sprawling panoramic views, and more generally of a much wider range of sizes and proportions. The square format also opened the magazine to a more flexible, at times almost playful, relationship between text and image. Text and image ceased to neatly part in two equal halves along the axis of the page. Images come in many dimensions, in many positions, and no longer seemed to expose with docility what had been previously locked in writing. It is clear, when opening *Arhitectura* in the 1960s, that the reader is primarily invited to look, and then, perhaps, to read, in a clear reversal of the magazine's much more literary identity of the early 1950s. Indeed, it is the text that is now visually, and perhaps even semantically, secondary, filling the gaps in between the images.(Figs. 4, 9)

Not only the quantity and status of text is diminished, the content of the articles becomes noticeably more pragmatic, highlighting technical specifications and solutions, quantities of materials used, costs, structural choices, etc. Articles are usually written by the architects themselves, with the effect of further situating their content in the sphere of facts, and of eliminating the presence of opinion and analytical and critical content. A passage from *Arhitectura* in 1963 would typically read:

> "We reached the following conclusions: [in this project] we have reduced the execution time by 30% compared to other current building systems; we have reduced the use of wood by 35%; [...] we have significantly increased the degree of industrialization, shown by a 25%increase of productivity of labor; [...] we have reduced the cost of construction by 3%."[11]

At the same time, the dryness of the articles is contrasted by the increasingly dramatic use of photographs, which, in taking over the magazine by their number, dimensions, and vividness, form a resounding parallel voice.

In 1970, the format and the general appearance of the magazine change once more. (Fig. 10) The articles gain considerably more substance, breadth and analytical content, short historical inserts about 20th century major architects start to appear. While the photographs done in the 1960s remained anonymous, an official photographer (Gheorghe Dumitru) is now mentioned in the opening credits. However, paradoxically, while authorship gains recognition, the photographic language of *Arhitectura* has been visibly tamed into a much more formulaic use of the medium, which only shows glimpses of its previous audacity.

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[11] *Arhitectura* 3, 1963, p. 21

The Politics of Genealogy

Throughout the 1960s, the scattered and unpredictable distribution of titles, text and images, and the dizzying multiplication of photographic angles in the magazine's pages provoke an overall sense of fragmentation, echoing earlier Soviet posters and photomontages, which freely overlapped objects, textures, printed matter and surfaces, or of the photo-essays which filled magazines such as USSR in Construction in the 1920s and 1930s.[12] Indeed, in the Soviet Union, Constructivism had remained, 20 years after its demise, a vivid memory, especially in the field of architecture where, in 1954, the regime's shift in building priorities was defined primarily in terms of a positive revision of the legacies of the 1920s.[13] Many photographs inside Arhitectura rely in particular on the work of Rodchenko. His worm's eye, bird's eye, oblique and dynamic viewpoints, as well as the use of montage were discarded in the 1930s, as the tastes of the Soviet regime swung in favor of more accessible and linear photographic narratives. But these visual strategies migrated into the work of Weimar photographers such as Moholy-Nagy, progressively shedding their explicit political content and fully integrating the Western visual and cultural mainstream. By the time when, in the early 1960s, some of these photographic tactics, such as the soaring façade, or the oblique view from above, re-entered the iconography of socialist architecture, they had become commonplace in the visual vocabulary of advertisement in Western European magazines.[14] (Figs. 11, 12)

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[12] For a detailed account of the debate over the use of photography and photomontage in the 1930s in the magazine USSR in Construction, see Erika Maria Wolf, USSR in Construction: from Avant-Garde to Socialist Realist Practice (PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1999).

[13] In December 1954, at an All-Union Conference on building problems, Khrushchev declared: "The opposition to Constructivism should be conducted sensibly. [...] We can no longer put up with the fact that many architects, while hiding behind phrases about "combating Constructivism" ... are spending the nation's wealth recklessly." Cited in Cook, 104.

[14] Abigail Salomon-Godeau, "The Armed Vision Disarmed: Radical Formalism from Weapon to Style," in The Contest of Meaning, 1989.

However, establishing the visual genealogy of *Architectura's* photographs can be deceiving, as the signification of similar formal strategies was deeply altered by their new political, geographic, and historic context. Indeed, the magazine's many referents not only contradict each other, but also their usual connotations are reversed. Photographic formalism, which was by definition an insistence on the autonomy of the image, turned out to have political value in the Soviet world, since it constituted a departure from the official demand on art to carry social-political meaning and to satisfy "people's aspiration towards prevalent forms of life."[15] For instance, the soaring facades in *Arhitectura* are at once identical in their photographic technique with the ones that populate Western advertisements for curtain wall manufacturers, and completely foreign from them. While in the West, they had been divested of any revolutionary reference, and their abstraction fully domesticated, their resurgence within the pages of *Arhitectura* was bound to re-activate some of their original political aura, due to the fact that they were re-emerging in a post-war, authoritarian version of the same socialist context that had produced them in the first place, and from which they had been forcefully and definitively purged during the Stalinist cultural operations of the 1930s. In the socialist context of the early 1960s, even slight signs of graphic fracture in the pages of *Arhitectura*, moments in which the eye had to struggle to recover continuity and coherence, were all noticeable events, since the soviet world had long ago ruled against visual fragmentation and in favor of smooth and seamless portrayals of a conflict-free reality. Conversely, it would be equally problematic to situate *Arhitectura's* use of photography as a mere return to the Constructivist precedent: that would mean canceling out the many ruptures and displacements that separate the two photographic cultures, among which was the ongoing

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[15] Socialist realist slogan, quoted and translated in Aleksandar Flaker, "Presuppositions of Socialist Realism," in Hans Günther, ed., *The Culture of the Stalin Period* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1990), 102.

ban on early revolutionary aesthetic practices from the official history of socialism and from its visual rhetoric.

Thus, *Arhitectura*'s overlapping and contradictory referents translate into an ambiguous relationship with, on one hand, a contemporaneous apolitical, commercialized and spectacularized mode of viewing and, on the other, a historical, experimental and politically-rooted aesthetic discourse. The readers of *Arhitectura* were probably perceiving these two precedents at once. For them, the magazine's imagery referred to its popular contemporaneous career within the Western magazines that circulated in Romania in the 1960s and were consulted with much interest. As such, it offered a visible contrast with the state-sanctioned iconography of enthusiastic worker brigades and monuments that appeared in posters, exhibitions and newspapers, as well as in previous versions of *Arhitectura* itself, and which continued to dominate the fields of painting and sculpture for the decade to come. (Fig. 13) At the same time, an audience that was keenly aware of the rediscovery and positive reassessment of Constructivism in Khrushchev's Soviet Union, or that had been exposed to Romania's own lively culture of avant-garde magazines during the 1930s and 1940s, was well disposed to detect the affinity with an earlier, more radical use of the medium.[16]

Therefore, elements that could speak of artistic resistance inside *Arhitectura* remain fundamentally unresolved, because they drew their political substance from conflicted and paradoxical referents, at once Western and commercial, and Soviet and revolutionary, at once the assimilation of an original avant-garde meaning into the mainstream and its revitalization within a context of censorship and repression. In fact, the photographs' stylistic unorthodoxy endlessly oscillates between being a tactic of resistance and being a carrier of socialist ideology.

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[16] See Susan Emiy Reid, *Destalinization and Remodernization of Soviet Art: the Search for a Contemporary Realism, 1953-1963* (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1996).

Architecture, Close up, From Above, From Below

One ubiquitous formal device, the façade close-up, reveals *Arhitectura's* political and semantic fluidity. Perhaps the first observation is that the close-ups displace the use of elevation drawings, and offer themselves instead as a mechanically produced and enhanced version of the elevation. Indeed, hand-made elevations that often employed washes, atmospheric skies, and invoked a general sense of artistry, disappear, with very few exceptions, from the pages of *Arhitectura* (plans remain the only drawings) and are replaced with photographs meant to convey a more sober, more hygienic reality. (Figs. 14, 15) And yet, photographs of facades are more than substitutes, and instead function as a radical re-interpretation of the architectural elevation and of its traditional characteristics.

To start with, the practices of extreme close-ups, worm's eye views and diagonal compositions prevent the recovery of the frontal position, and suppress the horizon. (Figs. 10, 16-18) The close-ups carefully avoid a central point of view: angles are skewed and sharp, forcefully introducing perspective inside an essentially flat mode of representation. The sharp angles cancel out another fundamental role of the elevation, that of representing the building as a cohesive totality. The photographs thus contradict the expectation of stable geometries and confined surfaces with their tilted and seemingly boundless views. The boundaries imposed by the photographic frame rarely correspond to the edges of the buildings, and instead are cropped abruptly, cutting, so to speak, within the buildings' flesh. Because it interrupts the building and suspends our perception of the actual margin, the photographic framing appears accidental, arbitrary, and results in images that are perceived as fragments rather than a totality.[17]

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[17] Rosalyn Krauss, "Grids," in *The Originality of Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996).

Paradoxically, cropping provides the viewer with a sense of expansion, as if one had an active and potent, rather than immobile entity before his eyes.

Sharp angles also prevent the façade from functioning as a surface, obliterating the windows either by sinking them deep into the façade or by making them disappear either behind soaring balconies or in the shadow of the *brise-soleil*. The photographs emphasize relief, recess, sculptural presence and a palpitating third dimension, denying any reading of the façade as flat skin. The tectonic quality of these facades is so powerful that it is easy to forget that they are, in fact, composed of windows, at a time when the representation of windows was an important piece in the repertoire of metaphors employed by socialist realism.

A ubiquitous device of socialist iconography, the painted window is unique, generously open, allowing the interior, and Stalin, to be bathed in light. (Fig. 19) Light – overabundant, sunny, heavenly – held a fundamental allegorical place in portraying a socialist ecstatic condition. In terms of political meaning, it functioned as the visual equivalent of the projected utopia of the Five Year Plans.[18] The window also stood for progress, for a transition without obstacles between the interior – the project, the idea, the model – and the exterior luminous reality. It is a doubly symbolic window, with its loud message of a bright future within reach, and its reference to the traditional modes of representations in which paintings function as windows on the world. On the other hand, the photographed window is multiple, endlessly repeated, and functions as point of darkness rather than source of light. (Fig. 20) In most photographed façades in *Arhitectura*, light is reflected, fixed, signified not by the windows but by elements cast in concrete (balconies, for instance), thus reversing the usual distribution of dark (walls) and

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[18] Wolfgang Holz, "Allegory and iconography in Socialit Realist painting," in Matthew Culleme Bown and Brandon Taylor, eds., *Art of the Soviets: Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in a One-Party State, 1917-1992* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993: 76).

light (windows). The windows pierce the façade, giving it texture and contrast, but are never inhabited. They are not in the process of being experienced, and instead are formulated as abstract patterns.

The unusual condition of these photographs is striking: in a cultural context in which artistic manner was bound by academic technique and highly controlled, they introduced the indeterminacy of the accident through cropping. Unlike socialist realism, which promoted pictorial expressions of harmony, unity and cohesion, they introduce fragmentation. They transgressed forms of representation over-determined by symbols and metaphors by instead suggesting spatial instability, disorientation, and uncertainty of scales. And finally, in a visual environment centered on heroic imagery, they exclude signs of subjectivity and the human figure. Thus, the photograph's refusal to define windows as experiential, see-through or even reflecting devices corresponds, with almost literal precision, to one of the fundamental definitions of abstraction in the 20th century art as the moment when perception of depth is blocked, and when narrative is repressed.

If abstraction, in *Arhitectura*, results from the breaking down of the representational rules of socialist realism, this did not mean that all representation was banned. On the contrary, a relentless photographic effort aspires to represent a world infused with geometrical order, which animates the entire focal range of the camera, and includes the whole spectrum of possible relationships between the viewer and the building, from the close-up to the aerial views. (Figs. 21-25) Through photography, socialist architecture, from the design of facade elements to urban planning, appears to be constituted of reiterations, repetitions, endless recurrences, unfailing regularities, and seriality, thus fulfilling another emblematic modernist theme, the painted grid.[19] As Krauss points out,

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[19] Krauss' essay established the use of grids as one of the most characteristic modernist ambitions, by their capacity to announce "modern art's will to silence, its hostility to literature, narrative, discourse." The grid situates images into the realm of pure visuality and defends them against the intrusion of speech.

grids seem to declare their modernity not only visually, but also temporally: it is a form that is confined to the art of the 20th century. Similarly, the network of lines that structure so powerfully some of *Arhitectura's* photographs function very much within the analytical model established by Krauss; that is, they at once prevent narration and surreptitiously tell the story not only of their own modernism, but also that of their socialist circumstances.

The grid can thus appear as subverting the visual world of socialist realism and as challenge to the outlawing of modernism under socialism. The grid's significance can however also function in reverse: it may turn out to speak not of Western avant-garde, but of authoritarian rule over the natural world and of a world entirely generated by the state planning apparatus. The cropping techniques, the soaring heights and aerial views may threaten orientation, but they also resonate positively with the socialist visual discourse: photography's tendency to suggest endlessness could also be seen as suggesting socialism's monopoly over consciousness and knowledge of the world or, more generally, as a new form of monumentality invested with the power of the totalitarian state, as building campaigns sweepingly take over the Romanian landscape.

Another example of ideology's unsteady control of photography is the representation of the crowd in the numerous shots of public plazas taken from above. (Fig 4) The obvious function of these photographs is to document the scale of the urban experience, and the craftsmanship involved in the execution of the paving mosaic; but the triumphant representation of architecture threatens, at anytime, to collapse into the melancholy always close at hand in the photographic vision.[20] The human figures in the image, black

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[20] Some of the images in *Arhitectura* could have easily been the object of the following description: "A recurrent film sequence runs as follows: the melancholy character is seen strolling about aimlessly; as he proceeds, his changing surroundings take shape in the form of numerous juxtaposed shots of house facades, neon lights, stray passers-by, and the like. It is

blurry spots on the intricate mosaic, are clearly secondary to the decorative pattern under their feet, and, by disrupting its order, point to the paradox of the crowd within representations of socialist reality. Crowds were essential icons for an ideology based on the notion of a unified, collective subjectivity; instead, the passers-by are indistinct, transitory, anonymous, without any aim in sight, unstaged.

The photographic representation of the crowd was often seen, indeed, as being fraught with ambiguity. The photographic record's intrinsic affinity for the accidental and the indeterminate, threatened to expose the unscripted, "uncontrollable expressivity of the human body caught in motion,"[21] or to provoke an encounter with "the modern look of distraction" in the attitude of the crowd, instead of the required collective attention and enthusiasm.[22] The passers-by photographed from above have a similar potential to annihilate the subject and its social reality, as they pose their unorganized and diffuse photographic silhouettes against socialism's certainties about a unified proletarian and collective mind.

These photographs of the crowd are also dramatically different from established iconographies of socialism. The representation of people in motion was a common trope, used as an allegory of progress, as "marching forward," and for the purpose of which "the Socialist Realist painter portrays people making steps or marching towards a point outside the picture, where the viewer is located."[23] The photograph seems to follow a similar visual tactic, that of a diagonally dynamic structure that "impl[ies] movement upwards and forwards."[24] But instead, the walkers are caught at random moments, the

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inevitable that the audience should trace their seemingly unmotivated emergence to his dejection and the alienation in its wake. Kracauer, 261.

[21] Ibid., 264-65.

[22] Dickerman, 153.

[23] Holz, 74.

[24] Ibid.

aim of their motion is unknown, and they seem to obey different, irreconcilable and obscure impulses as they fleetingly cross the empty plaza. It is not the anonymity of these moving people that is most disturbing of the socialist visual paradigm; after all, the abundant imagery of the New Socialist Man (or Woman) never intended to portray individuality and personal traits, but rather a standardized, heroic, socialist type. What is unsettling about these bodies in motion is how their indistinctiveness resists all kinship with the image of the worker, who was always seen as either bent in labor, or in close-ups destined to reveal the archetypal features of determination and the physiognomy of heroic toil.

Photographing versus Painting the City

There are, nevertheless, instances in which it seems as if photography, despite, or precisely because of all its modernist and western affinities, was embedded deeper inside the new ideology of collectivism, and triggered more political awareness than official imagery itself. There was, throughout the 1960s, an ongoing competition between painting and photography for the representation of buildings. *Arta Plastica*, the official magazine of the Union of Romanian Artists, and *Arhitectura's* equivalent for the visual arts, harbored during that decade an astonishing number of works on the theme of new buildings and building sites, in a variety of media, from oil on canvas to linocuts. (Figs. 26-31) The enthusiasm for painting, drawing, printing, photographing architecture speaks of a wide awareness of the inherent pictorial, or even sublime, qualities of the mass-housing projects that were transforming the city – an awareness in striking contrast with our present-day dismissal of those same buildings as grey and anonymous.

At first glance, it is painting that seems to embody most perfectly the socialist artistic ideology: men engaged in physical labor tell us of the promise of a new city growing out of their collective effort, of which the tower stands as symbol. (Fig 32) Also at first

glance, the photograph of the same architectural ensemble of Bucharest seems to be just another of the stock-in-trade images of a generic European postwar modernism, with no articulated political meaning. (Fig. 33) However, this last comparison shows how the second outdoes the first in terms of ideological persuasion and how the pictorial image falls short of the irradiating power of the photograph.

In the painting, the buildings are at once displayed and hidden, with trees acting as a screen. Architecture is at once the main subject and a repressed background. There is a persistent effort to tame the imposing blocks and to naturalize and to pictorialize them, by superimposing vividly colored trees over the gray, abstract grids of their facades. Trees force the architecture back into the natural realm, as if the continuous strips of windows were unsightly in their monotony. Despite the title, "Construction site," the representation of labor occupies only a low narrow strip of the canvas, and is done in an extremely sketchy way, especially in comparison with the lavish impastos of the sky, the trees, and the buildings themselves. The articulation of the workers has a tentative, unfinished quality to it: they are faceless, and their angular bodies offer only a caricature of movement. The labor performed also seems strangely dissociated from the buildings; there are no cranes, no scaffoldings, no bricks or concrete, suggesting that the workers' efforts are not directly related to the architecture in the background. In fact, given the contemporary discourse on the necessity for rapid industrialization of constructions, on the maximization of productivity, and on the need to provide housing for the working force, the painting seems strangely discordant, almost dysfunctional: labor is portrayed as primarily manual and done in small, uncoordinated groups; the housing blocks that stand behind the workers seem not only out of their reach, but also to constrain their space.

That the meaning of these buildings was never fully conquered, that this type of architecture was ambivalent and oscillating, is shown in the way in which the controlled message of this painting was overcompensated by details such as the red flags on the

roofs. Such flags are most probably fictitious, because of their odd scale and position in the painting, and are clearly added in order to maintain the buildings within the category of socialist objects, showing fear to lose control on the construction of their meaning and history. Their precarious status is further underlined by how shallow the space assigned to them is, squeezed in between the foreground and the old city.

The photographs, on the other hand, establish a different interpretative structure, and different narrative of the life in the city during socialist times. (Figs. 33-35) They have a radically different take on the scale, rhythm, and overall effect of the architecture. While the painting flattens out the succession of buildings, the photograph emphasizes angularity and diagonal lines. Within the pages of the magazine, many other angles and perspectives complement this photograph, which should be understood as part of a montage of various perspectives, an adding up of different perceptions that amplifies each of them, and gives their succession an almost dizzying effect.

The academic use of symmetry in the painting is avoided and subverted in the photographic record and, again, emphasis is placed on severe perspectives, cropping and abrupt close-ups. Understood as a series, the photographic image expresses the magnitude of the architectural operation rather than its encounter with the human body and with nature. Instead, such encounters are eliminated, and the architecture rules over a world of its own. Socialist architecture is continuous, and the message is that of encirclement, of a forceful taking over of the urban landscape. While the painting could not transform the monotony of this architecture into a dramatic event, photography, on the other hand, revels in it, and animates it. Paradoxically, while the painting has human activity as subject matter, it is the photographs of immobile objects, through their accelerated viewpoints, that give a better sense of movement and transformation.

A strong appeal to abstraction is at work here as well: abstraction in a visual, grid-like sense of emphasis on light and shadow and lucid, repetitive geometric patterns. But

abstraction takes over in a more literal sense as well, that of a withdrawal from the worldly aspects of a city, from the human figure, and from the mutable meaning of the crowds. However, an equally strong, if not stronger sense of collectivity emerges from these photographs; they provide a convincing setting for a bright, orderly and strongly communal urban existence. We are prevented from seeing the buildings as single, autonomous monolithic blocks (as they are in the painting); instead, the insistence on the endless rows of windows speaks to the viewer of a multitude of systematically organized lives, of a rapt experience of order. The very dynamic viewpoints give the spectator an impression of the future, of the presence of a strong and appealing urban vision. Ideology is apparent, compelling, and by constructing a photographic utopia, induces desire for a world entirely arranged by a single, regular, logical power .

I have tried to show how the doubly liminal circumstances of photography inside socialism – at once on the margins of the artistic sphere and of the architectural object – made the medium into an ideal terrain – better, in fact, than architecture itself – to observe the matrix of ambivalence in which modernism was cast under socialism, and to challenge the binary notions of resistance and collaboration that often corset most discussions about this material. In fact, photography inside *Arhitectura* showed a peculiar capacity to inhabit at once different political categories, or to mutate from one to another with such fluidity that the common essentializing of political dynamics into dichotomies of collaboration/dissent becomes impossible. The photographic shift in the representation of architecture did replicate the hegemonic logic of the society in which the architecture developed, but at the same time carried the potential to trouble, derail, and even reverse official political agendas. Finally, the socialist context also showed that the formalism of the photographic language constitutes at all times a form of participation in the political.

ARHITECTURA
RPR

9
1954
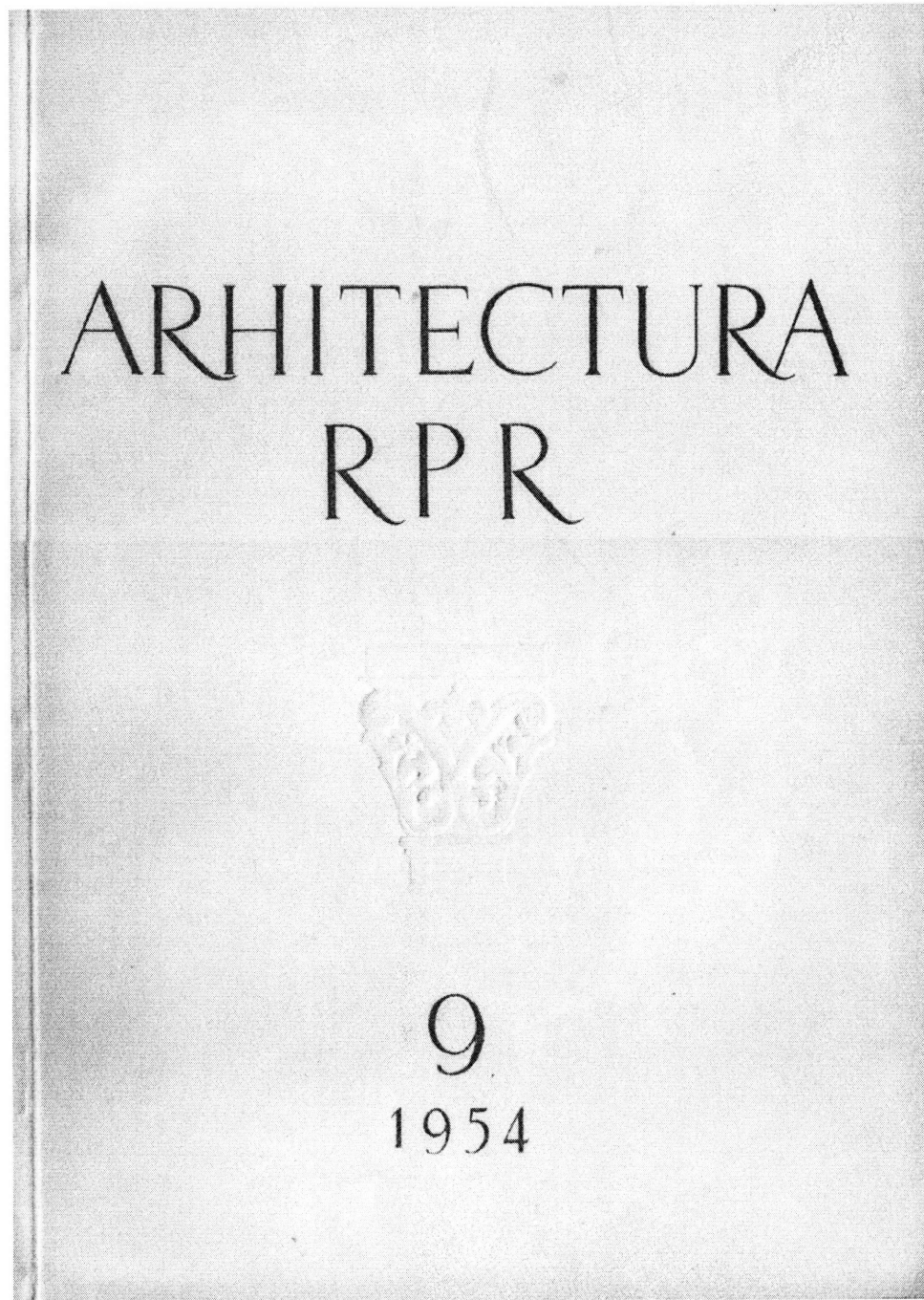
Fig. 1. *Arhitectura RPR* 9 (1954): cover page.
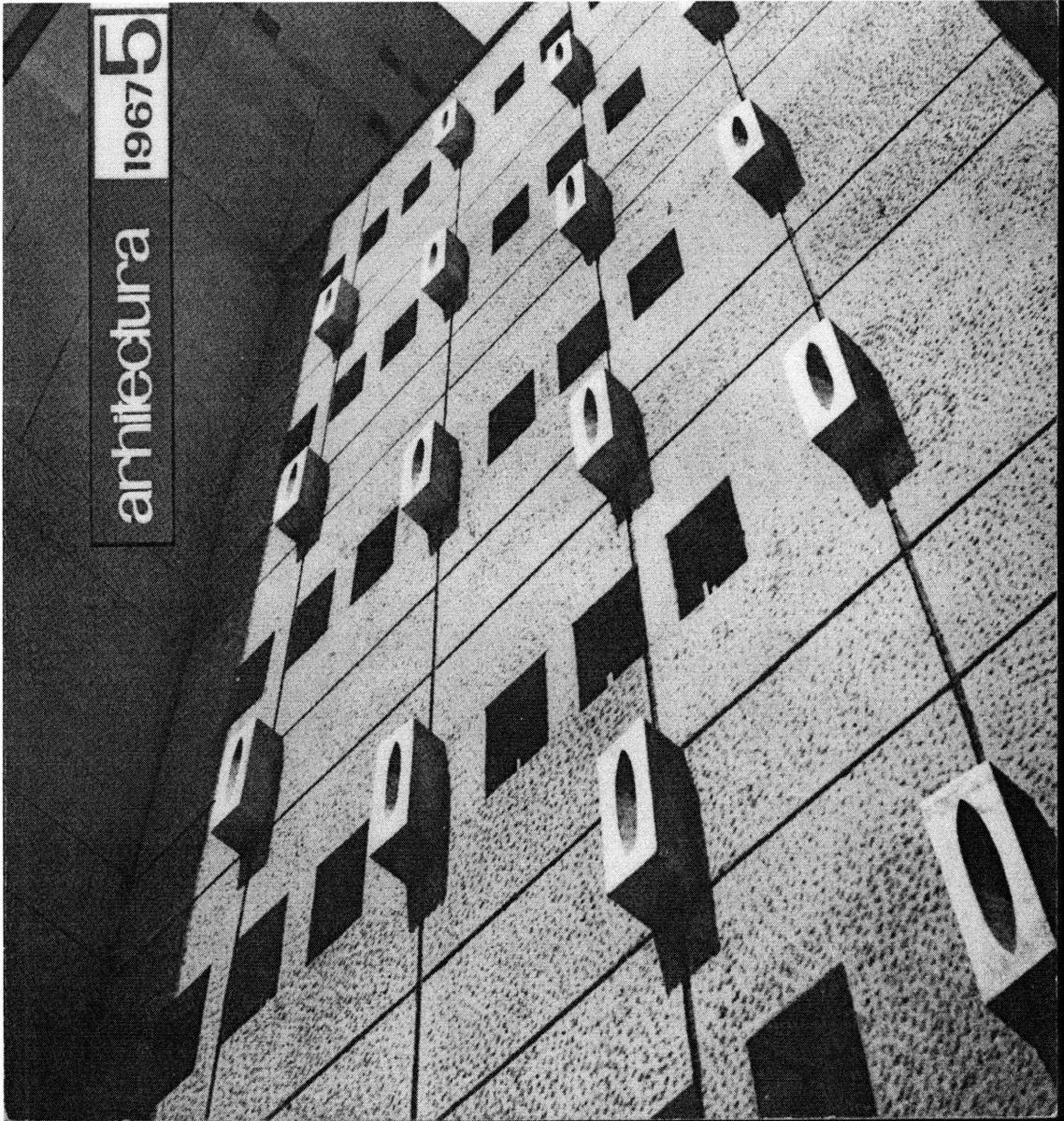
Fig. 2. *Arhitectura* 5 (1967): cover page.

Fig. 3. *Arhitectura* 6 (1954): 30.
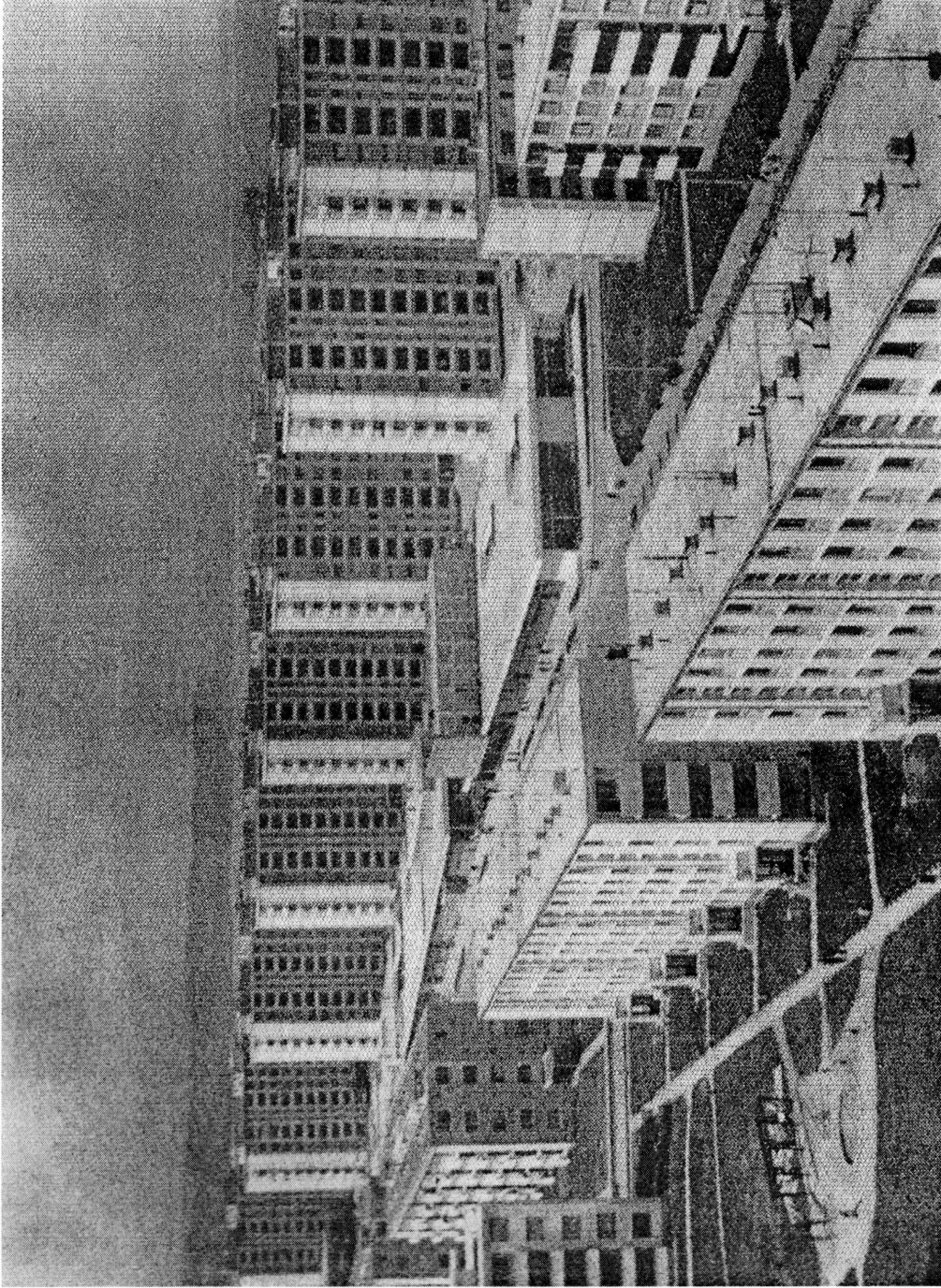
Figure 4. *Arhitectura* 4 (1963): 22-23.
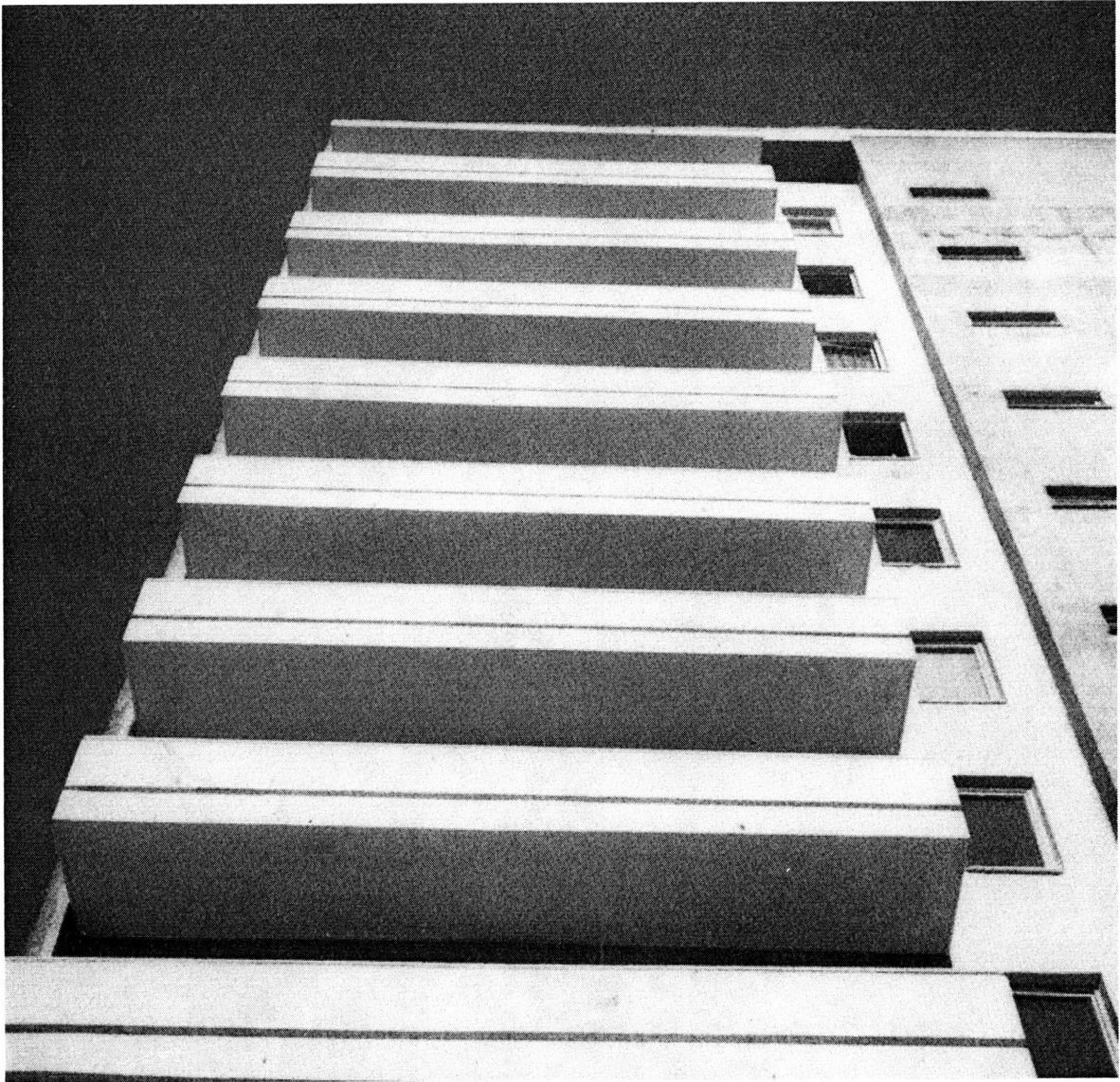
Fig. 5. *Arhitectura* 1 (1966): 20.

Fig. 6. *Arhitectura* 1 (1963): 36.

Fig. 7. *Arhitectura* 1 (1966): 4.

CINEMATOGRAFUL « ÎNFRĂȚIREA ÎNTRE POPOARE »

(autori arh. D. Bazalu, arh. N. Porumbescu,
arh. Tr. Stănescu)

Vizionarea filmelor artistice și documentare în săli confortabile și just repartizate în cadrul orașelor noastre este necesară pentru ridicarea nivelului cultural al oamenilor muncii.

Raioanele din N—V Capitalei, cu o populație muncitorească numeroasă, resimt de multă vreme lipsa unor astfel de dotări.

Hotărîrea partidului și a guvernului de a construi în raionul Grivița Roșie un cinematograf modern, de tip nou, are tocmai acest obiectiv — satisfacerea nevoilor culturale ale maselor muncitoare.

Mulți s-au îndoit de justețea acestui amplasament, considerînd cinematograful prea mare pentru populația cartierului, iar prin faptul că este plasat departe de centrul orașului, că el nu va putea funcționa în mod rentabil. Practica a infirmat aceste ipoteze, actualmente cinematograful « Înfrățirea între popoare » funcționînd cu săli pline și fiind într-adevăr util atît populației muncitoare din raionul Grivița Roșie, cît și Capitalei noastre.

Din punct de vedere al dezvoltării viitoare a cartierului, cadrul arhitectural necesar acestei clădiri monumentale se va putea realiza rapid și cu ușurință prin ansambluri de locuințe ale căror volume și plastică vor fi rezolvate în armonie cu plastica și silueta cinematografului ce va forma centrul acestei compoziții. În urma Hotărîrilor plenarei lărgite a C.C. al P.M.R. din august 1953, realizarea acestui ansamblu de locuințe va începe chiar în campania de construcții a anului acestuia.

Justă este, de asemenea, și așezarea clădirii față de una din importantele artere de acces în București, Bulevardul Bucureștii Noi; cinematograful va forma — mai ales prin dezvoltarea viitoare a cadrului său — un important nod arhitectural în plastica generală a acestei magistrale.

Programul adoptat este cu totul nou pentru țara noastră. În dorința de a realiza un edificiu cultural mai complex, proiectanții s-au orientat după un tip de cinema-club construit ca atare în U.R.S.S. și asemănător celui construit la Moscova, în 1952, după proiectul arhitectului Cealtikian.

Rezolvat pe două niveluri, el cuprinde la parter vestibulul cu casa de bilete, apoi foaierul cu o mică scenă pentru spectacole de estradă. Pe laturi sînt galeriile destinate bufetului-fumoar și o sală de lectură. La capătul acestor galerii sînt scările principale ce duc la sala de spectacol, situată la nivelul superior, avînd o capacitate de 800 locuri.

La baza concepției acestui tip nou de program stă grija deosebită pentru om. Pe lîngă aspectul exterior și interior care trebuie să reflecte bucuria de viață a oamenilor ce prin muncă își făuresc prezentul și viitorul lor fericit, grija pentru om se manifestă și prin crearea unei ambianțe plăcute pentru cei ce așteaptă rîndul la vizionarea filmului, oferindu-li-se săli și degajamente încăpătoare, bufete, săli de lectură, precum și spectacole de estradă.
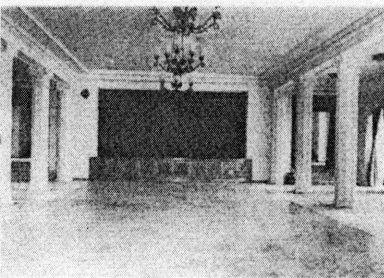
Privită din exterior, clădirea se afirmă prin silueta și volumele sale, echilibrată, senină și fermă. Monumenta-
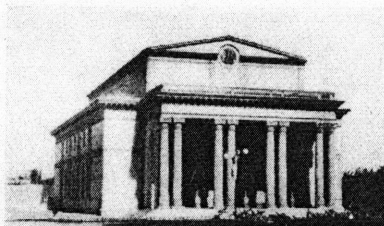
Cinematograful « Înfrățirea între popoare »
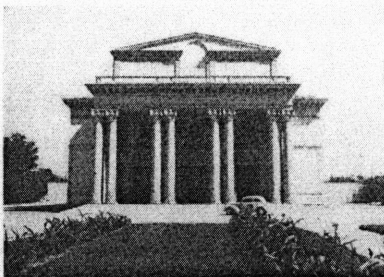
Fațada principală

Foaierul pentru spectacole de estradă

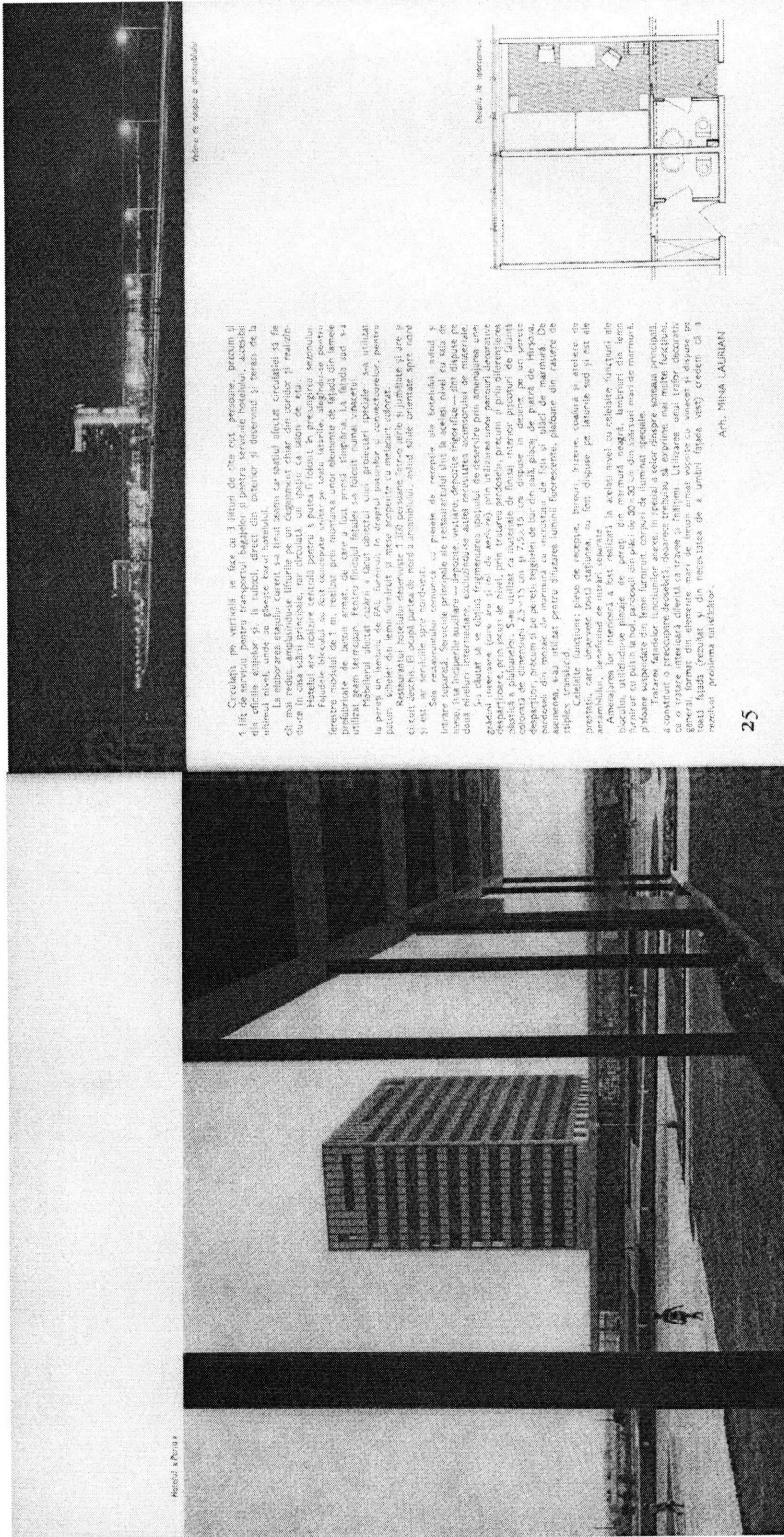
Detaliu foaier

7

Fig. 8. *Arhitectura RPR* 3 (1954): 7.

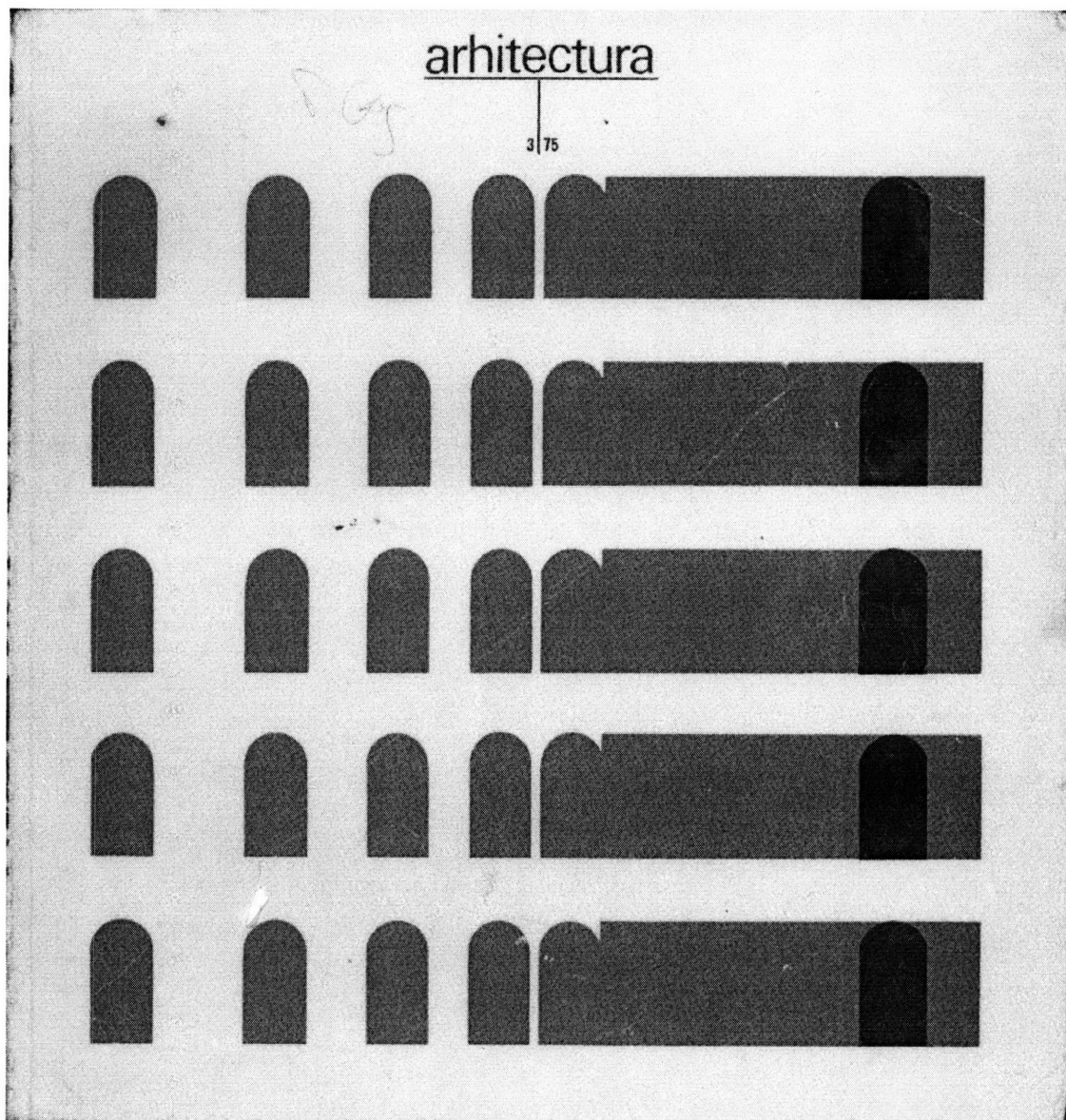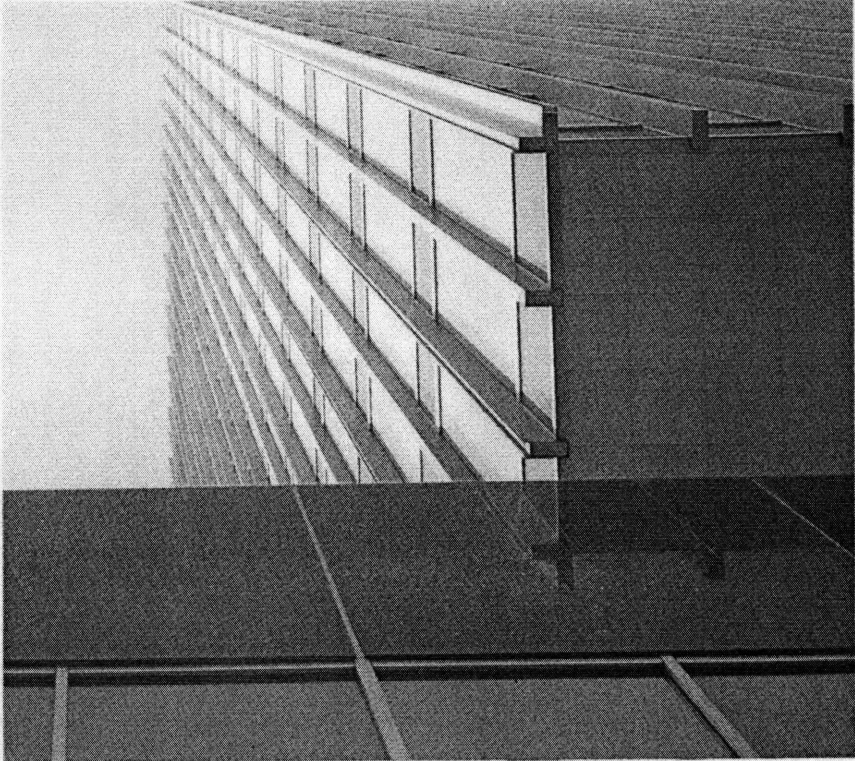Fig. 9. *Arhitectura* 9 (1963): 24-25.

Fig. 10. *Arhitectura* 3 (1975): cover page.

Fig. 11. *Arhitectura* 1 (1966): 32.

External hangers clad in stainless steel

Hearts of Oak House, Euston Road, London, has a podium of three floors and a suspended tower block of twelve floors, overhanging the public way on the east side. The building is unusual in that the hangers are outside the enclosing envelope in order to obtain the maximum usable office space.

A prominent feature is the cladding of the hangers in satin-finished stainless steel (316 quality), shaped to form vertical tracks for a maintenance cradle. The intermediate mullions, serving as air conditioning ducts, are also clad in stainless steel.

Clients: Hearts of Oak Benefit Society. Architects: Sidney Kaye, Eric Firmin & Partners. Main Contractors: F. G. Minter Limited in association with Trollope & Colls Limited. Stainless Steel Fabricators: Crittall-Hope Limited.

British Steel Corporation · SPECIAL STEELS DIVISION
ALLOY AND STAINLESS STEELS WORKS GROUP
Stocksbridge Works · Sheffield S30 5JA

Fig. 12. *Architectural Review* (October 1972).

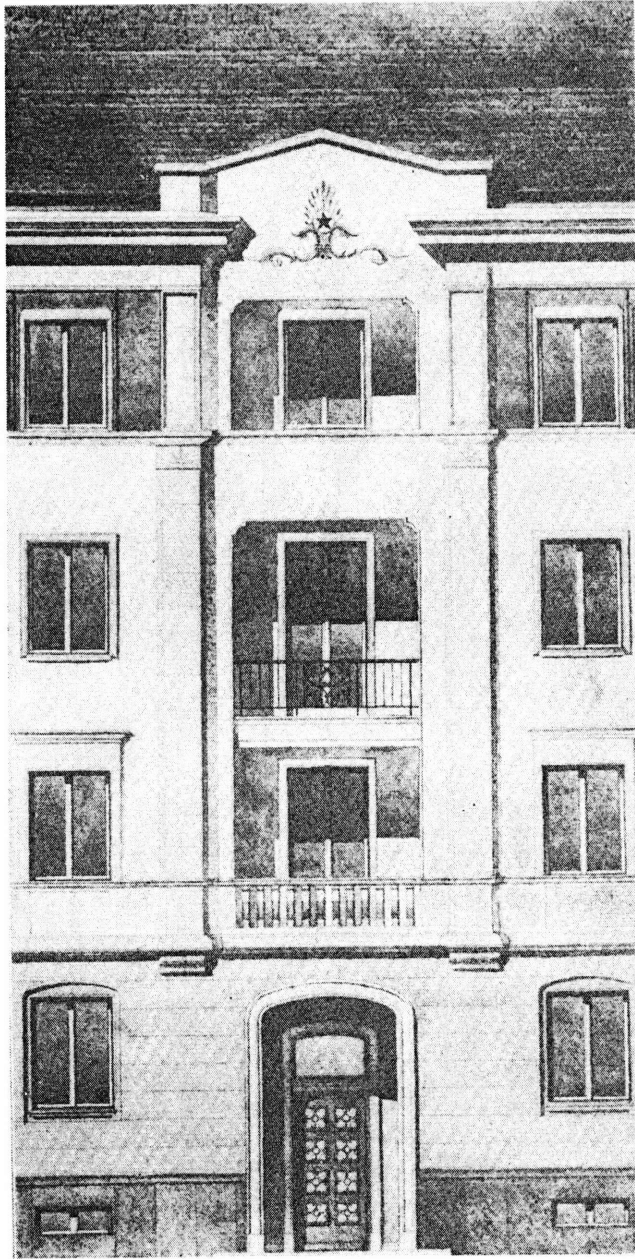Fig. 13. Lenin Monument, Bucharest, 1960. *Arhitectura* 3 (1960).
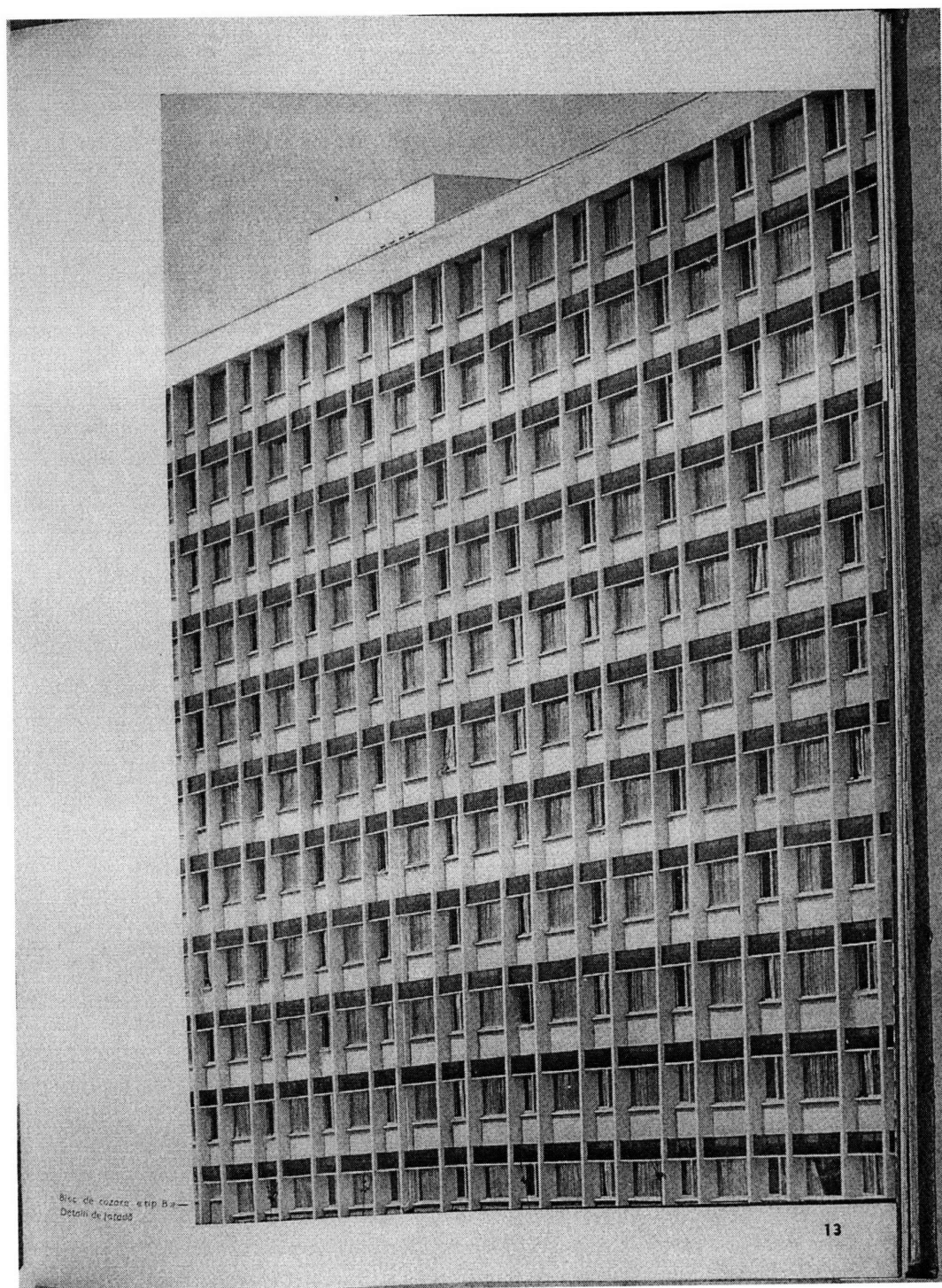
Fig. 14. Hand-drawn elevation. *Arhitectura* 9 (1954), 24.

Fig. 15. *Arhitectura* 3 (1961): 13.
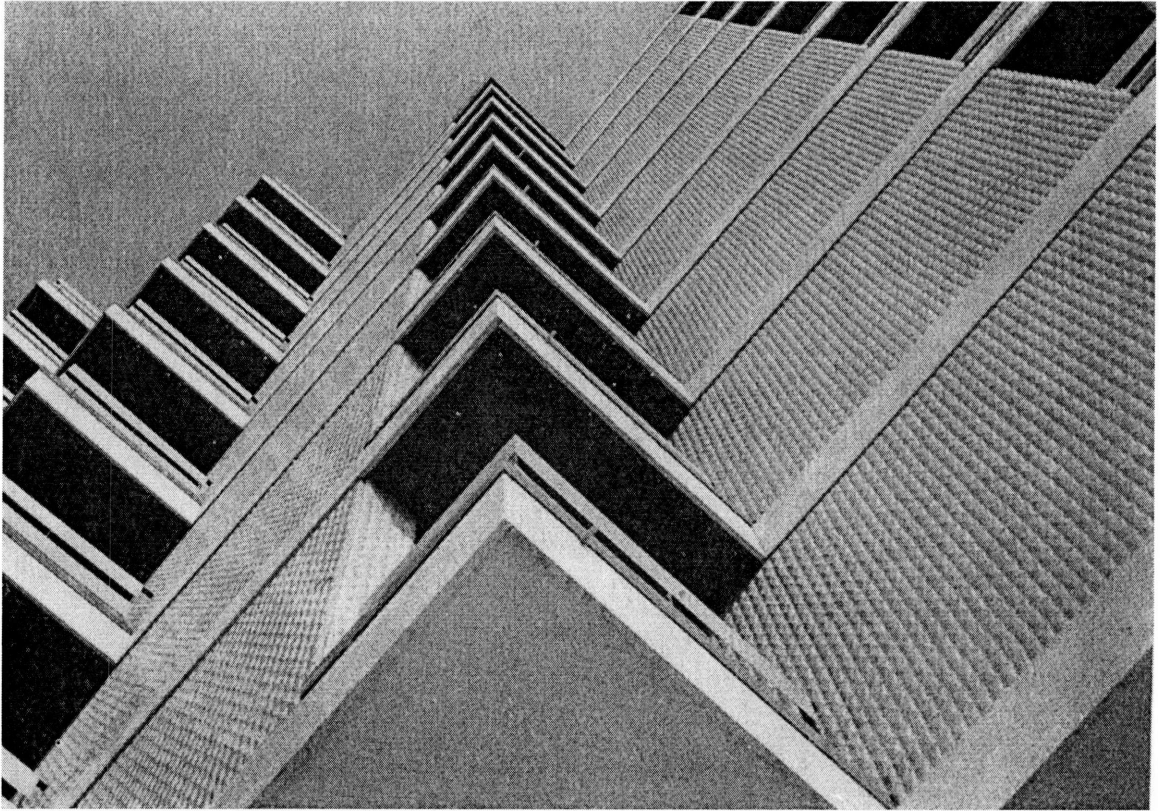
Fig. 16. *Arhitectura* 4, 1960: 12.

Fig. 17. Façade detail. *Arhitectura* 4 (1966): 34

Fig. 18. Façade detail. *Arhitectura* 4 (1966): 40.

Fig. 19. Stefan Szonyi, *I.V. Stalin*, 1954, oil on canvas, 3,2x2,3 m. National Art Museum of Romania. From Ministerul culturii, *Muzeul de arta al RPR: Galeria nationala*, fig. 6.

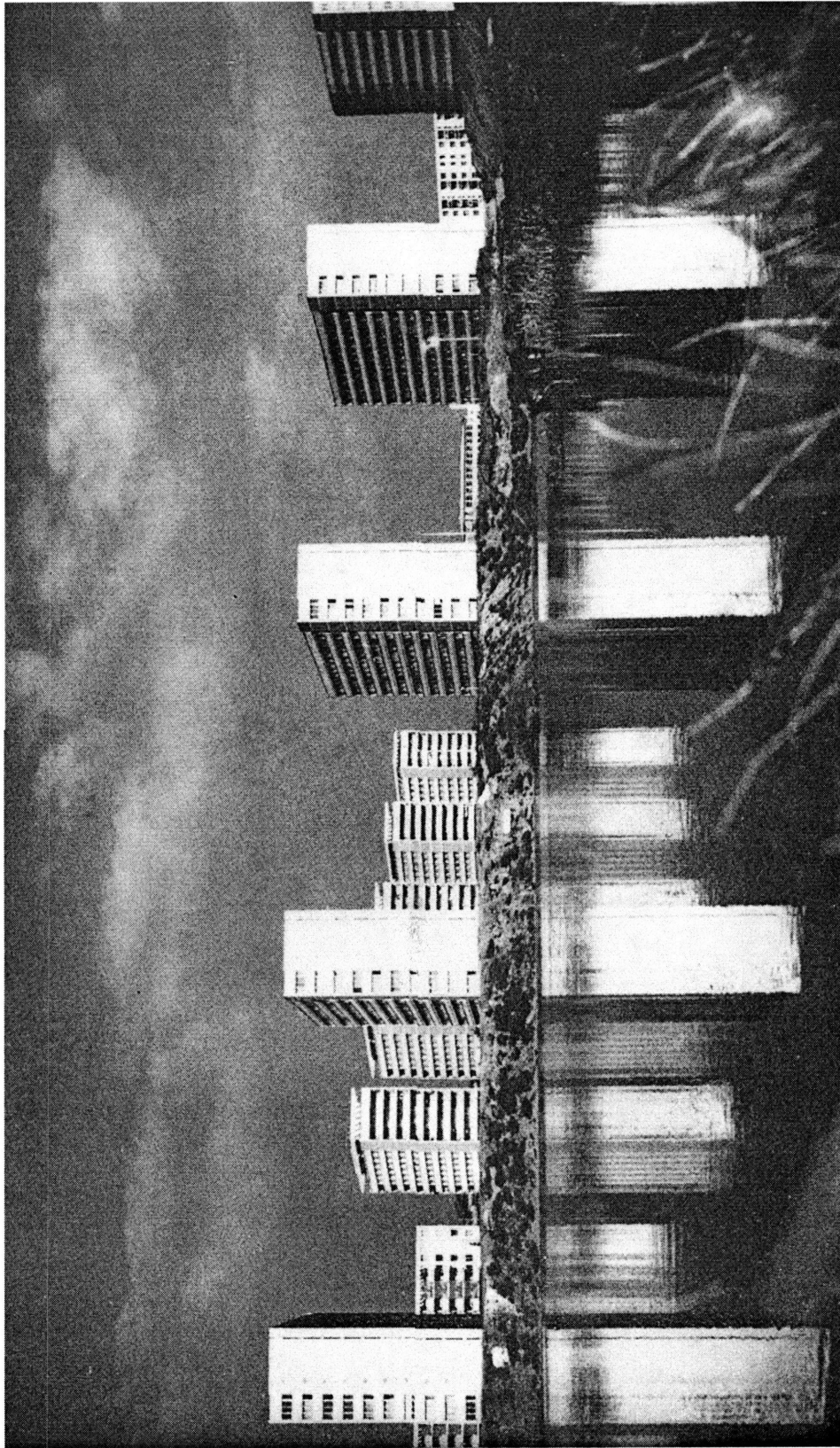Fig. 20. *Arhitectura* 4 (1960): 36.
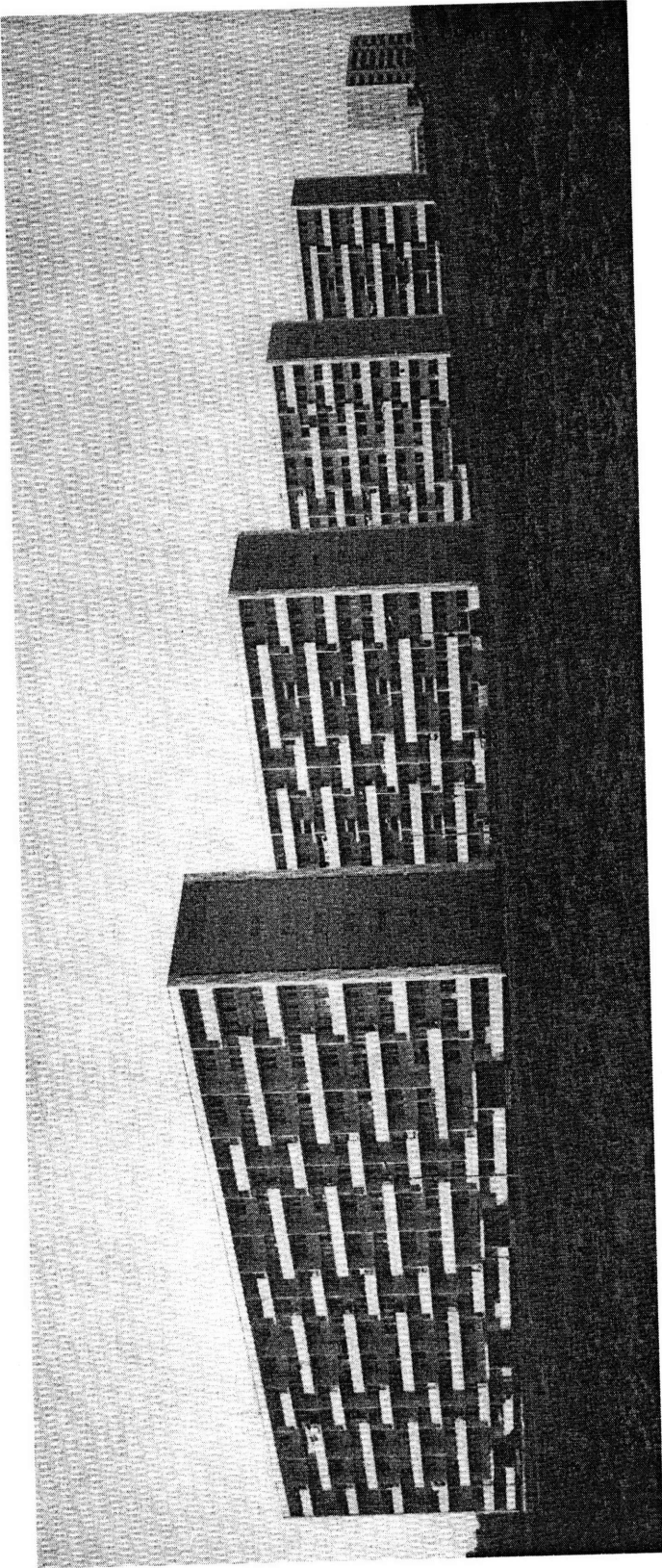
Fig. 21. *Arhitectura* 4 (1963): 34.
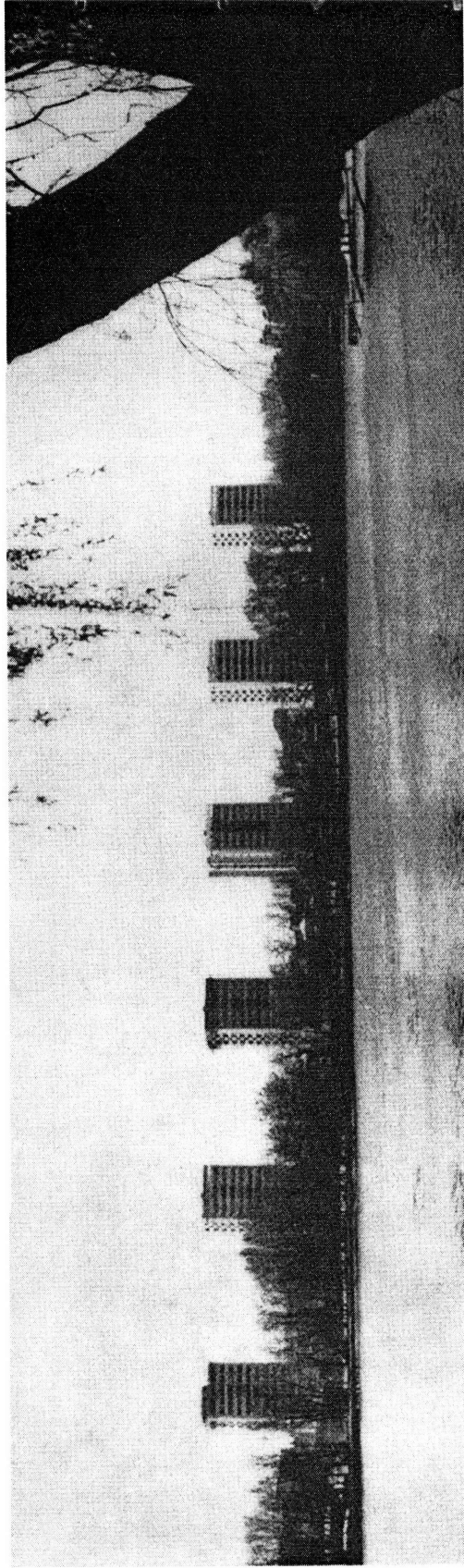
Fig. 22. *Arhitectura* 4 (1966): 31.
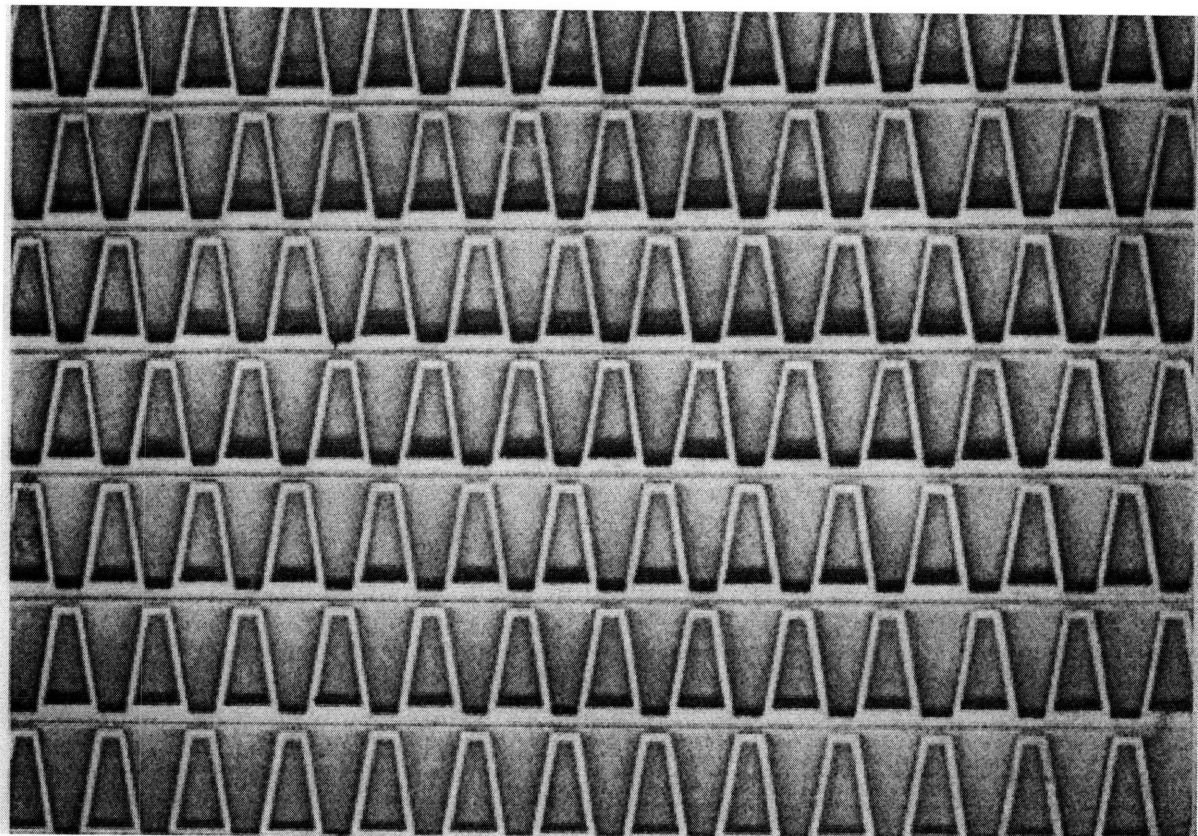
Fig. 23. *Arhitectura* 3 (1963): 20.

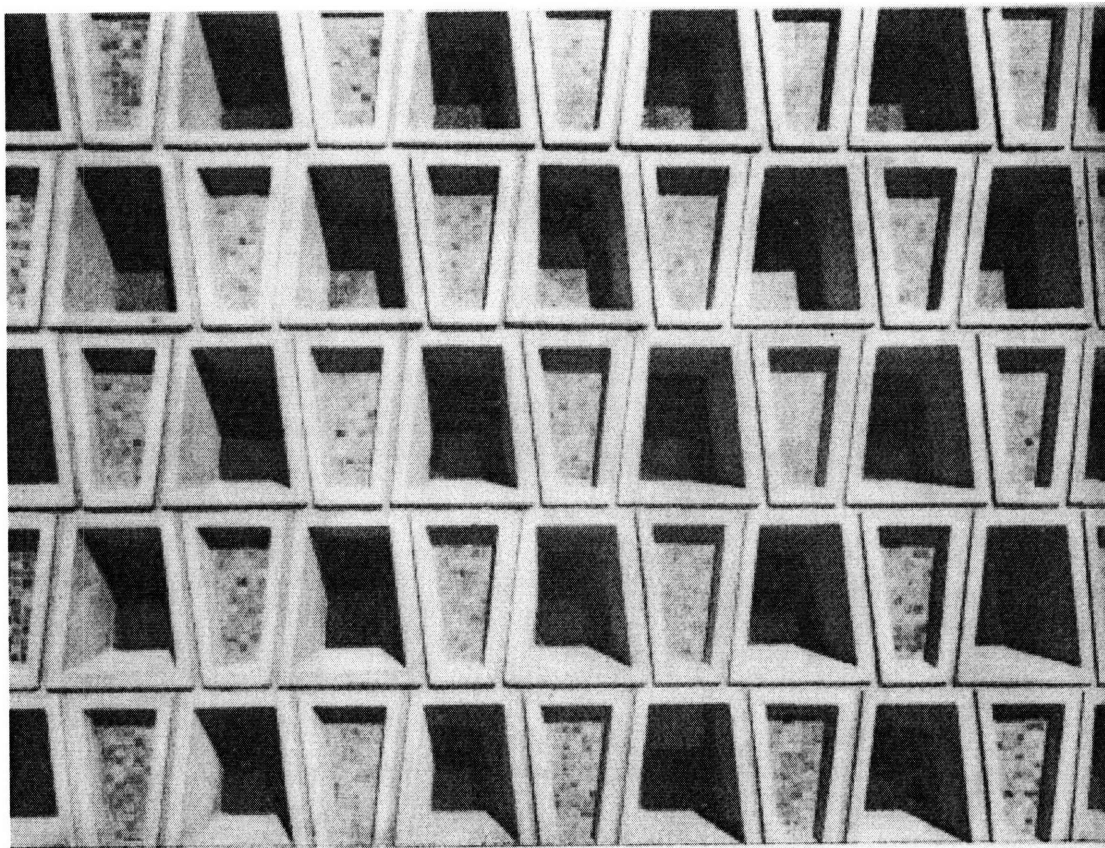Fig. 24. Façade detail. *Arhitectura* 3 (1960): 28.
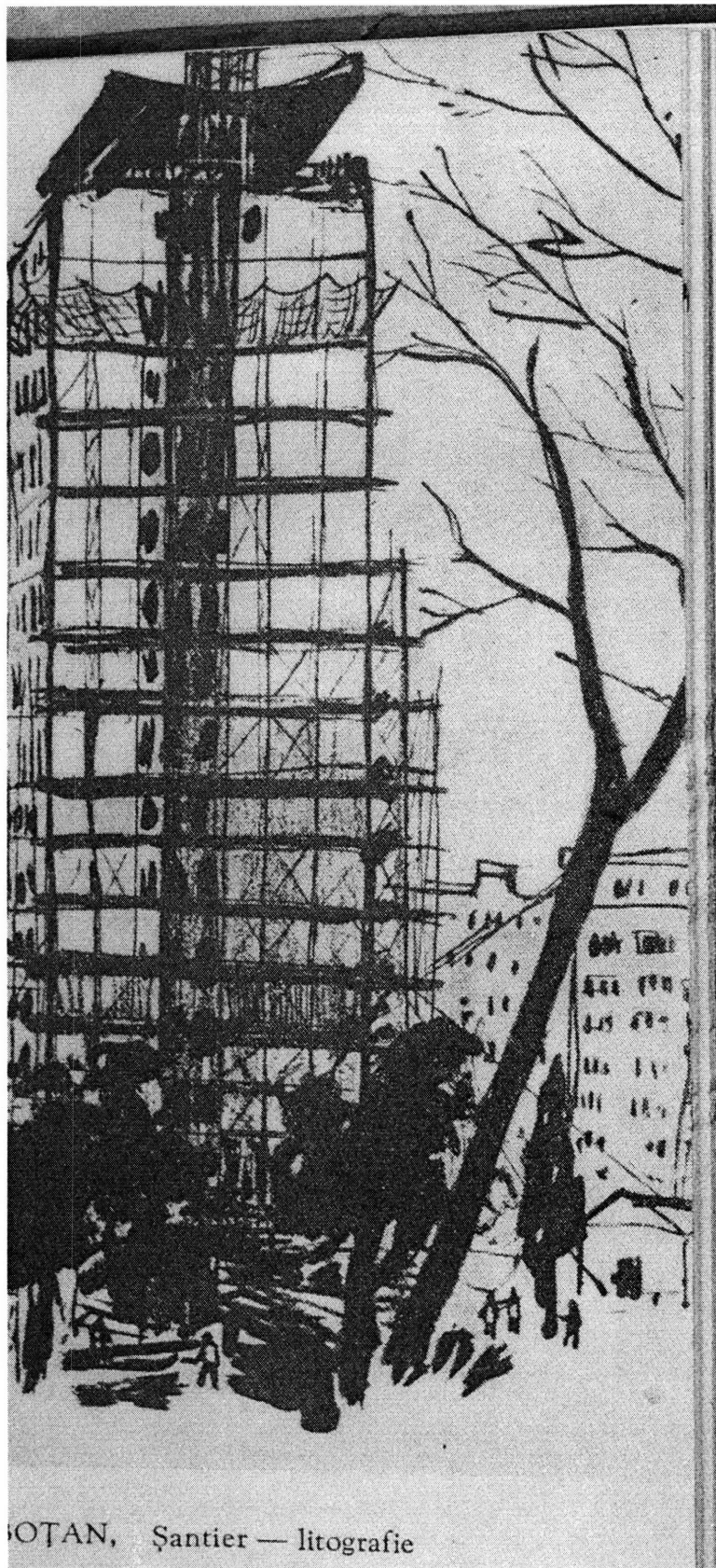
Fig. 25. Façade detail. *Arhitectura* 3 (1960)

Fig. 26
S. Botan, *Santier
(Construction site)*,
lithography. From *Arta
Plastica* 2 (1960).

Fig. 27. Viorel Margineanu, *Calea Grivitei (Grivita Road)*, oil on canvas. From *Arta Plastica* 11 (1965).
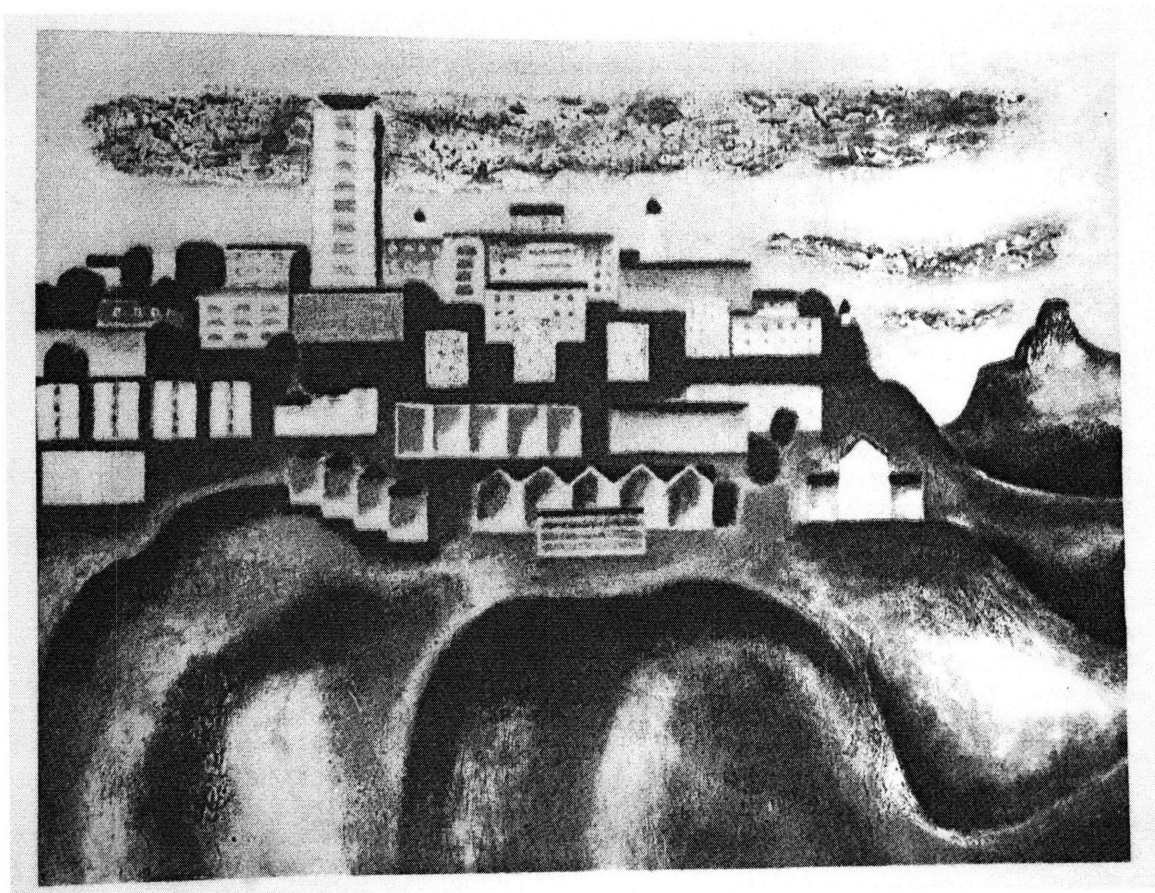
Fig. 28. Elena Greculescu, *Suceava noua* (*New Suceava*), oil on canvas.
From *Arta Plastica* 11 (1965).
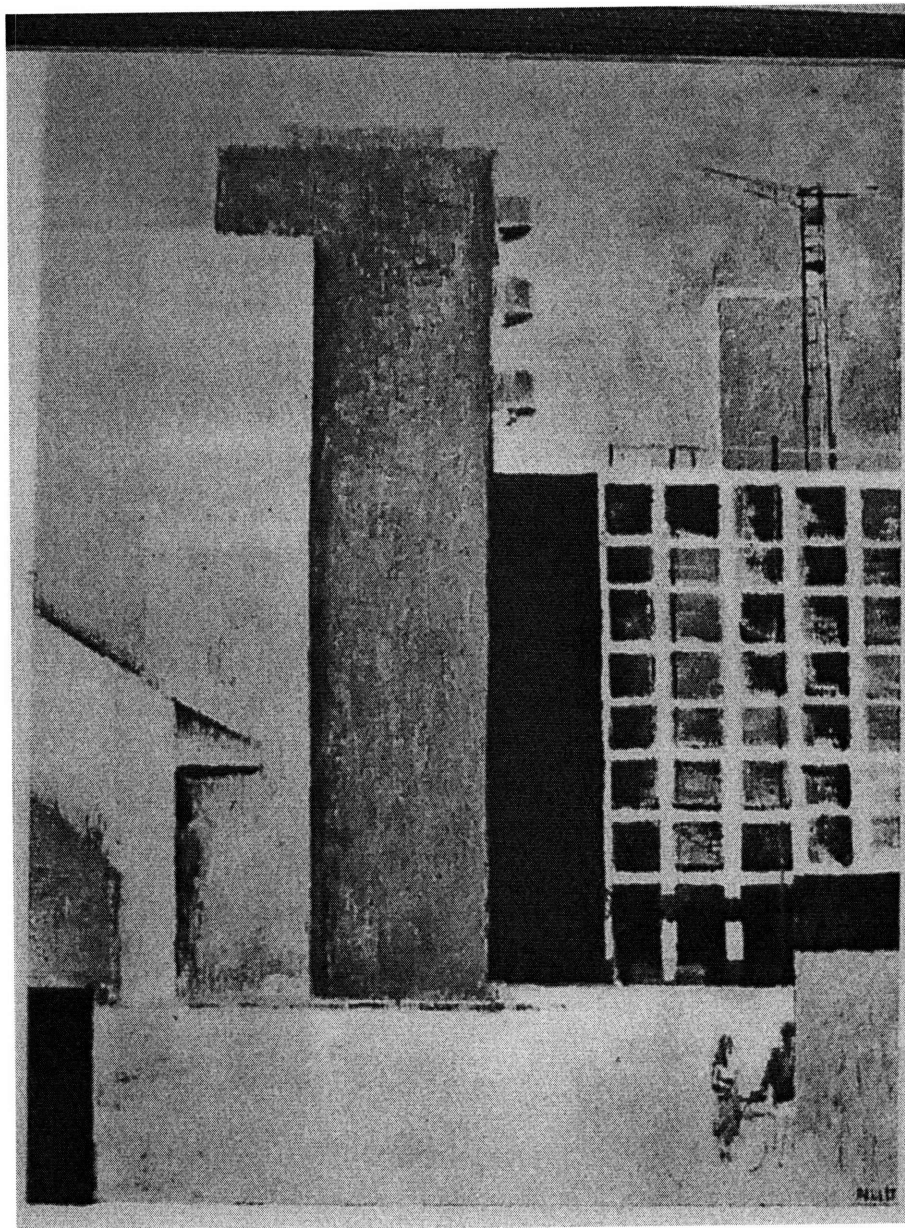
Fig. 29. Constantin Paulet, *Constructii (Constructions)*, oil on canvas. From *Arta Plastica* 5 (1964).

Fig. 30. Gheorghe Spiridon, *Constructii (Constructions)*. From *Arta Plastica* 8 (1964).

Fig. 31. Gheorghe Spiridon, *Peisaj (Landscape)*. From *Arta Plastica* 8 (1964).

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Fig. 32. Marius Bunescu, *Santier* (*Construction Site*), 1960. Oil on canvas, 0,66x1,87 m National Art Museum of Romania, Bucharest. From *Pictura romaneasca contemporana.*

Fig. 33. *Arhitectura* 4 (1960): 15.

Fig. 34. *Arhitectura* 4 (1960): cover page.

Vederea blocului turn

Vederea blocului turn dinspre str. Știrbei Vodă
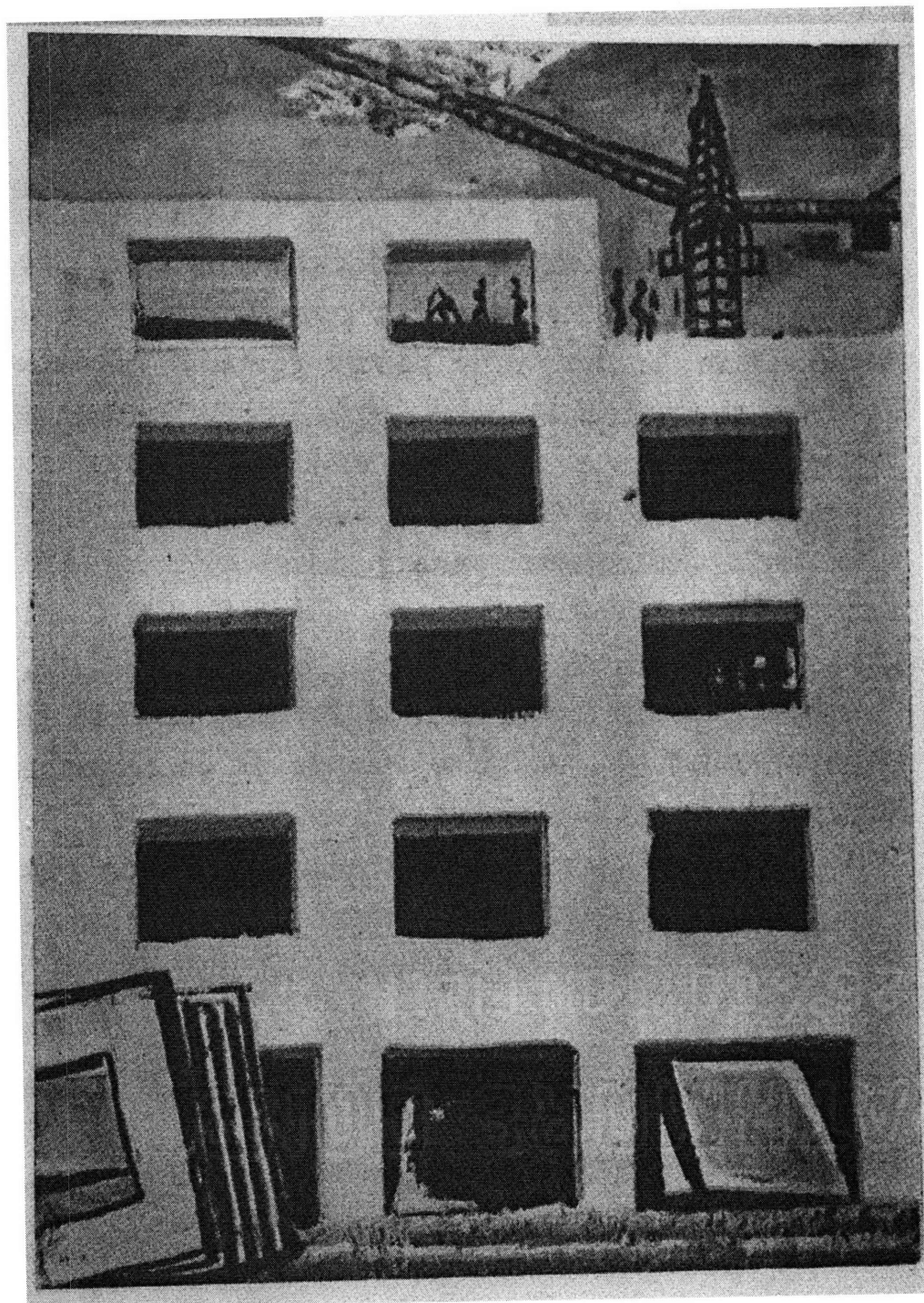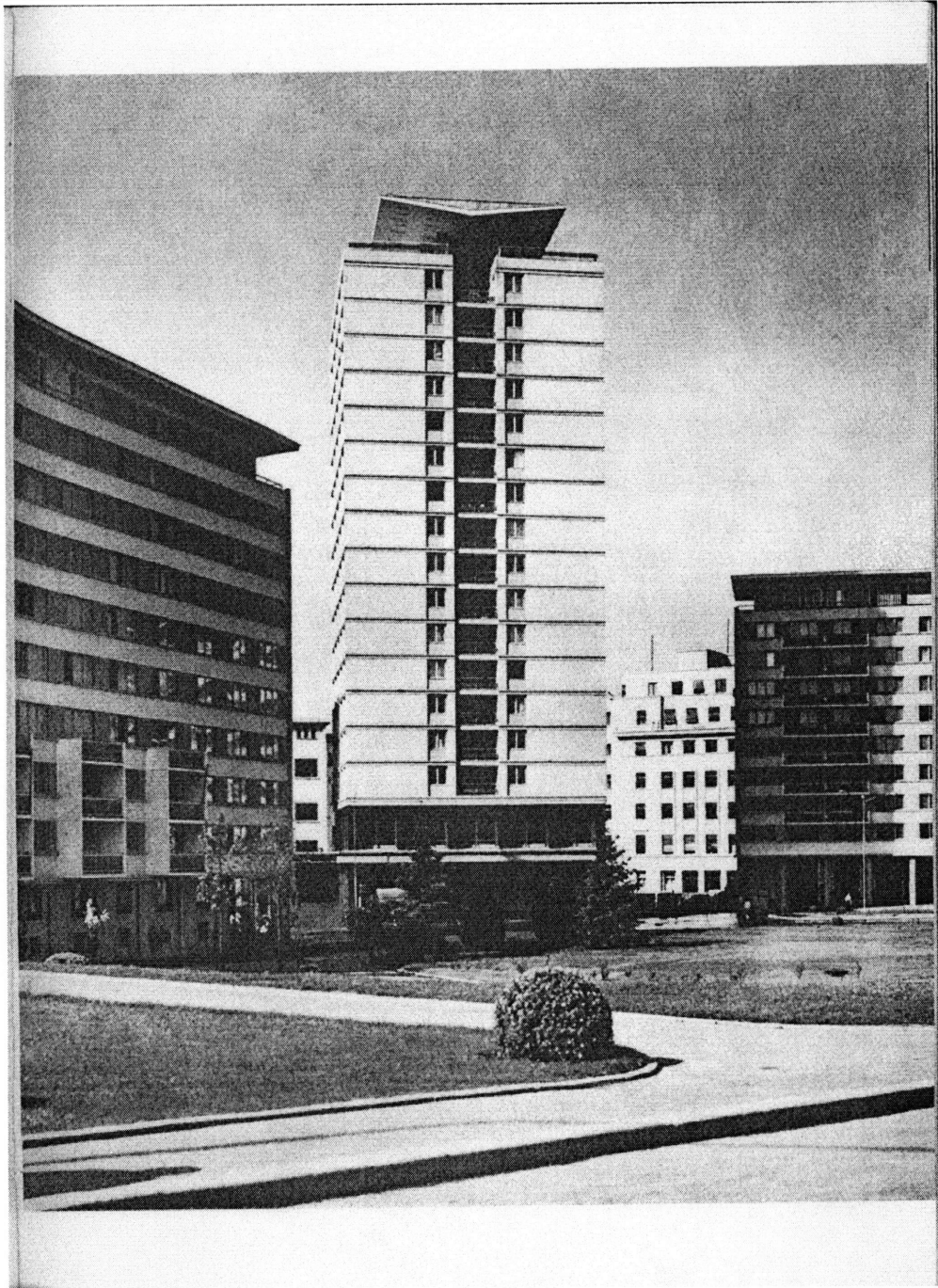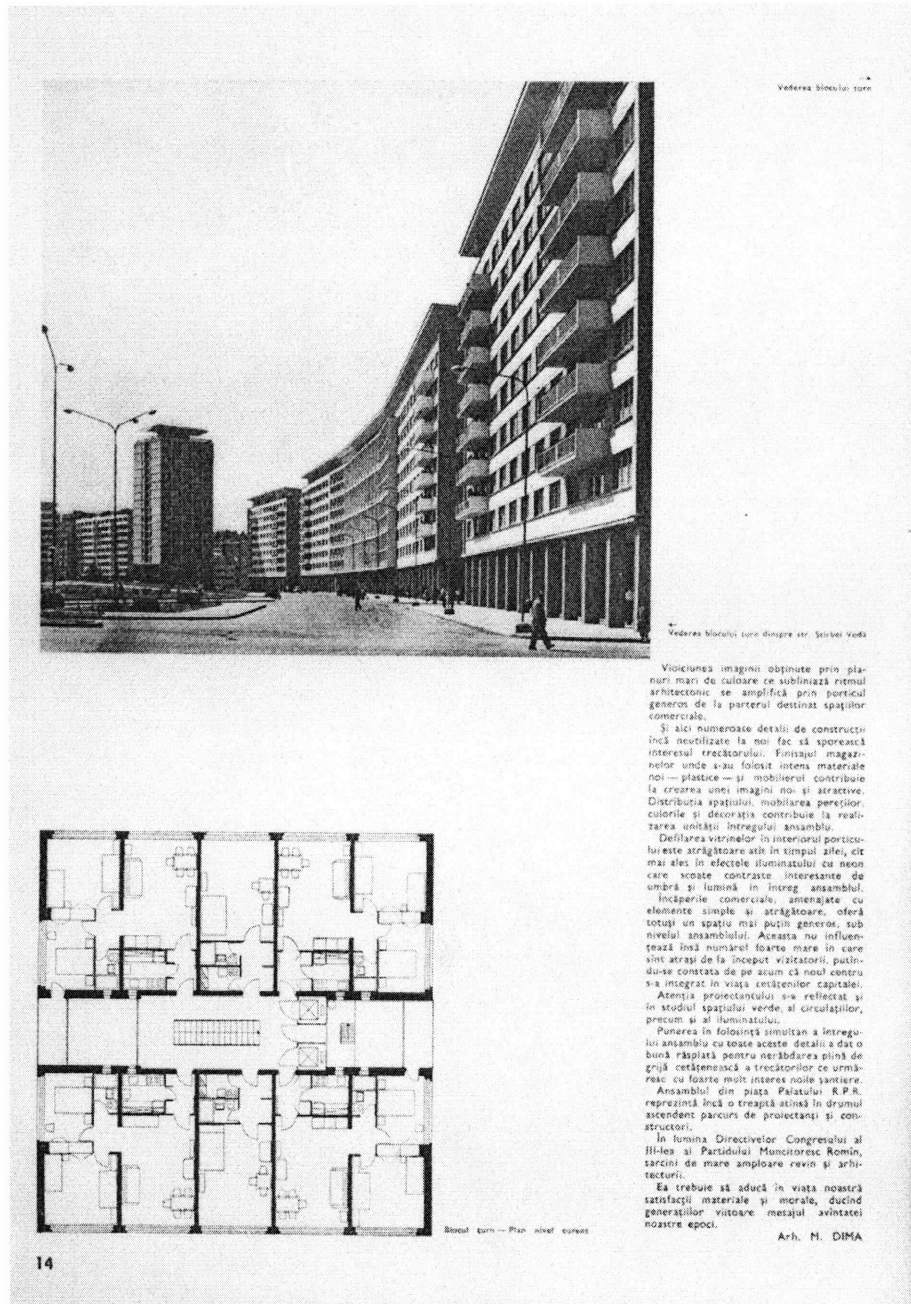

Blocul turn — Plan nivel curent

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Vioiciunea imaginii obținute prin planuri mari de culoare ce subliniază ritmul arhitectonic se amplifică prin porticul generos de la parterul destinat spațiilor comerciale.

Și aici numeroase detalii de construcții încă neutilizate la noi fac să sporească interesul trecătorului. Finisajul magazinelor unde s-au folosit intens materiale noi — plastice — și mobilierul contribuie la crearea unei imagini noi și atractive. Distribuția spațiului, mobilarea pereților, culorile și decorația contribuie la realizarea unității întregului ansamblu.

Defilarea vitrinelor în interiorul porticului este atrăgătoare atît în timpul zilei, cît mai ales în efectele iluminatului cu neon care scoate contraste interesante de umbră și lumină în întreg ansamblul.

Încăperile comerciale, amenajate cu elemente simple și atrăgătoare, oferă totuși un spațiu mai puțin generos, sub nivelul ansamblului. Aceasta nu influențează însă numărul foarte mare în care sînt atrași de la început vizitatorii, putîndu-se constata de pe acum că noul centru s-a integrat în viața cetățenilor capitalei.

Atenția proiectantului s-a reflectat și în studiul spațiului verde, al circulațiilor, precum și al iluminatului.

Punerea în folosință simultan a întregului ansamblu cu toate aceste detalii a dat o bună răsplată pentru nerăbdarea plină de grijă cetățenească a trecătorilor ce urmăresc cu foarte mult interes noile șantiere.

Ansamblul din piața Palatului R.P.R. reprezintă încă o treaptă atinsă în drumul ascendent parcurs de proiectanți și constructori.

În lumina Directivelor Congresului al III-lea al Partidului Muncitoresc Romîn, sarcini de mare amploare revin și arhitecturii.

Ea trebuie să aducă în viața noastră satisfacții materiale și morale, ducînd generațiilor viitoare mesajul avîntatei noastre epoci.

Arh. M. DIMA

Fig. 35. *Arhitectura* 4 (1960): 14.

Conclusion

This dissertation has followed modernism's rise and sweeping presence under socialist totalitarianism in postwar Romania, giving particular attention to the problem of aesthetic models originated under different political and historical contexts but which persisted nevertheless within a culture placed under authoritarian control. The dissertation found that, contrary to expectations of uniformity, the architectural culture of socialism was characterized by multiplicity and uncomfortable contradictions that often stemmed from problematic precedents, and which ran against the grain of hegemony. Each of the three domains under study – the architecture of the city, the writing of history, the photography of architecture – produced its own particular rhetorical and theoretical devices to tame the variations, inconsistencies, and irresolvable tensions that arose at once from within each domain, and from their conjunction.

Part One, "The New: Socialist Bucharest" has shown that the massive architectural and urbanistic operations of the 1950s and 1960s steadfastly took on important elements of the prewar architectural culture of Romania, as well as many of the modernist principles of architectural production and urban design that circulated in Europe and the Soviet Union of the 1920s and 1930s. The de facto continuity of practices threatened to dissolve the architecture of socialism within the vast and unspecific category of modernist manifestations, and as a result was accompanied by systematic proclamations of rupture from the political and architectural past. In the case of Bucharest, such past was embodied territorially and metaphorically in the squalor of the peripheral slum (*mahala*). The new socialist housing districts that emerged from the 1950s onwards were built so as to offer the inverse conditions of the *mahala*. The dissertation thus exposes the architecture of socialism as a simultaneous display of continuity and rupture that undercuts its claim to novelty.

Part Two, "The Old: Paradoxes of Socialist Historiography" examined, through the work of the architectural historian Grigore Ionescu, the contradictions that emerge from the task of writing history under socialism, and more specifically, from the encounter

between historiography and architectural practice. The economy of time proposed in these writings brings forth, I suggest, at least two problems. The first one concerns a centrally controlled architectural culture that promoted and supported at once a present-day building ethos that was a-historical (new) and transnational (socialist), and a notion of the past structured around vernacular and nationalist expressions. This enforced a double model of time: on one hand a time of linear and universal progress, on the other hand, the fixed essence of the folk. The second problem arose from the need to celebrate the undeclared modernism of the present while denouncing the modernism of the past and its alliance with capitalism.

Part Three, "The Modern: Through the Looking Glass," studied the full-face encounter between a modernist aesthetic and socialist propaganda carried on through photographs of architecture. While in the case of architecture, the familiar visual effects of modernism (such as geometrical compositions, the stark lines of reinforced concrete, the suppression of ornament and of historical reference) could still be conceived, under socialism, as the indirect, even involuntary consequence of a primary concern for economy and industrialization, the dissertation shows that in the case of the photographic medium, modernism was openly flaunted as an aesthetic and stylistic choice. Contradictions emerged here as well, between a utilitarian, rationalist discourse that denied all aesthetic concerns and the uncontrollable expressivity of the photographic production. But more importantly, Part Three returns to the original question of discrepancies within totalitarian culture, by exposing how the coercive oneness of socialist culture accommodated at once artifacts of mimetic function and artisanal production, and visual abstraction, and how it allowed each of these modes of representation to compete, side by side, for the role of officially representing socialism.

How should one account for the significant and repeated gaps observed between discourses and practices, or between practices themselves? This question bears asking, since totalitarianism has been repeatedly defined as a 'total' system in which all cultural

practices were tightly governed according to a unique and centrally sanctioned ideology. Having described the architectural culture of socialist Romania as a multi-layered and often conflicted aesthetic reality, how can we still cohesively define totalitarianism? What was the constant meaning obtained on the basis of dramatically changing formulations? How should one define the 'totality' of totalitarianism?

Recent discussions of totalitarian socialism (particularly those emerging from totalitarian socialist contexts themselves) have attempted to open the definition of totalitarianism to signs of fracture by underscoring the paradigmatic importance of representation for the entire process of political legitimization. These discussions have argued that a spectacular fabrication of meaning was possible under totalitarian circumstances in part because the individual subject assumed a cynical position, from which the distance between experienced reality and ideological representation (or between practice and discourse) was accepted as normal and unavoidable. [1] Therefore, this critique of

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[1] One of the most poignant formulation of the purported artificial nature of the socialist aesthetic project is the anecdote about a greengrocer as narrated by Vaclav Havel in the late 1970s. The greengrocer's acts are used to expose the grip of ideology on the level of everyday experience, but I believe the example to be useful beyond that. Havel's use of the word 'sign' throughout his analysis, though not part of an attempt for a larger semiotic reflection, nevertheless indicates that mechanisms of representation are at stake:

> "The manager of a fruit and vegetable shop places in his window, among the onions and the carrots, the slogan: 'Workers of the World, Unite!' Why does he do it? What is he trying to communicate to the world? Is his enthusiasm so great that he feels an irrepressible impulse to acquaint the public with his ideals? Has he really given more than a moment's thought to how such unification might occur and what it would mean?
> ...
> Obviously the greengrocer is indifferent to the semantic content of the slogan on exhibit; he does not put the slogan in his window from any personal desire to acquaint the public with the ideal it expresses. This, of course, does not mean that his action has no motive or significance at all, or that the slogan communicates nothing to anyone. The slogan is really a sign, and as such contains a subliminal but very definite message. Verbally, it might be expressed this way: 'I, the greengrocer XY, live here and I know what I must do. I behave in the manner expected of me. I can be depended upon and am beyond reproach.' ... Thus the sign helps the greengrocer to conceal from himself the low foundations of his obedience, at the same time concealing the low foundations of power. It hides them behind the façade of something high. And that something is ideology."

Havel et al. *The Power of the Powerless*, 27-28.

socialism placed the burden of inconsistency on the individual, subjective level, and addressed it in moral, or even psychoanalytical terms.

This dissertation has concurred with a model in which the socialist culture accepted the relationship between an object and its name as fundamentally unstable, and as a result relied consciously and extensively on discursive constructions to attempt a hegemonic rearticulation of reality.[2] It has found many such instances in which one is prompted to accept the authority of the word: the regime's insistence, for example, that its architecture is new rather than modern, or that its temporality is one of rupture rather than continuity. But to formulate the gap between discourses and practices as an individual, ethical dilemma, translates much too literally, in the case of aesthetic practices, into the dualistic frame of structural determinism versus free will. Because of that, I wish to suggest at least two ways in which the gap can be addressed as a problem inherent, not to individual strategies, but to the mechanisms of representation themselves.

A first proposition is that in Romania, the aesthetic paradigm of modernism proved more influential, and was equipped with a more stable definition, than the political paradigm of socialism itself. Modernism's continuity within the cultural space of socialism, and socialism's inability to summon its own, exclusive artistic forms, created a particularly acute problem for a regime based on claims of radical, revolutionary beginnings, a problem that was compensated by extensive discursive reformulations. In other words, the dissertation has shown that it was not socialism that ultimately altered the givens of modernism to fit for its own new uses, but rather the other way around. Perhaps the most striking proof of this is that, in the popular mind, socialism is now overwhelmingly equated with those particular architectural developments that occurred under its auspices and transformed the experience of urban life in Romania. What is left of socialism as it is slowly washed away from memory is modern architecture.

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[2] See Ernesto Laclau's preface to Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989): ix-xv.

However, this argument assumes that a fundamentally antagonistic relationship existed between totalitarianism and modernism, and that the two were engaged in a side-by-side competition for domination (an assumption that also reinforces received definitions of modernism as anti-totalitarian and intrinsically democratic). My second proposition posits instead the apparent inconsistencies within socialist culture not as lapses of a single system, but instead as evidence that at least two different models of representation were at work simultaneously. It is my argument that totalitarianism consisted of not one, but several aesthetic paradigms, and that modernism was but one of these paradigms co-opted in the task of representation and legitimization.

The dissertation has found that Romania's totalitarian culture relied not only on modernist forms (an architecture of concrete, a photography of lights and shadows, etc) but also on modernist definitions of artistic meaning, according to which form in itself was a kind of content. Having rejected modernism only in name, socialism assumed the modernist position of rejecting representation altogether, and presented practice as a mere response to the needs of modern life. More particularly, it resulted in an architecture that claimed to constitute socialism indexically: new cities, gigantic building campaigns, relentlessly measured, quantified, and accelerating, claimed to avoid the domain of representation (and of ideology) altogether, in their immediate and material transformation of everyday life.

But such a modernist stance was strikingly at odds with another, deeply entrenched characteristic of socialist culture: the regime's attachment to realism, and more generally, to a traditional and allegorical model of the artwork, in which forms are expected to yield a higher meaning, rather than suffice on their own. Thus the Floreasca towers harbor not only a strong utilitarian credo, but also the belief that buildings can signify the 'soul' of socialism (and suggest immaterial values of order, equality, collectivity). Similarly, the abstract language of the photographic medium dissolved the crowd into blurry spots on the paper, but also evoked a new, and non-mimetic, monumentality of the collective.

These contradictory impulses did not originate from a cynical manipulation of the mechanisms of representation, but rather in a surplus of these mechanisms. It is as if socialism was holding on to two different models of representation at once, piled up on top of each other: the modernist one, in which the form is in itself a kind of content, and as such its existence is meaningful in itself, and the allegorical one, according to which there is a necessary congruence between form and content, and the former needs to be scrutinized in order to obtain the latter. Modernism along with anti-modernism, index along with allegory were thus the equal components of the socialist project: this dissertation suggests that it is the exploitation of the full range of available modes of representation that is characteristic of totalitarianism, rather than their constriction. Totalitarianism was ultimately about excessively exposing, rather than hiding, its reality.

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