la Biennale di Venezia

12. Mostra Internazionale di Architettura

Partecipazioni nazionali

superbia

INSTITUTUL CULTURAL ROMAN

ISTITUTO ROMENO DI CULTURA E RICERCA UMANISTICA DI VENEZIA

superbia

Romanian National Pavilion in the New Gallery of the Romanian Institute for Culture and Humanistic Research at the 12th International Architecture Biennale Venice

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FOREWORD

The 12th International Architecture Biennale in Venice coincides with the closing days of the first decade of the 21st century. It is a time when, compelled no doubt by the economic crisis, the intellectual and creative community, alongside cultural operators, appear inclined to reflect on contemporary society as well as on their own way of rising to meet a host of challenges as diverse as they are pressing.

Under the circumstances, the relationship between tradition and modernity has acquired a dramatic edge, thus making a substantial contribution to the emerging spiritual and cultural values at the beginning of the new millennium.

The world of architecture and the international community of architects seem nonetheless to be involved in a more natural process, whose discontinuities are fewer as compared to those of other spiritual realms. This should indeed come naturally to a science blending the beautiful with the practical in the attempt to 'discipline' the creative spirit harmoniously by means of a set of rigorously pragmatic and social proportions, rules and criteria.

The current meaning of architecture – the mouthpiece of new values and lifestyles – has been accurately captured by the curator of the present edition of the International Architecture Biennale in Venice, Kazuyo Sejima, through the topic selected and the motivation provided: "People Meet in Architecture" essentially reflects the sheer force of this realm of the human spirit (and simultaneously a significant chapter in our cultural history) when it comes to generating a surprising collection of patchwork scenarios and finding original solutions for the interaction between the individual and the environment (be it natural and social). Such a solution could be the very framework of the debate the organizers have put forth this year, by inviting the former Architecture Biennale commissars.

Romania's participation in the 2010 edition has been graciously made possible by the joint involvement of several governmental institutions (The Ministry of Culture and Natural Heritage, The Romanian Cultural Institute and The Ministry of Foreign Affairs), whose non-standard response to the difficulties triggered off by the financial circumstances made possible an event unprecedented in the history of the Biennale: the presence of two national projects, one hosted by the Giardini National Pavilion and the other – by the New Gallery of

the Romanian Institute for Culture and Humanistic Research in Venice. The latter institution has entered the 80th year since its establishment by Romania's foremost historian, Nicolae Iorga, the one who, in the years 1938-1940, took it upon himself to muster the financial resources and cope with the complicated formalities required by building Romania's pavilion on the land granted by the City Hall.

The community of Romanian architects thus enhances its opportunity to have a say in the debate put forth by the Venice Biennale. We do have a good school of architecture. Even in Italy, at the Accademia di Romania, a great number of Romanian architects of the inter-war period studied or benefited from grants, alongside the specialists of future generations. Their theoretical and practical discourse, a quite interesting discourse, too, in most cases, has always made its mark on the ideas publicly debated in our country. It was no random occurrence that the jury assigned as winners of the Bucharest competition two teams of young architects and their projects: "1:1" in the National Pavilion and "Superbia" in the New Gallery of the Romanian Cultural Institute office in Venice. The former project contributes an original interpretation of the Biennale topic: on the one hand, its particular adaptation to the case of Romania, to the yet unsolved problems of Romanian society at large. The latter project, "Superbia", attempts a reflection on what the concept of 'home' can still mean today, after Martin Heidegger's philosophy taught us that to be actually means 'to inhabit', 'inhabiting' being the founding principle of existence.

Subsequent to its inclusion in the Biennale circuit, the exhibiting area of the Venice Institute's "New Gallery" (Cannaregio, 2215) will be thus able to monitor the collective response of visitors, specialists and the media, consequently marking the artistic destinies of the young authors of the "Superbia" project as well as those of their team-mates.

On behalf of the Romanian Cultural Institute, I wish Romania every success in the 12th edition of the Architecture Biennale.

HORIA-ROMAN PATAPIEVICI
President of The Romanian Cultural Institute

1. Radu Cioca - *Golden shoes for golden routes*
Courtesy of the artist

2. *Ideal couple* - Ilarie Pintea
Courtesy of the artist

3. *Inner hill* - Radu Cioca
Courtesy of the artist

CONCEPT

The theme of the 12th edition of the Venice Biennale proposes a humanistic attitude towards architecture: People Meet in Architecture is centered on the human being in their (personal) encounter with the sometimes too abstract concept of architecture: "The idea is to help people relate to architecture, to help architecture relate to people, and to help people relate to themselves."(Kazuyo Sejima). We see this as an opportunity to investigate architecture by new methods, and bring about a different approach on a problematic subject in contemporary Romania.

The Romanian National Pavilion hosted by the New Gallery of I.R.C.C.U, brings forward the recent residential sprawl of Romanian cities, born by devouring peri-urban landscapes, lacking planning and infrastructure, following inappropriate allotment and street patterns, which exploded in recent years due to the real estate boom. Today, the (fortunate?) stop of this phenomenon gives us time to reconsider it. The project Superbia (pride <lat.) speaks about the need for individuality – transposed upon one's image of their ideal home – about comfort and intimacy as goals (hard) to attain, by means of questioning the relation of interior vs. exterior, private vs. commonly shared space in Romania's newly built suburbs. Ultimately, Superbia occasions a review of urban living someplace where "urban" itself is missing.

The periphery topic is not new neither in the Romanian, nor in international practice, starting with the more conservative European adress, going towards more flexible attitudes in South America or Asia. Without seeking corrective measures, with no intention or possibilities for comprehensive studies, avoiding lamentation, we invite for an investigation uncluttered by preconceived ideas on how the city is defined or the way it should look. Moreover what we are seeking for is a comprehension of actual dwelling beyond statistical data.

From this perspective one notices first of all the way these places are inhabited: the Romanian suburb is a terrain of indivual search for one's well-being and comfort. Here, people concentrate all their effort towards creating their best possible home, which thus becomes the only support of their dreams, the reification of the best imaginable nature of comfort, though seldom free of compromise. Ideal living becomes self-centered and introverted. The personal search for comfort sometimes leads to the over-emphasizing of the interior or its immediate area, but only within the limits of the private property, meanwhile the exterior, the public space, remains unsorted. It belongs to no one.

The picture is therefore surprising, feature of sharp contrasts between "superb" interiors vs. crude exterior. The absence of streets, mud, underdevelopped infrastructure, and underplanning are ubiquous realities of this casual suburban scene. Moreover, an environment thus built reveals itself as a mere congestion of more or less striking simultaneous identities inside an incoherent weaving. Yet we can see in this simultaneity a different coherence: that of distinct gestures, indifferent to each other, performed by individuals sharing the same ideals and the same spatial practices. This coincidence generates a meeting-point - a place for people to meet in architecture - where everyone meets an architecture of their own.

This allows us to assume the presence of certain values to counter the absence of the city (in real facts or in figures), the lack of proper roads or planning, the precarious landscape and the ever present mud: the chance of spontaneity and customization, the achievement of maximum interior comfort and the assertion of an architecture of one's own. Whether the sum of elements of the new peripheries creates or not value remains undecided; but as the simple addition proves unproductive, further, more complex operations are required.

Symbolic but highly visual, the exhibiton interprets, in this respect, the concept into an installation of contrasts and subjective perspectives. The earth* is the emotional factor which charges and torments the gallery, against which a series of objects with different individulities are set: sculptural elements making reference of purist architectural stances and ordinary items of everyday living, overemphasised into unexpected or absurd objects. The installation thus becomes a space a negotiation between these elements as well as between their virtual projections. They are different channels through which it speaks about life in the new Romanian suburb, about individualism, materialism, value, effort, aspirations and status, about contrast between reality and its projection, and the difference of spatial processing between interior and exterior.

Voices of the suburb make themselves heard inside the gallery – cuttings from the interviews with inhabitants of different peripheries of Cluj, our study case – providing relevant details and a subjective but vivid picture of life in these areas, as seen from inside. In addition to this, a media project visually documents the Romanian suburb of 2010, by different means of probing and mapping reality, from drawing, to blog, from film to photo, a collection partially gathered by public submissions and developing throughout the exhibition.

Finally, the image is rounded up by the series of texts which form the main body of this catalogue. Coming

out of the intellectual sphere, they express both professional readings of the subject, citing theories, studies or research and opinions or personal beliefs, suppositions and even stereotypes, regarding the experiece of the city of Cluj, as well as that of Bucharest or even overcoming specific places. This type of vision, embodying multiple personal perspectives focused upon one subject, reveals our strategy of searching patterns in ideas, as well as in gestures, in attitudes, desires and tastes, regarded as further meeting-points, as possible firm-lands for tackling problematic issues and building architecture.

*The earth used for the exhbition was shipped over from Romania, from the soil-abundant suburbs of Cluj to earthless Venice. Besides the gesture being somewhat symbolic, this is a proof of authenticity and a response to the concept of Rebiennale, while it will be used for replanting the gardens of the Romanian Institute for Culture and Humanistic Research in Venice.

DANIEL ȘERBAN, SILVIU ALDEA

4. *Inner hill* - Radu Cioca
Courtesy of the artist

EXHIBITION

The "New Gallery" of the Romanian Institute for Culture and Humanistic Research in Venice offers us the possibility to recreate an intimate space on a domestic scale: one room to which the visitor can relate individually. White and shiny surfaces make us think of care for interiors but the sought-after comfort slowly slides towards the restraint of stepping on something precious. Within this pristine interior space the relation is detailed between the interior and the exterior, between comfort and discomfort, between raw earth and new architectural insertion. The installation violently shows earth's contrast to the serene clear space. It is at the same time displayed as a completely strange element to the gallery, an intruder and a living sensory element. We propose reversed values, an element that is usually a proof of neglect and chaos, the earth becomes tidy, contained by a geometry perimeter. On the other hand, it is living valuable material, where an architectural non-living object is placed into. The interior space is intentionally spectacular and, despite its intimacy, it communicates with the exterior through its large windows. This speaks about property showcasing, making an impression with one's home. Showing off one's own values can lead to absurd hypostases. As overdimensioned or over-invested into houses, items of the individual wardrobe lose their function by aestheticism: a pair of shoes should be made mainly to walk with and a house to be lived in. Instinctive need to express one's individuality springs from the natural revolt against the uniform way of life imposed on us by socialism and would lead to an overstressing matter: useless furniture items inhabiting superb interiors as hunting trophies. Along such excessive exhibition, there is sensible value and refined taste. Desirous of standing out, individuals' gestures become parallel and so very alike, creating a new commonplace space. Doubling the gallery by reflexion multiplies the identity of objects as elements of the system / installation by simultaneously showing two faces of the same coin, two stances of the same truth: reflected white turns black.

SILVIU ALDEA, RADU CIOCA

MULTIMEDIA CONTEST
In order to create a database of films/photos/collages which would reflect and illustrate the new Romanian suburb we launched a call for contributions in the form of an open national contest. The goal was both the gathering of a diverse library of images and the involvement of as many unspecialized people as possible in the process. The selection was made by a specialized jury composed of Architect Dana Vais, Art Curator Mihai Pop and Photograpy/Media Lecturer Doru Pop. Out of 42 participants one project was declared winner and the work of 14 more participants was selected to be presented in the exhibition.

The winning project, "FoOoOoOam", has been chosen due to the complexity of the theme and the style of representation. It is an online project which is organised around the idea of continuous exploration of the targeted areas and which is searching for ways of exposing aspects most of the time hard to reveal and define. As the exclusive multimedia unit of the project "Superbia", "FoOoOoOam" is developing throughout the exhibition.

MARIUS CĂTĂLIN MOGA, LAURA PANAIT

FOOOOOOAM

How to apprehend the changing idea of the brand new Romanian suburb? The spontaneous, inventive but also chaotic, individualistic and materialist features of these urban satellites are a perfect inspiration source, but the risk is that any discourse can turn inappropriate.

In direct contact with the suburban areas in Cluj, we realized that the best idea to understand this social phenomenon was to use our "sketchbooks" as a being that emulates the suburbia itself. A meta-peripherical discourse that is constantly changing. Departing from here, we developed a virtual journey to reproduce the idea of a walk through the growing city.

Based on Peter Sloterdijk's theory, we took the foam metaphor - a matter with hermetic consistence and particular dynamics - to represent the way in which these spaces are generated. Individualized cells spilled in a spontaneous way would show the growing suburbs, just as the many specific situations we present using different blogs, posts or social networks such as Facebook, Tumblr and Twitter.

Foooooooam is the web art ingredient of the project Superbia, in the Venice Architecture Biennale. Using the different web platforms, it aims to redraw a virtual map of the contemporary suburb, complemented by a second blog that acts as a periphery of our own blog. The page "I'm the center you are my periphery" is an invitation to the visitors to send pictures from their own peripheries and show how the perception of this urban phenomenon can change depending on where they are situated in the world.

ALINA BRADU, CARLOS CARMONAMEDINA, SILVIU MEDEȘAN
www.foooooooam.com

INTERVIEWS

Our concept is built around the hypothesis that, beyond the obvious chaos to see step by step , new suburbs in Romania present a realm of negociation between problematic realities and certain values: the opportunity for self-made individual comfort, formal expression, tracing one's own set of rules and so on.

The hypotheses drove us to conduct a small research, without the claim of scientific approach, about and involving the dwellers of these suburbs. We conducted a series of about 20 qualitative interviews around 2 hours long each. Average age of the speakers was 30 years, mainly couples or young families of middle start-ups and at the early stages of their professional careers. Setting off from a list of questions, the interviews actually grew into free dialogues about significant aspects such as place of origin, daily route to reach the perifery, reality compared to expectations, annoyances and trivial joys, but also prospects for the future and needs of change.

Next to the issues we followed during the dialogues, certain remarks appeared constantly: the hint of financial compromise in the context of unreasonable real estate boom during 2006-2008, running away from the socialist housing blocks of the more established neighborhoods, the obsession for a new home, the ideal of large floor area and last but not least the illusion of moving into an unspoiled natural environment but which has proven to be swallowed up by buildings or only acts as decoration, not for active recreation.

The fieldwork of this short case study has largely confirmed our hypotheses. Most of the speakers showed different degrees of satisfaction with their current situation and with their living in the suburbs in general, and while there are noumerous complaints and drawbacks, the words of Andrei Coman, 30 years old - one of the interviewees: "we've adapted so well to these new conditions" sum up the general need for emphasizing the positive aspects of their life in these new (sub)urban spaces.

SILVIU ALDEA, LAURA PANAIT

ARTICLES

SUPERB SUBURBIA. THE DEGREE ZERO OF URBAN SPACE

TEXT: DANA VAIS

Forget what you knew about suburban sprawl. Rather, take a look at the Romanian recent urban periphery. In the wide green landscapes, there are extravagant houses that have no gardens. But then, neither streets. Splendid cars are parked in mud. Between neighbours, seemingly endless fields go along with unbelievable proximities of windows through which sunlight never gets.

You thought the city was a sophisticated continuous system of flows and relations, rather than a collection of isolated objects?... Then what about these superb coloured bodies randomly thrown into the green fields? What about this urban space where nothing relates to nothing, but so much effort is consumed in each and every isolated point?

This is the continuation of contemporary urbanisation by other means: what is being experienced here is the total liberalisation of the urban system on low scales. The city has broken down into small pieces – it has been scattered into a myriad of individual mini-forces, it has been reduced to its smallest elementary particles. A new kind of instant city is being born from atoms. This is the degree zero of urbanity.

Micro-agents
Andrea Branzi[1] defined the "degree zero" of urban space as the space of the "weak metropolis": an enzymatic territory, hybrid, diffuse and reversible, in which the smallest elements – the molecules of urban life – mattered the most. They made the city, they changed the world. Indeed, the world does not necessarily change through big shifts, but rather by starting over, now and again, from the tiniest enzymes. Great transformations occur through microstructures. The city evolves in its most elementary domestic cells.

In Branzi's territory, micro-events still occurred in an existing generic grid of order. What if the micro-agents emerged in lack of any order whatsoever, in a maximum micro-liberty, as in our case here? The urban space would then begin from absolute entropy: this is the degree zero of urban space indeed.

For our micro-agents, beginning anew is an aim in itself. The radical start is actually a very topical issue today. "The world is running out of places where it can start over"[2], Rem Koolhaas warned, confronted to the huge urbanisation explosions in the world. But he was wrong. The world can start over everywhere. One should not look for radical beginnings only in the vastness of the globe. The world does not actually begin with bigness. Starting over is rather a matter of elementary particles. The world can start over within its smallest bubble.

Foam bubbles
Branzi's enzymatic model also predicted there would be no divisions between interiors and exteriors, between public and private spaces. Yet it is obvious that these separations have never actually disappeared. Quite the contrary, limits are tougher than ever today. In the Romanian suburbia, the entire world has been reduced to an accumulation of firmly defined private interiors. What is outside does not matter. The city around does not exist. The private bubbles are the only space of life that there can be. Exactly like in a space of foams.

[1] Andrea Branzi, "For a Post-Environmentalism: Seven Suggestions for a New Athens Charter", in Mohsen Mostafavi and Gareth Doherty (eds.), Ecological Urbanism, Baden: Lars Müller Publishers and Harvard College, 2010, 110-113; Charles Waldheim, "Weak Work: Andrea Branzi's 'Weak Metropolis' and the Projective Potential of an 'Ecological Urbanism'" in Mostafavi and Doherty (eds.), 114-121.

[2] Rem Koolhaas, "Last Chance?", in Ole Bouman, Mitra Khoubrou and Rem Koolhaas (eds.), Al Manach, special edition of Volume, Amsterdam: Stichting Archis, 2007, 7.

Peter Sloterdijk[3] claimed that the "city of the future" will be the "Foam City", and that the 21st century will be a Century of Foams. We live in a world of private spheres, where there is nothing in between. Every micro-bubble becomes a world in itself. We don't live in a shared world, but each in our own "indoor". All we care about are our isolations and immunities. You think this could be a return to nature?... Quite the contrary. This is the definitive artificiality: we produce only well-controlled acclimatised interiors. Relations to anything outside have disappeared. Vicinities do not mean opening through proximity, but rather opacity effort. The city becomes a multitude of elementary cells that "can be neither truly united, nor truly separated": a "co-existence in co-insistence".[4]

Space physics

Actually, our cities of foams are rather collections of isolated objects, floating in spatial fields where the only interaction is sheer gravity: the one with bigger mass prevails. The only laws in effect here are the laws of physics. The city coalesces by accretion from simple elementary bubbles into discontinuous patches of agglomerations and swarms. They overflow overboard the compact city, but still keep close to it. The force of gravity is maybe weak, but also implacable. And, as relativity theory describes it, it is maybe not even a force, but the warping of space itself. What we have here is simply the result of how spatial mechanics works.

When physicists studied matter at its smallest scales, what they found was uncertainty, a lot of empty space, and some very extravagant micro-particles. It goes the same for the urban space reduced to its smallest scale, the degree zero of urbanity – such as the space of Romanian periphery.

Superb after sublime

Something is incessantly born out of nothing. However, what emerges here are new individual private bubbles, not a new order. What is continually recreated is entropy. Order on urban scale, any bigger scale order actually, if it existed, it would be really sublime: bigness is always sublime. Modernists tried sublimity in their time (and communists were some absolute modernists), shaping the urban space like one big total artwork. Yet they have failed.

Individual micro-agents are light-years away from this intangible sublimity. All is not lost though. They might be small, but they have their pride – their superbia. Being superb at smaller scales is not a waste, it is not excessive. It is rather part of the spatial logic of entropy itself: the extravagant micro-particles take it all. All that can be invested into the urban space now is invested in their bubbles, which can thus flourish in full splendour. (Splendour in the grass.) And what do excess or waste mean, when all is entropy?... What is superfluous, when there is no order, therefore no good measure either, to be exceeded?...

The superbness of each of the elementary particles is part of how the urban space works when downscaled to the lowest limits. It is a sure symptom that the absolute degree zero of space has been reached. From now on, the scale of urban order can only go up.

[3] Peter Sloterdijk, Écumes – Sphères III, Paris: Hachette Littératures, 2005; see also Sloterdijk, Sphères I. Bulles, Paris: Fayard, 2002.

[4] Sloterdijk, Écumes, 50.

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I'm the center

you're my periphery
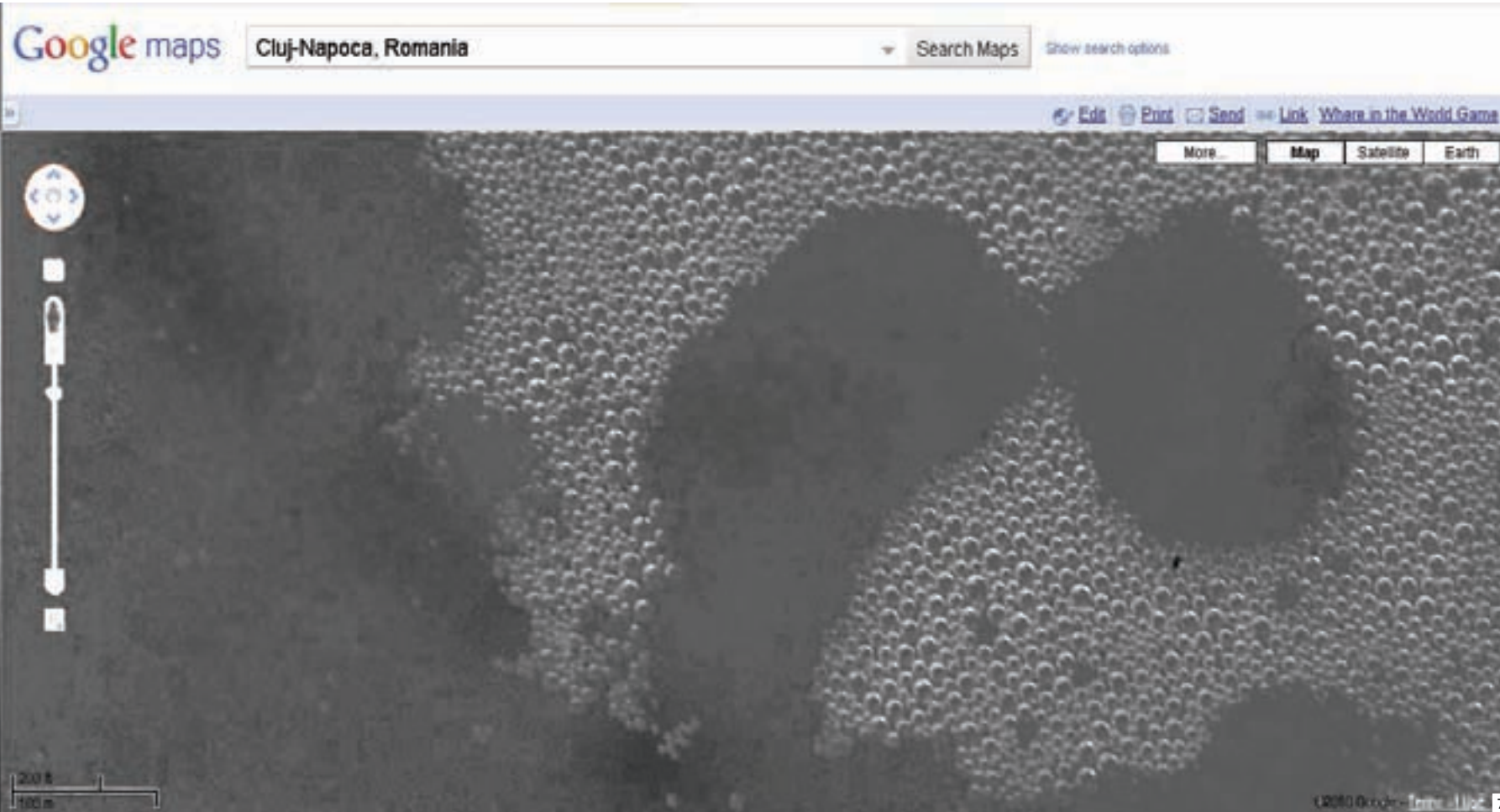
Superbia: When did you decide to move?

Előd: About 4 years ago we thought about getting a place, but the prices in Cluj were very high. A normal apartment with 2 rooms cost about 100 000 euro, in the city, not necessarily only in the centre. It was the economic boom period, when everybody was building and the prices were extremely high. After about a year we found out that in Floreşti or Baciu, right near Cluj, the apartments are much more accessible compared to the prices in Cluj at that period. We wanted to see an apartment in Baciu, and we couldn't decide right away by seeing what was there. Afterwards, we found out from some relatives that an Irishman had a project here in Floreşti and that's the project we eventually chose. When we saw the place, we asked to see some plans and when we saw the design, we knew that this is it and we didn't even look for other apartments. It was practically the second apartment we looked at.

S: And did it suit you?

E: Yes, the price too, and we decided to buy an apartment here.

S: Do you know the neighbours?

E: Yes, even before we moved, I can say we've become friends with everyone. Compared to how it was in Mărăşti, where living in an 8 storey building, for 6 years, I had no idea who my neighbours were. Here it was much easier to make friends. We are all approximately the same age.

S: Do you go out, at night?

E: As far as free time goes, we prefer the city centre. If we do go out, we don't come home, we go out directly for a beer or something. We theoretically work till five, and practically till six or seven. We would lose too much time if we would come home and then go back to town.

Előd, 31, journalist, Floreşti

THE SUBURB OR ABOUT THE LOGIC OF "NEITHER, NOR"

TEXT: ŞTEFAN UNGUREAN

According to Deleuze and Guattari, the frontier is a place of liberty. Should one open any book on town planning history, this is one of the main striking ideas. The governing body of medieval Braşov allowed for illicit transactions to take place outside the town walls, while at the same time, in Bucharest, those who wanted to make illegal business simply had to move beyond the city entrance barriers! There, on the outskirts of the city, the chances to flee from the control of the administration were high, opportunities built up and freedom reigned.

Built in the proximity of neighbourhoods made of collective buildings, the new suburbs of the post-revolutionary age have been perpetuating this archetype. For quite a long time after 1990, the notion of 'city perimeter' ceased to exist. In fact, the instauration within society of a new functioning mechanism based on private property, cumulated with the widespread social phenomenon of property retrocessions blew the principles of town planning into pieces. Why? Because town planning came to be associated with a communist-type social organization. The desecration that occurred after 1990 affected many spheres of social life: its management, forecasting and planning attributes, work discipline, its social control functions. Simultaneously, a disinhibitory phenomenon occurred, which engulfed both public and private sphere (family), ultimately invading the intimate sphere, which penetrated and settled, through the media, into the public space.

On the background of this disinhibition process, for a while, the right of doing just about anything with one's land didn't assemble in any way with the principles of urban public policies.

The mechanism of creating private property was, initially and inevitably, based on the right of inheritance. Meanwhile, after the opening of borders, a second mechanism came into being, related to the creation of private property. This time, it was a Lockean type of mechanism, based on work. With western money made from working abroad, Romanians had villas erected for themselves or purchased cars to mark their emancipation. This is the first thing that all of my acquaintances did; none of them invested in any business, nor did any of them open their own business. Our intention is not to find further explanations, we are suspecting that behind this behaviour rests the need for safety (a house is indeed the expression of this basic need), but also the need for social acknowledgement and personal pride. Consequently, these people purchased some land and started to have their houses built. Without bothering to look left or right, they just did what they thought best. In fact, they still believed in stability and sustainability, in the quality of the 'place' – all attributes of modernity. Through these characteristics, suburbs are a continuation of a solid modernity; they are the expression of a primordial shelter.

The '1989' moment was equivalent to a tuning of the theories. The notion of a 'public good' produced and managed by the State was thrown to the garbage can. Proclaimed as absolute truths replacing other 'absolute truths' (sic!), the new stances maintained that the public good inevitably originates from the individual good, without us bothering about it. Furthermore, no State or any other authority is needed to impose regulations that would go beyond individual initiative. In other words, if we all build wonderful houses, we shall have wonderful neighbor-

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hoods. Since in the old regime people failed to see where their own individual interest lay within the collective good, the fact that now the only focal point was the individual interest did not surprise anybody. Therefore, individual desires immediately found principles on which to build a justification. This is proof of the fact that the truth does not represent a unifying synthesis, but a balance of power in the relations between a majority and a minority.

Indeed, that was the moment when it was clear that the means of accomplishing public good in communist times, through the State's coercive methods, engendered a selfish logic and selfish behaviours and that the ideology of this 18th century liberalism glued itself perfectly onto this mentality, whose origin lay in a discourse diametrically opposed to liberalism. In fact, people wanted more freedom; they wanted to escape from a system characterized by visual and auditory constraints and interferences, limitations caused by the collective building reproducing the archetype of a prison. They found a good place for this freedom on the outskirts of neighbourhoods, on the border, somewhat against society and the State. In a way, this was a return to the state of nature described by Hobbes, in which cooperation is refused and the presence of a Leviathan declined. Consequently, these suburbs, which came into being as a result of individual actions, are ultimately an expression of selfishness and, definitely, not of individualism. Because what separates a selfish person from an individualistic one is the inability of the former to cooperate so as to bring forth a common good, inability deriving from a cognitive limitation: either the person cannot identify his own interest with in this greater common good, or he deems this action inefficient.

The fact that, after so many years, the suburbs still do not benefit from the much-needed infrastructure emphasizes, on the one hand, the absence of local governance, and on the other, these people's inability to organize themselves and cover the role that should have been played by the authorities. However, a very big step is needed to move from this to what Tocqueville calls "a well-understood interest". This can be translated by the coming into being of behaviours that require small costs and can be assumed by everyone (for instance, picking up a piece of paper thrown onto the sidewalk and putting it into the garbage can). A collection of such small actions can engender a significant public good – invisible at first; and this is precisely why this step is so hard to take… because it is invisible. Hence the question: how much can one learn, how much can one change and how can one do that? Or, the key ingredient in creating coherent public policies that can be successfully implemented in the urban public sphere resides precisely in people's ability to understand that sometimes, however good their intentions are, their individual actions build up and can trigger unexpected, perverted, dysfunctional effects. But can one truly learn otherwise than by current practice, other than from his own mistakes? By seeking more freedom, the owners of these houses found themselves caught in a network of conditionings and privations more powerful and constraining than the one governing the neighbourhood they had just left, which is something that they could not have anticipated, due to their insubstantial cultural capital. Ulrich Beck's quotation related to the solitary captivity of the ego as a mass punishment seems to describe the situation correctly. In other words, one could say that at the bottom of this stands an insufficient collective intelligence coefficient. How did it come to this?

By seeking autonomy and freedom in relation to the State, the inhabitants of the new suburbs chose an opponent that was different than what it used to be. The ethics of the State's responsibility in relation to a certain space disappeared from the logic of the State policy. The suburb became a crossroads between individual emancipation and political lack of responsibility. The political elite's escape from responsibility in what space is concerned was joined by a new definition given to the 'public sphere', which ceased to be the area in which major social issues are dealt with, and was reduced, as we have previously shown, to a trivial curiosity regarding the private life of public personalities. As it was no longer subject to social pressure and since it escaped civic control, the administrative incompetence became associated with the State-privatization phenomenon.

What is most unsurprising is the fact that all these houses look alike, as they are all characterised by two common features. The first of them is the fence. While marking the protection of the private, intimate space, the fence also hints at the property owner's fear. These suburbs are spaces dominated by fear, by the desire to keep oneself unseen by the others, to protect oneself from the others, hence the logic: big building – sign of wealth – fear – protection fence. The notion of 'neighbourly', commonplace in old communities, seems to be unknown in these parts. How can one persuade these people to collaborate, if they are dominated by fear and lack of trust? Their problems are similar, but they do not form a whole since, just as Bauman states, the individual is the citizen's fiercest enemy.

That brings us to the second element that is common to all the villas: their size. What I found most striking when I visited such a neighbourhood was the impressive size of the houses – a symbol of status and power, as previously mentioned. Any house design project is an attempt at recomposing one's identity, at rewriting the story of one's inner self. One's identity is no longer a starting point, as it used to be in the Modern age, but a finish point. At the end of one's life, when the process of defining one's identity comes to an end, the house is an argument. For an imposing house expresses an accomplished personality, doesn't it? And an accomplished personality is indeed the mark of the final victory! Through this character, by making a future project of one's identity, the suburb translates itself into a quest beyond modernity and into post-modernity.

I assume the owners had made some calculations on how much the building of the new house would cost, but I doubt that they ever pondered on how much their maintenance expenditures would be. I know a business owner who had a twenty-room house erected, thinking that his children and parents will live there with him, thus embracing the model of the extended Romanian family of the past centuries, or that of the present lifestyle of the Roma. None of his forecasted predictions came true, as neither his parents, nor his children live with him. He spent about 20,000 Euros on maintenance and when he finally started adding up all the expenses, he freaked out. Now he would gladly sell the house, but he cannot find any buyer. This is the biggest paradox of suburbs: the fact that they belong to two worlds, one ruled by safety, by the community, by the belief that the future is nothing but an improved past and the other dominated by freedom, in which one's identity is a life project, a breakaway from life's initial framework.

This example indicates a problem. Should one stroll through our villages, one can find sheds that have a room to the right side. The stable is connected to this room by a door, and on the other side of the stable there is the shed proper. The peasant and his family used to live in that small room. By living next to the stable, they were trying to cut down heating expenses and were also able to intervene quickly, if animals were to give birth. Back then, people had to sell milk or animals to get the money to build a house. Therefore, the building of the house was directly connected to the people's production capacity. Time was not a problem, and the reward came, as Tocqueville described would happen in a desirable modern world, after long and strenuous efforts.

So what is our point? That it would be worthwhile knowing how the owners managed to find the resources enabling them to raise such villas? How they forecasted the future of their business? This is a much broader phenomenon, as it can be also seen at the level of office buildings and especially at that of buildings meant to be public institutions. Or, this is where things start to get plausible. Our first guess is that the person never thought one bit about the maintenance expenditures of a house, since he had lived in a block of flats previously and that his first concern was his need of space, and definitely not maintenance costs. Thus, the villa is nothing more than an apartment taken out of its natural background – the block of flats – enlarged accordingly and having no connection whatsoever to the neighbouring buildings. Furthermore, we can suspect that the respective person had thought his job was perfectly safe, as he did not have the capitalist experience of people losing their jobs, precisely because he

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had spent his life under the communist regime, in which all jobs were safe. Finally, it is possible for the owner to have been one of those initiated in the new economic game, for whom building a house involved no sacrifice and the inhabitation issue was not connected to the money-producing machinery. Where the idea of sacrifice is missing, the idea of value is missing, as well, and, therefore, the building and maintenance costs cannot possibly have been important. Accidentally or not, what some of our capitalist fellow countrymen did was to reproduce the Phanariot model of consumption irrespective of costs. They did that because money-awareness had not been inculcated in their previous education – proof of the flawed, imperfect modernity in which they were raised. In both cases, the sense of precaution related to life's uncertainties is lacking. In other words, the notion of time was neglected and time was actually turned into a variable of desire. Basically, people were no longer willing to postpone receiving their reward.

Should one look at other countries – some of which more prosperous than ours – one can see the same phenomenon, which in Romania can be explained by historical factors, taking place over there, as well, even though these societies have not undergone the same social-political experiences as ours. One might then ask if there cannot be yet another explanation, one related to a strong economic mechanism, which engulfed the present-day world and exacerbated the desire, while group-related references dimmed away. Let us explain. Fifty years ago, when people built houses, their reference systems were usually related to the groups they belonged to. The democratisation of desire, a phenomenon whose beginnings can be traced to the 1990s, leads to

an unexpected increase in people's aspirations – not according to their real possibilities, but based on their wish to live a life that was not theirs, the life not of those who were like them, but of those who were different. Romanian women who worked as social assistants for wealthy families in Italy wanted to have houses like those of their Italian employers. Thus, there occurred a transfer of lifestyles into other spaces, transfer that has at the bottom the notion of 'desire' (which eludes the notion of a lifestyle typical for a social class) and which is also a temporal amalgam. To live like a football player, like a model or like a pop singer became a commonplace dream, likely to come to life thanks to the present-day banking system. Life, understood as an identity-granting process, was accomplished through and was the outcome of a certain type of political economy.

However, this reality is now history and the scapegoat carrying the blame is the present-day crisis. All of a sudden, people realized they do not have enough money either to finalize the building of their house, or for the infrastructure. Hence, they requested the support of the local administrations for space planning. Promptly, the administrations discovered that the respective buildings had been erected without an authorization. They did so not out of legal prudishness, but because of the lack of available resources, the idea being to hush dissatisfied voices. Politicians are now facing an 'unnatural' situation, as they are held responsible for the deficient management, so they put on an irritated face when approaching their electorate. The 'blame' is now searched for at the level of the individual or the governing body, supposedly having nothing to do with management. In short, the crisis revealed a paradox: although we have witnessed

the political actors' lack of responsibility related to the social dimension of a given space, the inactivity proved to be too costly and now, when the political body is being asked to re-assume its integrating function, we find out that the resources needed are lacking.

It is possible that this phenomenon of the political bodies' refusal to assume responsibility be connected not only to the privatization of the State by various interest groups, but also to the shift in the power model, from one power structure focusing on dominating a space, to one relying on dominating through time. Therefore, we might witness a control transfer from classical coercive means making use of physical force or money to more subtle control means, such as values. The consequence? Those operating with values, namely the media, became increasingly powerful in the public sphere. This change in the domination type by controlling time is related to the economic logic of capitalism, of the added value law, as it was defined by Marx in Capital, as being related to the decrease in the work time socially necessary to produce a good. The place of a 'social integrator' once held by the political was now taken by cultural integrators, such as the media, for reasons pertaining to a control logic derived from that of the market and audience. These new integrators are legitimised by clear-cut financial measurements, by their audience and advertising. We are thus witnessing a re-positioning of power relations between those who control the space, on the basis of financial means, and those who control time and rely on signs and values. The crisis repositioned the relationship between the public, private and intimate sphere and pushed social issues into the public sphere, while the press revealed the

inadequacy of the political system facing a new reality. The issues that used to be solved within specialised institutions, following long public negotiations, are now dealt with late at night, on television. Moreover, it seems that nowadays, no one is willing to live in a world like the one described by Ulrich Beck, in which life's major problems are given a biographical solution and in which risks and threats are assumed by the individual. How far are we going to push this refusal? Shall we answer to extremism through extremism, thus heading towards a world in which any private matter will get the scope of a public affair, requesting the government's intervention? Are we going to sacrifice our freedom now for a bit of extra security and comfort?

In an analysis of the 1789 French Revolution, Tocqueville remarked the presence of a syndrome: that of finding a radical, dispropor-

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tionate solution to a small problem, as, said the thinker, when a wild rabbit ran from one property to another, those involved gathered together to discuss the need to reform the State. Are we re-living that story now? Will time bring back from the dead the social class notion described by Marx in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, in which he stated that the proletariat cannot survive in times of crisis? Is it now obsolete to define one's belonging to a certain social class through a way of life determined, among others, by owning a real estate property? Are we going to live to see villas getting sold so as the owners can survive? Or are we going for a synthetic solution, of the type 'neither, nor', in which one is neither allowed to live, nor to die? This is in line with a Foucauldian interpretation describing the sovereign (medieval) type of power, as having life and death power over his subjects, but letting them live, whereas in the disciplinary (modern) type of power, the sovereign has no right over his subjects' life, but lets them die. In this case, the suburbs would be an illustration of this 'neither, nor' approach, situated halfway between life and death, between the long-gone modernity and dying post-modernity, between security and freedom. In the worst case, they would be more than the expression of a simple need, and in the best of cases, something a bit more than the long-wished for desire.

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Cosmin: It's about a complete project used for doing the joint possession. I consider it an apartment block. The only difference is that it's horizontal. This is why the address is 5H Sub Cetate Street. 5H is the house 'number'. The other row is 3H, 5H, 7H ... H is actually the house, and the number is the row. The houses are alphabetically ordered. Our complete address is 5H, apartment 2. Our street didn't have a name until last year. In all legal papers it was named the A Street and now it's the Sub Cetate Street.

Superbia: But if you call a taxi, they know how to get here, right?

C: Yes, they learned. All the taxi drivers saw the big panel with the "Green Paradise".

Every bad thing has its good part. Because the cars are parked on both sides of the road, you have to drive in slalom to get here. This implies low speeds, so the children are actually safer here.

S: Do you know some particular mothers, with whom you talk to or sit together with the children?

C: We are all quite alike. We didn't have a lot of money, we wanted to live in a house, we had an apartment or not, most of us are between 30 and 40 years old. Our neighbours are judges, journalists, lawyers, there's a football coach across the street, policemen, secret service agents, even

a family of pensioners. This family has a lot of land and they retired here because they found the area good for them. Most of our neighbours are 35-40 years old, with small children or they are planning to have children. Just a little bit up the road a family moved in with 2 small children. At the end of the street there are 4 families without children, but planning to have some.

S: It's growing quite a bit into a playing team.

Ancuța: There are 11 children already born, and another 3 to come.

C: It's nice to live in such a complex. You have your own intimacy, but at the same time the surroundings form a unitary atmosphere. It's a complex that's already been built, it's something that I can see how it is and I know it won't change. And if it has a specific style, it's even better.

We found the house in the newspaper: 128 square meters constructed, with garage, courtyard...

S: So it was exactly what they promised.

C: Yes. Except the alley, it's so narrow.

A: There were small differences.

C: Because the plots were smaller, they had to adapt the same project to the different plots, reducing 10-20 cm here and there.

A: 20-30 cm from the kitchen or from the living room. Two houses are never identical.

C: At our house the stairs finish in one place, at my neighbour's house they finish in another place. Although, it's the same project.

Ancuța, 28, economist and Cosmin, 36, electronics engineer, Floreşti

PICNIC CITY

TEXT: PLANWERK

In Romania, the new peripheries seem to escape one's understanding of the Suburbia. Instead, one finds a conflicting and unpredictable land. A phenomenon worthy of criticism, but undoubtedly inciting.

As architects and town planners, we have certain knowledge of the new peripheries, either through projects or by walking around. Probably most of us don't live there and never would. During discussions, these places invariably raise criticism, a vague shame and, in the best of cases, a sort of ironic curiosity.

Writing about the recent suburbs in Romania is thus a challenge, in the sense that it seems difficult to understand them at first glance other than as chutes full of town planning and architectural garbage, ignored, somewhere at the end of the city, where good quality architecture can only be found as an exception. This is why we decided to visit these places, either by car, by bicycle or by foot – sometimes bringing along a picnic basket – and to try getting to know them better.

The first conclusion: the new peripheries no longer correspond to the usual term of 'suburbia' and they cannot be approached through the same means employed to control suburbia in places it already has a tradition. The second conclusion: the new peripheries deserve a closer, more tolerant look.
There is, of course, some resemblance between the Suburbia and the new peripheries. Suburbia 'is' a periphery, the inhabitants of them both leave the city in hope of a better life and, seen from a distance, they might both seem to be the same thing: a city dissolving into the landscape. However, in order to be able

to understand what is going on at the margins of our cities, the differences are more important than the overlapping. Moreover, in order to be able to overcome our professional bias and cynicism, we need to understand the new peripheries in their own rights.

Suburbanisation, as a process, is replaced here by something closer to colonisation. The most important difference between the two lays in the fact that the latter does not exclude the unknown, the unexplored, and assumes it, even with some enthusiasm. Suburbanisation – a pejorative term for recent urbanisation – essentially tames the next piece of land; it is, on another scale, the known neighbour who, until recently, had a garden and now has decided to start building on it. Colonisation is, on the contrary, an adventure, and as such, it is equally triggered by promises and threatened by dangers. Maybe even more relevant for us, it has an open ending.

Coming into being
Since 1999 the city of Cluj includes in its urban area 2000 hectares of agricultural land, pastures, forests and orchards spread in a hilly area almost devoid of buildings, raising by ca. 50% the existing urban area. A few years ago, the officials of Sibiu were ready to include in the city a large landscape (ca. 2000 ha, compared to the less than 3000 ha of the city itself) under the simple functional designation of "villas". One can find similar examples, on different scale, in the case of most cities in Romania.
According to local legislation and regulations, these lands are equally buildable. Equally, that is no matter their location, dimensions, available facilities, type or way of occupation etc.

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In other words, they create a territory of uniform urban significance, vague and with restrictions limited largely to existing topographic challenges.

The permission to occupy these lands only depends on technical and bureaucratic formalities, which are relatively uncomplicated, and one can obtain them as a private individual. The increased accessibility in obtaining bank loans and the co-enthusiasm of the administration in the generation of a new type of settlement was all that was needed.

Today
Ten years later, a walk through the new 'neighbourhoods' of the city resembles rather an architectural safari than a traditional Sunday afternoon spazier. The new territories must be explored in the proper sense of the word: since they are not covered by the tourist maps of the city, finding one's direction becomes a thing of intuition and what would feature in architectural guides as a recommended site is a surprising discovery here. The land cannot be considered neither urban, nor rural, nor a landscape, despite the fact that it contains all three. What we would expect to call a 'network', according to a professional reflex, proves to be a rather unfinished puzzle, composed of pieces taken from different sets: hyper urban isles, with absurd density, rural fragments, hypermarkets with flocks of sheep roaming in their parking lots and an infrastructure left untouched since the 80s. It is all framed by or frames a landscape sometimes so intact that the built surroundings seem puzzling. The variety of home types is probably larger than in any of the 'normal' neighbourhoods of the city. Lacking any order and mediation, plot beside

plot, homes of all sizes come one after the other: from ten-floor blocks, villas for several families and one-family houses of all scales, to garden sheds.

In a society living predominantly in rural households and socialist-era blocks of flats, the new peripheries seem laboratories for testing little known habitation forms: aligned houses, terraced houses, multiple-level apartments, penthouse apartments etc. And, besides the important categories, the new ones, typical of the peripheries: houses that look like blocks, blocks that try to look like houses.

Not far from the southern periphery of Cluj, on the same hillside, one can find Andrei Mureşanu neighbourhood, result of a plotting action of the 1920s, neighbouring on the opposite end the central area of the city. Extrapolating to another era, Andrei Mureşanu corresponds to the suburb of Cluj in the interwar period.

Even today, in relation to the set of morphological, typological and anthropological characteristics of the 'classical' suburb, Andrei Mureşanu resembles the Western-European residential sprawl more than the new peripheries. It is a neighbourhood set according to the 'good' rules of town planning, with a regulated street and plot network, with houses of similar dimensions and the good quality architecture of that time. Although Andrei Mureşanu offers, consciously or unconsciously, a model for the periphery rising at its southern border, what we discover there is not a continuation or extension of the former, but a fundamentally different structure.

So what are the differences between the Suburbia, in its generally accepted meaning, and the new peripheries of the Romanian cities?

Safety vs. unpredictable
The European suburb is, par excellence, a place of safety, a cradle of the middle-class family, and even – what triggers the most criticism – a place of uniformity brought to boredom, even if it is good quality boredom. By contrast, living in the peripheries does not seem to be very reassuring. The luck factor is omnipresent and inevitable, depending on the number of floors of the next neighbour's house, the year when sewerage network was introduced, and extending to each person's capacity to pay the instalments. But the most important unknown element, for both optimists and pessimists, is its development in time, a thing radically opposed to the planned immobility of most suburbs.

Known vs. dream
The families which 80 years ago moved to Andrei Mureşanu, probably came from other parts of Cluj, a city mostly occupied by houses with courtyards. Despite being new, the neighbourhood they moved into was known to them, in the sense that they were familiar with a certain residential typology and a certain lifestyle. Determined by their wellbeing, by demography or simply on a whim, the new owners were taking an aware step towards something obviously better and in the same time within their reach. Compared to them, most residents of the new peripheries are taking a brave leap into the unknown. Just like their grandparents, they want normal and simple things: a better life, a happy family, the tranquillity of their own courtyard, social standing, a safe property etc. Yet, unlike their forefathers, most of the new residents do not know for themselves, but only imagine the simple things they want. The 'improved normality' of the suburb is replaced in the new peripheries by the TV stereotypes of the suburbs and the role of direct previous experience is taken over by real estate commercials. Most of the apartments in the new residential complexes are sold even before the start of the construction sites. Using credit, that is, virtual money, people buy scale models and graphic illustrations, that is, virtual homes. The illustrations employ hyper-realistic graphics and they focus on the private precincts exclusively, departing from reality and touching on the dream: neighbours never feature in these representations or they are replaced by inexistent landscapes, apartments look bigger than they are etc. Renaming places helps annulling the context, thus the unwanted reality. A simple inventory of the new toponyms measures the distance between reality and the distant horizon of promises: Bonjour Residence in Bună Ziua neighbourhood, Ansamblul Oxygen (Oxygen Complex) in the margins of the polluted chicken farm in Floreşti and American Village Condominiums on Hoia Hill.

Real estate commercial, September 2007: the pieces of furniture are depicted on a different scale than the apartment, making the rooms seem much bigger. The dimensions of inner spaces and the degree of completion are the most appreciated qualities of homes on the Romanian real estate market.

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No doubt, far from being a land of accomplishment, the new periphery is, at least, the scenery against which many people's dreams are distortedly projected.

Common rules vs. individual will
The Suburbia, despite being promoted as an act of liberation (running away from the city), is generated by regulations and governed by rules. Starting from the shape and dimensions of the house until the professional, ethnic or economic profile of its inhabitants, the Suburbia is a place of conformity. The feeling of belonging to a group in which one easily recognizes his/her own features and interests, even the desire for freedom and private space, lays at the foundation of community formation. There are self-aware communities, which recreate, on a suburb scale, the symbols of the larger community they consider to be part of, namely that of the city. Public areas, squares and neighbourhood plazas (scaled down replicas of the city centre) coagulate the suburbs abound them – these mini-, semi-independent cities – as a built testimony of the fact that they are more than a sum of private destinies.

The new peripheries are an area of manifestation of individuality and pioneering. The families that retreat here subject themselves to a situation of refuge on their property, which they try to protect from the vicinities. Just like in John Ford's movies, the new colonists pursue their dream of freedom through isolation and when they form communities, they do it forced by external impulses or menaces: the appearance of unwanted developments in the neighbourhoods, the competition for infrastructure etc. The rest of the time, life goes on in isolated, autonomous and

not rarely conflicting mini-communities – the family, the condominium, associations in law courts – each with its own rules, its distinct way of architectural expression and, as seen above, with names telling of 'personalized' dreams. The lack of public space is compensated on the spot by the wide pastures around, by the forests that the inhabitants discover with the same curiosity as that of the weekend tourists. In the new suburbs, common, but not shared value is everyone's freedom from the others.

Instead of a conclusion
The new peripheries are not inevitably lost, nor are they certainly salvaged. The disadvantages of their creation are obvious and the arguments against them are too well known to be detailed here: the alienation of the inhabitants through isolation, the fragmentation of the landscape, the rendering of the city ugly, infrastructural and ecological costs that cannot be covered, social risks on the long run etc. Nevertheless, these places can also be seen other than manifestations of administration's failures, of real estate manipulation and of specialists' incompetence. Beyond the criticism – otherwise funded and useful – one also needs to shed a different light on the matter, searching for qualities or, at least, for opportunities. From a quantitative point of view, the new periphery is the most important visible product of the society we have lived in for the past 20 years. This is why it contains, besides the errors of this society, certain traits that cannot be ignored: the will for and enjoyment of freedom, self-assertion, the proof of the capacity to overcome various obstacles through spontaneity and inventiveness, the readiness to adapt and learn and, maybe even more importantly, the often naïve enthusiasm of a new beginning.

House around Cîmpului Street, Cluj, 2010: spontaneous colonization of the landscape. The inhabitants of the large block-of-flats neighbourhoods move in places where not long ago they went out for picnics.

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Following the administrative measure mentioned in the beginning of this text, from a statistical perspective, Cluj is now in the top 10 greenest cities in Europe![1] This is of course a calculation, in both meanings of the word: a statistical abstraction and an electoral strategy. Since then, a large part of the landscape included in the city has been transformed; without remaining a part of nature, still, it has not become a city. Hundreds of families now live on the former picnic spots of the inhabitants of Cluj, but the picnics did not cease there either.

In the end of the 90s, the urban perimeter of Cluj was clearly divided in a relatively compact urban body and several hundred hectares of untouched landscape. Today, ironically, the survey of green areas touches upon reality: a large number of the inhabitants of Cluj live in a 'city' as green as it gets. A city that is a focus of controversy: criticised by the NGOs, promoted by real estate agents, regarded with bewilderment by the administration and largely ignored by specialists. However, we all agree on two things: (1) the new peripheries are an irreversible reality and (2) their development seems impossible to foresee and even less, to control. How could these areas be integrated in the city? Is it possible to 'forcedly' implement there public infrastructure and equipments capable of producing local cohesion and autonomy from the centre? Will they be, on the contrary, generated by the same 'spontaneous' market mechanisms that led to the creation of the entire area? Is there a risk of formation, under the impact of the crisis, of future 'luxurious' ghettos, and if so, what can we do about it? In order to answer these questions, the first step is to integrate the new peripheries and bring them in the focus of public and professional discussions.

For this reason, instead of offering conclusions, we aim at continuing our exploration of the new peripheries. The aim of knowing and understanding them is raising responsibility, as unique means of bringing them out of isolation and drifting. This is why, instead of a conclusion, we invite you to walk around and collect ideas in the Picnic City.

[1] according to a classification created on a global scale by the MioTechnology company, part of the campaign "I Love Green Cities" (source: Ziua de Cluj newspaper). According to the same study, Braşov occupies the 30th position, Bucharest the 38th, and Constanţa the 46th.

sometimes going nowhere
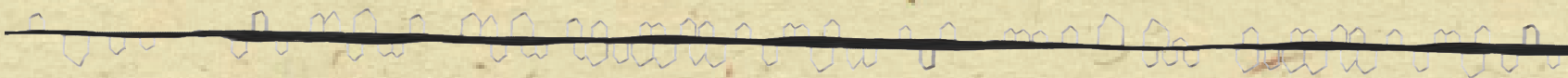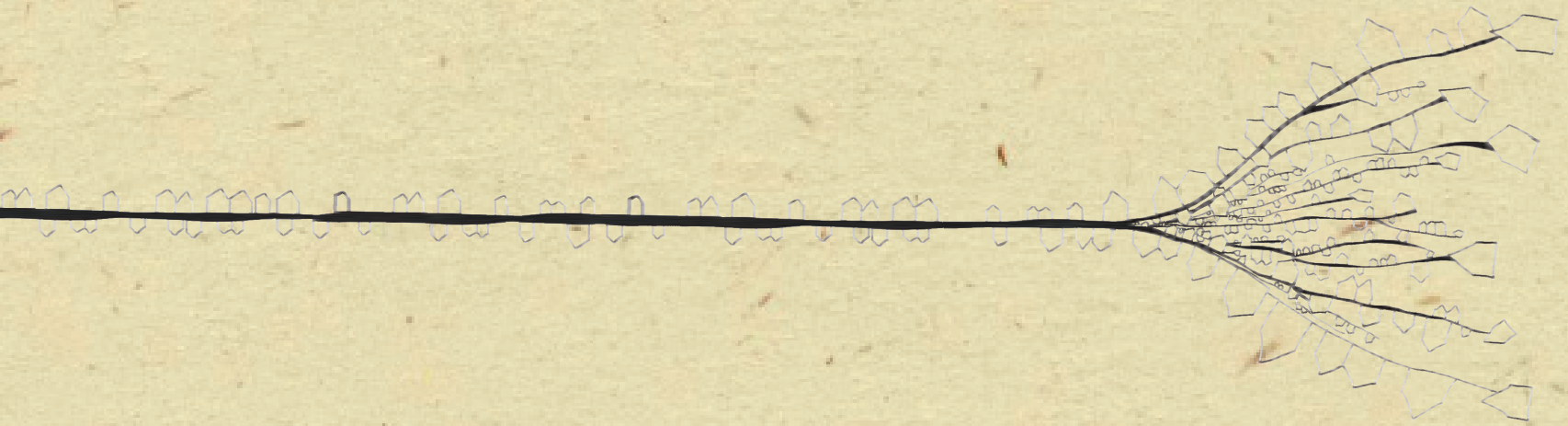
can lead you somewhere [21]

Superbia: How long have you lived here?

Andrei: We're not from Cluj. We're from Baia Mare. We stayed in Cluj for 3 years, renting a bachelor flat in the Grigorescu area. After that we looked for an apartment or house to match our desires and expectations. In the city we found old and expensive apartments, not very well taken care of. We didn't actually look for a finished home. We wanted to be able to do the finishing the way we wanted, but the prices were the same as for this house. By then, in 2005, it was under construction, and the price seemed very appropriate, taking into account that it's definitely more than an apartment. We have a small courtyard that makes all the difference.

S: So you also have a garden?

A: Yes, it's our place where we can go outside. We were both working for companies that gave us cars, so the distance didn't seem very important.

When we started the construction work here, it was just the corn and us. It should've been just a row of houses here, and another row mirrored across the street.

S: How many houses are in a row?

A: Six and instead of that block of flats, there should have been another six, but they built the block right in front of us, because it's more profitable than six houses.

On the one hand, they crowded us with the blocks and population, but, on the other hand, we were also lucky, because this is why the entire infrastructure was made. It was just a village road going to a field of corn.

Andrei, 37, economist, Baciu

ON THE CATASTROPHES, POTENTIAL, AND RECENT DEVELOPMENT OF ROMANIAN PERIPHERIES

TEXT: ŞTEFAN GHENCIULESCU

C. works in one of the main Bucharest headquarters of a well-known international company. It takes him one our by car to reach the 'office park' where the building is located, a complex of office buildings in a hardly accessible area surrounded by waste lands, industrial areas dating back to the socialist era, groups of villas and remains of the former villages once surrounding the capital.

The building is modern, with glass curtain walls, air conditioning, super communication technologies and employees in suites, but there is no sewerage in that area and the problem of evacuating residual water is solved through a large septic tank. It is the same solution employed by the residents of the nearby villas, but on an aberrant scale. One day, all employees in the building received a message on the intranet in which they were being politely asked to refrain, as much as possible, from using the toilet, because there was trouble with the functioning of the septic tank. Just like the house owners, the companies patiently await for the administration to build the necessary networks.

Given the narrow streets in the area and the over-crowded parking lots, the representatives of neighbouring companies tried to establish a timetable of arrivals and departures, changing their schedules in order to relieve some of the monstrous traffic jams at the entrance. One company, a bit further away, ensured for employees not driving to work a service of hired buses that run between the headquarters and the closest metro station, each morning and evening.

I believe one cannot discuss today about the post-socialist sub-urbia without touching on the latest episode of this development, namely the invasion of office buildings and apartment complexes on lands, which until recently were only used for building crowded villas. It seems to me that, more than any statistics or territorial analysis, the things mentioned above indicate the chaotic development of peripheries and the non-urban way of creating the post-socialist city. Maybe, as we shall see at the end of this article, these developments also indicate a possible change of paradigm and the changing of a wild suburb in a sort of city, in fact just as wild in itself.

Of course, no suburb in the world is coherent, but in comparison to the scale of development of metropolises in Southeastern Europe which did not undergo Communism, such as Athens or Istanbul, the Romanian phenomenon might even seem benign. What is shocking, not only in Romania, but in all former socialist Balkan states, is the extremely autarchic nature of all interventions, their departure from all planning and infrastructure projects, and also (or most of all) the suppression of development stages and the complete and absurd discrepancy between the maximal investment in the individual dreams and the almost null investment in everything related to the community or at least to a pragmatic coordination. The passionate taking over of western models comes in contradiction of principles with their deeply non-western and, eventually, non-urban implementation.

Ultimately, the present tendencies only take over on a larger scale and with other functions the logics of post-totalitarian occupation of the periphery. The Romanian suburb started with the first people who managed to accomplish their dream of

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owning an individual house and returning to nature after years and years of living in socialist blocks of flats. Villas were built on gradually bought village lots and former agricultural fields. Along the growing appetite for new homes, people built more and more, increasingly chaotically and crowded. Eventually, as a natural consequence, the prices reached such high levels that the construction of individual houses simply could not make the land profitable, thus the logical step towards erecting apartment buildings was taken. Ironically, the first inhabitants of the suburbia ended up in the blocks of flats they wanted to run away from, not as a form of politically imposed habitation, but as a product of the market. Of course, nobody planned buildings with adjacent functions such as shops, schools, kindergartens and churches, therefore, these started to be built strictly as a result of peoples' demands. The raising of land prices and the acquisition of most of the plots inside the city (which, in any case, were even more expensive), were the main reasons for the erection of isolated buildings and office complexes. The primary financial efficiency, probably doubled by the prestige of the spot (eventually, a luxurious area of the city) surpassed all other considerations; obviously, the promoters or owners of those areas were well aware of the accessibility and actual functionality problems. One can only presume that, just like the inhabitants, all the people count on the fact that, in the end, the local and central administration will solve the infrastructure problems and, therefore, the constant waiting and the troubles are but a small price to pay in comparison to the expected increase of value.

What is the result so far? I mentioned before the almost identical logics of development of the new and large investments and the ag-

glomeration of villas during the first fifteen years of wild capitalism, leading to segregation and collisions, the destruction of natural environment, pollution and severe traffic problems, non-existing urban and architectural coherence and, an extremely troubling aspect, the absence of public space.

At the same time, though, the wild liberalism brought a type of development that does not exist in western-type suburbia: firstly, a mix and sometimes overlapping of functions and, secondly, an increasing density. Either way we look at it, these are typical elements for the city and not the periphery. Maybe the explosion of the scale and the sudden creation of new functions during the last years indicate not only a galloping deterioration of a territory, but also the tendency to city production, aberrantly yet authentically. Indeed, it is a city lacking in urban character, a city that does not deserve to be thus called. Instead of accepting passively what is happening or, on the contrary, trying to control it (which has proven to be impossible), why don't we try to see the potential of the situation, to guide the process and introduce a minimal (thus more efficient) order in the way people are building?
Given such a perspective and knowing that the combination of financial speculation with the authorities' weakness and corruption makes any limitation of density and height level impossible, maybe we should allow investors to build, to fill in gaps, to bring in people and activities. Obviously, rules should be set; leaving everything to the market, as was the case until now, would be completely irresponsible. However, I think that, especially in contexts such as the Romanian one, regulations that are both restrictive and permissive might work better. We could identify some intangible areas, an urban reserve containing the still sur-

viving parts of nature or just empty lands still in public property. Such areas might host, when the authorities will allow it, the public equipments on local or metropolitan scale. This might guarantee a minimum sustainment, not only from an ecological perspective, but also from a social point of view. Besides such reserves, one might encourage an increase in building density, making the investors happy, yet imposing on them some simple rules that will allow the creation of an urban character: continuous street fronts instead of blocks and office buildings in the middle of ridiculous courtyards, and ground floors with public functions, opened to the street.

Nobody can control the periphery, at least not through ample urban projects and gestures; but, maybe, we could get used to thinking in terms of 'positive shifting' of unstoppable developments, a pragmatic reconciliation of individual dreams and public interest.

Romania

pământ îngrădit

(Romania, fenced land)[26]

The land is flat, you can practically have easy acces and direct transport. There was once a rumor they will introduce some sort of a rapid line. So theoretically it wasn't a bad choice. But then again the lands were in fact agricultural ones, with their specific parcelling, and the people didn't get along and few of them connected the parcels, cause you know the people here, they're holding tight every millimeter... And then this situation was generated. Plus the wish of having...800% profit."

Marian, 58, civil engineer, Becaș

You have a very nice view from inside, but from the outside ... pieces of wood and who knows what else ... a construction site.

Adriana, 25, architect, Floreşti

FABRICATING THE SUPERBIA. WHERE DOES THE CHAOTIC URBANIZATION COME FROM?

TEXT: NORBERT PETROVICI

"One of the disadvantages is that the houses are much too close to each other. [...] It's like an apartment block laid on it's side [...] disadvantages – the infrastructure is terrible, the roads are catastrophic and Florești Town Hall is a mess, to get rid of the problem, they transferred all roads in the administration of the County Council two years ago. Those people don't do anything because they are a governmental agency that never does anything. And, of course, in the meantime the road deteriorates. When we moved here, it belonged to the village and the mayor went «we will take care of it»... it was also time for elections. We went by his word because we had no choice. The condition of the road after all was 1% of the decision to move here, for the same money you get a house (and a flat in the city). [...] Now we are facing the problem to find a kindergarten. We work in Cluj, so we'd need it in Cluj. [...] Between the houses there's no playground for the kids. During the day the driveway is almost empty, 2-3 cars. In the evening after five-six and in weekends it fills up. The playground is a real flaw; it's in the driveway. Here, behind the [semi-detached] houses is a training ground for the army, a large flat land. You can do whatever you want there, nobody bothers you, it's just that the playground is not next to you. Somehow, it's very Romanian to think that we do not have a playground in our backyard, because abroad not every building comes with a playground. If you need a playground, you have a small park made by the City Hall [for everyone]. If there were a public playground [...], it would mean that the City Hall bought those plots, but, when they don't even care for the roads, what else do you expect? They ditched the roads so they don't have to worry about repairing them."
[Testimony of the owner of an apartment in a row of five duplexes in a suburban area near Cluj; from his yard, while gazing at the newly emerging neighbourhood]

"Thanks to the crisis, I say that we are saved". The owners of the new suburban villas feel relieved because the 2009 economic crises devaluated the land values in their neighbourhoods. That is somehow unusual; the devaluation of one's property in general is a matter of anxiety. The whole process of urbanisation and suburbanisation was privatised by the state, and the booming markets took advantage and built on every square meter available without providing adequate amenities and thus producing very dense areas. Even the new villas erected by private developers look like 'horizontal block of flats', in stark contrast with the post socialist middle class dream of the single-house family, where kids can run in the playground.

The crisis called a halt on almost all building sites or building plans, leaving many empty plots in the chaotic spaces of the new post socialist neighbourhoods. The crisis somehow installed a temporary feeling of normality. The market was tempered by the market itself, because apparently the state was not capable of doing that. *"Somehow, it's very Romanian to think that we do not have a playground in our backyard, because abroad not every building comes with a playground. If you need a playground, you have a small park made by the City Hall [for everyone]."* It is a gesture of normality to be provided by the City Hall with the adequate public spaces; however, it is unfair if the same City Hall hinders the real estate market through various urbanisation requirements simply dismissed as read tape. I intend to explore here the contradictory relations entertained by the middle class in the city of Cluj with the public administration and the local state.

On the one hand, the middle class opted out of any individual solutions and of any public provision of housing, through pressures for the privatisation of the urbanisation process. On the other hand, the same middle class, once confronted with the spatial effects of privatisation, has envisioned the local state as an impaired, *public, good provisioner. I discuss shortly the socialist* roots of the post socialist privatisation and the way it preceded in the first and second post socialist decades.

The Socialist Roots
The socialist administration was the proprietor of most of the urban land stock. When a specific terrain was manipulated by a state agency, it was from the perspective of the owner, not from the perspective of an urban manager. Urban space was not imagined as a space to be regulated or controlled, but as a discretionary playground for systematisation and development. This specific political rationality became even stronger after 1970, when Ceauşescu's industrialisation project of Cluj started. The urban real estate market was heavily restricted and there were barely any land transactions or private building projects. Moreover, in order to make way for the socialist block of flats neighbourhoods, important parts of the previous urban stock of houses were pulled down. The restrictions on the real estates markets, the misused and the discretionary way of managing property during socialism delegitimised subsequent regulation of property in the post socialist era.

The 90s Villas
At the beginning of the 90s, these socialist rules for the ordering of the city triggered a series of reactions, which, to some extent, destatised the practices of urban government and planning. The substantive authority of expertise in regulating urban development was disconnected from the apparatus of political rule and most of the responsibilities of managing real estate properties were transferred to the owners. Property was reified, was transformed in a simple object; ownership was no longer a social relation between social actors regarding an object; a relation based on the mutual recognition of the condition of handling real estate possessions. The emergent hope was that, as soon as the properties had been given back to their rightful owners, they would be taken care of, meaning that properties would be governed or, more precisely, they would self-govern. Through reification, property rights were schematised, leaving aside any possible social relations, thus rendering the object of possession manoeuvrable only by the 'owner'. The political apparatuses were excluded from the ownership relations, reducing the range of legitimate urban management interventions, even if some owners would abuse their rights. The sum of private owners came to be imagined as the market, the perfect device amenable to regulatory functions.

This idealised schema of the self-governing property was easily amenable to political action through the idea of market. So as not to impair the 'property rights' of the owners, the local administration negotiated the official urban regulations on a case-by-case basis. What came to be actually enacted was not a real market, but rather an emergent informal network that was lashing up together political and administrative forces with private owners of land and real estate proprieties. Building became possible even on pieces of land lacking the adequate amenities (roads and

[1]   A frustrated local politician argues: *"Yes, yes, yes, this is the situation. They win also in court. We have a lot of litigations and we lose. Those who started to build an illegal construction obtain through lawsuits a kind of legalisation. I don't know any more [what to do]... it's the society who has to decide, because both the authorities and the justice, and even the civil society, and... the environment, the health authorities... and whatever... do we rather want to live in a healthy environment, or we just allow everybody to erect illegal constructions wherever they want to?..."* (56, M, elected politician occupying an administrative position in The City Hall)

[2]   In addition, when a big plot was split up to be sold, the owner made pressure on the notary to use any legal means to maximise the marketable surface. The notary, without having any guiding urban plan, usually, was giving up to such request. The buyers of the smaller plots were reluctant to give away expensive land afterwards, in order to facilitate the construction of proper roads. The effect is a bent and narrow street structure or sometimes no streets at all.

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public utilities). The local administration had the legal responsibility to prepare the territory for urbanisation, but it did not have enough financial resources to make the necessary infrastructural preparation, therefore, the owners were entitled to provide for themselves all the necessary facilities.

However, most of the building plots were irregular, being former agricultural fields, and their limits were most of the times unclear. Therefore, it became very difficult to state some urban-planning regulations; even to sketch the street structure or fix the building height standard were very difficult tasks. Thus, the strategy was to wait for the first buildings and use them as guides for the subsequent regulations. In fact, every new construction had to provide first a zoning plan, which had to be approved by the local government. This opened the door to a case-to-case negotiation of the building parameters (height, percentage of the land used for building etc.) between the administration and the owner, and between the owner and his/her neighbours. However, even if these negotiations were important, still, they were less consequential for there had been no precedent in tearing down an illegal building[1].

The legal system was working according to the paradigm of self-governing property, and, in the end, always favoured the 'owner'[2]. In addition, when a big plot was divided in order to be sold, the owners would pressure the notary to use any legal means to maximise the marketable surface, by ignoring the actual requirements, especially because such kind of situations were loosely defined by the existing urban regulations. Since, after the purchase,

the buyers of the divided plots were reluctant to give away expensive land so as to facilitate the construction of proper roads, the result was a bent and narrow street structure and, sometimes, even the complete lack of access streets. All these unwanted effects proved very frustrating and created tensed relationships between neighbours[3].

In the 90s, there was a great deal of pressure towards deregulation and real estate market creation. Yet, what came to be actually enacted was not a market for single-family houses, but an unstable system of case-by-case negotiations. On the one hand, the self-governing property rights of the families investing in villas was restrained only by the oversized and constraining post socialist bureaucracy. The state appeared as the limiting bureaucracy that had to be bypassed through informal arrangements with the state agents themselves. For the urban planners, the incoherency reigning within the market forces was pointing out to the weakness of the unable politicians, whose responsibility was that of issuing adequate legislation, whereas, for them, the most important task of the centralised power was to retreat by any means from the economy. 'The market', just like anything else coming out of the process of curtailing all that is 'political', is made up of all the forces embodied by the private owners. The outcome of this configuration was a privatised and chaotic process of urbanisation, which led to a specific post socialist landscape: the new misshapen, yet prestigious villas neighbourhoods.

The 2000s Villas
The second post socialist decade meant for the city of Cluj, as for most of other major Romanian cities, an economic expansion cycle. While the pace of urbanisation until that date was rather slow and it

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[3] *"Here, if a brick is put atop of another it cannot be demolished. But when you look and see the chaotic layout, no alignment, no... urban planning, no structuring... So, virtually, your living there will be in discomfort. One buys a piece of land, but the plots are so mazy and mixed up as pastures before them were... and then everyone: I'll do something in that corner, another one does it here, someone else disturbs some neighbour over there... roads cannot possibly be drawn..."* (56, M , politician and resident in a villa neighbourhood).

4 The shifting perspective is excellently captured by an architect at the beginning of 2002: *"Normally, the licences should be issued like this: whether the building is located in our out of town, they should require the owner to build the sewerage as well. Or a stretch of road… Why should they issue a licence knowing that you propose to alter the local regulation of the area, maybe also the allowed uses, or even build higher and so on? But then at least, they should oblige you to pay for part of the infrastructure. In my opinion, this is how the council should have done."* (M, 56, architect)

entailed only the construction of houses, after 2002, the rhythm grew steadily and more and more blocks of flats were built instead of villas. The local administration was overwhelmed by the new situation and a new political rationality was needed to tackle the rapidly changing situation. A new schema able to handle reality took shape by perfecting the privatised urbanisation technique. Yet, the scale of the transformations asked for a change in the privatisation of the urbanisation: big investments were favoured, because they had enough resources to furnish the new developments with the adequate public amenities. Investors could also get an exemption from the zoning rules, if their were willing to invest in the necessary urban infrastructure[4]. Even if this was just a small change to the privatised urbanisation scheme, in fact, the effects brought paradigmatic changes. Until then, the rules for regulating an area were being produced during the building process of a certain zone, rules were derived

from the first few cases and then applied to all the subsequent cases. The planners were still trying to impose a consistent geometry to the new neighbourhoods, even if it was not always successful and most of the time rather impaired by the self-regulating ideology. Now rules were becoming negotiable if the developers were auctioning for bigger investments in urban amenities. It became clear that the owners of small lots were interested in introverted private spaces, while the market driven developers were putatively more interested in high quality urban amenities.

Therefore, it became easier for the politicians and public administration to negotiate the production of public spaces with the big developers: roads, public utilities, green areas, kindergartens and spaces for convenience stores. Even if the planners and architects employed in the public administration had to give up to some regulations, making more flexible the conditions for giving permits, it was still a win-win situation: the politicians could pose as agents of change and development, the planners got some public spaces and the big capital investments could be carried out according to their planned terms (for execution, return etc). The losers in this new power alliance were the smaller investors, the villa builders, the middle class dreamers, those who were searching for the perfect spot for a single-family house, where kids could grow in open and fresh air, far from the urban bustle. The quiet single-family houses were constantly threatened by the risky eventuality of ending up with having as neighbour a six storey block of flats with tens of eyes staring at their blue water pool[5]. The reaction of those who where living in the new areas was very bitter: *"There's no tangible urban planning, they are building chaotically, no respect for the neighbours already there".* (F, 23 years, economist, mother of one)[6]

[5] An official from the City Hall observes: *"The major good thing [with derogations from the rules] is that lots and lots of apartments were built, the downside is that they disturb the neighbours. At this point, I don't really know what's best."* (M, 50, building engineer at the City Hall)

[6] And she continues: *"[...] the flats are built very close to the nearby houses. That is not ok. Just an example, our neighbour built for himself a very nice house, with great efforts. He suddenly found himself with a six storey block of flats in front of the house and with half of his alley collapsed in his foundation. Once the blocks have been erected, he's going to find himself with a lot of people staring directly in his house."* An important detail is that she and her family are living in a block of flats, which initially was causing the same problems to her future neighbours.

[7] *"The town hall plan was not complied with, the builders dug right under our fence, our fence is running loose, the electricity pole is loose, as well. We sent a litigation to the town hall, one complaint after another, yet nothing was solved. After we sue them, we hope to have something solved. At least, they should comply with the plan, not exceed the surface they were approved to build on, obey the working timetable and the silent hours during the day and they should not destroy our foundation, our new foundation. I don't know, but if they continue building like this, we think of moving to someplace else, someplace where no further building would be possible."* (F, 23 years, economist, mother of one)

Collective action against big developers was hindered by the conflicting interests of the inhabitants of the villa neighbourhoods. On the one hand, the landowners are interested in increasing the exchange value of the land on the market; therefore, they were supporting lax zoning regulation and were pro-blocks of flats. On the other hand, those already leaving in a villa or a flat were interested in maximising the use value of the land, therefore, they were pleading for strict zoning regulation that may impede further big developments.

The inadequate urban planning provisioning and the power alliance between big investors and politicians were translated by the frustrated middle class into a complex discourse about the immoral economic game played both by the developers and by the local state[7]. The market was imagined as a space dominated by private interests and unethical behaviour and misconduct, while the City Hall was held responsible for the chaos represented by the unordered geometry of the space and the unfair spatial relations. That is because the 'state' should intervene to

moderate any misconduct, and, when this does not happen, the state is suspected to be corrupt and unable: *"The circumstance which allows the noncompliance to the plan is corruption. Bureaucracy makes things move very slowly"*. (F, 30, economist). Moreover, both institutions, 'the market' and 'the City Hall' are permeated with interests because at this level the actors know each other and form a local network. As the people from these new neighbourhoods see it, the muddy waters of the local interests can be avoided only at the 'higher' state levels: *"Interests of both sides. Of the town hall as well as of the builder. It would be necessary to have a superior intervention here, because locally a lot of hidden games can be played, town hall included and all, because everyone knows everyone here".* (M, 21 years, student, resident in a new development). Moreover, the existence of 'the state' becomes problematic, not only in the eyes of the inhabitants of the neighbourhoods, but also in the eyes of those who are supposed to embody it. The 'examination commission' is a special administrative department meant to check out if the buildings are constructed in conformity with the approved plans. Yet, in practice, the building inspector has merely a formal role, because the authority that she or he is supposed to enact disappears when faced with the materiality of the building. Once a building is erected, it becomes 'private property' and it cannot be demolished any more. This is why, generally, the inspector instructs the developer to submit for authorization a second round of plans that incorporates all the changes to the initial plan[8].

Conclusions

"Superbia" is a complex product of the middle class dream for a private home far from the putative urban post socialist ills. The weak state was colonised by the 'self-governing property' imaginary and suburban desires of the middle stratum. With their double status – as clients of the public administration and as experts of the local professional state –, the middle class was very consequential in shaping the urbanisation processes in the first post socialist decade. As a consequence, much of the urbanisation was privatised. The market came to be imagined as the real salvation and the answer to all social problems after the demise of the socialist regime, and was transformed in the foremost mean to attain the suburban single-family house, built by the enterprising new middle stratum subject. The effects were: urban sprawl, ill equipped areas with public amenities and practical no public areas and services. However, the very mean to attain the middle stratum housing fantasy was the Trojan horse, through which the entrepreneurial-capital colonised the middle stratum neighbourhoods in the second decade. The new projects and blocks of flats of the second post socialist decade were erected wall-in-wall with the post socialist villas. The public planner's hope was that, this way, some public spaces could be produced, even with the cost of sacrificing some regulations (building heights, densities, distances between constructions, mixing of villas with blocks). Yet, this solution only deepened the lack of genuine public spaces and services; most of the developers actually sold 'the public spaces' to their clients. The economic crisis came as a blessing for the new middle stratum inhabiting the single-family houses, because it stopped what they perceived as a the 'real estate massacre' of these neighbourhoods. Once again, the sum of small private owners could resume their introverted lives in areas with no public spaces, far from the intrusive entrepreneurs that were upsetting the equilibrium and the energies of these quiet places with their greed and bulldozes. This is the positive side of the crisis, as perceived by the middle stratum in want of privatised spaces based on their restrictive image of what beautiful family life in a suburban area means.

[8] *A public servant working at the urban planning department of the town hall recalls:*
Public Servant: In this case, the inspector, my workmate here, goes on the site and ascertains whether the building licence was compliant to the licence it had received. And if he finds out it didn't comply, he will not release a fine...
Me: He'll make a notice...
PS: He won't make any notice. The errant comes with a project to modify the building licence, but only in the end. What is there to be done, demolish his house? No one dares anymore if the errant comes with an amendment to the project and sets it legal, this is what I'm saying, ...
Me: And why doesn't it never get demolished?
PS: Because when private property is in matter, you need trials...
Me: And you get in court...
PS: Of course.
Me: And in court, as usual, it won't be approved. Is there a reason for this? Why?
PS: Yes... why tear down the poor man's house? Because of the 40 cm he exceeded by?
(M, 53, engineer in public administration)

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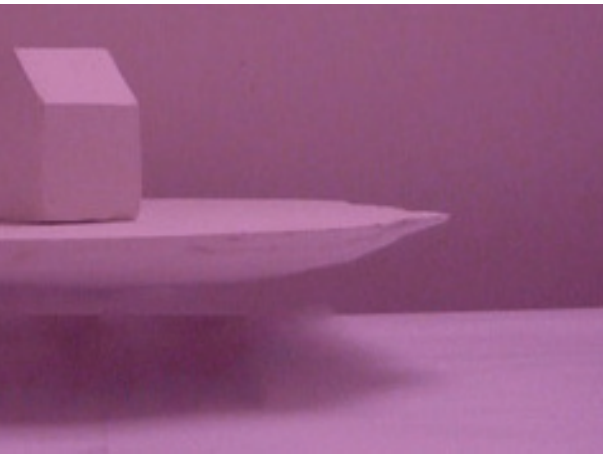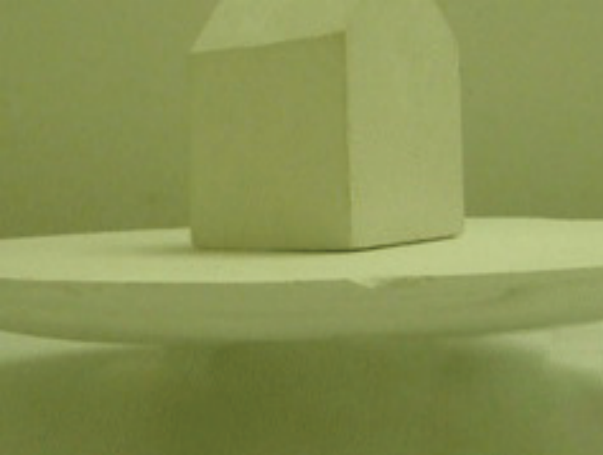
Kinga: The Florești suburb didn't exist then. When we bought the house, all the Eroilor area was an agricultural field. It was known that apartment blocks would be constructed there, but none of them existed. The site where our house is constructed is privileged, because it is hard to build on 50 meters in front and behind.

After a year, together with our neighbour, we built a wooden terrace, with roofs on each part of the fence. We negotiated a good price with a timber structure contractor and he built a sort of pavilion. We didn't choose the area because of the neighbours.

We go out together about once a month. The mothers, we find ourselves talking on the street, standing because there are no sidewalks or benches.

Superbia: By 'private street' you mean that the developer invested in it.

K: Yes. We don't have a public lighting system, nor telephone lines, but the street is very spacious. I have raised the first child from the age of one year and 8 months and the other one since his birth. You can let your children play in the courtyard or sleep outside.

The public lighting and the asphalt are missing and I don't think the problem is going to be solved. What's quite disturbing is that right near us, a 6 storey building is being constructed. We were glad that the financial crisis stopped the construction, but after stopping the work for one year and a half, they started again. They only finished one staircase out of five.

Kinga, 34, cultural manager, Florești

THE POST SOCIALIST NEIGHBOURHOOD: FLORESTI (CLUJ NAPOCA)[1]

TEXT: GABRIEL TROC

Context

The unspoken promise of the regime, which took hold in Romania in 1990, was that the recently acquired freedom will ensure the context for the rising of a society similar to those in the 'West', where wellbeing seemed widely distributed and hard work seemed to be rewarded accordingly. The middleclass ideal, in particular, became the norm and the ideal to follow in Romania, with all its presumed characteristics and benefits – promotion through education and merit, an abundance of opportunities on an always open labour market, consumption of goods beyond the basic needs, accessibility of consumerist lifestyles etc. After an entire decade when these expectations were not met, with the start of the new millennium and increasingly after 2005, the economic growth made one believe – at least in the large cities and for some layers of the population – that their hopes had been founded. From 2005 until the start of the economic crisis in 2008, a number of real opportunities – due to the influx of foreign capital, the creation of a good business environment and of a market which required qualified labour force –, doubled by an optimism accelerated by the recent admission of the country to EU, led to the impression that, in Romania, individuals too could rationally plan their lives on the long run. Thus, young professionals in particular could set themselves on the predictable and conformist ideal of the middle class, which consisted of establishing a family, buying a home and a car, having children, reaching a status of consumption etc.

The possibility of buying a new home, in particular, became a sign of the opportunities triggered by the new era and, at the same time, a symbol of social accomplishment. The demand –

somehow significant, due to a dramatic decrease in the real estate and building sector during the 1990s – was amplified by the desire for many people to get out of the communist block of flats neighbourhoods perceived as 'grey' oppressive, unaesthetic and lacking in comfort. As a consequence of this demand and due to the opportunities triggered by the relative democratisation of real estate loans (another 'sudden' element, if one thinks of the simple fact that in the beginning of the second decade, one could not even buy a vacuum cleaner in several installments), the construction of family houses and apartments rapidly revitalised. Relatively soon, new habitations were erected in all the large cities in Romania. Various 'real estate developers' (a novel term as well, which became part of the new entrepreneurial wooden language) exploited in a short period all the available land, from plots in the central areas to those inside socialist neighbourhoods, the areas around cities and the agricultural land pertaining to neighbouring villages. If the buildings erected in the old perimeter of cities (before 1990) led to an agglomeration and high density of buildings, continuing in fact a practice used by the communists in the 80s, the constructions in the liminal areas of large settlements reveal the introduction of certain types of habitation arrangements that can be considered typical of 'post socialism'.

The new real estate structures, either in the continuation of peripheral neighbourhoods or new urban structures farther away from the city, represent landmarks for the transformations undergone by Romanian society today – economically, legislatively, socially and culturally. The analysis of these structures can reveal the limits of the ways in which one can imagine living under the

conditions of private property of lands, the absence of strict regulations, in the context of people pursuing the quickest possible profit and so on. At the same time, such an analysis can account for the phenomenon of social stratification, the emergence of new ideals, new tastes and new forms of self expression, but also the emergence of new disappointments and disillusionments which were, until recently, impossible.

Among the big cities, after Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca knew the most intense activity in the field of constructions and real estate market. The city developed in all directions: towards the south, through the Bună Ziua neighbourhood and in the continuation of Andrei Mureşanu, Zorilor and Mănăştur neighbourhoods, towards the north-west, in the former Baciu village, towards the east, in Someşeni and further on towards Apahida and, finally, on a larger scale towards the south-west, in the village of Floreşti.

Among these, only Bună Ziu-a and Floreşti can be considered new, self-standing structures, unaffected by previous town planning restrictions and thus of interest for the analysis of 'post socialist residential town planning'.

One cannot understand this form of organisation of habitation without relating it to the social need it fulfils, i.e. the need to ensure residential conditions for large masses. In other words, one needs to define it through its typical characteristic, that of being a need proper to the 'population'. As a solution formulated in the context of a country that had recently passed from a socialist regime to a capitalist one, it becomes evident that the analysis must compare it to the corresponding socialist option. The contrast is obvious: before 1989 the building of ur-

ban neighbourhoods was done under the conditions of state property and centralised planning. It is well known that from the origins of progressive town planning, providing habitation for large masses of people relied on blocks of flats understood as 'machines for living' (Le Corbusier) and that the new urban setting could only be efficient as a result of centralised planning. The communists had at their disposal the necessary conditions for such a living arrangement; moreover, in Cluj-Napoca they also had, at least for a certain period, the will to make it happen, as proven by the initial plans of neighbourhoods such as Grigorescu and Gheorgieni. We also know what followed: the initial plans were abandoned or modified and the erected neighbourhoods were the result of restrictions typical for the socialist economy of the 80s.

Compared to this enterprise, the neighbourhoods built after 2000 lacked both a building-type pattern (the 'block of flats' increasingly became a hybrid, at the intersection of a modernist block and an obscure-origin villa) and a strict general town planning. The result, of which Floreşti is a good example, is a chaotic form of residence, only structured in the context of private property over the land, pursuit of fast profit, introduction on the market of architectural forms that meet the uneducated taste in the field and schizophrenic relationships between the local administration and private real estate 'developers'.

The inhabitants of these neighbourhoods, largely representatives of the local 'middle class', who counted on these new residential neighbourhoods, be that Pipera in Bucharest or Floreşti in Cluj-Napoca, find themselves nowadays literally prisoners there. These inhabitants, with their incomes diminished by the eco-

nomic crisis, unable to benefit from the mobility of a job market which no longer presents opportunities, indebted to banks for decades to come and already facing parental responsibilities, are forced to live on the outskirts of cities, in improper urban areas which pose bigger problems than the socialist neighbourhoods and have less and less chances that such problems will be solved in the predictable future.

Town Planning
Born from the fever of a massive and apparently diversified demand, Floreşti is a land marked by town planning experiments. Some might wrongfully believe that these are vanguard experiments, based on reflections on the issue of optimal habitation, but they are, more modestly and less visibly, the result of meeting the offer of residential space with habitation needs only intuitively and superficially anticipated. On a restricted area, a meadow used until recently for agriculture, one may find the embodiment of a large part of the spectrum of possibilities anticipated, on the one end, by Charles Fourier – the solution of collective habitation in a building complex that fulfils elementary functions – and, on the other end, by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon – the individual home, with 'garden, water, lawn and tranquillity'.

The above-mentioned references are not randomly chosen, since compared to the modern neighbourhood – with everything that modernist town planning imposed after the first world war (the principles of which led in Romania to the creation of the new interwar Bucharest and, later on, to the erection of the omnipresent workers' neighbourhoods) – the post socialist neighbourhood is a regression. It is well known that the

modern neighbourhood set out to open up space, to suppress the narrow streets, and to include attention for hygiene ("water, air, sun"). It intended to isolate residential units among green areas, encouraged simple outer forms, without ornamental or colour peculiarities, and interiors so conceived as to satisfy the residential needs of the average individual. The modern neighbourhood, in the original intentions of its architects, was meant to become a park and, through the opening up of space, it was intended to narrow down the distance between the ancient village and the ancient city.

Unintentionally, and largely due to the rules of the rapid reproduction of capital, the post socialist neighbourhood renounced all the above-mentioned principles. The result does not represent a new, better form of town planning – as a reflection of the long since theorized limits of the modern one – but it is a heteroclite, hybrid form, the negative which appears when the above-mentioned general directions are only negated and not replaced by something else.

Thus, one may find again, on a massive scale, the habitation unit of the block of flats, which is no longer subscribed to the simple geometry of the parallelepiped, but it is 'interbred' with various forms of villas, of various dimensions and roof heights, housing increasingly smaller attic apartments and with cut-in-terraces or inserted terraces with transversal roofs. These complexes of hybrid blocks of flats, facing together tightly, aligned along a strip of land that residually becomes both courtyard and street, or arranged around a rectangular yard militarily enclosed, represent a repertory for the creation of differences in the conditions of

using minimal resources: each 'developer' (with the complicity of architects?) imagined another type of balcony rail, another roof shape, various colour combinations, varied shapes and types of windows, excessively narrow or wide terraces, with diverse ornaments etc. Inner spaces are no longer built bearing in mind the social category of the potential residents, nor do they observe a rationally anticipated standard for the functions an apartment is meant to fulfil. Consequently, the very same building can house one- to four-rooms apartments, inner spaces that have functional delimitations and those with such compartments hardly have any functionalities (these are to be completed later by each inhabitant according to his/her own desire). The type of block also varies largely: from the simplistic ones – with one- or two-rooms apartments, reminiscent of the workers' colonies of the Stalinist era, plus a roof and thermopane windows, to the seemingly posh complexes – with terraced apartments and so-called penthouses. Besides blocks of flats, one encounters various individual houses, as well. They may be: lined up, for a single family or duplex ones, with one floor, an attic and the corresponding garden; scattered individual houses, isolated by strictly delimited gardens; and, finally, a 'neighbourhood inside neighbourhood', a 'select' area, strictly delineated by impenetrable fences with entrances benefiting from barriers and video surveillance systems, housing sumptuous, often excessive villas (excessive in terms of size, colour, surrounding vegetation and ornament), connected through properly asphalted roads with sidewalks, zebra crossings and miniature traffic signs. In a nutshell, these are artificial mini-towns, clear expressions of the desire for social class isolation, so manifest in the case of the post 1990 new rich.

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This diversity reveals in fact the main purpose of the entire enterprise called the neighbourhood of Floreşti: not inhabiting, but selling, not meeting the need of the population, regarding directly the local community as a political and administrative unit, but strictly exploiting a market characterised by an enormous demand and a wide confusion regarding the taste and quality of its products. The result, not al all surprising considering the route taken by Romanian commerce after 1990, from boutique, to bazaar and mall, is a real estate bazaar with something for everyone, something for each pocket: colorful products, gilded ones, showy ones, products with hidden flaws that become obvious at the first use.

The natural surroundings, a given good in our case, was not only used as a landscape resource but it was also seen as an obstacle and treated in a similar fashion as the extraction industry does. Entire hills were excavated, segmented, terraced and covered in concrete in order to make room for complexes of blocks or rows of individual houses that seem placed on top of abandoned stone quarries. According to the logic of minimising costs, the residential units are crowded around the utility network, leading to a landscape in which concrete agglomerations alternate with ample empty spaces, former agricultural lands which became sordid waste grounds, where the flocks of the village of Floreşti occasionally pasture among the debris. In the same way, the streams crossing the neighbourhood that could have been used as landscape resources and a natural means of refreshing the air, were treated in a rural manner, becoming just unwanted bluffs, crossed by poorly made concrete bridges, full of domestic wastes and nesting parasites. In fact, if architectural modern-

ism aimed to erase the difference between urban and rural, by engulfing both in a new form of habitation, the post socialist neighbourhood takes to paroxysm the poor development typical of some Romanian villages. Large, unfunctional houses, lacking all artistic value, are either lined along the main street, which in time became a county or national road (with the traffic that comes with this change of status), either crowded along dusty side roads whose transformation into modern streets keeps being postponed.

Habitation
The Law of Private Property rules over all of this, tracing decisively the coordinates of habitation.

Each strip of land bears the mark of property here, a fact that significantly limits access, movement, determining the circulation flux of both individuals and vehicles. One finds this framing on various levels: each 'developer' delimited through fences the complex he built, each piece of land around the blocks is a precisely set parking and numerous inhabitants of the ground floors surrounded the piece of land behind the block they bought together with the apartment. As a result, the only accessible areas that could be transformed into socialising areas, playgrounds for children or walking zones, are the car ways: either the narrow ones between the blocks, or those along the roads that allow access to the neighbourhood. Departing, again, from the commandment of modern town planning that supports 'opening up', post socialist town planning condemns the residents of the new neighbourhoods to living enclosed (a twisted 'gated community'), where physical mobility is limited to a restricted number of

routes and where the narrow street, criticised by the moderns in favour of gardens and squares, becomes once again the main locus of the community.

It is a community unwanted, as a matter of fact, but created by force of circumstances, from the need to face common challenges: after 1990, the general tendency was that of breaking with the community, of isolating each individual in his or her apartment, of becoming autonomous as a reaction to the old restrictions of living in common. Such rupture was accomplished by cutting off from the central heating system, by strictly dividing the parking lots, by closing in balconies etc.). The new inhabitants of Floreşti, most often coming from the old workers' neighbourhoods, where anonymous living gradually became a reality and local communities and vicinities dissolved, found themselves, to their great surprise, in the same situation their parents had faced 30 or 40 years before, when they moved to neighbourhoods such as Mănăştur, Grigorescu and Mărăşti. They discover that they are part of the same social categories, being surrounded by people of the same age, with similar professions, incomes and lifestyles. The resemblance does not stop here; just like their parents, they must solve the problem of childcare while they are at work, they face recurrent power, water and gas cuts, they must deal with the sudden appearance of a new building in front of their sunny windows and put up with the annoyance of permanent working sites. In addition, they also have specific problems, such as: acquiring legal property documents, dysfunctions in the companies providing various services, issues related to public transportation and, more recently and pressing, paying the instalments. All these elements force community

coagulation, the re-emergence of urban vicinities, a personalisation of social relations, unanticipated and often unwanted in the beginning – a community where one can also express accumulated discontent. The community acquires an actual shape, it becomes an inclusive 'us', whereas the 'other', with opposing interests and attitudes, is the identified source of all the faced problems; either the 'developer', the real estate agencies that cheated their expectations, the local administration of Floreşti that does not become involved in paving the streets, collecting the garbage etc, or the town hall of Cluj that no longer provides public transportation, forcing the inhabitants to use the services of a private company.

The gulf between expectations and reality is, no doubt, one of the most typical traits of living in the post socialist neighbour-

hood. As mentioned before, most inhabitants had previously lived in the old workers' neighbourhoods in Cluj or other towns. Naturally, both the reference point people had when they decided to buy a home in Floreşti and the evaluation of their present homes are determined by comparison with socialist apartments. Most often the inhabitants decided to move here after a long experience as tenants or after living together with their parents – in most cases sharing life in small spaces, designed by others. The apartments in Floreşti seemed attractive, with prices below the Cluj average, with open areas and minimal inner partitioning. The generous interior space, with its luring promise of personalised design, is constantly invoked, yet after living there, this quality is perceived as a flaw. The downfall of inner openness, not immediately apparent at the time of the acquisition, is the absence of storage and intermediate spaces in the apartment's structure; there are no storage or transit rooms. When actually inhabiting these spaces, people discover that their apartments only seem to be, on average, larger that the socialist ones. Moreover, the absence of hallways, closets, pantries, division walls and doors between rooms with different functions, raises serious difficulties in organising daily life (and, of course, they are inevitably reminded of the fact that socialist apartments were not that badly structured after all…) As a result, the ample terraces, the dream of every inhabitant of the socialist neighbourhood, become extensions of the interior space, housing storage areas, closets and shelves. In extreme cases, again taking over the model of crowded habitation, the terraces are entirely suppressed and enclosed with thermopane windows. The limitation of private areas inside the apartments, with poor sound insulation (a turned on TV or radio may be heard throughout the house) is accompanied by the absence of any real intimacy inside the block. Due to the poor materials used, the walls just as the floors, resonate at the slightest noise: one can constantly hear the neighbours' steps, their washing machines, the TV sets etc. Eventually, the discovery of the precarious nature of such buildings is an everyday experience, unanimously shared by the new inhabitants: the installations do not work properly, the fresh wall painting on the block starts to flake, the walls are not straight, the doors do not close properly and so on.

Confronted with such a situation, those, more than few, who cannot come to terms with their choice, have two main options. The first one, typical for young professionals who are still confident that their future holds promises, is to stick to the belief that their living in Floreşti is just temporary. They see their present home as a mere step in their life plan, which will eventually lead to an ideal habitation in an individual house with a garden. The second one, rather typical for workers whose economical situation rapidly deteriorates, is to dream of returning to the socialist neighbourhood, which they revalue after having lived in Floreşti and – who would have believed it just a few years ago? – perceive the former as 'airy', 'green', provided with 'well made, solid' apartments and means of public transportation; in short, they dream of 'returning to the city'.

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I can't explain you how it used to be here before. What we have gone through...hmm....During one year it was a nightmare. It was mud all around here. Going to the office, wearing suits and rubber boots, putting the boots in a plastic bag and then putting on shoes.

Andrei, 37, economist, Baciu

PSEUDO-MODERNIZATION VS. WEAKENED MODERNIZATION

TEXT: COSMIN CACIUC

Debate on the new residential peripheries – a diffuse phenomenon, structured from an economical, social, town planning and architectural perspective on multiple levels – can become extremely troubling through its implications that go beyond the image of the built environment, touching upon that of collective identity on a regional level. I would like to start from four basic hypotheses:

1) The problems of habitation in Romanian society, caught in the never-ending drifting of the economical transition period, are caused by the difficulties related to a profound modernisation and the perpetuation of pre-industrial patterns of cultural behavior.

2) The condition of urban modernization has a generic character and is projected against a wider regional background: Serbia and Bulgaria, for example, are confronted with similar problems of pseudo-modernisation, which goes on according to a 'turbo town planning', the diffuse extension of metropolitan peripheries, chaotic conformity, aesthetic collages and social segregation.

3) Cultural and social tensions can be mainly explained by the superficial adaptation to the western-type consumerist society, following the trauma of the totalitarian communist regime, in the absence, by a profound reconsideration of the fundamental conditions that imply assuming modernity both on an aesthetic and ethical level.

4) Pseudo-modernisation is our lived, dysfunctional model, based on laissez-faire, one's indifference towards the context, simulating western models, maximizing economical profit and cultural irresponsibility. The weakened (or profound) modernisation is a desirable model, based on the idea of cultural sustainability, ethical respect for the context and assumption of more critical theoretical practices.

Habituses and generic patterns

On one hand, we become accustomed to a new consumerist society, embracing it superficially, obeying the rules of its game with desires and identities. On the other hand, the persistent residues of a closed society that longs after the values of a lost and idealised past puts a distance between us and the ideals of profound modernisation. Lifestyles and habituses are born somewhere between these two coordinates, if one were to make reference to Pierre Bourdieu's terminology: "The habitus is the generating and unifying principle that re-translates the intrinsic and related characteristics of a position into a unitary lifestyle that is a unitary complex resulted from a selection of persons, goods and practices"[1].

One can start from the hypothesis that a house is the expression of a habitus, thus of a lifestyle with a series of coherently associated values. We can therefore better extrapolate the idea of habitation as a collection of lifestyles determined by two fundamental coordinates: economical capital and cultural capital. Let us then identify generic architectural types (by reference to the single-family house in the urban periphery) corresponding to certain lifestyles, and let us associate them with negative and positive marks (- and +), the latter involving mostly a future aspiration, a desire for improvement or a coherent potential development in a cultural sense:

• **Boyar-residence-type villa**, built relatively coherently, on the basis of certain traditional motifs restricted to the facades. Its beneficiaries, who may own over average cultural capital, against the background of a generous economical capital, seek refuge in an idealised, out of time image.

[1] Pierre Bourdieu, Rațiuni practice – o teorie a acțiunii [Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action], Ro. transl. Cristina and Costin Popescu, Bucharest: Meridiane, 1999 [1994], 15. See especially table on p. 14 entitled "The space of social positions and the space of lifestyles".

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(−) Detachment from contemporary reality; anachronism; individualism; nostalgia for life in the countryside and for another century; discomfort against cultural modernisation; free and 'abstracted' interpretation that puts out of scale the vernacular image it uses as historical reference; placement indifferent to the eclectic existing context of the periphery; disjunction between the 'modern' interior (adapted to contemporary functions) and the 'traditional' exterior.

(+) Traditionalist rigour; honesty in respecting typologies; appropriate size of a building's volume; traditional materials and crafts; a correct association of vernacular building styles with their original context. The rehabilitation of an existing boyar-residence is anyway preferable to an imagined and nostalgic reconstruction. *Helpful tools: works on the history of Romanian architecture, examples of Neo-Romanian architecture (Ion Mincu, Petre Antonescu, Grigore Cerchez), studies of folk architecture, Village Museum in Bucharest and "Astra" Museum in Sibiu.*

• **Declarative classical monumental villa**, 'crushing' through sheer mass (not style), built of expensive materials and suffocated by the clichés of luxurious living. Its beneficiaries own significant economical capital, but lack any cultural capital.

(−) Egocentricity; megalomania; cult of personality; lack of culture; dominating attitude and indifference towards the context. The beneficiaries seek to express through their way of habitation, with an aggressive soberness, the idea of their social and business success, territorial domination, longing for an aristocratic tradition, which they lack from a historical and education perspective. Modernity is reduced to the technology of simulating a 'classical' image, with out of tune and coherence themes and motifs according to a stylistic code.

(+) British neoclassicism, used as a model, would have offered a valid lesson on the tectonic quality of building, adaptation to the context, sense of proportion, constructive honesty and the deep knowledge of the classical orders and composition principles. *Letting aside their anachronism, anti-modern reactionary attitude and populism, the representatives of the Anglo-American neoconservative movement (Leon and Rob Krier, Robert A. M. Stern, Demetri Porphyrios, Alan Greenberg, etc.) could serve today as models.*

• **Ranch-type villa**, result of repeated extensions, agglomeration of volumes, a disproportionate labyrinth-like composition, with visual barriers toward the street, random collages of styles, themes and exotic motifs (even taken from several continents) wanting to 'appear' respectable in the absence of a sense of humour that would well fit here (or of a postmodern cultural background). Its beneficiaries have taken a sudden leap up the social hierarchy and own, almost exclusively, economic capital.
(–) Lack of cultural capital and refusal to integrate aesthetic and ethical models; implementation of personal phantasms through juxtaposition; identity crisis; the beneficiaries' superficial education and the architects' professional confusion regarding stylistic contexts.
(+) If this pattern were coherently articulated with a postmodern playful attitude, with a sense of proportion and humor, the cultivated eclecticism and the control of the architectural language would resonate, delayed, it is true, with an international tendency which started four decades ago and which was critical at that time. *Helpful tools: the principles and examples of figural postmodernism (Charles W. Moore, Robert Venturi & Denise Scott Brown, Michael Graves) or abstract postmodernism (Ettore Sottsass, after the mid 90s) which take a reverence in front of the context.*

• **The neo-functionalist villa** which combines modernist, postmodernist and traditional themes (on various levels of coherence), expressing the inner organisation through the outer image, with almost the same aesthetic language. Its beneficiaries own large economic capital and average cultural capital.
(–) Modernity is assumed with hesitation and a certain fear, so that pitched roofs covered in semi cylindrical tiles/metal tiles and curtain walls/glass walls for the living room occupying two floors coexist in tension, beside various details for windows, rails, stairs and terraces, imposed rather by constructive systems and contemporary technology than by an assumed aesthetical attitude.
(+) The practical design of the interior space imposes a sense of proportions and balances the representation on the façade of the idea of comfort or social status, despite the ample volume. This type of villa is better adapted to its context than any of the other above-mentioned types; this is accomplished through openings, transparencies, fragmentation of volumes and means of connecting to the existing topography. *Helpful tools: regional modernism (Alvar Aalto and Henriette Delavrancea-Gibory)*

• **Chalet-villa or "box with a roof"-type villa,** occupying two floors; it also combines modernist and traditional themes but on a smaller scale, due to the restrictive compact typology. Its beneficiaries own average economic capital and do not excel in cultural capital.
(–) Although it looks small, the chalet-villa has nothing to do with the scale and typology of vernacular chalets, which it 'inflates' and 'embellishes' with the help of modern techniques, without following the idea of development/ pavilion-type extension or the traditional building principles (structure and wooden clos-

ings). On the other hand, the beneficiaries' desire to isolate them-selves amidst nature has little to do with the real context where such villas are located. The 'box with a roof'-type villa is an ur-banised and simplified version of the chalet-villa, often inspired by the global outlook of the communist blocks of flats, only placing the accent of functional pragmatism and adding a few 'touches' on the facades.

(+) The idea of ostentatious representation is replaced by that of discretion and austerity. Its beneficiaries do not usually have the same economic status as the owners of ranch or classical monu-mental villas. If aesthetic moderation results from an ethical self-limitation consciously imposed by the beneficiaries, although they do have the funds for much larger villas, the aspect can be even worthier of appreciation. *Helpful tools: examples from contemporary Swiss architecture.*

• **Late-modernist and minimalist villa**, the most recent and rare species of building in the context of the periphery, stands out through its elaborated parallelepiped volumes, the terrace roof, generous glass surfaces, inner spacing communicating horizon-tally and vertically, and a relatively unitary aesthetical language. Its beneficiaries own over average economical capital and superior cultural capital.

(−) On one hand, the aesthetic explorations inside this category can often lead to excesses in composition, redundancies, clichés, inconsequence and rhetorical abuse on the level of their details and their use of materials. On the other hand, its beneficiaries associate minimalism with a new exclusivist lifestyle, with luxury products intended for the elites. The minimalist villa is placed above the pattern of the neo-functionalist villa due to its high level

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of architectural shape elaboration, being preferred by high-level professionals.

(+) Through reference to the precedents of the international modernist tradition, which started in the first decades of the twentieth century, through aesthetic discretion and the attention it sometimes pays to the context, the late-modernist pattern involves a maturing of architectural thought beyond the borders of this profession, substantially reaching the issue of profound modernisation. *Helpful tools: interwar modernist architects (Horia Creangă, Marcel Iancu) and the recently awarded items in architecture annuals and biennials.*

• **The pseudo-vernacular improvised villa**, the widest spread type in the peripheries, typical home of the social strata with either average or low economic and cultural capitals.

(−) Compositional gestures appear spontaneously, even irrationally, often entering the realm of kitsch, through the random juxtaposition of hybrid and redundant elements chosen on the basis of personal 'fixations' or aesthetic idiosyncrasies. There is no proper professional control over such projects and building decisions are taken on the basis of the uncritical influence exerted by an existing situation, which adds to personal whim or the advice/offer presented by those who sell building materials and systems for the facades and covers.

(+) One can detect practical reasons in the free intervention of the beneficiaries, the logic of the extensions and even a good sense of proportion, in the absence of knowledge of professional aesthetical principles. Spontaneity, intuition, lack of prejudice on what is considered to be 'beautiful' can generate valid participatory practices. *Useful tools: guides on participatory design (those written by Christopher Alexander for example, but with critical remarks).*

Collage-periphery and improvisation

The main problem with contemporary peripheries is related to the superficial assimilation of the idea of modernisation in Romania, against a background dominated by the pre-industrial culture of the basic individual values. The stereotype of 'classical beauty' (with its various stylistic sub-variants) is simulated in the periphery house with images stylistically falsified (narrow wavy small balconies that are in fact of no use, pointy windows and fat rails...) in the absence of a classical or pre-industrial 'world'. The dream house may be located on an unpaved street, lacking sewerage and running water. The absence of infrastructure alone cannot justify the problem of the superficial modernisation of the periphery, just as the idea of modernisation cannot be simplistically reduced just to the implemented infrastructure or the number of mobile phones per inhabitant. People's mentality remains un-modernised, with or without septic tanks, deep-level water pits, optical fibre cables or asphalt on the urban side street. The location on an existing lot, the relation to neighbours, the understanding of the structure and spirit of the place are still not among the basic criteria of suburban design (and this regards both beneficiaries and those architects who are servile towards their clients). Pre-modern patterns are visible in the way habitation becomes 'territorialised' in an individualistic fashion, totally departing the need for a community space.

On this level, one must make clear the distinction between the formal resources of pre-modernity (vernacular architecture, which remains a valid source of essential principles, as long as it is interpreted in a critical manner) and the myth of the village community, which Henri Sthal stripped of ideal traits in his stud-

ies[2]. The 'citizen solidarity', as opposed to the 'extensive solidarity' of the village community, is a western product, crystallised only a few centuries before the Industrial Revolution and polished through architecture and 'intensive' urban organisation[3].
In our case, industrialisation and dictatorship brutally overlapped a rural world, with space-related and cultural patterns bases on gregariousness. Public behaviour (from that of discourse to that of everyday life) is still manifest in a primitive fashion in Romania, by comparison to the western model. Communism – in the sense of a civic interest that goes beyond each one's back yard and in that of the reactionary or anti-modern neo-traditionalism – is an urban value activated 'contractually' and by 'inter-relating', which we did not fully manage to understand. Hence, the feudal mentality of aggressive cuts in existential space, of fortifying oneself with walls and of territorialism, at the level of individual habitation. Peripheral residential occupation is born out of pastoral nostalgias and gregarious principles of organisation. The ideals of beautiful countryside life, of owning a large garden, of extensively occupying the yard, are pursued with a lack of interest for infrastructure and, especially, with a lack of interest in the structure and spirit of the place, things that do not depend on technology or administration. The rural population that has migrated to the cities during the last half of a century has brutally adapted to a consumerist society over just two decades. If one takes into consideration the fact that most inhabitants of the cities are the first or second urban generation in their family and that, in fact, half of Romania's population is composed of inhabitants coming from the rural environment, one can better understand the failure of urban acculturation, the nostalgia for countryside life and the rarefaction of the periphery.

The new market for building materials and the magazines with typical ground plans and examples of decoration and design play an essential role in modelling lifestyles, suburban image and territorial identity. The paradox of representing pre-industrial ideals through the most recent possible means and technologies may not be so much in focus today, since it has become a conditio sine qua non, just like gypsum wallboard, 'thermopane' windows, painted polyester and sandstone plates that suffocate the elevations. Problems of identity and style feature symptomatically in the image of facades and fences – the true places to test individual representation.

Eventually, one must discuss the positive perspectives of residential peripheries, which hold a remarkable potential for experimenting, mostly on an aesthetic level. I do not believe that the easy replacement of kitsch with minimalist single-family houses worthy of awards during architecture annuals and biennials alone can solve all the problems of the periphery, as territorial organism, and its cultural aspects, on the level of inter-relations. Balkan-type wild urbanisation or 'turbo-town-planning' imply spontaneous, unexpected hybridisation, stylistic mix and improper implementation of constructive systems with unexpected visual effects.

Ironically, what Christopher Alexander and Robert Venturi supported from university pulpits in the early days of postmodernism (the collage-architecture designed by its beneficiaries following general guides and "shelters decorated with symbols", respectively) are created spontaneously in the peripheries of the Balkans, but on a disarticulated and derisory level. The idea of

[2] Viorica Nicolau, Istoria socială a satului românesc [Social History of the Romanian Village], Bucharest: Paideia, 2003.

[3] "The peasant community is another myth of our pre-modernity, through which we resist the urban culture and solidarity born along the modernity in the German cities, in the city states, in Florence, Sienna, Padua and Venice…" Dumitru Borțun, declaration in an interview with Stelian Țurlea entitled "We live in a late Middle Ages", March 5, 2009, ZF – "Ziarul de Duminică" [The Sunday Newspaper], http://www.zf.ro/ziarul-de-duminica/interviu-dumitru-bortun-traim-intr-un-ev-mediu-intarziat-021403/.

[4] Ivan Kucina, "Învăţând din lecţia Balcanilor Occidentali" [Learning the Lesson of the Western Balkans], Arhitectura #71: Feb. 2009, 58-63.

[5] I find several examples extremely significant and useful: Okö Haus in Berlin (Frei Otto, 1990), Straw House in London (Sarah Wigglesworth & Jeremy Till, 2001) and the small (but legendary) projects signed by Rural Studio in the US between 1994 and 2004.

city and architecture seen as collages, made from fragments put together, would make sense here, since juxtaposition is the key principle of self-organisation, but it does not imply kitsch or feudal individualism.

The poor inhabitants' vernacular shelters in the urban margins, on the border between village and city, for whom academic discourse on 'collage' does not even exist, can display, on a closer look, valid aesthetic principles and even a number of ecological traits that educated architects, authors of the luxurious villas in the periphery, ignore with great ease. The lesson of suburban architecture is more significant when it comes from the poor areas of improvising: a primary shelter can display remarkable tectonic qualities, in the absence of all theory, generated only by out of time common sense and the logic of materials that gravity requires.

Instead of refining the essential building principles, the beneficiaries of the new wellbeing simulate mostly an image of success through cloning, falsification and never tiring multiple encoding. The over decorated architecture of retrograde and disarticulated significations in Romania has no connection with the "shelter decorated with symbols", described by Venturi, that involves subtle irony and semiotic multiple encoding. It also has nothing to do with Christopher Alexander's preaching of a kind of vernacular common sense mysticism combined with neo-populism. Unfortunately, we remain trapped in the hilarious sequence of feudal retard (with images of castles and little towers), in which the domestic representation is based on a soap-opera-type of scenery.
The lost of craftsmen's building tradition and the tempting new materials can open the way for brave experiments based on brico-

lage and ingenious, on the spot interventions. The new 'handmade working site' would imply adapting to new situations through the criticism of existing systems applied with no reason and genetically cloned. On the one hand, spontaneous aesthetic hybridisation characterises the entire Balkan world on a spectacular level and it offers numerous examples[4], while on the other hand, the western world tries to bring these regions closer to its 'disciplined' architecture, using ever since the 70s and 80s participatory discourses as an excuse[5].

Habitation and responsibility
The incompleteness of the periphery must not be reduced only to the success of individual initiative, indecently inflated on the level of representation, or, on the contrary, to its failure, expressed through the financial stop of megalomaniac palazzetto-type projects, fossilised in a brick and mortar state in the existing urban texture. The periphery, through the phenomenon of spreading, defines the postmodern urban condition. We can no longer make appeal to economic excuses in order to avoid the problem, which in fact runs much deeper; this problem is cultural and, during the past twenty years, we have been unsuccessfully searching for our identity and that of the built environment. The confrontation of urbanity, of civility, implies therefore a critical interpretation of the social conditions and the effective transformations in daily life. Assuming the 'image of incompleteness' traces, in fact, a larger backdrop of late modernity, a weakening of 'strong' cultural, social and political determinations. This weakening implies, beyond aesthetic liberties, an increased role played by ethics: responsibility for the context, the environment and the society; in short, the burden of an immense worry.

Location! Location! Location! [48]

Adriana: When I moved here, if you can imagine, this whole area was a field.
Except those semi-detached houses and the cemetery, there was nothing else here.
Superbia: When did you move here?
A: In 2007. It was very beautiful. Open space, no noise, not a crowded place. It was just how I
wanted it. Me, the forest and a beautiful sight.
I moved here at the end of the summer. Right after that, they started to dig here, near the build-
ings, and they began with this one next to me. I even have pictures of a rainy morning with an
excavator making noise.

S: So you didn't have a garden or anything in the back, just the house itself.
A: That's right. Afterwards, all these semi-detached houses started appearing like fungus after
the rain. What can I say to them, that they don't have a 3 meter distance to their own property
limit? Should I sue them? What can I say? There's nothing to say here.

S: Does it give you joy to invite someone into a beautiful home like yours?
A: Yes, provided you close your eyes till you get here, and open them when you are inside.

Adriana, 25, architect, Floreşti

LIVING BEYOND THE CITY. THE EXTENT OF AN URBAN PHENOMENON

TEXT: VERA MARIN & ANDREEA MATACHE

"It is 2005 in Pipera, an area that seems to be close to Bucharest, but far from the City. Our family has grown and our flat became insufficient. We hear of a new building complex starting to be constructed and the low price of a home there seems tempting for a time when owning a house there equals having a lot of money. As we are interested in buying a home, we study the project and the real estate agents assure us that our building complex will be different: unlike others, it will have a park, a kindergarten, a neighbourhood shop, a leisure community center; and the streets look so nice in the catalogue they show us, the houses are surrounded by vegetation and one can hardly see the next neighbour. We think we've hit the jackpot and we must buy as soon as possible, since who knows if we will be able to find something else. When we went on our first visit to the working site, the foundations were hardly finished, but the image of those streets was still so vivid in our minds. That was it; we decided to go for it.

We go and sign the paperwork; they've convinced us! A few months later we are called to occupy our homes... there seem to be a few changes? We can't see the trees flanking the street, but it is certainly too early to think of such things, we should wait for them to grow, but we can't see where!

We move in and we are happy to have our first house with a garden. We wait for the complex to be finished, since we've moved in among the very first. After a while, during a period in which we got used to the area and especially to the difficult roads to the city, the complex is finished. Unfortunately, it is just a complex of houses and again houses, no trace of the other buildings, and the streets we believed to be full of vegetation are only full of cars,

parked on both sides and a pedestrian finds it hard to make his/her way between them. And the next neighbour seems very close, but if we are not curious to see him, maybe he is not so curious to see us either.

We are still fortunate to have the field in the back of our house, a plot still not built upon due to the crisis. Here we take our dog for walks and sometimes socialise with our neighbours. Otherwise, houses and again houses. The image in the catalogue is still present in our mind and there alone. Still, we own a house in Pipera, and even one with a garden!

The period encompassing the years of transition from the socialist to the post-socialist city has stigmatized the configuration of Bucharest through the lack of urban development policy and the abundance of private real estate initiatives, differentiated urban dynamics being a consequence of this change. New habitation programs, of which 'gated-community' type closed residential complexes are part of, rapidly found the needed land in the areas around Bucharest, similar to most city suburbs in Eastern Europe. These programs reflect a preference for villas, as a rejection of living in block of flats apartments. The restrictive density of the collective complexes built during communism was replaced by individual houses grouped in complexes that are pretty dense themselves, enclosed between opulent surrounding elements and with an elaborate arsenal of home security systems.

In this article, we aim at bringing into discussion the characteristics of house groups north of Bucharest, as measuring unit for the recent developments of the city, in an attempt to understand the

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way these complexes reflect or not specific values and ways of living. Our working hypothesis starts from the fact that this type of habitation represents neither a copy of imported models (of a 'gated community' type), nor a taking over of autochthonous models. As a local interpretation, with its strong and weak points, this way of living represented at a certain point (the beginning of the 2000s) an attractive offer for those marked by the lack of diversity in living conditions during the communism.

As professionals, we recognize the importance of understanding the needs of the people who will use the spaces we design and their capacity to enter in possession of, to inhabit, to feel and to adapt the space designed by architects and town planners. It's just that in the case of plotting for type houses, the relationship between the professionals and the users of the designed space is filtered by the financial interests of real estate developers. In Romania, these interests are balanced neither by the inhabitants' knowledge of what 'quality living' is, nor by the authorities designated to check and approve such buildings, who should act as filters for the protection of general interest. Real estate developers have dictated too high densities and improperly located houses made of cheap materials, yet sold as luxurious houses. The developers presented their 'accomplishments' in commercial brochures that exploited their clients' lack of experience and their desire to express their financial potency by acquiring a home in a 'prestigious' perimeter. People bought houses basing themselves on representations with seductively furnished interiors, generated by attractive 3D simulations, which were often false, impossible to build on the respective sites and did not respect the real proportions of spaces.

Living "beyond the City"

In Bucharest, like in other large Romanian cities, the creation of 'closed' residential complexes, with typified lots, represents the tendency of the past twenty years in the expansion of urban space. These are groups of homes with a low height level, upheld under the notion of 'complex' or 'neighbourhood', terms which in most cases do not reflect the de facto reality. This huge wave of constructions, reaching a peak in the 2000s, makes us analyse the phenomenon under two respects: first, that of the context built with specific elements and second, that of the social and cultural context that determines the selection of a certain habitation style in the northern periphery of the city of Bucharest.

The proliferation of plotting in the suburbs is a response to urban population growth, but also an aspiration towards a 'lost normality' of habitation in the city, in the continuation of the residential complexes with individual houses created during the interwar period. Paying attention to an existing urban model in the history of Bucharest, which, unfortunately, has not been analysed, nor taken over nowadays, we see that, in the case of interwar residential complexes, one could speak of cohesive communities, of neighbourhoods with their own identity. Plotting was conceived around an element of identity of that respective residential community: a park or a building fulfilling a public function. In the same sense of creating identity, there was an interest in the stylistic unity of architectural details. The complexes were built in coherent relation to their urban vicinities. The 'new' Bucharest of the interwar period appears as a collage of urban identities.

[1] Andreea Matache, "Locuirea în Ansamblurile rezidențiale închise. Zona Pipera – Voluntari" [Living in closed residential complexes. Area Pipera-Voluntari], PhD dissertation defended at the Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Town Planning, March 2010, supervisor Prof. Ph.D. Arch. Sandu Alexandru.

The northern area proved to offer good-quality residential features, destined for people with over-average financial possibilities. We mention here the residential complexes located near Kiseleff and Aviatorilor boulevards, Herastrău Park and Lake (the former Bonaparte and Filipescu Parks that have generated Dorobanți and Primăverii neighbourhoods). Around the 30s, these were peripheral areas, but a periphery for the rich social classes. The present-day period indicates continuity under this respect: towards the north, the city has grown to include real estate developments intended for the rich, while the southern area belongs to the middle or even the low class. Despite all of these, one can note that the way real estate developments are promoted in the south is similar to that in the north of the city. In fact, in all peripheral areas, real estate developers focused on each respective group of homes promoted by a private investor and managed as 'islands' that ignore the context where they were located and the rest of the city. We most often speak of significant inner dysfunctions in such groups of homes, that become typical repetitive elements, such as: predominance of the built areas, absence of essential amenities for living comfort, monotonous and bad-quality architecture, problems related to parking lots and even traffic inside that group – extremely important elements, considering that these plots depend on the traffic of the inhabitants' own cars, since, most of the times, there is no public transportation.

The elements of built space organization reflect as well on the cultural-symbolic and social realities of present-day residential areas. On a symbolic level, the 'house' is no longer a simple element connected to immediate necessities, but a cultural construct of social class image, illustrating the class status of the 'newly rich'.

The images shown to the prospective inhabitants during marketing campaigns replace the simple 'house' with the notion of 'villa', and the group of houses, that have nothing else in common than the perimeter of the same plotted site, is replaced by the notion of 'residential complex'. Using terms not fitting reality, real estate developers aim at attracting rapid success for their investments. The improper use of these terms has led to confusions regarding life in the periphery, confusions that the specialists have not sufficiently criticised.

Fieldwork research[1] indicates that habitation in closed residential complexes located in the suburb does not constitute a specific case continuing the development of the city, but a 'borrowed' typology related to a western model of urban expansion. In the case of American cities, the 'closed communities', as source of inspiration for transition-period accomplishments, appeared as a consequence of fears existing in the American society, but also as a tendency to counteract insecurity by isolating and deliberately enclosing the house complexes. In the case of Romanian suburbs, the model was used as means of asserting the social status of the new urban elite, through spatial detachment from the existing urban territory and through symbolical delimitation of the new territory.

In the USA, the 'gated community' residential model is also the consequence of urban sprawl, stimulated as well by the low cost of land in the suburbs, supported by the developed town infrastructure and the quality of road networks connecting them to the city, that insure the daily traffic between the residential suburbs and the 'down town'. In the case of Romanian suburbs though,

one cannot discuss about a phenomenon of similar proportions. 'Closed communities'[2] develop over increasingly smaller surfaces, where the density of buildings is much higher and thus more uncomfortable and, in most cases, the corresponding infrastructure is insufficient. Paradoxically, peripheral areas in the north of Bucharest (Pipera area) end up being more expensive than urban ones. Equally paradoxical is the tendency to limit private space, which rather generates small and very small space fragments, both through an over dimensional and aggressive treatment of the fences around individual properties and the enclosure of groups of homes built according to typified ground plans. Therefore, one cannot speak of the closed character of an area, but rather of the enclosure of plot sequences, whose dimensions depend on the plotted land.

Another idea that takes us further away from the original model is related to the value of enclosure and isolation from other areas of the city; the enclosure is in the same time physical, social and symbolic. In the case of 'gated communities', the focus is placed on interiorizing community relations between the material limits of the surrounding walls or fences. Community represents the formal legitimising "instrument" of the new urban actors, defined according to ethnic criteria or social, cultural and professional status. The type of living becomes an accessory of a lifestyle created through stereotypes and copying, affiliated to a community that would correspond to these ideals. In areas with groups of houses built in the north of Bucharest, in the 90s, the concept of community is rather replaced by that of collectivity, made up of the new area residents, who want to be part of the new urban elite, as a sign of the new fashion, rather than in search of a living area, that should express common lifestyles, preferences and values.

Actors and Motivations
In conclusion, we are talking about closed residential complexes as manifestations of the need for emancipation, of the individual pursuit of diversity in habitation. As regarding the choices made on the characteristics of the built context, one may notice a brake in urban models and architectural styles in the rest of the city of Bucharest. One may notice, as well, the intention of real estate developers to generate a marketing identity proper to the new residential areas (Pipera, Voluntari), an identity referring to the new urban 'elites'.

Reality shows a simple juxtaposition of residential units: the absence of buildings with community functions and of public space makes good-quality urban living impossible, as an identity-related component of the city. They create enclosed and self-sufficient groups, inside their physical boundaries, through the lack of social cohesion manifested in residential complexes, but also through poor connections with elements of the street. The latter is a simple, small access way, lacking sidewalks and designated green areas. The street thus exists as a sterile space, lacking in the urban quality of socializing and the existence of public space. In the same time, through the poor connection with the city's functionality, the new residential areas remain isolated archipelagos composed of singular individualities lacking any community fusion.

Through the succinctly presented analysis in this article, we could note that those coming to live in the recent suburb complexes do not take this step because this way of habitation expresses values that they recognize as their own, but in order to express their financial success, to be together with other wealthy people. More-

[2] Local adaptation of the term 'gated communities'; ibidem.

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over, they seem to reject living in block of flats complexes or the density and drawbacks of the city. Without having clear criteria on what quality of habitation means, nor the opportunity to enter in dialogue with designers, architects and town planners, in the 2000s, many people made choices they now regret, as indicated, as well, in the account presented in the beginning of this article. Communication among all actors involved in the development of these residential complexes is the only possible starting point for reaching less frustrating living experiences or design experiences, which could make professionals proud.

As long as the financial interest 'dictates' and all others follow this logic, the chances of failure are great. By better understanding what has happened during the past twenty years – the preferences, the imaginary and the accomplishments of the transition period – professionals might become more efficient in their mission to educate the beneficiaries to require more from real estate developers and to keep a balance between all these tendencies with irreversible effects in both time and space. However, the equation has more than two unknown factors: beneficiaries/developers, on the one hand, and architects/town planners, on the other hand. Professionals working in public administration and enforcing the law should no longer treat lightly the interest in durable urban development, whereas politicians should plead, in their speeches and projects, for higher quality living by assigning local budgets that will ensure the growth and revitalisation of settlements. Thus, architects and town planners would have a stronger influence on the process of building houses in the periphery. Professionals could accomplish this mission by becoming more public through informational programs, possibly supported by profes-

sional organisations, and, last but not least, by refusing to draw "as they are told" projects that they certainly know to be bad.

Marian: One day a fox went through there with the dogs chasing it and came out this side. A rabbit used to come here a few weeks ago; it liked the grass here, it used to come in through there, eat and then leave.

Superbia: What we got so far from for answers is that the reason for them moving here was based on a finances. More space for less money compared to the city.
M: There was a category of people who categorically refused Baciu or Floreşti. Maybe the younger ones, married with children, thought that it may be more financially accessible to stay a few years, and after a while move out.
S: Yes, but those with other expectations also chose these places eventually.
M: Yes, but maybe they weren't so young, around their 40's. It matters that it's very close to Cluj, and that the public administration allowed them to build more or less in a chaotic way. Probably there, in Floreşti or Baciu the land was cheaper. The investors started off with minimum investments and took less loans from the banks. There surely is a financial explanation behind it all.

Marian, 60, civil engineer, Becaș

ABUNDANCE, DEFICIENCY AND COMICS

TEXT: MIRUNA STROE

What do we actually talk about when the issue is the Romanian recently developed suburb? On one hand, theory tells us we discuss 'deficiency' – many aspects of deficiency: legislative, of public space, of taste, of culture, of administrative interest, of strategy, all in all, lack of urbanity –, generally speaking, all those aspects that shape the sphere of 'discontent' surrounding the public discussion on the recent estate development of Romanian towns. On the other hand, for the architectural practice, until very recent times (just before the beginning of the economic crisis, this unexpected occasion for reflexion), the suburb meant abundance. Abundance of projects, both individual houses and estate developments, projects for established design offices and for young emerging architects – basically, a rich field of experiment without much discernment. Actually, the motive behind the development of the suburb was exactly the abundance, the financial surplus of the emerging middle class, which was eager to express its newly attained status.

This difference between the theoretical and the practical aspects in the Romanian architectural milieu is not surprising; however, when it comes to the suburb, the gap is bigger than expected. A new kind of dwelling takes shape between the two extremes: abundance and deficiency, plus and minus. I would like to name it in a more precise way than the general term 'suburb', that is why I shall start the quest for a proper name. My professional experience is situated in this twofold reality, previously described. I, just like others, had the opportunity to design houses in such areas, where the relation with the context is mostly a problem of resistance and, inevitably, all negotiations are turned exclusively on the architectural object, producing self-centred architecture. Nev-

ertheless, on various occasions, I joined the voices that expressed the discontent of the professional milieu about the chaotic development of towns through suburbs.

Especially because I have experienced both situations, I tried to find the specificity of dwelling between these two poles and capture it in a 'name' that could function as an instrument in further theoretical approaches. With no pretence of being an onoma-tourgos, I am rather interested in the process of naming, where the differentia specifica meets the tools of the copywriter and becomes the emblem.

The term suburb, with its Latin etymology (sub – under and urbs – city, an 'undercity' referred to the housing area of the less fortunate inhabitants of Rome, outside the Roman hills), contains many nuances nowadays: from the diverse urban growth patterns throughout history, to the privileged housing areas outside the overcrowded city centres, to slums. Suburb thus proves to be an all-comprising word. Instead, there are many words in different languages that name a particular kind of suburb, each specific for a certain cultural area. Browsing through various dictionaries, the abundance and inventiveness of terms depicting poor suburbs is obvious, while more luxurious housing areas are generally named suburbs (or different equivalents, without negative connotations). As the higher social status generally comes with the pretence of differentiation, the rich housing areas are not considered homogenous (as is the case with poor neighbourhoods), they are collections of unique elements. But what happens in the case of an inflation of 'uniqueness'? Doesn't it become the norm and turns into a homogenous mass? This seems to be the case of our sub-

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urbs, which further emphasises the need for a new name.

Let us look at some terms that define mass, even poor housing. How do the names pinpoint the specificity of a certain kind of housing and what is that specificity? I chose the most interesting names regarding their composition, their origins, without aiming to provide an exhaustive list.

Favela. The Favela hill (on which the first slum of Rio de Janeiro developed in 1946) gave the name of all Brazilian slums, as most of them are located on hills outside cities. The proper noun Favela became a common noun and described this kind of settlement, in which the 'viral' growth and the slopes of the streets make it impossible to go by car.

Baraccopoli. The Italian name seizes the huge difference between the existence of the community, suggested by the prestigious Greek polis, and its formal dwelling, in barracks.

Shanty town (a term established at the end of the 19th century), slum or squatter settlement. The English terms denoting poor suburbs are very general, but this is usually compensated for by several local denominations, as for example: tent city, trailer park, colonias (for the Mexican settlements bordering with the United States) or even hooverville (an explicit reference to the political regime of Herbert Hoover, who, in the time of the Great Depression, increased the number of people forced to live in spontaneous settlements).

Bidonville. Pierre Merlin and Françoise Choay identify the apparition of the word sometime before the Second World War to name the improvised houses of the Moroccan peasants on the outskirts of Casablanca[1]. Most of the building materials used for the overcrowded barracks were reclaimed junk, among which, petrol cans (in French bidon), hence the particular name.

Banlieue. In the French cultural space, the generic name of the suburb, banlieue[2], bears, as the same dictionary notes, the mark of an administrative definition; in Medieval Latin, banleuca represented the area influenced (leuca, lieu fr. – place) by a restraining order (ban – ban). As noted by the authors, in reality, suburbs are too complex to be explained by a term that sums up only territorial and administrative aspects. This is the reason why banlieue grew in complexity over time, becoming the most comprehensive term. There are two characteristics that generally define suburbs: the dependence on the city and their development towards a greater complexity of their functions and towards solving multiple aspects of dwelling that span longer periods of time ("a systematic, almost continuous occupation of space"). The observations of Merlin and Choay draw the image of a dwelling area that, on its apparition, is imminently "unfinished" and not completely developed functionally, administratively, network-wisely. Moreover, it is inhabited by people who generally have their jobs in the city, thus being alternating migrants. This image, not yet an entirely urban one, could be representative for the Romanian reality we are dealing with. So, is the recent Romanian suburb a work in progress? Can we blame the lack of public space on the complexity that has not yet matured? Given the long periods of time that take a suburb to become a complex urban entity, we could get to the regrettable point where public space might not "fit" in the physical area of the suburb.

[1] See the article 'Bidonville' in Pierre Merlin and Françoise Choay, Dictionnaire de l'urbanisme et de l'aménagement, troisième édition revue et augmentée, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000, 118-120.

[2] See the article 'Banlieue' in Merlin and Choay, 99-107.

[3] The urbanism of the socialist period is not essentially different from what was practiced throughout the world at that time; the difference resides in the unidirectional application of a single model, neglecting any experiment. Thus, while in the western countries there was a moment of critique towards the functionalist urbanism, in Romania its use continued for at least two more decades.

[4] Augustin Ioan, Sacred, Safe and Busy. Oraşele mari în extincţie [Sacred, Safe and Busy. Great Cities in Extinction], 8-15 in ACUM2.

[5] On the other hand and in another context, it might be interesting to comment on the ease with which the same inhabitants access the new virtual social networks; maybe their novelty makes them less susceptible.

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In the case of Romanian towns, there is something else to be pointed out: the traditional logic of the town's growth was brutally interrupted by the urban practice of the socialist period[3] and, in the meantime, nobody claimed its revalorization. By forgetting the traditional logic of city growth around certain values (public space being one of them), the inhabitants themselves forgot they needed those values. We have created a generation of people who are content with living in the given conditions and will not claim a radically different space when they afford to buy a new home. Speculating on the psychological profile of the the recent suburbia's inhabitant, we could discuss about a certain subconscious resistance towards the logic of the city growth proposed by the socialist planning, but not a comeback to the traditional logic; let us not forget that we are in a moment defined by speed, automobiles and remarkable distances. The desire to turn against all rules (here I am following an idea issued by Augustin Ioan)[4] goes so far as to give up the connection to any network (including some essential ones, such as plumbing or gas), for fear of interaction with 'power' networks. Recent suburbs are like perforations in the widespread territorial (and state) network, large perforations that require a certain independence, even if only formal.[5]

After browsing through terms coming from so many different

languages, a question might arise: why the Romanian word *mahala*[6] is not sufficient enough to denote that particular kind of suburb we are discussing about? Given the importance, already accounted for in a detailed manner[7], of Bucharest's development on a network of mahalale and parishes, the role of the mahala cannot be neglected. Still, it depicts a certain historic moment in the development of the city. A certain social context, together with a development pattern, defines what we call mahala and such conditions are no longer met today. Besides, the term mahala does not refer solely to the urban development in the outskirts of the city, it can be encountered in central areas as well. One of the few common aspects between the old mahala and the recent suburb is the inhabitants' so-called 'up-startism'. The old inhabitants of the mahala (named mahalagii), who, in spite of their lack of refinement, aspired to a higher social status, are not entirely different from the recent well-off inhabitants of the suburbs, with their fast cars and measureless houses.

This is why it is not surprising that there is no need for public space in the suburbs; as long as there are places for 'going out' (and parading one's wealth) in the city, areas meant for entertainment and commerce and often identified with the Malls showing up in every city, they are enough. Thus, we come to another feature of our recent suburbia: a certain relation to the American way of developing a city. Although, in the past, Bucharest, for instance, went through its Balkan and French period, and the cities in Transylvania through the Central-European period, nowadays, following the good tradition of globalization, they readily embrace the American model of suburbanisation. It comes naturally that the nostalgia for America (i.e. the United States of America) and for its values makes some of our clients – more than a few – ask us to design houses of American

inspiration. However, this influence comes with an unavoidable impact on public space, by organizing the suburbia in strict interdependence with the Mall. The Mall supplies whatever need one has for authentic public space, even if it turns it into a 'cardboard' version. The moment when the generation raised in Malls will need Squares and Streets might not come soon. As Dana Vais noticed[8], introducing the Mall in our cities exposed us to a condensed (a few years) version of a history that spanned more than fifty years in the United States. As a result, the Romanian version overlapped stages and, obviously, did not stop to assimilate critical moments. Thus, we now have, in an undifferentiated manner, suburb malls and central malls whose public spaces absorb and confiscate the citizens. We cannot help but notice the highly criticised process of 'mall-ification' of the city itself. It suffices to observe the pedestrian area in the centre of Braşov or the recent situation of the Lipscani area, which, in order to 'save itself' became a large food-court (not to say a generalised pub).

My paper is dedicated to justifying the suffix 'ville' within the term that I propose. Since the English language has become a common choice in naming almost all 'estate developments' (it would be interesting to see whether they will keep their English names in daily use) and the American influence has been immediately adopted, we have built a 'cartoonish' reality that deserves a name close to the ones found in comics.

As I have started from the extremes – on one hand, the professional milieu and the abundance and, on the other, the theoretical approach centred on deficiency – and noticed that the reality we observe is a roughly sketched imitation of the globalized American suburb, I can finally introduce to you the term Plusminusville.

6   Mahala is the widespread term in Romanian language when talking about poorer neighbourhoods, but not necessarily at the periphery, also in the centre of the cities. Its Turkish origin speaks about a certain period in the development of our cities and may fail to express the contemporary reality. N/A

7   See Adrian Majuru, Bucureştii mahalalelor sau periferia ca mod de existenţă [The Bucharest of the Outskirts or the Periphery as a Mode of Existence], Bucharest: Compania, 2003.

8   Dana Vais, Cultura mallului in Korunk no. 12/2009. For the world of the Mall, see www.korunk.org.

INSIDE

OUTSIDE

Laura, 29, interpretor

Europa residential area

Előd, 31, journalist

Florești

Eleonora, 61, retired teacher and Alexandru, 62, engineer

Bună Ziua residential area

Mirela, 50, technician

Bună Ziua residential area

Andrei, 37, economist

Baciu

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Andreea Matache is architect, university lecturer, author of PhD thesis Ansamblurile rezidenţiale închise. Pipera, Voluntari, the first interdisciplinary study of the northern peri-urban area of Bucharest that uses the methods of urban anthropology, author and co-author of a number of architectural, urban planning projects and publications in specialized journals.

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Planwerk Cluj was initiated in 1998 as a network of Romanian and German architects and planners. Now, the team, under the name SC Planwerk SRL is involved in research, urban design, communication and social development and teaching. Planwerk received several awards at the 2002, 2004 and 2008 editions of Bucharest Architecture Biennial.

Miruna Stroe is a teaching assistant and PhD student in the Theory and History of Architecture Department at "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urban Planning of Bucharest. Her thesis deals with aspects of dwelling during the 60s and 70s in communist Romania. She is also part of the architectural office MoodFactory.

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Dana Vais is researcher and critic of architecture. She is associate professor at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, where she teaches theory, modern and contemporary history and architectural design.

EXHIBITION

Radu Cioca was born in 1982 in Baia Mare, Romania. He studied at the Art and Design University of Cluj-Napoca and L'Ecole Superieure des Arts Saint Luc de Liege, Belgium. He is one of the co-founders of Slash Gallery in Cluj-Napoca .

Ilarie Pintea was born in 1982 in Cluj. He studied Design at the Art and Design University of Cluj-Napoca.

Ionuț Țințoc was born in 1980. He's following a tradition of leather ware manufacturing transmitted from father to son.

Teodora Vlad was born in 1983 in Cluj. She studies Film&TV at the Edinburgh College of Art. She currently lives and studies in Edinburgh.

FOOOOOOAM

Alina Bradu was born in 1985 in Cluj, Romania. She studied graphic arts at Art and Design University of Cluj-Napoca, L'Ecole Superieure des Arts Saint Luc de Liège, Belgium and in 2009 she finished a Master Program in graphic art at National University of Arts in Bucharest, Romania. She attended several art residencies in Bucharest, Berlin, Cluj-Napoca and Lille.

Carlos Carmonamedina was born in 1982 in Comarca Lagunera, Mexico. He studied visual arts and Mexican literature at the Universidad Veracruzana, Mexico City, Mexico. In 2010 he finished a Master's Program in Painting at the Art and Design University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Carlos attended art residencies in Romania, Serbia, Croatia and France. He has 3 solo shows in Mexico and his work has been featured in numerous exhibitions in Mexico, Ukraine, Romania and Serbia. In the beginning of 2010, he started an online art magazine: www.miremagazine.com.

Silviu Medeșan was born in 1984 in Târnăveni, Romania. He studied Architecture at Technical University of Cluj-Napoca and Institut Supérieur d'Architecture Saint-Luc de Wallonie in Liège, Belgium. He co-organized Z.A. - Architecture Days in 2007 and 2009 in Cluj. In 2010 he was awarded second prize for his final work as student by the O.A.R. (The Chamber of Romanian Architects).