

Intellectuals, Society, and Architecture: The History of a Change in Urban Attitudes in Post-1989 Bucharest

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Eliminary Clarifications

This paper investigates a change in cultural attitudes of Bucharest cities after 1989.¹ The objects of these changing attitudes are the new Bucharest architecture after 1989 and the relationships between the architect and the society. The study is based on a set of oral history interviews made in Bucharest in April 1998. The interviewees are mostly professional architects, but also included are other intellectuals from related areas or involved in architectural problems. The interviews were focused on the problem of the social role of the architect, as well as on the relationship between the specialist and the wider public in the architectural field. The problem of change in attitude is sought in this direction throughout the paper. Concerning the controversial issue in

• thus, the paper does not intend to give definitive answers about the role of the architect in present day Romania, but to offer a better understanding of the problem in its historical complexity.

General Context

Architecture in Focus

After 1989, architecture has been extremely present in the life of Bucharest.² First, there is an extremely rich construction activity that has changed the cityscape of Bucharest. A large variety of architectural types so readily born in a changing Bucharest has brought about new problems for Bucharest elites: what has to be accepted and what is to be criticized in the

¹ In concentrating on issues relevant for the present times, the statement of purpose of this paper is close to Andrei Plesu's declaration of intentions from "Chipuri si masti ale tranzitiei" (Faces and Masks of the Transition): "Did I act properly when I invested so much time and energy for making the inventory of contingent facts? Did it make any sense the effort to have been...so 'actual?' ...I yet believe that on the behalf of our generation it is written not only the duty of a temporary authorial writing. We should supply also simple documents, lived experiences, testimonies. We will have, at least from time to time, the modesty to be only signs of the age" in "Chipuri si masti ale tranzitiei (Faces and Masks of the Transition)}. 1996. Bucharest: Editura Universitatii Bucuresti, p. 7.

² Nevertheless, the presence was merely a cultural problem considered of subsidiary importance, lower in the hierarchy of urgent issues, after political and economic problems.

newly born environment. Second, Bucharest's architecture became a national problem³ in the public consciousness of Bucharest. Discussions about the "legacy of the communist period"⁴ have become ardent in the cultural life of Bucharest. On the one hand, the recurrent theme of the "razing of Romania's past"⁵ put on the agenda questions of architectural restorations, reconstructions and revitalization of the historical zones of Bucharest destroyed, damaged, or isolated in the last two decades of the communist regime.⁶ On the other hand, the problems of the communist systematization project and of the communist interventions in the heart of the city have completed the apocalyptic perspective of architecture in Bucharest. All these three factors have generated debates on architectural problems on television programs and in cultural publications.⁷ In spite of this continuous presence of architectural problems in the public discussions, few important studies have been written on any of these subjects.⁸ This

³ In 1991 the architects celebrated a hundred years from the beginning of the activity of the Romanian Architects Society (SAR). Although it was a celebrating occasion, the architects have discussed exclusively the problems of the city and have suggested solutions out of the crisis. "Searching for the Lost Space." 1991. *Arhitectura* 3-4:6-7.

⁴ This is an extremely highly-used phrase in many public discourses that tries to legitimize the present crisis through the historical and inevitable fate of the recent past.

⁵ For example, the book of the historian Dinu Giurescu, entitled "The Razing of Romania's Past" has encouraged the attitude of a survivor of a martyr culture from the most part of Romanian intellectuals. Giurescu, Dinu. 1990. *The Razing of Romania's Past*. London: World Monuments Fund.

⁶ The elite's discourse usually gives extreme emphasis to the "martyrdom" of the city. See Andrei Plesu, the speech at the celebration of SAR: "the terrible trauma that the architectural patrimony has suffered." "Invitation," *Arhitectura*, 3-4 (1991), 47. Also Alexandru Beldiman, in the presentation of the exhibition "Bucharest-the state of the city," 1991: "This first exhibition on Bucharest after the revolution wishes to shout: WATCH OUT! MARTYRED CITY! It can be healed with LOVE and AWARENESS!" "The Exhibition Bucharest: State of the City," *Arhitectura* 1-6 (1990), 17.

⁷ Nevertheless, these public debates have had a limited audience that did not expand beyond the closed circles of specialists and educated people. Some of them, the most prestigious, are issue no. 190 (1996) of the cultural journal *Dilema*, entitled "Architecture and Urbanism," the issue of the cultural review *Secolul XX* 4-5-6 (1997) entitled "Bucharest," and the talk show "Profesiunea mea: cultura" (My profession: Culture) of Nicolae Manolescu from ProTV in March 1998, centered around a discussion with architects.

⁸ For example, a great number of informal journal articles and bitter discourses have drawn attention to the problem of the satellite-districts of Bucharest where people have been expropriated and moved into blocks of flats of 3-4 levels, where the lack of sanitary appliances have thrown an entire population into a life of misery (the case of villages around Bucharest like Otopeni or Snagov). To my knowledge, the only citation of the case in academic, serious research appears in Gail Kligman's article "The Politics of Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania." The same, the only citation about "gypsy architecture," one of the most controversial subjects in the Romanian mass-media after 1989, is made by Augustin Ioan in his study, "Le Postmodernisme dans l'architecture: ni sublime, ni complètement absent" (The Post-Modernism in Architecture: neither sublime. nor completely absent) (1995). See Euresis, *cahiers roumains d'etudes litteraires* 1-2 (1995) (Bucharest: Univers, 1995), 239-255.

demonstrates how uncertain and troubled is the field, and how much the lack of stable values stops the professional from elaborating general surveys and of adopting larger perspectives on the issue.⁹ In such rich and controversial cultural environments, the changes in attitudes are most likely to appear.

Translating Western Terms

Before 1989, Bucharest experienced an extremely centralized, authoritarian control in architecture.¹⁰ The architects and the elites had little space of maneuver outside official directives. The profession of architect had even been abased to an inferior level.¹¹ Information flow was practically frozen.¹²

⁹ According to Augustin Ioan, more interested in writing on the subject seem to be some foreign scholars. Maria Cavalcanti from the Oxford Polytechnics intends to write a doctoral dissertation on the House of the People. She expressed her amazement about the lack of a serious Romanian study on the issue. "The Communist Disneyland," *Arhitectura* 1-6 (1992), 1.

¹⁰ Here is the opinion of an architect (Sanda Florian), presented in a talk show on Romanian Television (Tomorrow Society, producer Emanoil Valeriu, June, 7. 1990): "The former legislation was so restrictive and frustrating that it was practically impossible to follow all the rules imposed on the architect. The decision process was so centralized that some very good architects were forced to apply all over the country some catalogues of typified projects, made by not-so-good architects. It was an aberrant situation." "Urbanism: Study of a Stage," *Arhitectura* 1-6 (1990), 6.

¹¹ Here is an example of ideological discourse from the communist period, about the important role of the architect in the process of building the socialist society: "He [the architect] is proud of the fact that, today, he builds for the entire people, that architecture, today, is a state activity, that the architect is a state activist, aware of the role of honesty and responsibility that he has and working with devotion and creative enthusiasm to fulfill with honor his great tasks." Ascanio Damian, "23 of August. the Celebration of Liberty," *Arhitectura* RPR 4 (1959), 19.

¹² Actually, this kind of scenario is a part of the architects' discourse after 1989. Architects try to justify their collaboration with the communist regime, building a parallel discourse about the oppressed architect. Some critics have signaled this fact as early as 1990. For example, here is the presentation of one of the first meetings of Romanian architects after 1989: "Among various opinions there is a refrain that appears continuously: we could not do anything, we were uninformed, the connections with the world were broken, the totalitarian regime has forced us. And some other riddles we are already bored of." Ciser, Cristina. 1990. "Meeting at Danes Hall." *Arhitectura*. 1-6. p. 19.

Very few architects could travel abroad.¹³ Publications in the field were limited to a number of studies either theoretical or focused on historical architecture, very specialized and punctual, avoiding any contact with the connected fields of social sciences.¹⁴

After 1989, new ideas about architecture, its social role, and its professional ethics, long discussed in the Western context, have been launched in the Romanian elite circles. Architectural reviews began to present the architecture from other parts of the world.¹⁵ The Union of Romanian Architects began to have contacts with professionals and associations outside the country. Romanian architects began to take part in international contests.¹⁶ This new context permitted the acquaintance of Bucharest elites with world-wide contemporary problems in architecture. The second inevitable step was the problem of the relevance of these new ideas in the Romanian context. Obviously, the problem of "translation" in Romanian from Western architectural "languages" has appeared. In order to clarify this problem, a short presentation of the new attitudes discussed in this paper is needed.

¹³ According to recent evaluations, before 1989, only 2-3% from the entire population could travel abroad in Romania. See "Romania-Starea de fapt" (Romania -the Present Situation). 1996. Bucharest: Nemira, p. 176. Referred further as Romania. As for the architects, the few study trips that some of them were allowed to take were limited to the other socialist states. Here is the official speech about these travels from 1959: "An important contribution to this informative action has constituted of the study trips organized by the Union of Architects in various countries of popular democracy and especially in the USSR. What they saw in the USSR has an important influence on their experience in the problems of comfort and prices of apartments. Also, we have to fight against the uncritical admiration of some specialists for anything that comes from Western magazines and to reject anything could represent the fashion inspired from the bourgeois decadence. . . ." Octav Doicescu, "23 of August, the Celebration of the Liberty," *Arhitectura RPR* 4 (1959), p. 19.

¹⁴ There are some exceptions that deserve attention. There have been some sociological studies on the quality of dwelling presented in *Arhitectura* journal, i.e. the article of Victoria Barbuta and Cezarina Nicolau, "A Survey of the Relationship Between the Dwelling Habits of the Population and the Functional Structure of the Flats." Pages 35-39 in *Arhitectura* 1 (1985).

¹⁵ There have been theoretical presentations of contemporary trends in Western architecture even before 1989, but the implication of specialists in Western debates became possible only after 1989. For example, the articles presented in each issue of the journal *Arhitectura* are under the general title of "Idea" or "The Movement of Ideas."

¹⁶ According to the interview with Alexandru Beldiman taken for this study, some of the important Romanian contributions to international contests included The Biennial of Architecture-Venice (1995), the third with Romanian participation, and the UNESCO contest "Architecture for the Poor" (1998).

New Attitudes for a New Environment Skimming the Romanian cultural and architectural journals from the period 1989-1998, as well as listening to the architectural "voices" interviewed for this paper, one can get a sense of the changes occurring in both the urban environment of Bucharest and the mentalities of the cultural and architectural elites. For a better understanding of the rest of the paper, a list of the new architectural situations and attitudes revealed by the interviews is briefly sketched here: a. PUBLIC BUILDINGS: The idea that new modernist public buildings disrupt and harm the unity of the Bucharest environment slowly fades away during the period 1989-1998. Today, very few voices are still opposing the construction of new public buildings in Bucharest, even in the center. Architectural variety is as valued in 1998 as architectural unity was valued in early 90s.

b.

PRIVATE VILLAS: The image of the newly rich social class as being forever doomed to bad taste when building their residential villas is replaced by the image of the rich people whose architectural tastes can be refined and polished throughout the years. Recently, the elites seem to have given up the crusade against the rich and their luxurious villas.

c.

GYPSY PALACES: The Roma minority of Bucharest has been seen for a very long period as an acculturated, illiterate population, whose construction of freedom should be restrained by law. In the later days, the Roma architectural phenomena in Bucharest are starting to be seen as simple manifestations of cultural diversity and less as architectural monstrosities.

d.

THE COMMUNIST BOULEVARD: The Palace of the People and the large boulevard built by Ceausescu in Bucharest was considered after 1989 to be the worst architectural aberration ever built in a civilized country. Elites were continuously mourning Bucharest as a "martyr" city. In ten years the situation changed drastically. Today, the Palace of the People is considered a symbol of Bucharest, together with the architectural examples from the past, like the Patriarchy or the Royal Palace. Since the Romanian Parliament has found new shelter in the former palace of Ceausescu, the huge communist intervention in the southern part of the city gained its legitimacy as an important area of the city.

B.4. The Origins of the New Situation: 1989-1992

In order to put these new attitudes in their cultural context, the right understanding of the premises of this change is needed. Immediately after 1990, elites had to face an entirely new situation. One of the underlying assumptions of this paper is that in the Romanian context, the problem of a growing gap between intellectuals and the people appeared after 1989. During the communist regime, the ideological control of the censorship over any cultural manifestation invalidated any relevance they might have had for the large public. For that period of time one can not discuss the gap between professionals and the public, since there was no real attempt to put them into a 'dialogue'. On the contrary, radical incompatibility between the official

discourse in any field and the realities of the life of the common people and the intellectuals alike make the problem irrelevant at that time.¹⁷

After 1989, the elites and the common people have been actually confronted for the first time. Two different, divergent realities began to draw general attention to the new problem of an incompatibility between architectural elites and the public of Bucharest. Two different stories about architecture, the one told by elites and the one told by the ordinary citizens,

have made the gap extremely acute.

a. The general public. People outside the profession have taken usually two attitudes. First, the new rich class of Bucharest began to be involved in real estate activities, constructions, and land speculation. A new type of middle-class, rich, eclectic private architecture has flooded Bucharest and its surrounding areas.¹⁸ The people controlling this new environment show an increased suspicion and misunderstanding toward the elite circle of architects.¹⁹

Second, the largest portion of the population of Bucharest has experienced a crisis in real estate. A place to live became a luxury and a high ideal.²⁰ Apartment prices and rent prices have risen sharply.²¹ The result was a lowering of the common people's expectations and interest in architecture as a part of their urban environment.²² Since the basic need for a place to live is a major problem for the Bucharest average citizen, the interest in problems like

¹⁷ Some authors argue that on the contrary, the communist regime opposed the architect and the society to one another. Nevertheless, the people were used to subsume the architect under a larger category of communist officials that they were hostile to. The architect and his architectural ideology was known to the Romanian public only after 1989. This distinction made, there is no real conflict between the point of view of this paper and statements like the following one: "The architect and implicitly the architects have been in the service of the power. Today there is a certain suspicion of the society toward our profession, a loss of credibility that comes from the perception of the politics as related to the built environment in the last regime." Pascariu, Gabriel. 1997. "To Make Peace with Architecture." *Arhitext Design* 1, p. 1.

¹⁸ The same eclectic architecture appears in some other parts of the former socialist block.

¹⁹ The complaint that the client does not ask for an architect when one builds something is a leitmotiv of the interviews presented in this study.

²⁰ According to the study "Romania -starea de fapt," 53.3% of Romania's population desires "a better food" as the most urgent project of betterment of their future. Romania: State of Facts, 36.

²¹ After the Law of Dwelling (No. 114/1996; 14611997), a system of credits for the disadvantaged categories of the population has been settled. Nevertheless, in December 1997 from 18,000 requests, only 2,000 have been fulfilled, according to . Adela Cocimirca, *Casa Lux* 2 (1997).

²² Although the quality of the dwelling is at "surviving level," Romanians are satisfied with their dwelling places. Thirty-two percent of the total population considers their living place as being acceptable. Most of the people (59.7%) consider their lodging place to be good. (Romania: State of Facts, 40-44).

architect's role in shaping their environment or the quality of the urban life is almost non-existent.

b: The specialists. On the other hand, most of the professionals have an opposite response to these popular attitudes. First, they disagree with the trends of contemporary private architecture in Bucharest. For most of them the new private houses that appeared after 1989 are perfect examples of the bad taste and lack of education of the ordinary, though rich, people of Bucharest.²³ These professionals, as well as other intellectuals, deplore the lack of open mentalities of the masses. In their opinion, people deny almost totally and with disastrous consequences the leading role that the educated architect should have in any building activity.

Second, the elites have stimulated a global discourse about Bucharest, its architecture and its inhabitants. For them, Bucharest is a "wounded city."²⁴ The perspective has catastrophic dimensions and their tone is apocalyptic. The communist period was a perfect absurdity, in total contradiction with any architectural principles and ethics. The result after 1989, is, they claim, a corruption of the taste of the public and the lack of reasonability and "common sense"²⁵ from the part of both the officials and the clients regarding architectural problems. To sum up, the incompatibility between the architectural elites and the public, an old problem for the Western world, became an acute reality in Bucharest only after the fall of communism.²⁶

First Elites' Responses to the New Situation

Although there is a growing gap of misunderstanding, the cultural elites became increasingly aware of the problem and of the need to find solutions out of the crisis of communication. In the early 90s, Bucharest's intellectuals built a complex system of attitudes and reactions to deal with the situation. Some of them are the result of a Western influence acquired after 1989, thus a problem of recent history, while some of them are mixed with age-old ideas about the role of the educated specialist, thus a problem of tradition. This is another leitmotiv term from the elite's discourse.

²³ According to the interviews.

²⁴ See the appreciation of architect Gheorghe Leahu of the impact of the new Civic Center on the entire city: "Between the new center... and the rest of the city a big open wound has remained, a wound of wasted land, backs of houses and empty walls. The existent city can not assimilate organically this transplant of new and triumphant boulevards and buildings. The existent city and the new center remain two separate entities, two bodies alienated from each other." Leahu, Gheorghe. 1995. *Bucurestiul lipsarut* ("Bereft Bucharest"). Bucharest: Arta grafica.

²⁵ This is another leitmotiv term from the elite's discourse.

²⁶ Some architects think that the gap existed from the communist period and that after 1989 it began to be closed due to the activity of the architects: "There are the organizers of this first exhibition [Bucharest: the state of the city] who made the first step toward the annulling of the curtain of silence and hostility that separated the two groups artificially opposed to one another by the communist regime: the architects and the society that they serve." Adrian, Dan. 1990. "The Exhibition Bucharest: State of the City." *Arhitectura* 1-6, p. 17. See also footnote 31.

historical inheritance over a long period of history of the architectural profession. Nevertheless, this paper elucidates the nature of the policy of change adopted by the elites during the early years of the period in focus. The solutions that they seek are an attempt to catch up with the Western context. The Western terms of "participative architecture" or "democratic architecture" are a concern of Bucharest intellectuals. In spite of this, their attitude is fundamentally different comparing with the Western world. Under the Western label, age-old attitudes find their shelter. In this paper, the attitudes of the type presented below are considered paternalist.²⁷ The discourse of architects centers around the idea that Bucharest needs help. The city and its citizens are in danger.²⁸ They see the solution as depending only on their powers. Intellectuals are entitled to look for solutions and to put them into practice correctly.²⁹ There must be dialogue between architects and the citizens of Bucharest, the elite voices usually claim. Nevertheless, the dialogue depends exclusively on the elite's abilities to persuade the people that the solutions that they propose are beneficial for everybody. Bucharest is suffering, and intellectuals can distribute the curative medicine³⁰ if and only if the permissive context is available on the part of the

²⁷ Obviously, there are levels in their paternalistic position. There is a plurality of solutions and opinions that I do not attempt to cover. Nevertheless, this paper seeks a common ground in their position that, no matter how much democratic make-up it receives, proves to be still paternalistic at a critical analysis. At a larger level, this tendency has been observed by Andrei Plesu about a category of intellectuals that he opposes critically: "A special case is the cultivated individual without dilemmas, the one that considers oneself 'the better consciousness of the nation:' concerned and categorical, this one overwhelms us with dichotomies: chooses the bad from the good like a precise oracle, decides who's to be forgiven and who's not, advises, punishes, postulates He/she is the great organizer, the great teacher, the great healer He/she knows what we need better than we know it ourselves. Decides at our expense what we will think, how we will entertain, who deserves admiration and who deserves our spite The one that never admits that he/she is fallible, that he/she can be monstrous, unwanted, and harmful. The one that always knows what one is doing ... " "The Person Without Dilemmas." 1993. Dilema 8.

²⁸ The organizing team of the exhibition "Bucharest-the State of the City" from 1990, has stated the following intention: "The exhibition intended to be a signal. The nowadays Bucharest is definitely a unique city in Europe, if not in the entire world. The enormous wound made in its heart by the brutal intervention of the dictatorship, yet unhealed, must be treated with care, because the healing should leave the least signs possible." Beldiman, Alexandru. 1990. "Bucharest: State of the City." *Arhitectura* 1-6, p. 16.

²⁹ See the Manifesto of Architects from 1990: "We ask you to put together our talent and professional honesty in order to correct the urban and architectural errors of the last decades and to elaborate projects that should aim at the benefit of our citizens." "Manifesto of DAR." 1990. *Arhitectura* 1-6, p. 47.

³⁰ For the medical metaphor in the architectural discourse, the survey of the architectural publications during the period 1990-1992 is extremely relevant. The

people. Moreover, the ~ ~cept variables in this scenario. If people resist chang~ or l~ popular In,difference endangers the success of their plan of salvation, etc ~rcles. Will need the help of the authorities and of the legal system to sustain their efforts to administer the medicine.³¹ Therefore, this type of discourse of the elites is considered in this paper rather as a philanthropic one, than an attempt towards the democratization of the architectural problems. Participative architecture in the Romanian context, came in the 90s as an obvious change in attitude on the part of intellectuals, but suggests rather a growing interest from their part to be involved in social problems, than implying their categorical decision to be just one side of a democratic twofold dialogue between those who create architecture and those who are affected by it.

Lastly, this type of early architectural discourse suggests some infiltrations of the traditional architectural thinking into the newly acquired Western-type architectural language. The paternalist position in cultural attitudes is influenced by a long tradition of utopian thinking about Bucharest. Since the end of the nineteenth century, intellectuals from within or outside of the circles of specialists in architecture have built utopian plans for a future Bucharest.³² An investigation of this line of utopian writings would clarify the influence of this tradition on the recent-day architectural context in Bucharest. A tradition of Utopias helped to reinforce the idea that a single, providential mind of a visionary thinker can provide solutions for endless problems of an entire community.

On the other hand, after the communist experience, present-day intellectuals reject firmly the idea of a centralized power to command the entire field of architecture. Nevertheless, they accept the possibility of a concentration of power into the hands of a team of highly responsible specialists, sustained in their decisions by a progressive, illuminated elite. The utopia of a providential mind that provides solutions for the problems of the city is replaced by the utopia of an educated elite able to save the city through educational means. If the masses are no longer forced to accept "what is good for them and they do not know,"³³ nevertheless, they are supposed to be persuaded into it.

"wounded city" is the most used formula, as well as the "communist implant" or the "sufferings of the city."

³¹ The lack of help on the part of the officials is another leitmotif of architects discourse.

³² Some of these utopian writings belong to Ulysses de Marsillac, Martha Blbescu, George Calinescu, and Marcel Iancu.

³³ The authors of "Romania -Starea de fapt" consider that the entire political system of Romania after 1989 has a paternalistic tendency of this type. They consider that after / 1989, "the government that protects us from evil replaced the one that has pulled us toward betterment." (Romania. p. 179).

The Interviews The present research presents a change in progress. Therefore, the study is a complex mixture of cultural attitudes and hypotheses about the nature and the origin of these attitudes. The primary purpose was to demonstrate that a general change can be detached from this nexus of attitudes not yet settled. Therefore, this third part of the paper lets the interviewees "speak" in order to demonstrate that different attitudes can reveal the presence of a change in progress. On the other hand, it is the authorial voice who has gathered together the signs of change from the interviews and has interpreted them according to their rapport to the change. The interpretation of the interviews advances two hypotheses for further analysis. First, the change exists, but it is limited to a number of elite members with solid theoretical background and strong interests in producing meta-discourses about architecture. Second, this change happens rather at the conceptual level, as a tool to be used in architectural debates, than at the practical level. At the level of architectural practices, one can not talk about a change, but rather about more flexible opinions, induced by a closer contact with the new realities of the field.

List of the Interviewees

This chapter focuses on the set of interviews taken in Bucharest in April 1998. A presentation of the interviewees is necessary for a better understanding of the methodological strategy of this chapter. The ten interviews have been divided into five categories, according to their role in elucidating the premises of the chapter. In this respect, the categorization of the interviewees already announces the conclusions of this part of the study. Criteria of the division are the role inside the elite, the professional branch, the specialization, and the level of professional achievement.

1. Two interviews with practicing architects:

T. Zoran-male, age 47, specialist in the domain of interior) decoration, long experience of practice.

M. Rabu-female, young architect, full-time editor of the review of feminist analysis "Analyze"; occasionally, she practices civil architecture, mostly small "villa" projects.

2. Two interviews with professionals involved in publishing activities in the domain of architecture:

C. Saban-female, age 30, art historian specialized in design, editor-in-chief of the review "Design Bulletin," the first Romanian professional publication in the domains of design and architectural design.

C. Teodoru-female, age 27, architect and art historian, editor of the review Casa Lux, one of the very few Romanian publications in the field of interior decorations and architecture addressed to the larger public and with a wide audience.

3. Two interviews with the directory staff of the Union of Romanian Architects:³⁴

Alexandru Beldiman-President of the Union Măna. Celac and K. Kovacs³⁵-the former, important member, writings in the history and theory of architecture; the latter, young architect and theoretician, former lecturer at CEU Prague Art and Architecture Department. .t Two interviews with members of the artistic elite, relevant for the opinion about architecture of another elite, Interested also in taste judgments: Amelia Pavel³⁶-important Romanian art historian, representative of the old generation of cultural elites, with long activity in the cultural field. Marina P. -female, student-artist at the Art Academy of Bucharest, the department of painting, last year of study.

i. Two interviews with student architects: Andra P. -female, age 23, student at the Institute of Architecture Ion Mincu" Bucharest, the fifth year of study.

Valentin U. -male, age 24, student at the Institute of architecture Ion Mincu" Bucharest, the fifth year of study.

the Interviews Reveal Two Basic Attitudes

This section investigates how some of the themes presented in elite discourse are positioned in response to the new ideas about the role of the architect. In this paper these ideas are considered to be a result of Western influence. As it will be further presented, there are two conflicting scenarios in the architectural field, both of them looking to the Western world. Nevertheless, as it will be later shown, there are levels of adopting the one or the other of these two main attitudes:

1. The Romanian professional wants to be accepted in the Western world as an equal ally. The architect is able to prove the professional quality of his work, which can be considered high-level work at Western standards. Nevertheless, the drawbacks from inside, the clients, the non-existing laws, the communist legacy, stop them. Therefore, the architect is at odds with the entire society, which is not able to recognize his/her merits and to provide him/her the permissive

environment to work.

2. Coming from the same highly praised Western world, some ideas about a change in the status of the architect begin to be adopted by the Romanian professionals. These ideas challenge the previous scenario. The client should be taken into account, the law has to protect the

³⁴ These two names are widely known. Therefore, I use their full name during the text, since they are relevant names inside the profession.

³⁵ The interview was performed in an office of the Union of Architects. During the interview, a young architect, Kazimir Kovacs, joined the discussion. His interventions will be marked in the text with K. Kovacs.

³⁶ See the footnote 36. A relevant name for the artistic circles of Bucharest.

society and constrain the architect, rather than to protect the architect and constrain society, the future development of the city cannot be considered the exclusive domain of the architects. Moreover, the communist habits should be considered not only the origin of the societal misunderstanding of the architect's role, but also the origin of the architects' misunderstanding of the client or of the law's role.

Nevertheless, the latter critical attitude is rather a theoretical one. It comes from the highest circles of intellectuals. It is rather a critical response to the first scenario, then an attempt to put those ideas into practice. It is, as it usually happens in Romanian cultural history, a case of "synchronic" adoption of Western terms into the Romanian context, a "theory without content."³⁷

In order to sustain these statements, the final part of the paper is divided into two parts. The first part interprets and synthesizes the discourse of the elite members interviewed. This part does not claim to let elite's voices "speak for themselves." It is rather an attempt to put their discourse in a larger context in order to systematize their opinions. The second part dissociates from the elites discourse those ideas that suggest a change in attitude and tries to put them in their historical context of post-communist Bucharest in order to offer the correct dimension of the "change."

The Four Attitudes: Interpreting Elites' Discourse

After listening to the "voices" of the members of various elitist circles, one needs to refine the two basic options already presented. Four attitudes can be discerned among the "voices." First, there is the intransigent attitude. The architect/specialist is right and the society is wrong (Mu Rabu and C. Saban).

Second, there are some voices that accept the "biased" nature of their attitude. The professional claims that he is right, but probably, this is not an objective attitude. However, the elite member can not avoid being "biased." This subjective tendency is built into the idea of an educated elite. These voices are exclusively those of the students interviewed.

(Valentin U., Andra P. and Marina P.)

³⁷ A famous debate in the Romanian culture is the debate between the theory of "forms without content" of Titu Maiorescu and the theory of "synchronism" of Eugen Lovinescu. The first one claims that the modern institutions have been imported to Romania after the French model by the will of some progressive intellectuals and that the Romanian realities were not ready yet to accept them. Thus, the modernization process is only a "form" without "content." On the contrary, Lovinescu considers that the progress comes always from "above" and that the intellectuals have always been in the avant-garde of progress. He elaborates the "synchronism" theory that says that the ideas are circulating faster than the economic conditions are developing. Thus, there will always be a "synchronism" with the West in ideas and attitudes, even if the material base for the progress has to be provided afterwards. See Ungheanu, Mihai, ed. 1996. *Teoria formelor fara/ond*. Galati: Porto Franco.

Third, there is the tempered attitude. The daily impact with the public teaches the architect how to negotiate, how to accept the compromise. These "voices" are more inclined to criticize the intransigent attitude of the professionals in the first category. These are the professionals who have built relationships with the clients on a daily basis. One is an interior decorator the other one an editor for a popular architectural magazine. (T. Zoran and c. Teodoru)

Fourth, and the most important for the scope of this study, there is the critical attitude of some voices coming from the highest circles of the professional elite. These are the voices of some original intellectuals who are beyond categorization, and who have taken the pulse of their elite circles being able to adopt a neutral position. They have noticed a gap between the elites and the masses. They know how dangerous for a well-functioning society are such gaps. They do not rush to condemn society. They are more willing to locate the evil inside their own elitist circles. (Alexandru Beldiman, Mariana Celac and K. Kovacs and Amelia Pavel)

A change happens somewhere between the second and the third attitude. The first two categories of voices are rather inclined to exculpate the professional and to accuse society. The last two categories are, on the contrary, inclined to absolve society and incriminate the professional. Nevertheless, smaller changes happen inside these two groups, too. Therefore, two larger categories, grouping the first two and the last two, will be discussed here, as basic categories that are nevertheless evolving:

A. From Paternalism to Philanthropy

At the center of the first group of attitudes lies the idea that an educated person is more important for society than an uneducated one. The educated person puts their knowledge at the disposal of the society. Therefore, society owes respect to the educated person. (M. Rabu) There are some (voices that suggest the opposite, but one should not listen to them: "I think that the role of the architect is even more important nowadays. One should try to educate rather than accept to be subdued. Somebody told me, 'it is not true, we live in a market economy, the professional should change according to the demand/offer law.' I answered: 'Wait a minute, how can I put aside everything that I have striven to learn, everything that I accomplished through knowledge, to renounce my education, in order to adapt to the will of the people with money? Why should it not be the other way round? I must make them understand that I know better than them in this respect, and to educate them,'" (M. Rabu)

This paternalist attitude has consequences at the level of searching for solutions for the city. If one knows better, then one is entitled to decide what is to be preserved and what is to be destroyed from the present city. Unfortunately, one does not have the power. or the general support in order to do that: "I cannot demolish all these new buildings, although I would like to. (M. Rabu) "Ideally speaking, Bucharest should be demolished 100 percent. However, it is absurd to demolish entire districts. In realistic terms,

exactly what has been built after the earthquake in 1977 should be demolished." (C. Sabau) When looking for urban solutions, these voices always have in mind the Western example. "I would like to see happening in Bucharest too, what happened in Paris [the demolition of proletarian quarters of blocks of flats from the beginning of the century and their replacement with individual houses]." (C. Sabau) Nevertheless, the adoption of a Western example is accompanied by the good intention of taking care of the people. The Western world has taken this attitude because they care for the urban quality of life. Unfortunately, in Bucharest, nobody was interested in the quality of people's life: "In the quarters of flats there is not a single cinema in the entire districts, except Balta Alba and Dumul Taberei. People do not have green spaces, they do not have leisure spaces." (C. Sabau) This philanthropic perspective of "people's needs" diminishes when the actual relationship of these people with the architect is concerned. People are twice guilty. First, they are guilty for not paying attention to the architects and not listening to their philanthropic preaching. "I did not notice a change in

the mentality in the last nine years. I mean, the general mentality, because the specialist has it [the right mentality.] He [the specialist] has launched multiple signals. Seminars, workshops, conferences about architecture have taken place. There has been the contest 'Bucharest 2000.' A lot of problems have been discussed. The international echoes have been much more powerful than the national ones. In Bucharest, the significance of this contest has died. It is a question of public education that disappeared in the communist period and didn't reappear yet." (C. Saban) Second, they are guilty for not cultivating themselves sufficiently in order to be able to understand the architects' perspective. In both cases, the West is the model that offers credibility to the argument. The West has paid attention to the architect because in the West people feel the urge to cultivate themselves. "In the West, if one has money, it is almost a duty to cultivate oneself. As one pays attention to the way one looks, one cares also about the place one lives. In contrast, in our culture, those that have money are illiterate and do not understand a thing from the architectural projects, they accept only what they already know." (C. Saban)

The conclusions of such a discourse are pessimistic. "We are a people with a deformed and manipulated mentality." (C. Sabau) The specialists, hurt in their pride, sigh and draw back from the public activism to a self-imposed non-activity. The elites have done their job; if the society does not understand, the battle is a lost one.

B. From Partial Compromise to Open Criticism

The opposite discourse understands the dead end of this scenario. First, one should be aware of the gap between the specialist and the public and its consequences. Then, one should try harder to draw the attention of the public to architectural problems.³⁸ If somebody is to blame for the dead-end,

³⁸ The solutions suggested by Alexandru Beldiman are more active associations throughout the country; the faculties of architecture should be more involved in the architectural problems, the dialogue with the client more emphasized.

then the elites are to blame, because they are responsible.³⁹ "Today, we witness a general fanaticalism, of Intransigent positions and unwillingness to give up, It IS rather an Intransigent attitude from the part of the elites, than an intransigence of the masses. The elites always complain that the masses are uneducated, have bad tastes and, most of all, are irremediable. The elites are more willing to contest "the Other" than the large public. The larger public does not want to be involved too much in this fight." (Amelia Pavel) The Conclusion is that the elites are fighting without having a real opponent to face.

Other voices claim that the spite is mutual: "continuous irony from the part of the social body; continuous despair from the part of the elites in front of popular indifference." (Mariana Celac) Once the gap is acknowledged, the errors of the elite's scenario are evident. The one that understands this complex situation, can no longer accept the paternalist attitude: "I suspect enormously any attempt of the others to put me 'in the right direction.' Probably I cannot be integrated in the circles of today's Romanian elites. If I am so scared of somebody having enough power to put me in the right direction, then, I am extremely cautious not to get to the idea that somebody needs me to put him/her in the right direction." (Mariana Celac) Therefore, the same interviewee suggests, the chaotic development of new architecture in Bucharest is better than any form of "good direction" imposed by any circle, elitist or not. If there is anything good that happened in the architecture of Bucharest after 1989, it is the plurality of expressions of the private enterprise. "Something happened; instead of only one, there are many." As far as the negative examples are concerned, the worst phenomena are located in the field of the historical patrimony. Thus, the conclusions of the dialogue with Mariana Celac and K. Kovacs are amazingly different from the usual elitist discourse: "The best part [plurality] is the result of the fact

control. The worst part [patrimony] is the one where the involvement of the state that the architectural policy was relaxed, and lacked strict professional control. The elites should have been the most powerful." (K. Kovacs)

A more moderate critique of the elites' paternalist attitude is the policy of Alexandru Beldiman. In his opinion, the citizen should not accept any pretension of architect or of the state of deciding in one's place.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, since the people do not know their rights, it is the duty of the architects to teach them this simple fact. The paradox of this opinion is that the architects should teach the common people how to resist architects. As his opinion implies, a democratic attitude must be imposed on people from

³⁹ This is the opinion of K. Kovacs.

⁴⁰ "We have to teach the inhabitants of the cities that they have the right to present their opinion, that they are not supposed to bear unconditionally everything that the political power or the specialists suggest. This is to be done by means of continuous education." Alexandru Beldiman

Up to this point, a change in attitude between the first and the second scenario seems evident. Nevertheless, this second, anti-paternalist discourse has its internal contradictions that must be underlined for a correct understanding of the shift in attitude. In this second discourse, the reverent attitude toward the public is induced by an abstract ideal about democracy, reinforced with newly adopted Western arguments. Interest in a dialogue with "the masses" is accompanied by a primary interest either to educate the people

(1) or to prove to themselves that the Romanian elites are democratic, thus, European (2). Therefore, a corrected perspective on the interviews is needed.

The Correct Dimensions of the Critical Attitude

1. THEAITEMPTTO EDUCATE THE PEOPLE

The second type of discourse asks for a dialogue with the people. The dialogue can be a negotiation (the moderate attitude) or a partnership (the critical discourse). Nevertheless, as the argument develops, the original mechanism of this change of attitude is revealed. Having a dialogue with the people implies that the people get to know the problems of the specialist and to finally understand the professional arguments. Therefore, the architect will perform his/her work much easier. The dialogue is a means of lifting the people to the level of educated, aware citizens, able to understand the architects and to sustain their enterprises.

Thus, Alexandru Beldiman thinks that "a butcher will pay an architect differently if he would know what is the actual price of his work. Otherwise, he will think that only an unintelligible sketch does not deserve an important percent of the investment." Making the architectural problems known, means to help the architect find a better place in the hierarchy of professions. This can also apply to the story of the exhibition for the re-planning of the urban space in the Piata Victoriei (Victory's Square).⁴¹ Alexandru Beldiman narrates how the organizers have gathered two thousand questionnaires from the people visiting the exhibition. The scope of this detail inside the story was not to demonstrate that architects take into account the public's opinions about the urban space, but to prove that the exhibition organized by the Union of Architects was a success. An argument for this interpretation is the fact that the interviewee does not find necessary to narrate what happened to the questionnaires afterwards and what was the result of a possible study of the public opinions gathered at that occasion.

Thus, Alexandru Beldiman's statements that "before 1990 the desire to familiarize the population with the program of architects did not exist on the agenda of the professional" acquires a different connotation. There is not a change as far as the real interest in the public's opinion is concerned. The change lies rather in a new interest in the public legitimation of the architects' position.

⁴¹ Alexandru Beldiman, the head of the Union of Romanian Architects, has, during the interview, described the Union's efforts in maximizing the audience of these exhibitions of urban planning.

Moreover, behind the architects' democratic statements lies the preference for a~ ideal kind of client. Some voices claim that the dialogu: with the peopl~ IS needed. Nevertheless, those voices suggest that there is a hierarchy of clients and that the best ones are the educated ones. M. Rabu opposes the story of Gogu, the ill~terate, rich and authoritarian client, the story of a house built by her at Ramnicu Valcea for a couple of intellectuals. The two cases cannot be compared. M. Rabu is ashamed for being the architect of the first villa, while she is proud to have built the second one. Even less "intransigent" voices, like T. Zoran, use the same hierarchy.⁴² "There are three categories of clients. The first are those who understand you and let you do what you want. These have a solid culture behind them." T. Zoran tells the story of the director of the RENEL who was the grandson of Anghel Saligny.⁴³ He was willing to accept what the architect was saying, so he accepted the suggestion to build a conference hall in the company building and to decorate it with didactic images of company activities. The underlying suggestion of this story is that genetic heritage is important in shaping individual taste. Architects will gladly work only for such clients with "pedigree."

The same partial acceptance of the people's taste demonstrates

C. Teodoru, who is working for a large audience review, Casa Lux. Having closer contacts with the average clients, she is aware of the changes in their mentality that may influence the profession. She criticizes the "intransigent" architects for not being able to cope with the new phenomenon of popular hobbies. There is a certain hobby that gains more and more popular agreement, she says. "The client is ready to pay a great amount of money to be able to design for himself some objects to use or with which to decorate his house. It is a strategy of annihilating the everyday monotony of life." The professional, she says, is not able to understand this tendency and to offer the client advice and help to accomplish his hobby. "The stimulation of clients' creativity and capacity to invent is a new task on the architect's agenda." Nevertheless, when the entire interior space, not just a detail, is concerned, the specialist is indispensable. C. Teodoru considers that the entire

(interior space must be conceived by an architect, not by the owner of the house himself/herself. This opinion contradicts even the articles presented in the review that she edits. Some of the "famous" housekeepers interviewed for the review affirm that they are extremely passionate with house decoration⁴⁴ and that they could not live in a house arranged by somebody else.⁴⁵ Therefore, even an editor of a very popular magazine has difficulties as far as the acceptance of popular tendencies is concerned.

⁴² Amelia Pavel holds a view of a different hierarchy_ She accepts the nouveau riche, as persons that can acquire culture through money. Nevertheless, in her opinion, the larger masses are disastrous as far as the cultural level is concerned.

⁴³ A famous Romanian engineer from the first part of the century, who has built a bridge over the Danube, considered an important technical and artistic realization.

⁴⁴ See the interview with Georgeta Dinica, Casa Lux 2 (1998), p. 46.

⁴⁵ See the interview with Elena Erbasu, Casa Lux 2 (1998), p. 56.

Finally, when dealing with real people, Mariana Celac has difficulties in acting according to her general critique of the elites. In her story of a house from Snagov, she could not accept the client's preference for traditional materials like brick-stone and his rejection of modern materials (prefabricated materials) so much used during the communist regime.⁴⁶ She could not admit that the client expressed his disagreement with the past by translating it in a categorical rejection of the communist economic and functional principles of building "houses for the people." Like C. Teodoru, Mariana Celac cannot give up being a professional in order to cope with popular mentalities.

2. FACING THE WEST

It has been argued so far that the willingness to take public opinion into account is an ultimate solution for the survival of the profession rather than a real interest in hearing the other voice. The second step of the argumentation consists of showing the important role that the influence of

Western norms had in accelerating the process of opening the closed circles of elites toward the public.

After listening to all the interviews, Mariana Celac reveals herself as one of the most categorical voices in accusing the elites as paternalist and self-sufficient. Nevertheless, there is a sense in her discourse that her open views are more influenced by Western readings than by indigenous phenomena. First, during the interview she is using a great amount of English words that prove a familiarization with the Western debates in the field: Speaking about popular attitudes, she uses the formula "nurture versus nature;"⁴⁷ between the elite and the people there is a "gap;" the attitude of the intellectuals is "out-dated;" the programs of the architects must be very well "targeted."

Moreover, when she speaks about the need to conciliate the elites and the public, she has in mind Romanian integration in the European Union. "The problem of entering Europe lies here. The elite does not get it that an official policy aimed at civilizing this country should be used as a strategy not to promote the elites, but to narrow the "gap" between the elites and the social

body." On the other hand, she criticizes the elites' tendency of comparison with the West: "There is a small inferiority obsession among the intellectuals.

If the Romanian elite had not been so interested in what is its position versus the rest of the world, the society would be better understood. The preoccupation for the image and the status is too visible now." The inner contradiction of her statements testify how uneven and disrupted is the appeal to the Western model, which the Romanian contemporary elites use in their discourse.

⁴⁶ "They have built two anti-atomic bunkers on the shore of the Snagov lake."

M. Celac

⁴⁷ The words in italics inside the quotation marks have been originally used in English in the Romanian interview.

Alexandru Beldiman argues that the Union of Architects has accomplished consistently the task of enlarging the popular involvement in architectural issues. Nevertheless, he also mixes the task of making architecture popular with the country, with the task of presenting Romanian architecture abroad. Moreover, discussing the relationship between the architect and the public, A. Beldiman adds data concerning the Western echoes to some Romanian architectural exhibitions, thus changing the focus

of the interview. Finally, although the interviews are centered on the architects' role in society and their dialogue with the people, different levels of professional disputes among the specialists themselves interpose in the interviewees' discourse from time to time. The terms of these debates are usually centered on Western arguments, never on the problem of the popular reception of the architectural object. For example, the famous dispute about the "Bucharest skyscrapers"⁴⁸ rarely brings into discussion the influence of these tall buildings on the psychology or mentality of the Bucharest's inhabitants.⁴⁹ Usually, the dispute is a strict professional one, about Western trends or Western models.

⁴⁸ A good example of the debate pro and against the "Bucharest skyscrapers" could be found in the issue number 190 (1996) of the cultural publication "Dilema." These tall office buildings built in Bucharest after 1989 could be hardly called "skyscrapers" in real terms. They are ironically referred to as "skyscrapers" in the Bucharest vernacular language.

⁴⁹ An exception is C. Sabau who discusses the negative psychological effect that the low building of BANCOREX on Calea Victoriei might have on the passer-by, specially during the night.

Conclusions This paper presents the discourse of eleven members of the architectural elite who are inserted into the cultural context of post-communist Bucharest. The first part briefly sketched the architectural problems and new situations that appeared in Bucharest after 1989. The second part presented the interviews with members of the architectural and artistic elite, taken in (1989). Their voices have been roughly divided into two categories. Thus, the first hypothesis of the study is that the difference between the two types of discourse demonstrates a shift of attitude among Romanian elites, concerning the role of the architect in the society and the relationship that he or she must build with the client/public.

Additionally, the second part of the chapter focusing on interviews investigated the nature of this change in attitude. The hypotheses advanced are the following. First, the change in attitude is reduced to a small number of intellectuals. Moreover, they can be circumscribed inside the elite as persons with theoretical interests and high positions in the hierarchy of the Romanian elite. They are authorities inside the intellectual circles, either symbolic or effective. Second, the change is considered superficial, as rather the result of an adoption of Western terms applied non-consequently to Bucharest local problems. It is a classical example of a Romanian case of Westernizing from above.

⁵⁰ Additionally, a slight change in attitude is manifest by those professionals that prove to be in continuous contact with the client or the larger public. Nevertheless, in this case too, the change is determined rather by the need

Talking about the unusual presence of a "skyscraper" on Calea Victoriei, the oldest boulevard of Bucharest, the proponents of this building recall the example of Paris (C. Sabau) or of Boston (Amelia Pavel) where historical buildings cohabit harmoniously with modern ones, while its opponent recall the example of German cities (T. Zoran) where the historical center is preserved in its original stylistic unity of the architectural profession to survive in the new context of a free-market economy, rather than by a real interest in adjusting the architectural practices to the popular mentalities.

If the scope of this paper would allow further analysis, an overview of the Romanian architectural journals and magazines from the last decade will confirm the conclusions of this paper. There is a change of attitude, but it is rather the adoption of Western ideas, without practical consequences in the architectural field. The architect adopts a framework of theorizing about the city and about architecture, preserving, nevertheless, an abstract level of the architectural debates. Being informed as far as Western terms of the problem are concerned, architects choose to challenge their own views. The adoption proves intellectual flexibility and openness to a plurality of perspectives regarding the architectural object. Nevertheless, architects are not willing to challenge the local architectural practices. There is still room for maneuver in Bucharest, as far as the assimilation of these ideas by the local realities is concerned. To tell whether the result of this conjunction will look similar to anything known before, as architectural strategies or practices, expands the purpose of this study. However, the possibility begins to interest the Romanian architectural elites.



"Casa Poporului"-"The House of the People"--Ceaușescu's palace and avenue legitimized as the new siege of the Romanian parliament -A postcard sold in Bucharest in 1998

⁵⁰ See footnote 37



The offices of "The Romanian Commercial Bank" on "Calea Victoriei"-The modified ground floor of a former block built during the last part of Ceausescu's regime



The new "Financial Plaza" building of the "Bancorex" Bank on "Calea Victoriei"-The historical boulevard of old Bucharest



Gypsy-like palaces built by rich Romanian ethnics at Snagov



"Gypsy Architecture" in the area "Mihai Bravu" in Bucharest



A villa of the "Nouveaux Riches" at Snagov-A satellite village of Bucharest

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Tradition Revived and Contested

