

Mélange Modernism: Case Studies of Alternative Architectural Practices at the Crossroads Between Modernism and Postmodernism

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Foreword: Concepts and Themes

This article is part of a broader research, in which I aim at discovering the specific place on the global architectural scene of several underexamined architectural creations of the 1980s in Romania. To this effect, I consider some points of reference. On the one hand, I propose *utopian thought* as a tool of analysis, as it is redefined and reconceptualized by Nathaniel Coleman in *Utopias and Architecture*¹ and, on the other hand, I seek to understand the influence of the postmodern spirit, through the influential writings and philosophies that have left their mark on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The key concepts which I will expose in this article are the invention of exemplary architectures through competition proposals and critically infused creations that distance themselves from the official state-run practice, the stylistic *mélange* which appears through the collision of currents - the friction between escapist postmodern experimentalism and pedagogical Modernism. The school diploma projects, the speculative competition proposals and the experimental built projects which will further be presented are illustrations and examples of these concepts.

Nathaniel Coleman argues that “development of a useful definition of utopia must emphasize those aspects that foster invention of an exemplary architecture,”² asserting that “the dimension of utopian influence on architecture I explore is the underexamined potential of utopias to contribute to a continuing renewal of architecture.”³ Such is the case of these underexamined late modern and postmodern transitional works that emerge in specific cultural and social contexts, much like 1980s Romania. These works are, in a sense, *stylistic hybrids*, representing a heterogeneous mixture developed through an educational system which was anchored in pedagogical Modernism of the Romanian school of architecture of the 1970s and 1980s (mainly the “Ion Mincu” Institute of Architecture, hereinafter referred to as *Ion Mincu*) and an incipient experiment in the coordinates of postmodern contemporaneity. This picture must include the social, economic and political context of an authoritarian communist regime, which, through a policy of gradual isolation from the Western world, renders these case studies particular through an inevitably escapist and subversive facet.

I propose the concept of *mélange Modernism*, as invoked in the title of this article, to encompass a heterogeneous form of creation and serve a dual purpose. Firstly, it speaks about the stylistic influences from which these creations borrow an architectural language, stylistic manners and aesthetic concepts, as well as an interesting overlaying of contiguous fields of study which reveals obscure dimensions of the architectural discipline. Secondly, I propose this term as a *hypernym*, an *umbrella term* to encompass the presented array of creations.

1 Nathaniel Coleman, *Utopias and Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

2 *Ibid.*, 24.

3 *Ibid.*, 5.

Insofar as currents are concerned, an interpretation of Postmodernism in Romania is a delicate and complex subject, that I will approach only by focusing on some selected aspects. As an authoritarian regime closed to unwanted foreign influences, the mainstream currents of this architectural period have had the misfortune to cross the wall of political censorship in truncated, partially understood and incomplete theoretically grounded forms. Schools in such closed environments are in a situation where they lose their synchronicity with the outer trends and advance particular and local cases of styles, different from those developed in culturally free circumstances. The focus of this article is, however, to shed light on some theoretical and critical case studies, some of which have remained at the stage of unconstructed architectural poems - competition drawings and *drawer architectures* (a term which was first used in fiction - *drawer literature* - for those works which had a subversive character, inadequate for the official ideology and unpublished until the Revolution of 1989) - others have managed to become particular built syntheses of contemporary architectural discourse, laden with personal searches.

Given the nature of these case studies - visualizations and competition proposals - for this article, I have chosen to present images of these works through a process of redrawing. The figures which will be presented are redrawn based on the original drawings or prints, images, and illustrations taken from primary sources - *Arbitectura* magazines published at the time and personal collections of the creators. It is my hypothesis that architecture and, particularly, drawn architecture can be better interpreted through a more profound way of understanding, by following through the composition and drawing elements in a similar manner as their creators. This method of reading the presented material is intended to increase the value of this analysis.

Origins: A Historical Praxis

In a broader historical context, my hypothesis is that these architectures find their origins in imaginary works and architectural inventions pioneered by architects such as Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Paul-Marie Letarouilly or the French visionary architects Claude Nicolas Ledoux, Étienne-Louis Boullée and Jean-Jacques Lequeu. Architectural manifestations such as Piranesi's imaginary views of prisons from *Carceri d'Invenzione* or Ledoux and Boullée's *architecture parlante*, which speak of their function through form and ornament, show us a personal and ideal dimension of architecture, filtered through the imagination and experience of their authors. The 1950s witnessed the rediscovery of these works through studies, such as Emil Kaufmann's *Three Revolutionary Architects, Boullée, Ledoux, and Lequeu*,⁴ regarding them as valuable architectural creations.

If one were to illustrate the connection between these historical currents and works from the 1980s, we could look towards Boullée's *Architecture, Essai sur l'art*. Here, Boullée writes

"I cannot conceive of anything more melancholic than a monument consisting of a flat surface, bare and unadorned, made of light-absorbent material, absolutely stripped of detail, its decoration consisting of a play of shadows, outlined by still deeper shadows."⁵

Looking towards Brodsky and Utkin's 1986 *Nameless River* etching for *A Glass Monument for the Year 2001* competition,⁶ where a glass slab resembling a river is being held by two thousand and one columns as a metaphor for time, we can find a kindred sensitivity.

Furthermore, the postmodernist interest in such utopian and artistic inventions, together with an attention for architectural drawing has produced a similar way of creating architecture,

4 Emil Kaufmann, *Three Revolutionary Architects, Boullée, Ledoux, and Lequeu* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1952).

5 Etienne-Louis Boullée, *Architecture, Essay on Art*, translated by Sheila de Vallee (London: Academy Editions, 1976), 106.

6 Ronald Feldman, Lois Nesbitt, and Aleksandr Mergold, *Brodsky & Utkin, Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2015), plate 19.

through ideal and imaginary proposals. The 1980s are a culmination of this specific drawn dimension of architecture, which started in the 1960s with individuals like Aldo Rossi, with groups like Superstudio, Coop Himmelb(l)au and Archigram, and ended in the late 1990s with the beginning of digital design and representation. Looking towards the Eastern Bloc countries, a sense of dissatisfaction and disappointment with the status quo and the approaching *Revolutions of 1989* have created a palette of subversive practices. The nostalgia for lost architectural artefacts, the revolt against an amnesiac architectural practice and urban planning (attitudes rooted in postmodern theories and thinking) have grown strong and manifested themselves through nostalgic and subversive imaginary creations which are in line with this specific drawn dimension of architecture.

Local and Global Context

In Europe, the architecture and architectural education of the late 1970s and the 1980s are marked by two fundamentally different contexts in the socialist East and in the capitalist West. The first can be found in a state of social and economic decline which will end up in the *Revolutions of 1989*, and the latter can be found in a state of relative economic and social prosperity. The official architectural profession in the two can be synthesized as isolationist, relatively stagnant and politically dictated in the totalitarian East (although a gradual relaxation of censorship had begun from the 1960s onwards), whilst the West can be found in a late stage of experimental Postmodernism, from revivalist-like ornamental and ironically decorated styles to some technological and high-tech aesthetics.

As Ostwald explains the situation in Russia,

“Following Nikita Khrushchev’s 1956 rejection of the excesses of Joseph Stalin’s leadership, the communist party in Russia endorsed a type of dour modernism as the official architecture of the state. Over the next two decades, and under the leadership of Leonid Brezhnev, this position became so entrenched that the only state-sanctioned model of architectural practice was tied directly to the production of these utilitarian works.”⁷

The Western schools of architecture are slowly leaving behind the rational, doubtless and universal International Style in favor of a more localized, symbolic and complex Postmodernism and some experimental practices. One can only mention Alvin Boyarsky’s idiosyncratic chairmanship at the Architectural Association in London, where, as Irene Sunwoo presents, the school “began to operate as a testing ground for alternative forms of architectural production.”⁸ The Eastern architecture schools, left in a form of isolation, develop parallel genres of architectural currents, stylistic revivals and forms of partial synchronism with the currents in the West.

From the studied subject’s point of view, the 1980s are marked by international competitions organized or supported by Western magazines such as *Japan Architect*, *L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui*, *Domus* or *Architectural Design*. These competitions offered architectural conversations on various themes, from resistance to an aggressor - *Bulwark of Resistance* (1986 *Shinkenchiku Competition*) to predictions about what the future of architecture might mean - *A Monument in Glass for the Year 2001* (1986, *Central Glass Competition*). They have facilitated a breach for architects in the Eastern Bloc countries, encouraging the invention of a palette of imaginary architectures, anchored in the spirit of a distinct Postmodernism. Noticed by the ‘outside’ Western world, they have gained international recognition and have encouraged generations of architects to escape, in a professional and critical sense, from the socialist system.

7 Michael J. Ostwald, “The Event, Politics and Dissent: Alain Badiou and the Utopian Provocations of Brodsky and Utkin,” *Architecture and Culture* 2, 1 (2014): 16.

8 Irene Sunwoo, “From the ‘Well-Laid Table’ to the ‘Market Place’: The Architectural Association Unit System,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 65 (2012): 24.

Russian architects are some of the first to enter these competitions. Representative of the Moscow school are members of the movement called *Paper Architecture*: Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin, Yuri Avvakumov, Mikhail Belov, Mikhail Filippov and Nadezhda Bronzova. The Novosibirsk (Siberia) school of architecture is represented by architects such as Victor Smyshlaev, Viacheslav Mizin, Andrei Kuznetsov and Yuri Tarasov.

Apart from Russia, in the area of Soviet control, the Estonian school in Tallinn (the Faculty of Architecture of the State Art Institute) and graduates from the EKE Project (a design institute in the Estonian SSR) are active in the same context of participating in international competitions and inventing imaginary architectures, with architects such as Ülevi Eljand, Leonhard Lapin and Tiit Kaljundi.⁹

In other countries of the Eastern Bloc, groups are participating in international competitions. This is the case of the Hungarian group composed of the architects László Rajk Jr. and Endre Borza, together with the writer György Konrád and the poet Miklós Haraszti. Concerning this group, a subversive attitude manifested outside the sphere of architecture can be identified.

In Romania, alternative practices that include proposals for international competitions are explored by young students and architects, disillusioned by the limitations of current professional practice or keen on a more complex and critical dimension of architecture. It is the case of Dorin Ștefan, the *Timișoara Group* (mainly composed of Vlad Gaivoronschi, Ion Andreescu, Adrian Ionașiu, Alexandru Florin Colpacci and Claudiu Panaitescu), Marius Marcu-Lapadat and Horia Gavriș, Dan Bolomey and Matei Lykiardopol, Dan Coma, Eugen Dumitru and Constantin Luca, and many others. These architects participated whilst still being students in school (at *Ion Mincu*) or whilst practicing as architects in state-run institutes (the Romconsult, the IPROTIM or Carpați Institutes).

Representative as an embodiment of the *Zeitgeist*, the Architectural Association in London is experiencing decades of transition from the 1960s, from rough, concrete urbanism, to the nuanced and complex thinking of Postmodernism. The idiosyncratic figure of this paradigm shift was Alvin Boyarsky, chairman of the faculty between 1971 and 1990. Through his pedagogical experiments, AA develops a creative philosophy and critical thinking that will manifest itself from the way the units are organized to the way students and unit masters are presenting their creations. At the heart of this philosophy was drawing, as an action, as a receptacle for discourse and as an object of art in itself.¹⁰ This is when architects such as Zaha Hadid, Bernard Tschumi, Rem Koolhaas, Elia Zenghelis, Zoe Zenghelis, Stefano de Martino, Alex Wall, Daniel Libeskind, Christopher McDonald, Peter Salter, and many others assert themselves, as tutors and later on, as architects. Under Boyarsky's leadership, the *Architectural Association* becomes an avant-garde nucleus whose drive and purpose is architectural drawing, as a critical instrument, as an art object and as an act in itself. To illustrate the atmosphere of the school, one can invoke the inauguration of the *Folio* series through Daniel Libeskind's *Chamber Works: Architectural Meditations on Themes from Heraclitus* (1983), a collection of high-quality reproductions of drawings presented by the architect in an AA exhibition.¹¹ These *AA Folios* have perpetuated the school's philosophy all over the world and have since become a common practice in architecture schools. Alongside, one can mention Zaha Hadid's 1983 exhibition, *Planetary Architecture Two*, where her drawings decorated the walls and floors of the exhibition spaces, or John Hejduk's installation *The Collapse of Time* from 1986, which marked the school's incursion into public space.¹²

9 Andres Kurg, "Conceptual Architectural Projects form the Late Soviet Period," in *Centrifugal Tendencies: Tallinn - Moscow - Novosibirsk*, ed. Yuri Avvakumov (Berlin: Tschoban Foundation. Museum for Architectural Drawing, 2017), 134.

10 Igor Marjanovic and Jan Howard, *Drawing Ambience: Alvin Boyarsky and the Architectural Association* (St. Louis, Missouri: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, 2017) - on the subject of the AA and its practice in the 1980s, under Alvin Boyarsky's tutelage.

11 Marjanovic and Howard, *Drawing Ambience*, 41.

12 *Ibid.*, 47.

This *zeitgeist* further facilitates the possibility of expression and affirmation for the Eastern Bloc, drawn architecture having no need to be built. It receives a form of autonomy and self-sufficiency, with an imaginative search for sensitive, allegorical and metaphorical themes, allowing the use of architecture as a purely creative tool.

Starting with the second part of the 1970s, the Russian architecture schools of Moscow and Novosibirsk have been experiencing a trend of escapist thinking. This occurrence has been catalyzed by the *Japan Architect* magazine, which, since 1975, started by inviting famous foreign architects to be judges in competitions of architectural ideas, making it more appealing for young architects around the world.¹³ Unsatisfied with the professional routine of the Brezhnev era, the movement engaged students and young architects in nostalgic and marginal searches of architectural ideas, most of them created for these international Japanese competitions. The movement was called *Paper Architecture*, the name being given by one of the exponents of these escapist groups - Yuri Avvakumov. Initially, the term had a pejorative undertone, being attributed to architects who distanced themselves from *Socialist Realism* and were not being commissioned any real architectural projects.¹⁴

In an interview with Julia Andreychenko from InRussia.com, Yuri Avvakumov speaks of a link between *Paper Architecture* and the French *architecture parlante* phenomenon, through river-shaped architectural monuments, buildings in the shape of ships and other similar searches. He also mentions personal references of some exponents, such as Brodsky, which had a sensitivity for Piranesi, Avvakumov himself being inspired by the Russian Constructivists Tatlin and Melnikov.¹⁵ While some looked back at Russia's recent avantgarde, the engravings of Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin are loaded with the atmosphere of Piranesi's *Carceri d'Invenzione* series (1750-1761), not only through the shared medium (engraving), but also through the content: the overwhelming scale of these architectures and the atmosphere they evoke, the nostalgia and the timelessness of the imagined objects.

All these searches, which are parallel to the socialist architect's predetermined mission are strongly synchronized with the regained affection for drawing and architectural imagination manifested by some Western schools, such as the AA.

It is important to mention a similar change of direction which happened in the United States in 1969, when Robert Venturi, along with Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, have directed their work at Yale School of Architecture to produce the celebrated manifesto - *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972). Alongside *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966), this study is a cornerstone in the birth of American Postmodernism in architecture, preoccupied with rediscovering ornament, symbolism, the vernacular and other ignored themes during the modernist hegemony.

As author Rosalind Krauss notes in *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, the American neoconservative Postmodernism "countered modernism with a return to ornament in architecture, to figuration in art and to narrative in fiction."¹⁶ Such was the case of American architects like Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, Charles Moore or Michael Graves.

13 Yuri Avvakumov, "Paper Architecture: Foreword," in *Centrifugal Tendencies: Tallinn - Moscow - Novosibirsk.*, ed. Yuri Avvakumov (Berlin: Tchoban Foundation. Museum for Architectural Drawing, 2017), 8.

14 Vladimir Frolov, "Columbarium Habitabile. Paper Architecture inside and out," in *Centrifugal Tendencies: Tallinn - Moscow - Novosibirsk* (Berlin: Tchoban Foundation. Museum for Architectural Drawing, 2017): 14.

15 Julia Andreychenko, "Building Castles in the sky," <http://inrussia.com/building-castles-in-the-sky> (last accessed May 14, 2019): "Paper architecture is, in my opinion, more closely connected with „architecture parlante" (speaking architecture) – so let's add Jean-Jacques Lequeu to your list. All these buildings in the form of ships, housing developments in the form of still lifes, monuments in the form of rivers, bridges in the form of scales, and so on and so forth, are undoubtedly connected to speaking architecture. At the same time, many paper architects had their own individual preferences: Brodsky and Utkin liked Piranesi; Bush, Khomyakov, and Podyapolsky liked Tessenow and Shpeer; I liked Tatlin and Melnikov."

16 Hal Foster, Rosalind Kraus, Yve-Alain Bois, and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, *Art since 1900. Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (London: Thames and Hudson 2004), 590.

This particular narrative thread is representative for some of the presented case studies, paving the way for an architectural language loaded with Classical archetypes, sequences and elements. As much as stylistic aspects are concerned, one can argue that some of the case studies which will be presented in this paper are critically postmodern but modern in language. A form of early European postmodernity closer to the realities of Romania could be invoked in this case. A new form of rationalism, expressed by Italian architects such as Aldo Rossi, Carlo Aymonino or Giorgio Grassi (part of the *La Tendenza* group) and German architects like Oswald Mathias Ungers can be seen as references for some of the featured case studies.

The Romanian School of Architecture

From a cultural point of view, referring to the architectural discipline, 1980s Romania presented a form of aggravated cultural isolation. The censorship perverted access to information, the foreign magazines' issues were delayed for months and the economic austerity of the decade made the situation even more difficult.

In the 1970s, with Ceaușescu's July 1971 theses proposing a 'cultural revolution' in Romania, the Bucharest earthquake of 1977 and the concept of self-censorship culminate in the 1980s as a repetitive professional practice consisting of typical collective dwellings, few to no unique projects, a reduced cultural feature and a kind of ossification of the architectural discipline. These are moments in which some architects, dissatisfied with the status quo, exhibit alternative practices that follow narrative threads parallel to the ideological mission. These actions call for encrypted and hermetic approaches, resulting in interesting examples of allegorical architectures for international competitions such as the Japanese *Shinkenchiku Residential Design Competition* and the *Central Glass International Architectural Design Competition*, drawer architectures and built architectures charged with hidden and cryptic meanings.

In the 1980s, there were several aspects to the architectural education at *Ion Mincu*. Programmatically, its mission was to train architects to serve the state-controlled practice of the Design Institutes, but the atmosphere around the student organization called *Club A* (established in 1969 by Emil Barbu 'Mac' Popescu) the student dormitories and the studios, with the contemporary music they were listening to, the forbidden movies they were running, the poetry they were reading and the exhibitions that took place in the faculty spaces underline an environment in which critical thinking was not hindered, if not encouraged. One can find a pertinent description of the school's ambiance in Helen Stratford's *Enclaves of Expression*¹⁷ article, based on architect and teacher Doina Petrescu's experience in the school.

As far as education goes, we find *Ion Mincu* in a stage of modernist pedagogy initiated with the subsequent chairmanships of figures such as Ascanio Damian from 1956 (first as dean of the faculty until 1957) to 1969 and Cezar Lăzărescu from 1970 to 1977. Ascanio Damian's chairmanship coincided with the end of the study of Classical styles and Classical language specific to the Beaux-Arts curriculum, focusing on educating students towards the immediate needs of society, nurturing a functionalism of clearly traced axes and a sober, clear language, rooted in the teachings of sacred figures such as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, or Le Corbusier. Lăzărescu's celebrated modernist architectural practice and his further continuation of Damian's reform furthered this ideological stand. The interwar education of these rectors, in a modernist spirit, will bring to the stage of 1960s architecture a local genus of modernist mannerism, heavy with optimism and charged with a social mission, in the context of the gradual renunciation of the Soviet socialist realism imposed until the first part of the 1950s.

17 Helen Stratford, "Enclaves of Expression: Resistance by Young Architects to the Physical and Psychological Control of Expression in Romania during the 1980s," *Journal of Architectural Education* 54 4 (2001): 218-228.

Furthermore, *Ion Mincu* had the opportunity to host valuable exhibitions from the artistic environment of those years. In 1980, the *Scrierea* exhibition took place, the theme of which brought together contemporary artistic and scientific languages, from the fields of visual arts, architecture, music, literature, and mathematics. As Madga Cârnci argues, *Scrierea* “marks the peak of the artistic investigative spirit of the ‘70s.”¹⁸ This exhibition was organised by the art critic Mihai Drișcu and the artist Wanda Mihuleac, who would go on to organise another exhibition named *Spațiu-Obiect* (1982) in the premises of the *Ion Mincu* school. Their exhibitions crowned a decade of experimentalism and activism in art and influenced the activity and interests of both students and staff, even their participation in the *Spațiu-Obiect* exhibition.

At the same time, through magazines outside the Eastern Bloc, like *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, *Japan Architect* or *Domus* - magazines which could be found at the *Ion Mincu* library, some of them could even be found at newspaper kiosks - Academia was exposed to some postmodern theories, criticism, and built architectures. This can be seen as an external influence with positive consequences, as we will see, some of the case studies are created by architects which have experimented with postmodern discourse, as a means of expanding one's knowledge and establish a critical and complex stance on architecture.

Four Case Studies

The selected four case studies touch on three aspects of architectural creation. These three aspects define different moments of one's career, beginning with the diploma project [1], continuing with the proposals for international competitions [2] and ending with an actually built piece of architecture [3]. They are as follows: Vlad Gaivoronschi's diploma project from 1982 - *Housing and facilities in the Cetate area - Timișoara*, the competition proposal of Horia Gavriș and Marius Marcu-Lapadat for the 1985 Shinkenchiku competition - *Bulwark of Resistance*, the competition proposal of Dan Bolomey and Matei Lykiardopol for the 1986 *Docks Museum* in London and Dorin Ștefan and Emil Barbu Popescu's *Youth House of Science and Technology* in Slatina, designed and built between 1979 and 1986. Alongside these examples, other works and pursuits by these architects and the groups they were active in will be presented.

This selection presents key moments of the architecture discipline, from a diploma project with contextual qualities in the case of Vlad Gaivoronschi [1], to a competition with artistic qualities and a poetic discourse in the case of Marius Marcu-Lapadat and Horia Gavriș's *Bulwark of Resistance* [2], to a proposal for a complex competition, loaded with playful aspects and architectural references in the case of Bolomey and Lykiardopol's *Docks Museum* [3] and finally, a built architectural object, a receptacle for a critical postmodern discourse in the case of Dorin Ștefan's *Youth Culture House* in Slatina [4]. I seek to pair them together to illustrate a complete picture of this alternative architecture of the 1980s in Romania. They also point to a broader image, as well as a certain narrative thread, a form of chronological collage. They feature a spectrum of pursuits that stretch from the margin between architecture and visual arts, as an artistic expression through the medium of architecture, to discourses that reach critical dimensions in phase with postmodern theories. These case studies were chosen to illustrate a complex picture of an alternative Romanian architecture in the 1980s, a parallel architectural practice, distant from the official practice, and an architecture that, compared to Western practices in the 1980s, displays synchronic sensibilities. All these examples begin with an education that is anchored in a modernist spirit and continue by accessing theories from the postmodern spectrum. They are all equally stylistic hybrids, born from a rational vision imprinted by the educational background of the *Ion Mincu* school, contaminated with the postmodern complexity that transpires from the West.

18 Madga Cârnci, *Artele plastice în România: 1945-1989. Cu o addenda 1990-2010* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2016), 217.

Before going further with the Romanian case studies, one must present some contemporary Eastern and Western works, for a better understanding of the following palette of creations. I have selected two examples: Douglas Darden's *Museum of Impostors*¹⁹ and Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin's etching for the 1985 *Bulwark of Resistance* competition - *Villa Nautilus*²⁰ (the same competition in which Gavriș and Lapadat participated). I have written about Darden's allegorical architectures in a previous article²¹ regarding the postmodern discourse. In this particular example, *Museum of Impostors*, Darden proposes a reversal of architectural canons as follows:

Architecture posits the authentic.

Architecture posits the fake.²²

As LaMarche observes,

"Darden explores the question of authenticity in recent critical postmodern discourse by framing the Museum in terms of the authentic and the simulation [...] Thus architecture is implicated in both its insistence on authenticity and its complicity in the production of the fake."²³

Darden presents the museum exhibits as "stories of the lives of individuals in American history who have pretended to be someone different from whom they really were."²⁴ Looking at the architectural object, it is composed of a bridge-like structure flanked by two silos, one being a twin silo containing two large trees and the other containing a windmill-powered music box. The bridge is two-sided, as is the itinerary - one presents us the fake whilst the other, the authentic. The itinerary starts from the twin silo towards the second silo. This allegorical piece of architecture, like all of Darden's works, is designed as a metaphor, stretching architecture to its farthest limit.

With a similar result, Brodsky & Utkin produced etchings like *Villa Nautilus*, with allegorical qualities akin to Darden's works. Whilst Darden explores a marginal architectural discourse, using literature as a patron, Brodsky and Utkin are producing "graphic forms of architectural criticism"²⁵ directed towards the Soviet architectural practice.

Villa Nautilus presents us a house dug into the middle of a crowded boulevard, flanked on both sides by high-rise buildings, with cars passing it by the way a stream of water would. The house has a street-level function, a dining room which is mirrored in the lowest underground level. The shape of the house resembles a *vesica piscis* and with its central circular spiraling stair, it resembles an eye, pointed proudly towards the sky. The name of the etching is taken from Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas: A Tour of the Underwater World*, having its own Captain Nemo, drawn smoking a pipe whilst confronting the river of cars. As Brodsky and Utkin explain in the etching "Seeing the uselessness of [escape], he built his cell in a place where the mad pursuit of God knows what is seen the best of all: in a midst of a big street in a big city."²⁶ This house displays a particular kind of resistance, "Day by day the little ship sails forward against the current staying in the same place."²⁷

19 Douglas Darden, *Condemned Building: An Architect's Pre-text: Plans, Sections, Elevations, Details, Models, Ideograms, Scripttexts, and Letters for Ten - Allegorical Works of Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993), 11. The book presents works that have been developed in the 1980s.

20 Feldman, *Brodsky & Utkin*, plate 27.

21 Alexandru Sabău, "Politics of Self-reference. Self-sufficient Discourses in 1980s Architecture," *studies in History and Theory of Architecture* 6 (2018): 171-186.

22 Darden, *Condemned Building*, 11.

23 Jean LaMarche "The Life and Work of Douglas Darden: A Brief Encomium," *Utopian Studies* 9, 1 (1998): 162.

24 Darden, *Condemned Building*, 13.

25 Lois E. Nesbitt, "Man in the Metropolis: The Graphic Projections of Brodsky and Utkin," in *Brodsky & Utkin, Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin*, ed. Barbara Darko (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2015), 13.

26 Feldman, *Brodsky & Utkin*, plate 27.

27 Ibid.

[1] Gaivoronschi's diploma project brings up some spatial typologies from the past and a sensitive approach towards a historic urban site. This project encompasses sensitivities that transcend modernist puritan searches and extend towards a postmodern approach.

Gaivoronschi belongs to a group of architects who, in the 1980s, as recent graduates and young practitioners, participate in international competitions, write and draw imaginary architectures with metaphorical and allegorical qualities. The group was composed of Vlad Gaivoronschi, Ion Andreescu, Adrian Ionașiu, Alexandru Panaitescu, and Alexandru Colpacci. The educational background of these architects is influenced by a special case in Timișoara's art scene - the *Sigma* group. Active in the 1970s and composed mainly of the artists Ștefan Bertalan, Constantin Flondor, Doru Tulcan, Elisei Rusu, Ion Gaiță and the mathematician Lucan Codreanu, its interdisciplinary activity attempted to bring together aspects of philosophy, mathematics, literature, biology, psychology, cybernetics, bionics and architecture, using diverse media - from drawing to paper to photography and film. The experimental model adopted by this group was inspired by the German avant-garde school Bauhaus.²⁸

The searches of this unique experimental group and the presence of its members in state education imprinted an unusual character in the artistic education of Timișoara in the 1980s, also influencing those pupils who later became architecture students. One of the esteemed representatives of this experimental group - Ștefan Bertalan - was also present at the "Traian Vuia" Polytechnic Institute of Timișoara, where he taught the *Form Study* course.²⁹ This artistic environment, an up-to-date library with the latest issues of magazines such as *Japan Architect* and tutors such as Hans Fackelmann had strongly influenced the three years of study that could be attended at the Faculty of Architecture in Timișoara. Gaivoronschi, Andreescu, and Ionașiu continued their architecture studies at *Ion Mincu*, from 1979 to 1982. During their years at *Ion Mincu*, the group participated in a few competitions, one being the 1981 *Meditation Chapel* organised by Central Glass, where they won the third prize with a composition called *Meditation as a journey into the Labyrinth*.³⁰ The drawing operates with a composition in which architecture receives a secondary place, the proposal itself being presented as a comic book, with frames arranged clockwise around a central view of Venice (the city as a labyrinth), where the stages of knowledge are described, according to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Another competition proposal they designed was for the *Doll's House* competition, proposed by the *Architectural Design* magazine.³¹ Here, they referenced themes from a Romanian fairy tale (*Old Ageless Youth and Deathless Life*) and imagined an Orthodox Christian rite inspired dollhouse that becomes, in essence, a tomb.

Returning to Gaivoronschi's diploma project at *Ion Mincu*, I have considered selecting it so as to highlight some sensitive issues related to the content of a diploma project and its positioning as a critical creation, being placed between the curriculum of a school with a modernist agenda and a personal, postmodern attitude.

In describing the project, Gaivoronschi himself argues that "the morphological and typological characteristics of the old Baroque city impose canons, which restrict the freedom of creation."³² The chosen site is in Timișoara's historic center, north of Victoria Square, on an awkward site along St. John's Street, adjacent to the *Modern* store. To this day, the site remains unoccupied.

Two spatial and typological elements draw our attention to this architecture - on the one hand, the commercial canopied gallery, characteristic of the 1900s architecture and the open-air

28 Cârneli, *Artele plastice în România*, 133.

29 Vlad Gaivoronschi (architect at Andreescu & Gaivoronski Associated Architects and professor at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, Timișoara), interviewed by Alexandru Sabău, Timișoara, May 2019, transcript, Cluj-Napoca.

30 "Premierea unui colectiv de arhitecți români într-o prestigioasă confruntare internațională," *Arhitectura* 2 (1982): 73.

31 "Doll's House," *Architectural Design* 3-4 (1983): 57.

32 Vlad Gaivoronschi, "Locuințe și dotări în zona Cetate - Timișoara," *Arhitectura* 4 (1983): 70.

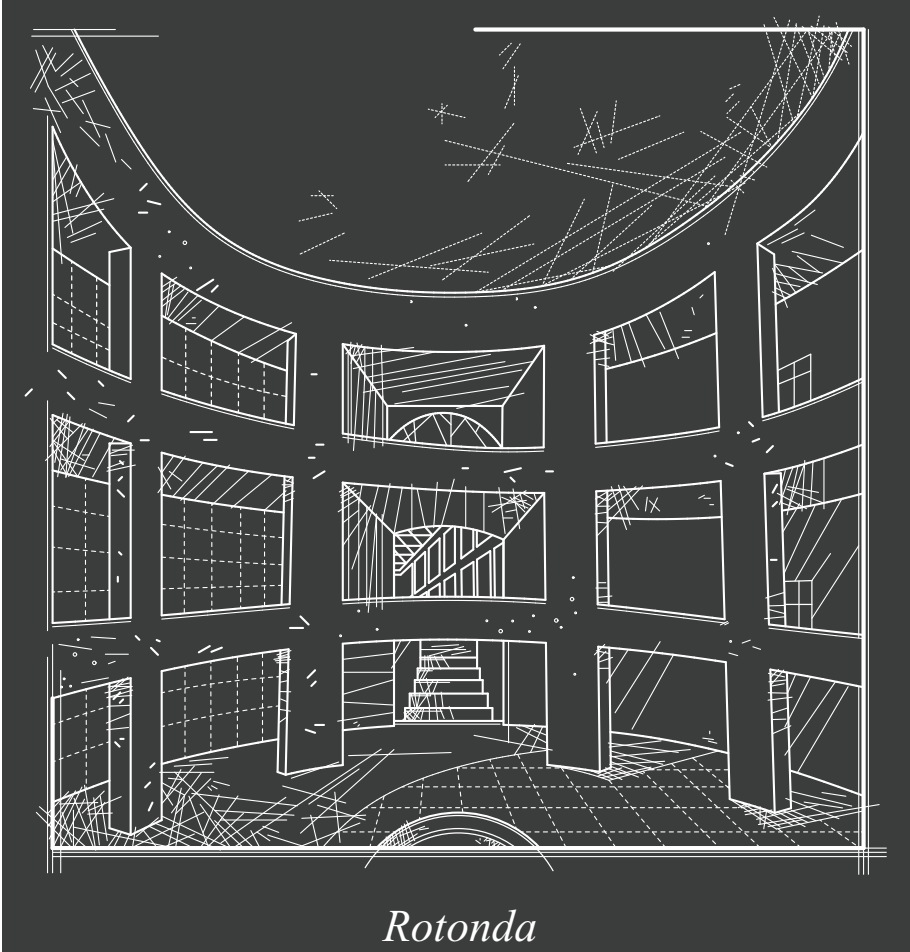
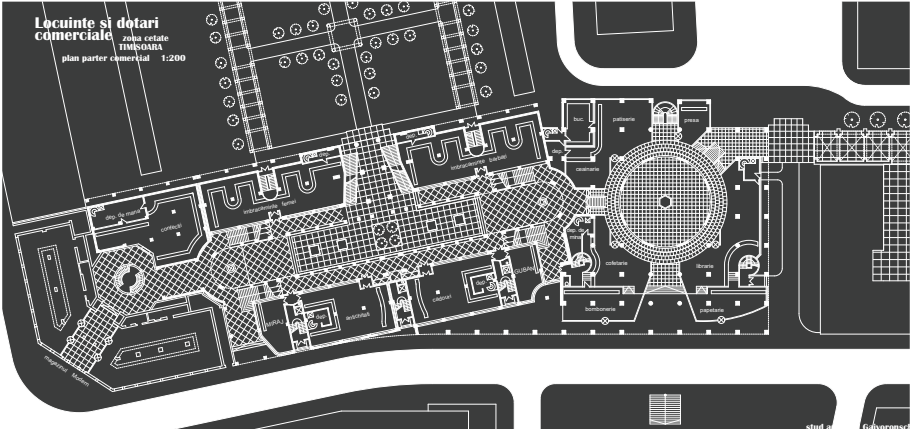


Fig. 1: Perspective sketch for the *rotonda* of the diploma project

Fig. 2: Ground floor plan of the diploma project



theater/exhibition rotunda (Fig. 1 and Fig 2). Referring to the rotunda, Gaivoronschi argues that “The rotunda is not just a replica of the old baroque yards, an exaggeration of the interior-exterior contradiction. Sculpture exhibition or open-air theatre, distribution and polarization node - it is the hidden place whose configuration transcends its generative process.”³³

The proposed canon is spatially reused and functionally repurposed, receiving a poetical architectural program. These two strong elements are accompanied by a certain configuration of facades, squares, porticos, and arcades of various typologies. The building proposes a complex architectural promenade, which starts from the *Modern* store atrium, going through the commercial gallery, from where one can exit into an enclosed garden (shared with the building of the IPROTIM Design Institute) or continue towards the rotunda, which can also lead you on three paths - to the upper levels of the building, underground via a tunnel towards a plaza across the building or towards the adjacent Fatebenefratelli Church, a path which further provides a restored enfilade structure through the plot.

Regarding this diploma proposal, it is important to mention the *Neue Staatsgalerie* in Stuttgart by James Stirling, finished in 1984. Gaivoronschi’s diploma is heavily influenced by this reference, especially in using spaces like the rotunda and some axonometric representations.

In a less artistic and a more architectural manner than Brodsky and Utkin’s graphic criticism, one must see this design acting as a manifesto for the kind of architecture Gaivoronschi and same-minded colleagues wanted to build: mindful of its past and respectful towards its context.

[2] The competition proposal for *Bulwark of Resistance* by Gavriș and Marcu-Lapadat is an interesting example of a visual architectural metaphor, where fragments and scenes juxtaposed from places of affectivity and personal memories of buildings reflect how architecture transcends its built dimension and enters into the field of fiction.

Gavriș and Marcu-Lapadat conceived this project in the first years of their professional career, after returning to Bucharest to work, alongside other architects, on the House of the Republic in 1985, and feeling a lack of hope and perspective. During this period, they were exposed to atypical readings, documenting Classical styles and Classical architectural language. Among those readings discovered during the year 1985, Marcu-Lapadat mentioned the engravings of Claude Nicolas Ledoux and the drawings of Étienne-Louis Boullée. At the same time, they were exposed to postmodern searches by architects such as Elia Zenghelis and Rem Koolhaas.

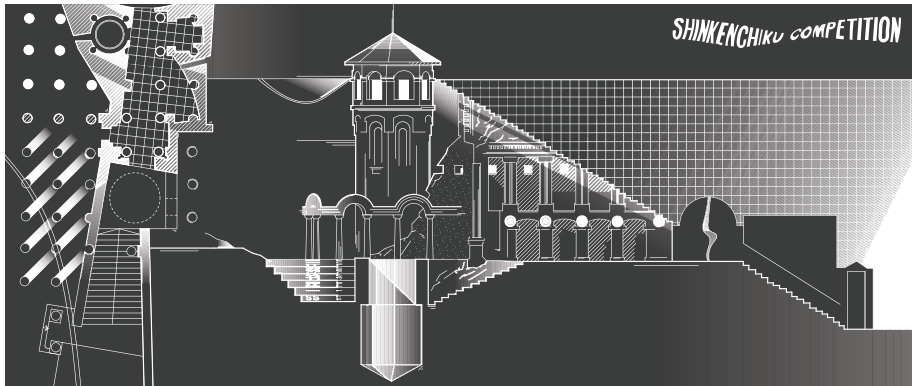
The proposal for *Bulwark of Resistance* is, as Marcu-Lapadat states, “a cocktail of memories, through which you pass from one space to another, outside the laws of physics.”³⁴ The composition itself is made on photographic paper, representing a collage of photographs blended with an airbrush. The blended images range from pictures of Hadrian’s Villa in Tivoli, the dilapidated Cantacuzino palace in Prahova county, drawings of abstract grids and column grids, to a brick-tower that the authors, traveling by train towards Bucharest, saw projecting on the curtain walls of an industrial hall (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4). This proposal won a mention at the Shinkenchiku competition of 1985. *Arhitectura* magazine wrote about this participation in the first issue of the year 1986. Here, the two authors briefly describe the reason behind their proposal:

“In our approach, we have first assumed that we each carry in us images and places which have impressed us over time and that intertwine, coexisting, somehow forming a homogeneous whole. The staircase of the childhood yard, the cruet-stand, the princess’s tower from the childhood story, or classic examples of architecture, along with the banal roofs with dormer windows, all defining our personality, constituting themselves in affective memory, fragments of life, glimpses of longing, which we must protect, so that, in turn, we feel defended by the aggressions of contemporaneity.”³⁵

33 Ibid.

34 Marius Marcu-Lapadat (architect and professor at Interior Architecture Faculty of the Ion Mincu University, Bucharest), interviewed by Alexandru Sabău, Bucharest, March 2019, transcript, Cluj-Napoca.

35 Marius Marcu-Lapadat and Horea Gavriș, “Mențiune acordată unui proiect românesc în Japonia,” *Arhitectura* 1 (1986): 64.



The two architects started taking part in competitions during their student years, another contest in which they participated being *Theater for Tours*, 1983, Stockholm, organized by OISTAT (International Organization of Scenographers, Technicians and Theater Architects) together with Iános Mészáros and Dinu Lazăr. It is worth mentioning that the Timișoara group and Dorin Ștefan also participated in this competition.

After graduating in 1983, while working at the Design Institute in Râmnicu Vâlcea and before returning to Bucharest in 1985 to work at the Carpați Institute for the House of the Republic, Marcu-Lapadat continued these ideal pursuits, creating a series of imaginary architectures in airbrush technique. These exercises will culminate in the proposal for the *Bulwark of Resistance* competition.

[3] The proposal made by Bolomey and Lykiardopol for the London Docks Museum touches the notes of a particular case of postmodern language - that of *high-tech*, juxtaposed with a playful way of expressing architecture. The scope of the project was to reuse an abandoned naval depot from London's docks as a museum, with the purpose of being a link between the past, present, and future of these docks.

The project is presented in a sketchy and playful manner, with a zeppelin displaying the name of the museum from a height and various signalling elements (banners, flags). The proposed architecture is of a high-tech nature, with thin and expressive metallic elements, structural thrusts and fitted with a glass enclosure. It seems to channel a form of contextualism that borrows from the technological expression of complex utilitarian constructions from ports - especially from structures like cranes. In the same way, the graphic representations depict various sailing vessels, juxtaposing them together with the proposal suggesting a second storyline of the architectural solution (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6). The quality of the graphic representations and the atmospheres are reminiscent of unconstructed utopian projects such as Cedric Price's Fun Palace of 1961, a project that inspired well-known architectures such as Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers's 1977 Centre Georges Pompidou, from which this proposal seems to draw its inspiration.

The project received one of ten equal prizes awarded by the organizers. The jury was composed of personalities such as Renzo Piano and Edward Cullinan. *Architectura* magazine reserves seven pages of the second issue of 1987 to present the drawings of this proposal.

As described in the magazine issue, the museum "sought to be in harmony with the floating naval collection; the bridge of the central lobby invites to a 'boarding' for an imaginary journey."³⁶ The construction is configured so that, at a metaphorical level, it produces events that are found in the naval world - embankment bridges, decks and control towers.

36 Dan Bolomey and Matei Lykiardopol, "Proiect românesc premiat la concursul internațional 'Muzeul Docurilor din Londra'," *Architectura* 2 (1987): 66.

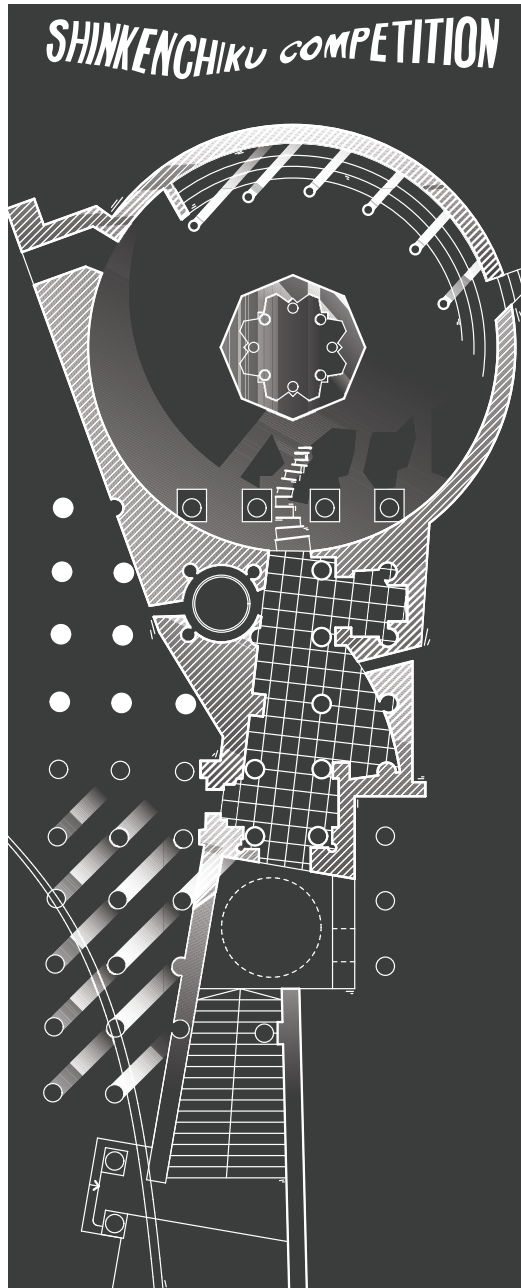


Fig. 3: Lower part of the first competition proposal for *Bulwark of Resistance* (opposite)
Fig. 4: Left part of the first competition proposal for *Bulwark of Resistance* (above)

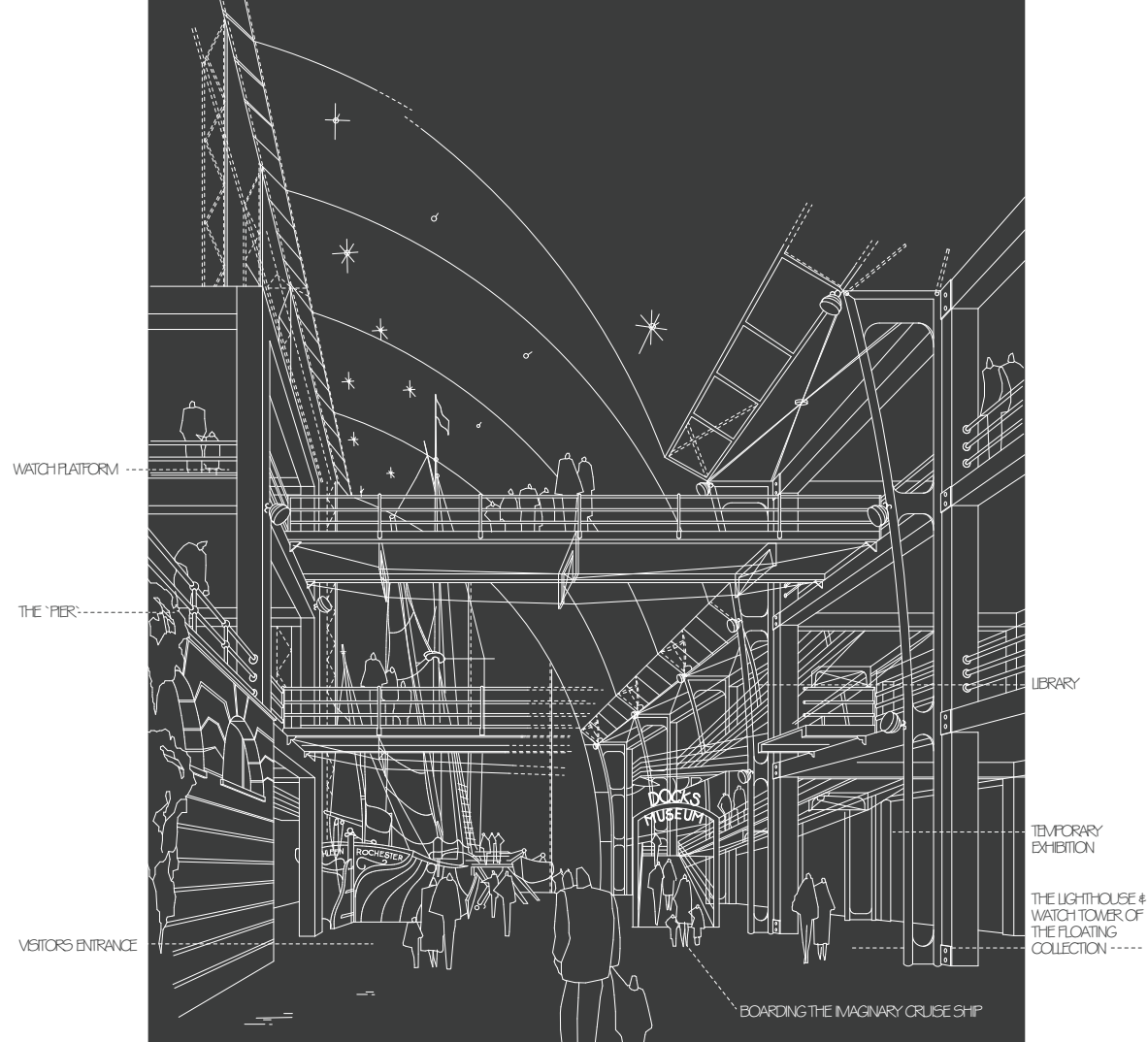
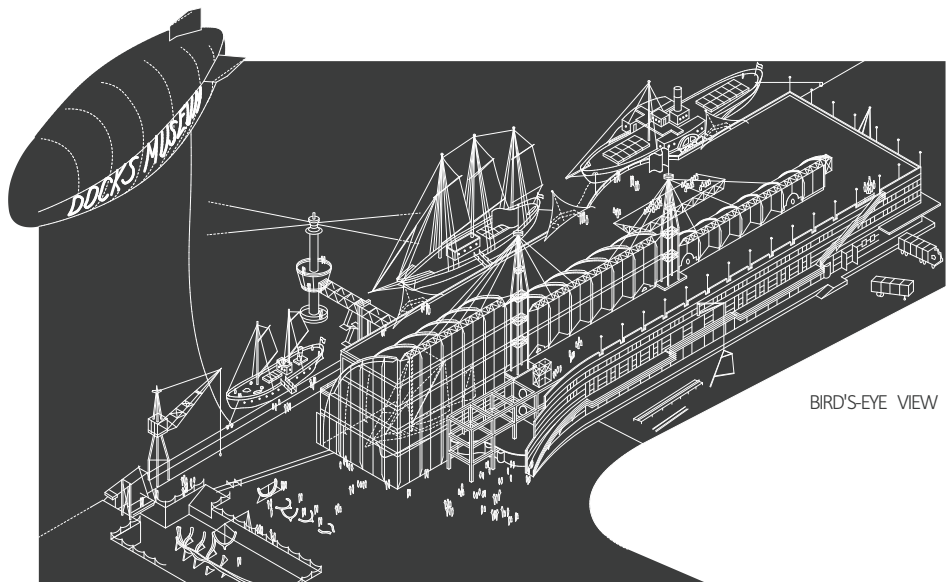
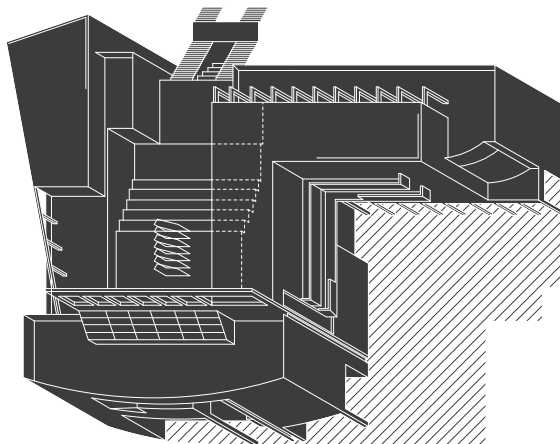
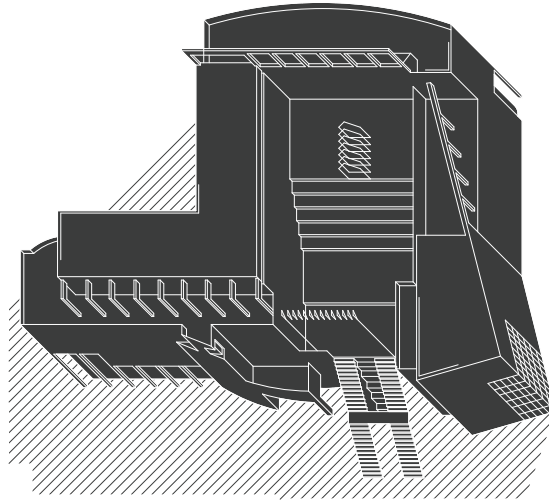
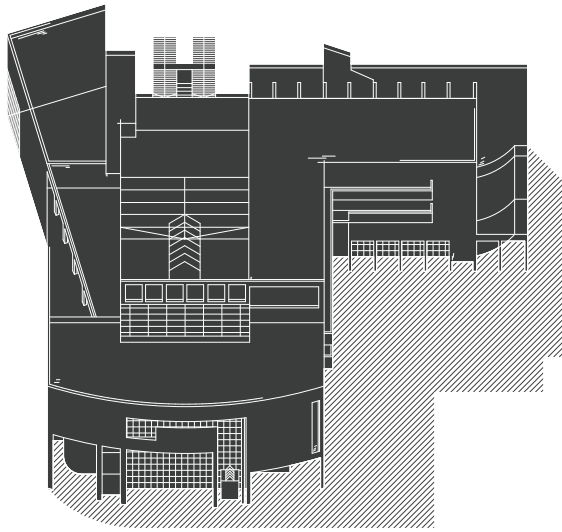


Fig. 5: Interior perspective for the *Docks Museum* competition proposal (above)

Fig. 6: Exterior perspective for the *Docks Museum* competition proposal (below)

Fig. 7, 8, 9: Axonometric views for the *Youth House of Science and Technology, Slatina* (opposite)





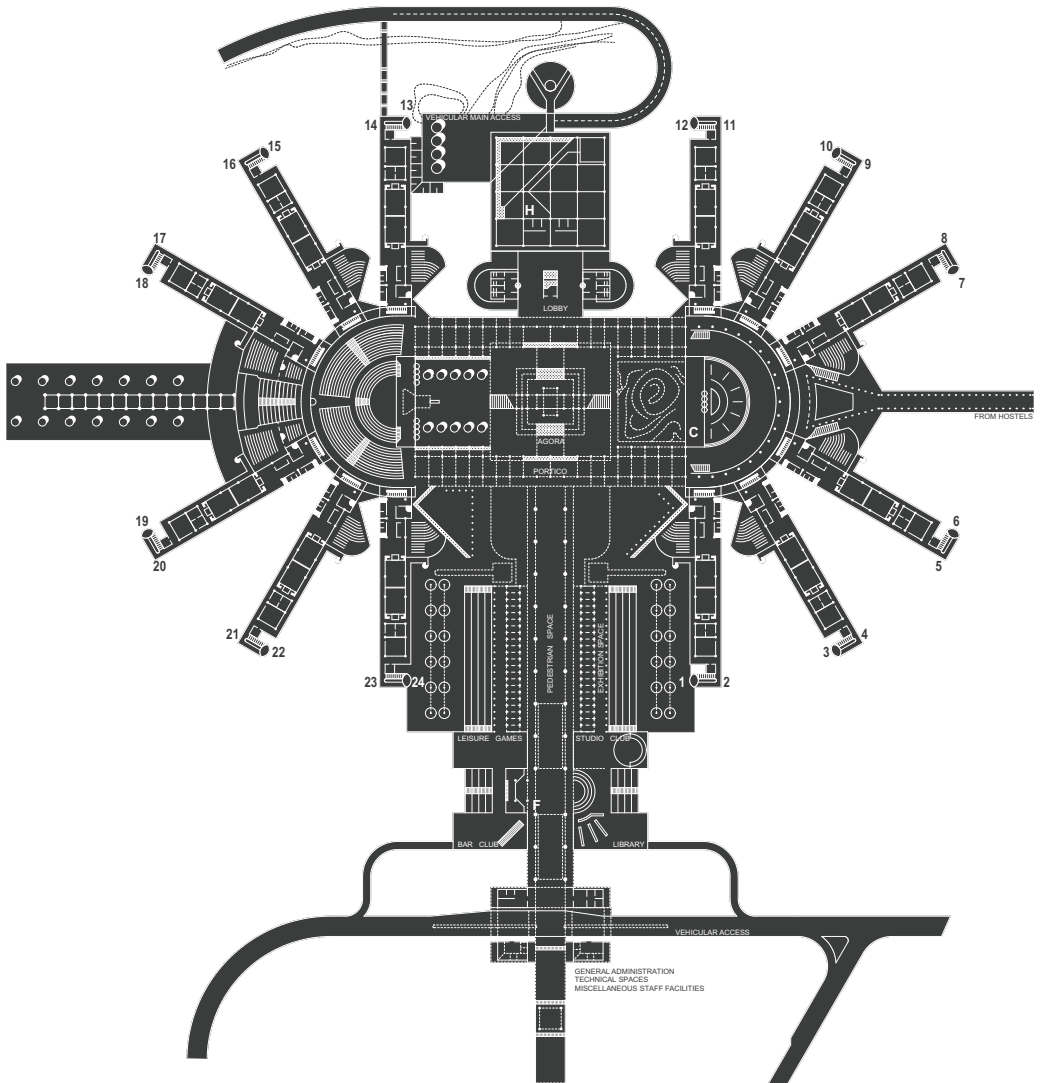


Fig. 10: Plan view for the *Technical College of Bauchi, Nigeria*

[4] The *Youth House of Science and Technology* in Slatina is the only example of built architecture and it is a stylistic hybrid par excellence. The discourse behind this construction is of a postmodern nature and the retained architectural expression is both an adaptation to the poor conditions of the built environment of Romania in the 1980s and inspiration from the neo-Corbusian works of some architects such as Richard Meier or John Hejduk. An analysis of the façades together with a discussion with Dorin Ștefan reveal the conditionality behind the building and the way it negotiates its relationship with the regime, with a personal, critical search and with its references. The façade from Alexandru Ioan Cuza Boulevard is the one that speaks to the regime and diverts the viewer's attention. The side façade from Ecaterina Teodorescu Street is functionalist, accommodating rooms arranged along a doubled tract. The "back" façade is where the architect hides his critical searches, being the one which is given the slightest external attention, allowing him to explore spatially and aesthetically. Here, a flight of stairs takes you to a protected auditorium between three sides of the construction. This façade has a borrowed aesthetic feature from the new Italian rationalism of La Tendenza, being influenced by works like Aldo Rossi and Carlo Aymonino's Gallarate district from Milan. The fourth façade, on the continuation of Alexandru Ioan Cuza Boulevard, presents a "deviation," a breaking of the volume, referencing Richard Meier's overlapping, angled grids (Fig. 7, 8, 9).

The fifth issue from 1987 of the *Arhitectura* magazine features the building in eight pages, with plans, axonometric views, and photographs. It has been a celebrated and appreciated architectural object at the moment of its completion, the magazine mentioning three professional prizes (the city of Kardzhali special prize, honorary diploma and a silver medal at the Interarch '87 in Sofia, Bulgaria and the Prize of the Union of Architects of the Socialist Republic of Romania in 1986).³⁷

Dorin Ștefan is an architect with an extensive theoretical, critical and practical activity, started in 1975, with his graduation from the Ion Mincu Institute, continued with his work as an Assistant-Professor at Ion Mincu Institute, an architect in the department designing youth facilities for the *Union of Communist Youth* (Uniunea Tineretului Comunist - UTC) under the direction of Emil Barbu Popescu, as a collaborator at the Romconsult Institute (the Romanian Institute of International Consulting) and writer on critical topics for the *Mișcarea Ideilor* column in the *Arhitectura* magazine.

Alongside this representative built architecture - the *Youth House of Science and Technology* in Slatina - Dorin Ștefan was involved in various proposals for international competitions such as the consultation for *Les Halles* in Paris (1979), the *Tête Défense* (1982), national competitions for various designs of local interest (the Typified Culture House contest in 1985, a Tourist Complex on the Bank of a Lake in 1982) and technical proposals for projects outside the country at Romconsult, along with colleagues such as Dinu Patriciu, Viorel Simion and Zoltán Takács.

An interesting example he created with Viorel Simion in 1979 is a proposal for the *Technical College of Bauchi, Nigeria*. Here, inspired at a planimetric level by a totem-like shape and using postmodern references such as Richard Meier, with a neo-Corbusian language and pure geometric shapes, they produced an architectural proposal that reminds a lot of ideal architectures created by visionary architects such as Claude Nicolas Ledoux, with ideal cities such as the royal saltworks from Arc-et-Senans in France (Fig. 10).

Besides these more practical competitions, Dorin Ștefan mentions a large number of participations in the Japanese *Shinken-chiku* and *Central Glass* competitions, which would give birth to ideas and concepts that reverberate to this day, in real, built architectures. It is the case of the sketches made by him for a competition proposed by *Japan Architect*, where he studied the idea of a house for the sculptor Constantin Brâncuși. This concept becomes a real architectural object in the proposed extension of the Jean Mihail Palace, Craiova, now the Craiova Art Museum, where a pavilion takes an egglike shape, made from glass slabs, contained in a structural glass box. In this pavilion, the visitor enters alone, through an elevator from the underground level.

37 "Casa Științei și Tehnicii pentru Tineret, Slatina," *Arhitectura* 5 (1987): 10-17.

Aftermath: What Comes After '89?

The discussed architectural case studies were, to a large extent, an early stage of affirmation for the architects under study. As far as the competition proposals go, after experimenting in several of them, many stopped participating and gradually entered into the hand-on practice, characterized by real constructions. Others felt a singular need to escape from the current state practice as a form of professional escapism. As for the critical architectures that came to be built, such as Dorin Ștefan's Youth Culture House in Slatina, this was just the beginning of a fertile career, characterized by experiment and nonconformism, both in the field of architectural theory and education, as well as in practice. Regarding the Timișoara group, Vlad Gaivoronschi argues that the architectures proposed for competitions and the searches of that period are part of a wider narrative that begins in the 1980s, goes through the 1990s and brings us to their current practice. In an interview he gave, he mentions that "I think the continuities are very interesting. I never separated myself from what we did in the '80s."³⁸

The 1990s witnessed some local competitions on the topic of contemporary Orthodox worship space, for example, the contest for the Greek-Catholic Cathedral in Cluj from 1992, the contest for the Church of Martyrs in Timișoara in 1994 or the various competitions for the People's Salvation Cathedral in Bucharest (2002, 2010). Some participants, including Dorin Ștefan or the Timișoara group, proposed critical projects that have attempted to create an ecclesial space for the 21st century but ultimately, the beneficiaries chose conservative projects.

In an interview with Adrian Ionașiu, part of the Timișoara group, we will find a brief explanation of the gradual distancing from competitions through the 1990s: "From 1990 to 1996 it was a pretty free period, we allowed ourselves to continue participating in many competitions. Later on, the low prices of the design practice forced us to do quite a lot of work."³⁹ The reality of everyday life, the professional practice of post-revolutionary Romania demanded a material effort that gradually reduced the availability for such endeavors. However, these architects continued to create critically significant works of architecture, producing valuable built pieces of architecture and proposals in various more mature competitions from 1989 until now, being also actively involved in the architecture schools in Timișoara and Bucharest as professors and tutors.

Conclusions

The article has attempted to highlight lesser-known aspects of the practice of Romanian architects in the 1980s. Analyzing these creations through the filter of currents from the West and similar creations in the Eastern Bloc, I sought to investigate if they are synchronous in pursuits and intentions. What we find here is a gentle form of synchronicity with established trends in countries and schools outside the Eastern Bloc, in the form of an opportunity to practice critical architectural works, and allowing a much-sought communication between architects from the Eastern Bloc and the outside world. What is worth remembering from this historical moment, apart from the official state-run practice? I find that a relevant way to look at these creations can be achieved through a quote, regarding banned literature in the 1960s, by Romanian-American writer Andrei Codrescu. In his book, *The Disappearance of the Outside: a Manifesto for Escape* (1990), Codrescu states: "The party argued that all words must serve the people. But here were words that served only language, a more suggestive and specific language. The secret of modern literature and the reason it was banned was its autonomy."⁴⁰ Similarly, all state-run architecture practice had to serve its people, with architecture becoming

38 Vlad Gaivoronschi (architect at Andreescu&Gaivoronschi), interviewed by Alexandru Sabău, Timișoara, May 2019, transcript, Cluj-Napoca.

39 Adrian Ionașiu (architect at Arhitekt Studio A), interviewed by Alexandru Sabău, Timișoara, May 2019, transcript, Cluj-Napoca.

40 Andrei Codrescu, *Dispariția lui "Afară". Un manifest al evadării* (Bucharest: Univers, 1995), 28.

a subservient and utilitarian profession. Ultimately, this reduction of its significance has taken away its profound meaning, its relation to a complex historical legacy. The works presented here serve architecture, its betterment and its continuous renewal. They are *inventions of exemplary architecture*, as Coleman would argue.

Seen from the perspective of the communist authority, these works presented little or no official significance and were, at best, tolerated. When they were awarded prizes at international competitions, there was a moment of nationalist pride, with small mentions in magazines such as *Arhitectura*. This pride that the communist authorities was displaying was more related to the fact that Romanian architects received awards, any kind of awards for that matter, remaining oblivious to the profound meaning of these participations, the fundamentally subversive nature of these competition proposals. These works represent intimate visions of a better architecture practice, longing for Western cultural independence.

The discussed case studies are merely fragments of a more comprehensive picture. They have been selected so as to cover more than one direction. The diploma projects and competition proposals of the *Timișoara Group* or Dorin Ștefan's writings and competition proposals from the 1980s can become stand-alone research topics. Considering the format of this article, I chose to write just an overview.

The umbrella term *mélange Modernism* was proposed so as to cover a palette of various creations. Just as the term *Paper Architecture* was given to a colorful palette of works, styles and ways of seeing architecture in the case of the Russian schools, this hypernym seeks to encompass a vast spectrum of works which are rooted in schools with a modernist curriculum but mindful of the postmodern ways of seeing architecture which slowly leak through the cracks of the Iron Curtain. The end of the communist dictatorship brought by the 1989 Revolution concludes this period, and the outside-inside dichotomy that has fueled these designs vanishes in thin air.

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ILLUSTRATION CREDITS:

- Fig. 1: Original sketch by Vlad Gaivoronschi, from his personal archive, 1982, redrawn by the author.
- Fig. 2: Original drawing by Vlad Gaivoronschi, reproduced in "Locuințe și dotări în zona Cetate – Timișoara," *Arhitectura* 4 (1983): 71, fig. 5, redrawn by the author.
- Fig. 3, 4: Original composition by Marius Marcu-Lapadat and Horia Gavriș, reproduced in "Mențiune acordată unui proiect românesc în Japonia," *Arhitectura* 1 (1986): 64, redrawn by the author.
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