Reverse-engineering Political Architecture.
The House of the People and Its Hidden Social Effects

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While focusing on the example of the House of the People in Bucharest, the article will look at the delicate balance between governance and the construction of cities in socialist Romania. A dual perspective on the edifice (from the top-down decision-making level and from the micro-level of the professionals directly involved in the construction) accounts for the communist authoritarian decisions upon the urban system and for the ways in which power and authority worked in the late seventies and eighties in Romania, but also for how such technologies of power proved to work with discontinuity, allowing for spontaneous, unexpected accumulations of individual territories of action.

The case of the Bucharest Civic Center and, at its core, the House of the People (officially House of the Republic), will be read as both a continuation of previous spatial and urban politics (such as the construction of new civic centers throughout the country and an increasing control over construction and the urban space) and an exception, a deviant urban operation with sometimes surprising social and economic consequences. Against a general political background defined by mechanisms of repression and control, our study zooms in on the the micro-level of the everyday life and of the complex agencies brought into play during the construction of the House. Underneath the official level of authority and institutional control of the country and the huge construction of the House of the People, invisible networks of resilience were organizing themselves at the level of individuals, and of underground economic and professional strategies that encourage us to refer to Foucault's theories of "governmentality" (of the self and of the others).[1]

While stressing this level of reading, the present article is based on the preliminary conclusions drawn from an ongoing research that attempts at putting together an oral history of the making of this edifice. In interviewing direct participants in its construction and design, we hope to bring forward a different perspective on the hidden narratives and micro-effects that the huge construction site of the Bucharest Civic Center had on the urban, social and economic mechanisms at play in the late stage of Romanian Communism.[2] The ramifications of these

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1   Foucault defines his theory of governmentality during his lectures at the Collège de France in 1977-1978 *Sécurité, territoire, population* [*Security, territory, population*] and further develops the concept in 1978-1979 in *Naissance de la biopolitique* [*Birth of Biopolitics*] (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2004). Foucault's concept would later be extended by many recent scholarship in political science, that focus on the study of the "conduct of conduct," or the regulation of human behavior and the articulations between technologies of power and the micro-practices that allow these very technologies to translate into real life. See Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasman and Thomas Lemke, *Governmentality. Current Issues and Future Challenges* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

2   A preliminary caution should be used when referring to socialism or communism: terms are often used interchangeably, despite some important differences in philosophy and politics. This interchangeability can be found both in ideological texts from the epoch and in later references to the communist or socialist bloc of countries under the direct political influence of the Soviet Union. Of course, for each of these countries specific variations may be found both in terms of ideology, politics and economy. Communism can be seen

mechanisms will actually become quite relevant for the development of the early 1990s in Romania, and even for the later years defined both by the communist inheritance and the strive for becoming a (neo)liberal society (construction professionals that used the experience and connections established during their work on the site in order to establish later, newly founded individual enterprises, new professional networks that finally participated in the construction of the post 1990s).

Building an oral history of the construction of the House of the People proves to be quite a difficult task, somehow similar to a detective's work: identifying the characters, persuading them to answer, and reading through the various individual narratives in order to detect the recurrent clues and common threads. Certainly, the method is not without its limits and dangers, since oral histories are often biased. The limitations of applying oral history have already been brought up by number of researchers, especially when it comes to "highly politicized research settings."[3] Consequently, our questions focus on certain patterns and relevant issues in order to spotlight how the construction of such building could say something about agencies of power and the actors involved. Moreover, the temporal distance helped us overcome the difficult matter of the subjects' responsibility as to their engagement in the events, which could have biases the answers.

Biopower and totalitarianism

The theoretical framework used to understand the complex intertwinement of agencies and how this building stands as its culmination is based on various disciplinary approaches, besides architectural history. Among these, Foucault's famous lectures on biopolitics and governmentality are particularly meaningful, as is his curious silence concerning totalitarianism.[4] In looking historically at the shifts from the feudal society (ruled by the pastoral State, as he calls it) to the modern state, he explains how modern practices of governance are linked to mechanisms of power that are exercised based on the model of economics and statistics. Modern state becomes gradually, starting with the 18th century, "an effect of institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations and tactics"[5] where governing does not refer any more to the people as subjects, but rather at governing a "complex composed of men and things", and the population will be understood "no more starting from the juridical-political notion of the subject, but rather as the technical-political object of management and governing."[6]

Foucault's deconstructive perspective on power, discipline and governmentality as a result of various agencies, mechanisms of control and forms of resistance inexplicably falls short when it comes to communist states, and extremely reserved when discussing socialism. Although the notions of biopower and biopolitics are central to his lectures from 1978-1979,[7] he is quite inexplicably reserved in discussing the particularities of the socialist states, simply reducing socialism to a type of governmentality that is "branched on (other) different types of governmentality."[8] In the transcript of his lectures on biopolitics, the few pages dedicated to socialism mainly refer to the case of Eastern Germany, to the ideological dangers of socialism and to the lack of autonomous socialist governmentality – he resumes on asking: is there an adequate

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as an extreme form of socialism, an aspiration of those socialist political regimes that rapidly turned, in countries such as Romania, into a totalitarian government, especially after the rise of Nicolae Ceaușescu as leader of the Communist Party (1965) and later President of the Republic.

3   Erin Jessee, "The Limits of Oral History: Ethics and Methodology Amid Highly Politicized Research Settings," *The Oral History Review* 38, 2 (2011): 287-307. https://doi.org/10.1093/ohr/ohr098, last accessed May 2, 2018

4   Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom. Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 233-240.

5   Ibid.

6   Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, 103.

7   Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique. Cours au Collège de France (1978-1979)* [*Birth of Biopolitics. Lectures at Collège de France (1978-1979)*] (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2004).

8   Ibid., 93.

socialist governmentality? Is there a strict, intrinsic autonomous socialist governmentality possible?[9] Yet, to our knowledge, no mention is made to other socialist or communist regimes behind the Iron Curtain, nor does he include in his discussion on biopolitical tools the repressive security and control systems at play, although in his brief passage about socialism he speaks about the socialist state as a "hyper administrative state (…) a state of police."[10]

By biopolitics and biopower Foucault refers to the different "technologies of power …that use different mechanisms" in order to control the physical and political body of the population. In neoliberal governmentality, these mechanisms are not necessarily repressive or explicitly oppressive, and are based on the knowledge of statistics, safety and regulatory measures of social control (such as birth and death rates, medical and sanitary measures, etc). It is however strange that in developing such a comprehensive concept, Foucault did not include totalitarian and repressive communist regimes, where biopower and social control were central ruling techniques.[11] This omission of communist biopower is even more intriguing, since by the time of his lectures on biopolitics and governmentality, important work on totalitarianism had already been done by Hannah Arendt, in her *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951).[12] However, we find an equally surprising oversight of the biopolitical perspective in Arendt's analysis of the Stalinist communist totalitarianism. Up to Arendt, the exclusion of the individual from the political life does never refer to the bare life (under total control in totalitarian regimes), but to man's capacity to act as a political person.

Roberto Esposito shows how Foucault's and Arendt's positions, although complementary, might seem incompatible: for Arendt bare life is exterior to politics (and so politics and law have an almost transcendent nature), while for Foucault the politics is not exteriors to the individual, on the contrary, he demonstrates precisely how law and politics are intimately linked and derive from power struggles and complex relations between various agencies at play.[13]

These strange double omissions have been observed by Giorgio Agamben in his work *Homo Sacer*, where he takes further the idea of biopolitics in connecting it to the questions of sacred and sovereignty.[14] That Foucault "was able to begin his study of biopolitics with no reference to Arendt's work […] bears witness to the difficulties and resistances that thinking had to encounter in this area."[15]

"Security, territory, population." Governing socialist Romania

In order to understand how the re-construction of cities became a priority and an instrument of power and control under the rule of Nicolae Ceaușescu (1965-1989), one would have to partially revisit the complicated period that followed the end of the Second World War.[16]

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9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 94.

11 Although the term originally belongs to Rudolf Kjeller, who coined it in 1905, Foucault's extended understanding of the concept has been most influential in political theory after the 1980s.

12 "While under present conditions totalitarian domination still shares with other forms of government need for a guide for the behavior of its citizens in public affairs, it does not need and could not even use a principle of action strictly speaking, since it will eliminate precisely the capacity of man to act." Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: A Harvest Book, 1976), 467.

13 Roberto Esposito, "Totalitarisme ou biopolitique" ["Totalitarianism or Biopolitics"], *Tumultes*, 26 (2006): 9-20.

14 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford University Press, 1998), 4-5.

15 Ibid., 5.

16 In 1947, along with the forced abdication of the last Romanian king, Michael I, the name of the country was changed into the Popular Republic of Romania. This happened under the direct influence of the Soviet Union, whose armies were occupying the country at that time. The situation would progressively evolve towards a nationalist approach towards the mid-sixties, materialized in a new Constitution adopted in 1965, together with a re-naming of the country as the Socialist Republic of Romania.

The first period of the communist regime in Romania, roughly spanning between 1947 and 1965, has been probably the most violent in terms of repression methods used to rapidly take control over the country and the population.

A series of laws and administrative measures whose implementation began at the end of the 1940s gradually allowed for a radical repossession by the State of all the resources of the country, from industry to the housing stock and the private possessions of the citizens, taking control not only over all economic resources, but also regulating bare life, if we were to use Agamben's terminology.[17] This created the precedent for further confiscations of land and property, to be put in place decades later (early 1980s), in order to clear the land for the construction of the House of the People.

Few other actions taken during this first period would contribute to set the background for further interventions into the urban realm. The administrative-territorial reform from 1950 remodeled the entire territorial organization of the country, imitating the Soviet Stalinist model of administrative units (*raioane* / counties).[18] In 1952, following the same Soviet model, all planning and design activities were introduced into the centralized system: architects were no longer allowed the liberal practice, but employed by the state various design institutes, directly subordinated to the State Committee for Architecture and Constructions (to be renamed several times during the following decades).[19] Ana Maria Zahariade explains how, starting with the early fifties and practically until the fall of communism, the State (actually substituted by the Party) not only became the unique investor, promoter and client but also the biggest landowner in the country, the only agent of construction and investment.[20]

These measures aimed at centralizing all activities related to planning and construction (including the control of building permits, design fees, repartition of the human resources along the territory, elaboration of type-plans for constructions) in the overwhelming public sector, while the private investment had almost completely disappeared. Such actions were met with extreme dissatisfaction by architects, who not only became public employees, but were also deprived from the authorship of their work. Finally, it was an attempt to radically annihilate the creative dimension of the profession, and of the professional pride as well.

However, investment in construction was one of the main directions of the political regime throughout the first decades of the post-war period. The "socialist reconstruction of cities" was repeatedly stated as one of the main priorities: with a focus on industrial cities, the urbanization of smaller towns and the urban transformations of county capitals, in order to satisfy both the need for housing and the interest for a type of architecture that could symbolize the socialist state (first soviet-influenced socialist realism, then a revival of modernism in the early sixties and finally a rejection of all forms that would not comply with the idea of a "national style"). Resuming, we might say that although the professional practice was itself nationalized starting with the early 1950s, the large investments in construction actually gave architects a lot of work, albeit in the centralized design institutes and although politically controlled and dictated.[21]

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17 The *Law no.119 from June 11, 1948 for the nationalization of all the industrial, banking, insurance, mining and transportation societies* confirmed the transition to an entirely centralized economy, passing the entire industrial and economical property, as well as the land and the mining resources directly into the ownership of the State, while the *Decree no. 92 from 19 April 1950 regarding the nationalization of buildings* confiscating a large part of the private housing stock, passed into the administration of the local Councils.

18 *Law of the Raions.* The Stalinist soviet model would later be abandoned. In 1968, the *Law no. 2 for the administrative and territorial organization of the Socialist Republic of Romania* re-instated the former administrative units.

19 For a detailed account of the nationalization of the profession, see Alexandru Panaitescu, "Consacrarea fracturii – momentul 1952" ["Breaking up with the past – the 1952 Moment"] *Arhitectura* 3-4 (2016): 120-129; and Ana Maria Zahariade, *Arhitectura în proiectul comunist* [*Architecture in the Communist Project*] (Bucharest: Simetria, 2012), 133-144.

20 Zahariade, *Arhitectura în proiectul comunist*, 137-139.

21 Ibid., 75-87.

It is mainly during the 1970s (after the great earthquake of 1977) and mostly the 1980s that investments in constructions stopped, in the context of a rapidly evolving economic crisis and more generally the visible failure of the communist governance. This contributed to the growing disappointment of architects with the status of their profession and only accentuated a background of frustration that explains their position and partial enthusiasm for the later project of the Civic Center and the House of the People.

Civic centers and national obsessions

A number of priorities regarding the development of cities had already been set among the planning directions set by the previous decades: a focus on industrialization and urbanization as the markers of a socialist modernity, the obsession of erasing the differences between rural and urban areas, housing as one of the main construction programs, as well as a growing importance given to the (re)construction of the city centers, according with the requirements of representation of the Communist Party.

The mid-sixties marked a significant and promising moment on the political scene in Romania: the arrival of Nicolae Ceaușescu at the head of the Party in 1965 was seen as an opening towards the West, both politically and culturally.[22] Yet the apparent liberalization proved only to be the prelude to the restrictive, dark period of the seventies, marked by an aggressive expansion of nationalism, combined with an almost unbounded cult of personality where politics, the Party and the State would become the ruler's instruments for his discretionary will, and the entire country his personal playground. Ceaușescu's rule symbolically culminated with the gigantic project of the Bucharest Civic center, having at its core the colossal building of the House of the Republic.

The initial political distancing from the Soviet Stalinist model was accompanied by an ideological re-positioning of the country in the lines of a local, national tradition. A new territorial reform would return the territory mainly to the principles of the pre-war model.[23] As to emphasize the distance from the Soviet influence, even remote historical references would be implemented, such as the Latin name *municipium* to define larger urban centers that proved to have "a special significance for the economical, social-political and cultural and scientific life of the country, or those cities that could develop in these directions."[24] The *municipia* were inferior to the county capitals (that would host larger Party organizations and the governing structures of the territorial district), but receiving the title would also allow these cities to attract more resources from the central organization, thus introducing a competition between them.

The priority given to the revival of the "civic centers" thus comes in this context of a general recalibration of all areas of public life towards national "specificity and identity." In discussing a possible timeframe for the construction of civic centers, Irina Tulbure[25] divides the post-war socialist period in several significant moments: 1944-1956, 1956-1966, 1966-1974, 1974-1989. While the first two are marked by the socialist realism, the 1966-74 period is dominated by a strong revival of the national ethos in architecture, whereas during 1974-89 this tendency would become excessive, together with an obsessive need for political legitimation that would be translated into architecture as propaganda.

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22 A distance that had already become noticeable after the death of Stalin, in 1953, under the rule of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, first communist leader of Romania (1948-1965). After the death of Dej, Nicolae Ceaușescu took his place as the leader of the Party.

23 *The Law no. 2/1968 regarding the administrative organisation the Socialist Republic of Romania*.

24 Ibid., art. 4.

25 Irina Tulbure, "The Romanian City and Its Center: A Recent History Perspective," in *Shrinking Cities in Romania. Orașe românești în declin*, edited by Ilinca Păun Constantinescu (Bucharest/Berlin: MNAC/DOM Publishers, 2018).

Alex Răuță[26] investigates the complicated destiny of the "civic center" throughout the 20th century Romania, showing how the concept of "civic center" had already been present in the inter-war period as an influence of the American City Beautiful movement, as well as in the first decades of the communist period. If during the first decades of the communist period the concept of civic center is inherited from the prewar period and the realizations are rather limited (while the concept itself is avoided), Răuță argues, during the rule of Nicolae Ceaușescu, the civic center re-enters both professional language and practice, and is supported by both the reconstruction activity developed in county capitals after the 1968 administrative reform and by the "debates around urbanizing a significant number of large rural centers."[27]

If for the rural areas the ambition was to achieve the urban status,[28] in the case of larger cities, and especially for county capitals, the intention was to group all public buildings around a central, monumental urban space that would become representative for the political power. The terminology varied, and the civic center was sometimes called "new center," "social (cultural)-administrative center," "political-administrative center"[29] and the ensemble consisted in a grouping of administrative-political and cultural buildings around a central square. However, the composition and constituent elements of the civic center could vary: if the City hall and the county seat of the Communist Party were the obliged ingredients (most often combined into the same building – and most often the vertical dominant of the composition), the houses of culture flourished as an architectural program during the late sixties and seventies, but were gradually abandoned in the eighties, when the approval for the design fell under the direct charge of the State Council presided by Ceaușescu, who was less and less interested in "cultural-social" functions. These buildings were often complemented with a hotel (usually used for the delegates of the Party), a general store (*magazinul universal*), a theatre and usually a front of collective housing (also for members of the nomenklatura) that would provide the urban context for the general design. Of course, there was also the public space – an essential ingredient that would structure the entire composition and would become the venue for the famous political rallies meant to reassure the leader of popular support.[30]

What may we learn from the complicated story of the civic center, when looking at the construction of the House of the People?

First, the entire project of the Bucharest Civic center is situated within a larger process of urbanization and monumentalization of Romanian cities, consistent with the generalized ambition of re-constructing the "socialist city." However, some of these ideas may be retraced to the pre-war urban period, and when it comes to the Civic center it seems that even for the initial decisions regarding the site of the House, suggestions had been made (again, no names can be traced back to the authors) that the idea of an important urban center linked to the Arsenal Hill (*Dealul Arsenalului*) could be found in the 1935 Masterplan.[31]

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26 Alex Răuță, "Negotiating the Civic Center: Architects and Politicians in 20th Century Romania" (PhD diss, "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism, 2013), 3-33.

27 Ibid., 27.

28 The destruction of the rural areas intensified in the mi- seventies, after *Law no. 58/1974 - The Systematization Act* and the *National Programme for systematisation of the territory.*

29 Alex Răuță, "Civic Centers under Ceaușescu´s Rule. The Failure to Articulate a Professional Discourse," *studies in History and Theory of Architecture* 1 (2013): 105-119, and Tulbure, "The Romanian City and its Center."

30 Excellent studies are to be found in the work of the two authors mentioned above, Irina Tulbure and Alex Răuță. Also, a significant chapter is dedicated to the question of civic centers by Ioana Iosa in her compelling book *Bucarest. L'emblème d'une nation* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011), 109-127.

31 On March 8th 1977, just a few days after the devastating earthquake that traumatized the entire city, Ceaușescu called a meeting with some of the important architects of the time and asked for proposals for a new political-administrative center for Bucharest, initially envisaged for an unbuilt site belonging to

Second, the autocratic and hyper-centralized decision making process as well as the set of priorities announced by the propaganda (modern, industrial, urban), among which the focus on the construction sector made it possible for important investments in the realization of civic centers, practically without hiatuses. Once the investment approved, construction would follow, within one single urban operation. Of course, this would also introduce a certain rivalry between local administrations, who would compete for funds and political confirmation. But also the precedent of these urban projects allowed for high concentration of resources and power, a process only to be replicated at a national scale with the Bucharest Civic Center. As mentioned previously, the Law for investments from 1980[32] drastically reoriented all investments, stipulating that all resources would have to be directly supervised at the government level, and practically slowing the construction efforts started in the previous decades. There was, however, one notable exception: the House of the People and the Bucharest Civic Center – during the entire eighties most investments and a large part of the country's resources were directed towards this megalomanic project, yet no explicit mention about this particular public investment would be made in official documents. A similar silence was kept in the major architectural publication of the time, *Arhitectura*, where, besides the official announcement of the beginning of the construction, no other mention, comment or image can be found during that period.[33]

Third, we have seen that since the end of the fifties, but especially in the seventies, architects had grown more and more frustrated with the little creativity allowed by the standardized designs and the rare opportunities to participate in interesting public projects. Civic centers were among the rare cases that provided both the challenge and the means that would stimulate architects, who would find here a ground for creative exploration.[34] Certainly, only a happy few — architects with already established reputation or politically connected — were allowed to participate in these projects, and this would become more obvious in the first stages of design for the House of the People, when a competition was organized behind closed doors, upon invitation.

All these arguments point to an important element that was looming over all sectors of public and private life of those times, and that to a certain extent participated to maintain the apparent illusion of grandeur: secrecy and illusion. Ana Maria Zahariade[35] and Augustin Ioan even use the term "occult" when describing on one hand the complicated relationship between architects and power, and on the other hand, the nature of the urban project for the civic center, considered by Ioan as "the biggest urban operation in the history of Romania."[36]

Bucharest civic center and the House of the People

The idea of a gigantesque project that would turn the image of Bucharest into a center of monumental power started after the great earthquake of 1977. Ceaușescu exploited the disastrous consequences of the cataclysm in order to promote his own political agenda: the reconstruction of Bucharest, a socialist capital-city that would be envied by the whole world. Although in the early seventies Ceausescu was clearly against interventions in the fabric of the capital,[37] shortly after the

the Army. On March 22nd, the ruler's agenda had already been changed and the final site (to be enlarged during the project design) was proposed. Cf. Constantin Jugurică, *Memoria carnetelor cu însemnări. Bucureștiul cutremurat 1977-1989* [*The Memory of Notebooks. Shaken Bucharest 1977-1989*] (Bucharest: Arhilibra, 2012), 38-39.

32 *Law no. 18/1980 concerning investments.*

33 Zahariade, *Arhitectura în proiectul comunist,* 84-86.

34 The complicated story of the participation of the profession has been discussed by many scholars. We have mentioned in the previous notes the work of Ana Maria Zahariade, Irina Tulbure, Alex Răuță.

35 Zahariade, *Architecture in the Communist Project*, 110-121.

36 Augustin Ioan, "The History of Nothing: Contemporary Architecture and Public Space in Romania," *Artmargins* (3 December 2006). http://artmargins.com/index.php/featured-articles-sp-829273831/156-the- history-of-nothing-contemporary-architecture-and-public-space-in-romania, last accessed Oct 2, 2017).

37 According to the memoirs of Constantin Jugurică (who participated closely in hundreds of meetings with Ceausescu during the construction of the House), when in 1975 the mayor of Bucharest had envisaged some interventions into the historic fabric of the city, Ceaușescu replied severely: "You architects wish to destroy everything. What others have done in centuries, you want to demolish in a few years. You have

disaster he summoned a meeting[38] where he announced the plan to reconstruct the central area of the city, together with the project for a new political-administrative center „for the country." The ruins of the earthquake turned to be a pretext to create even more ruins, in an unprecedented demolition campaign.

The project was publicly announced in 1984, symbolically seen as the 40th anniversary of the "revolution of social and national liberation."[39] The inauguration of the building site was also supposed to mark the re-election of Nicolae Ceauşescu as the General Secretary of the Communist Party. The whole project, that involved the erasure of a fifth of the historic Bucharest (450 ha),[40] consisted of the construction, along with the House – officially named the House of the Republic and popularly known as the House of the People – of a 4,5 km long East-West axis, one that would originate at and be dominated by the House as the *locus* of Power.

The literature around the House of the People (Palace of the Republic / today the Palace of the Parliament) is quite abundant: the majority of the existing scholarship insists mainly upon the destructive dimension of the largest urban operation in the history of Bucharest. Yet the details of the building process itself remain somehow occulted. There is no clear evidence about the exact number of people involved in the construction site, nor that of the number of architects and planners that contributed to the design: we know that architects must have been in the range of several hundreds (between 400 and 700), whereas the number of construction workers went to 25,000 at any time, working in daily shifts, to a total of 100,000 towards the end of the period.

Towards the end of the eighties, the rhythm of the works had become the most intense and the deployment of resources practically limitless, in the context of drastic economies and limitations imposed on an already impoverished population. Living conditions had grown unbearable: restrictions on food, electricity supply (especially during some very hard winters in the mid-eighties), public and private transportation (petrol supplies strictly controlled to the extent that, in some periods only even or odd car numbers were permitted to circulate on Sundays on the public roads). The overall economic and political situation had deteriorated so badly that in the spring of 1989, six prominent veteran members of the Communist Party wrote a letter addressed to Nicolae Ceauşescu,[41] simultaneously broadcasted in March 1989 by the BBC and Radio Free Europe. While reaffirming their adhesion to the socialist ideals, seen as "discredited," they were strongly criticizing Ceauşescu's policy, asking him to change the course of his government. Two issues retain our attention: first, the direct mention of the pharaonic construction site of the House of the People, and second, the diagnostics of a failed government, incapable of ensuring the most basic needs for the citizens.[42]

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a hostile attitude towards the inheritance of our ancestors." Constantin Jugurică, *Memoria carnetelor cu însemnări. Bucureștiul cutremurat 1977-1989* [*The Memory of Notebooks. Shaken Bucharest 1977-1989*], (Bucharest: Arhilibra, 2012), 36.

38 The work meeting that took place at the Central Committee of the Communist Party on March 22nd 1977 decided that "the central area of the city has to be reconstructed, along with the new political-administrative center, the reconstruction of certain major arteries of Bucharest, together with the realisation of an important number of social-cultural buildings and art monuments, all of which would give the Capital superior urban and architectural qualities. All these have to be built on new principles and concepts, different from the past years, ones that would marry modern aesthetic and construction principles with elements of traditional Romanian architecture…" And all this had to be "realized in a very short time, the political-administrative center has to be built in the following three years, whereas the entire task of reconstruction and systematization had to end by 1984." Press release from March 23rd, published in *Scânteia* (official press) from March 23, 1977. In Jugurică, *Memoria carnetelor de însemnări*, 39.

39 *Informația Bucureștiului* 1 (September 26, 1984), apud Irina Tulbure, "From Casa Scânteii to Casa Poporului and Back. Architecture as Icon of a Totalitarian Regime," s*tudies in History and Theory of Architecture* 1 (2013), 85-86.

40 Cf. Andrei Pandele, *Casa Poporului. Un sfârșit în marmură* [*The House of the People. The End, in Marble*] (Bucharest: Compania, 2009), Iosa, *Bucarest*, 2006.

41 Known as "The Letter of the Six," signed by Gheorghe Apostol, Alexandru Bîrlădeanu, Silviu Brucan, Corneliu Mănescu, Constantin Pîrvulescu, Grigore Răceanu.

42 The original broadcasted English text of the letter includes several accusation points, among which the compromised position of the country in the international community, the destruction of personal property,

"The Civic Center, the biggest multi-billion lei investment of Romania has no public budget and is being built against all existing laws regulating constructions and their financing. The cost of that immense building has tripled because of changes you are ordering every month in the interior and exterior of the building."[43]

Collective Authorship – a project and its methods

"Collective Authorship" started in 2008[44] as a research and an artistic project into the possibilities to re-construct with documentary tools the narrative around the inception, development and (relative) achievement of the complex project of the House, sometimes colloquially named "The Palace of Ceaușescu." It was already clear at the on-set of the research that the post-traumatic literature accumulated since the 1990s around what has been probably the most devastating set of events experienced by the city of Bucharest in modern times, was somehow obstructing the coming to life of a reality both broader and more nuanced.

The preliminary interviews conducted with a group of architects who were holding during the 1980s key-positions in the development of the project proved to be unsatisfactory, since they were mostly focusing on the problems, inner tensions, power struggles and accomplishments of one single profession. Situated practically at the center of the large area resulted from the rapid and violent processes of demolition-and-construction of the 1970s and 1980s, the House of the People is an unavoidable reference point not only by its sheer scale, but also by its geographical positioning in the immediate vicinity of the historical area of the city.

The research started as a spontaneous exploration of the city, a kind of Situationist *dérive* by taxi, when the drivers passing along House of the People were reminiscing voluntarily about their youth as participants with various attributions in the construction effort. An image was slowly emerging out of those random encounters, that of a possibility to draw a physical and conceptual equivalent of the House in the form of a massive volume of statements, memories and stories, bringing forth the voices of anonymous participants to this huge endeavor. The novelty of such an approach was double: on the one hand, it would open the floor to social and professional categories ignored by current literature, almost exclusively written from the vantage point of architects and city planners. And on the other hand, it would offer the opportunity of introducing different voices in the growing nebula of oral history that already started to inform the analysis of the House of the People.

After the political turn of December 1989, Ceaușescu's ambitions to redesign not only Bucharest, but also other Romanian cities and, especially, the rural and natural areas of the country raised huge mediatic interest, in Romania and abroad. Understandably, special attention was payed to the dramatic human consequences of those ambitions, and this triggered a stream of testimonies of/from the victims of the expropriations, demolitions and displacements.

As a research and artistic project, "Collective Authorship" aims to expand this testimonial pool to the people who were involved in this complex process of transformation, enlarging by that the scope of the analysis and looking in a more nuanced way at a phenomenon of scale. The

the permanent state of fear of the citizens, the total surveillance and control of the population, economic bankruptcy, disastrous agricultural policies, forced assimilation of the minorities, and the deteriorated international prestige of the country (with several foreign embassies having closed in Bucharest). The third point of the letter equals the incapacity to ensure the most basic needs for human life with the inability to govern: "Why urbanize villages when you cannot ensure decent conditions of urban life in the cities, namely heating, lighting, transportation, not to mention food. A government which five winters in a row is unable to solve such vital problems for the populations proves incompetent and inapt to govern." http://www.hetel.ro/index./2011/01/1603/, last accessed May 2, 2018.

43 Ibid.

44 Research and artistic project initiated by Călin Dan, who has himself been a direct witness and an indirect victim of the construction.

idea is to reach through interviews a relevant sample of the population that had been involved in the design and execution of the edifice, relevance achieved through profession, age group or place in the administrative hierarchy. While a Situationist approach to the city of Bucharest has revealed useful in order to identify the elusiveness and complexity of the subject, in terms of authorship, memory, impact on the city scale and on the city's identity, at the beginning of our investigation another set of theoretical tools were required in order to put in perspective the acquired information. As the topics delivered by the interviews were yet to be revealed, there was still no road-map, and there was also no a-priori set of concepts that were meant to be illustrated / checked through the research. The only evidence about the aim of the whole process was implied in the title: the denial of individual authorship in the case of large urban equipments was implying from the on-set a collective responsibility for the results of such endeavors. The ramifications of this work hypothesis are vast, but the one coming immediately at the front is the ethical dimension of such a statement. As far as responsibility is taken away from the top of the social pyramid of power, and re-distributed along all top-down and bottom-up vectors of hierarchy, some questions arise:

Who? How? Why?

Who is responsible? How is the responsibility enacted? Why did the event arising the issues of responsibility and enactment occur?

Such an inquisitive triad is looking at the distribution of power (who and how), at the causality of the social practice (how and why), and at the mechanisms of identity (who and why). The investigation is looking at the complexity of the city by attempting a visualization of its transformations and functions. In that strategy of approach, again, Foucault's concept of governmentality proves pivotal to the discussion along the three axes of knowledge, power and ethics with an emphasis on the last, as the indicator of the "processes by which the individual acts upon himself."[45]

Through ethics, the subject achieves a self-constituting mode, responding in a personal manner to the agencies of moral codes and of the individual historical examples. That does not imply a displacement of the moral system beyond morality into an a-moral mode, but creates a zone of relativity and creativity where ethics play a central role, while being submitted to subtle transformations.

Without such an attitude towards the who? – how? – why? triad, it would be impossible to conduct a research into the process of construction of the House, since the idea of participation is tainted from the start by the implication of guilt. Governmentality offers a spectacular turn around from the usual approach to the excesses of the communist dictatorship, if the researcher is willing to question the accepted methods, and to agree with Foucault that the modern state is not (only) a centralized structure but (also) "a tricky combination in the same political structures of individualization techniques and of totalization procedures." [46]

In 1982, Foucault suggested that techniques of ruling are tied to the "technologies of the self,"[47] and the couple technique-technology, despite its metaphorical vagueness in Foucault's vocabulary, retains an appealing precision when applied to the processes of architecture and urban intervention. As we have already seen, while Foucault did not elaborate on the mechanisms and specifics of the communist states, he mentions briefly that the only rules that apply everywhere are the rules of liberalism. Now, almost three decades after the end of the cold war we may better grasp the advantages of such an approach.

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45 Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann and Thomas Lemke, "From Foucault's Lectures at the Collège de France to Studies of Governmentality," in *Govermentality. Current Issues and Future Challenges*, edited by Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann and Thomas Lemke (New York: Routledge, 2011), 2.

46 Ibid.

47 Michel Foucault, *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres. Cours au Collège de France, 1982-1983* [*Governing Oneself and Others. Lectures at Collège de France, 1982-1983*] (Paris: Gallimard, 2008).

Micro-effects and self-governance

The interviews[48] conducted so far within the frame of the research and artistic project lead to a double conclusion: first, there is no black-and-white perception of the House of the People among the participants and second, there was no monolithic administrative structure that controlled the production of this edifice.[49] It comes as a surprise, in the context of Ceaușescu's dictatorship, and especially of its last decade, which was dominated by extreme manifestations of anti-liberal governance, how the technologies of power proved to work with discontinuity, allowing the spontaneous accumulation of individual territories of reflection and action.

As an onset remark it should be noted that all participants we have interviewed were at the beginning of their professional life in the period in question (the 1980s). From there we can infer that the level of conformism – be it political, entrepreneurial, or otherwise – was rather low at the time of the events, and that the social participation of the subjects, their strategies of insertion and their ambition to succeed were factors playing a role in the ways they were designing their momentous tactics.

Also, one should be aware of the subjective filter installed by memory. The reference to the advantages of young age (energy, carelessness, courage) is recurrent in almost all the interviews, with very few exceptions – and that creates a general upbeat tone, in contradiction with the grim details surfacing under the mainstream narratives.

As pointed out previously, a major weakness in the applicability of Foucault's concept of governmentality remains the fact that he never extended his reading on the subject in the area of the communist systems, which — at the time of his lectures at Collège de France — were an important part of the geopolitical landscape. A comparison could be interesting, considering precisely the fertile ambiguity of Foucault's proposition, the fact that at least at the level of the official discourse there is an overlapping of systems that should be submitted to scrutiny. The production of symbols in the State dominated by the figure of Nicolae Ceaușescu could be assimilated to an ambition of filiations with the medieval pastoral "good" government.[50] The leader was not only an administrative, but also a symbolic synthesis of the paternalist models illustrated by rulers from the Romanian Middle Ages with the revolutionary models of the early 20th century. Ceaușescu was Secretary General of the Communist Party, but simultaneously President of the Republic, and President of the National Assembly, the last position adorning him with the bizarre attribute of the scepter – an unequivocal reference to royalty. The good shepherd, represented in the propaganda paintings together with rulers form the 13th and the 14th centuries, was at the same time the administrator of a dynamic economic development and the initiator of gigantic projects, all in the name of the *raison d'état*.[51]

The State engineered by Ceaușescu and his acolytes was not based on an evolutionary transformation from the period of pastoral techniques of government into a Marxist-Leninist version of the modern state, but rather an original synthesis of the two, realized under the pressure of international capitalism, and trying to adapt previously existing forms of governmentality to the rhetoric of the "proletariat's dictatorship." If we look at Romania as it comes out of the interviews, what strikes first is the fact that, with the starting of the House of the People project

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48 Participants in the survey were asked a set of similar questions, as well as a number of questions adapted to and resulting from the context of each conversation. Standard questions were addressing their professional involvement and role in the project, their work experience (on other construction sites), what were they gaining in comparison with other salaries at the time, the level of communication with other teams and professionals, eventual contacts with the management level, the impact of their participation on their professional and personal lives, how did they perceive the HOUSE OF THE PEOPLE at the time of the construction versus today, technologies and materials used on the site.

49 A teaser resuming some of the video interviews can be previewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21PthOIttXc (last accesssed October 10, 2018).

50 Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, 167-195.

51 Bröckling *et al.*, *Governmentality*, 5.

the whole country was suddenly engaged on a path for which it was not necessarily prepared, technologically and in terms of human resources.

The old structures – meant to serve the Party leaders' needs in terms of architectural representation – were insufficient in the newly installed *raison d'état*. The House of the People was only the main and most ambitious project of a whole series that needed the expertise of architects, engineers, and various types of workers.

Suddenly, the human resource had to be re-directed and re-designed. All the architects interviewed agreed on the fact that – despite the insane ambitions and the anachronism of the program, the House of The People has been a stimulus for work migration from outside Bucharest to the capital city. In a country where most of the resources were centralized, while simultaneously the communist rule instituted a compulsory dispersion in the territory of all fresh graduates form universities, this has been a golden opportunity for an important lot of young architects to be where the action was. The same observation came from other professionals involved in the process - visual artists and masons.

A special remark concerning the last. In the 1970s and the 1980s stone masonry was a disappearing profession. The last important commission has been the realization of *Casa Scânteii*[52] a Stalinist project accomplished between 1949 and 1956, one of a series of similar buildings raised in many of the capital cities of the communist block as a sign of submission to the Moscow rule. The veteran masons of the *Casa Scânteii* site were summoned to train at high speed new generations of young people supposed to cover the huge needs manifest not only at House of the People but also at other projects dedicated by Ceauşescu to his own cult. As noticed by several interviewees, the stone carved manually became a trademark of the period. While the masons were not necessarily bound to a career in Bucharest (workshops were established in many centers around the country), they were sensitive to the opportunity offered by the regime to leave a life with no economic perspectives in their villages of origin, impoverished by the forced land expropriations and the state controlled agriculture, for new economic and professional opportunities in big cities.

The masons were particularly impressed by two facts: a. they could make huge amounts of money (for the standards of the time – at a maximum, half the price of a Dacia automobile per month); b. they were involved in the revival process of old techniques, antique in fact, enabling them to become a sort of elite of the working class. It is characteristic that along the interviews, the self-reference was never as masons, but as artists. The Renaissance model, where the skilled manufacturers were sharing the social and economic prestige with the artists, seemed to spin into this particular historical moment of Romania.

The majority of the architects expressed the same feelings. Not only could they return to the city where they studied, but also and mostly they were out of the loop of local Design Institutes working exclusively standardized buildings, with no real need for architectural skills. While the House of the People program was eclectic at best, it allowed competition between collectives, invention at the level of details, intensive work against challenging deadlines, and a revisiting at both the conceptual and practical levels of the grand history of architecture. Looking at Vitruvius became a liberating activity in a profession that lost in the last two decades almost any opportunity to exercise a creative agenda. While the architects did not experience the economic empowerment of the masons, they were able to somehow revive the vanishing standards of the profession.

The age factor becomes here very important with the architects. In a country ruled by gerontocrats and in a profession with hierarchies dominated by older generations, the fact that the chief architect of the House of the People ensemble, Anca Petrescu and her collectives were all young became an important factor of preparation for potential change. We have seen above, with the stone masons that young, fresh professional, were raised and formed at the initiative

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52 For a detailed account of the political propaganda through architecture see Tulbure, "From Casa Scânteii to Casa Poporului and Back," 78-90.

of the communist party in order to serve its projects by practically reinventing a profession. In architecture, for the first time after the installation of communism in Romania, there was a slight mutation in promotional policies and a break in the rule of the old over the young professionals.

Was there a certain freedom of the subjects in the frame of this narrative? No doubt there was. Unlike their parents, submitted to the post-war poverty combined with the extreme policies of the Stalinist police state, those youths were able to seize unexpected opportunities to build not only a career within the more liberalized system of grand projects, but also to explore for themselves different paths of action.

What we should retain so far, from this summing up of the human resources direction of the inquest, is the strange way by which governmentality insinuates itself in the actions of a regime dominated by doctrine, and not by economic calculation, by total control of the masses and definitely not by stimulation and negotiated control of the individual. The top down, mass level of government operations in Romania generated a residual stealth phenomenon of individual negotiation and appropriation. The set of actions upon other actions characterizing in Foucault's words the liberal state and its interventions meant to keep in balance the powers at play[53] seemed to work here as well, residually, in the inner tissues of the structures build by the government.

Three factors are at play in the eastern version of governmentality, understood here as a series of dialectic, dynamic processes taking place between a top down power apparatus and a horizontal, multi-layered society in search of identity. They are: a. the overblown scale of administrative initiatives; b. the lack of checks and balances; c. the delay in technological development.

a. The sheer scale of House of the People induces the concept of chaos almost as a necessity. In order to coordinate such an enterprise, there was a need of control structures beyond the capacities of the society at the time. Romania was a police state in the classic sense of the concept, where the police was ideological, not economic. The frailty of the system was its lack of capacity to govern practical processes. To that we must add the scale of ambitions in meeting targets: the whole building was accomplished under enormous stress of time, with deadlines becoming tighter and tighter as the 1980s unfolded; one interviewee commented that it was like Ceaușescu felt he had no more time to see his project finished. Add to that the erratic behavior of the client: there are endless stories about Ceaușescu changing his mind from one weekly visit to the other, sometimes about large operations, with huge consequences in terms of work hours and materials consumed.

b. Closely linked to the above comes the lack of checks and balances, due on one hand to the lack of administration culture; on the other to the lack of specialists able to oversee such gigantic operations; and thirdly, to the ideological framework superimposed on any enterprise governed by the communist state – according to which the project had to succeed at any costs. There is a consensus among the architects that Anca Petrescu did not have, beyond personal energy and dedication to the project and its client, any particular skills qualifying her as a leader. There was no unifying vision of the whole project from the very beginning, and the constant changes of opinion from Ceaușescu's side were met with no professional resistance. The only thing that mattered was the next deadline. As a story tells us, the dictator asked a round question during one of his countless visits to the House of the People – is anyone stealing from the site? The timid answer was – yes, some. Never mind, concluded the dictator, it stays all in the country.

Before going to point c., let us draw some partial conclusions from what was said. In a paradoxical way, the dominant state who wanted to impose itself through large projects was generating through the very same a chaotic behavior with micro-manifestations of governmentality. In the folds of a structure too large and too abusive, individuals were carving (some literally) their own space of initiative. Were they doing that through illegal means? Absolutely. But illegalities, breaking of the existing rules, theft, are dominant forms of governmentality in the close systems of communist dictatorship. Due to the ideological abuse and economic failure, those systems encourage the perception of illegal behavior as a form of survival and also as a form of resistance.

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53 Bröckling *et al.*, *Governmentality*, 5.

The short-term consequence is the apparition of pockets of autonomous development; the long-term consequence is a disastrous deformation of the collective mentality, which will resist the implementation of liberal forms of governmentality, perceived as endangering the advantages acquired through chaos[54].

c. Technological development is the cornerstone of our inquiry about Collective Authorship, as it touches the fundamental question of the triad sketched above – namely the "how?" question. There are two types of narratives here – one concerning the infrastructure and structural work on the building; and the other regarding the facades, interiors and all finishing. We are dealing thus with two opposites – the hidden part, and the visible part.

As for the first, no reliable narrative exists. There are mentions of the unlimited budgets at the disposal of the engineers working on the structures, as shown previously in the letter of the six dissidents. There are urban myths about a ten stories deep bunker in the underground, and about tunnels going from House of the People to various strategic institutions (the Central Committee of the Party, the Ministry of Defense a.s.o.) and to Ceauşescu's villa across the city. It is well known that the dictator was preoccupied to have a secure place both for work and symbolic representation, protected from the consequences of a devastating earthquake like the one from 1977. It is also known that famous specialists were involved at various levels of responsibility in the building process. One interesting detail concerns the relation between the public communication and the realities of the construction agenda: the House of the People construction site became active in 1980, with under and aboveground works that evolved very fast into a gigantic concrete structure. The development was surrounded by complete media silence, while being practically in the eye of all citizens of Bucharest, who could perceive from a distance the dance of the cranes above a cloud of dust (during daytime), and the light and sparks of welding operations (at night). Parallel to that, rumors started to circulate of people dying on the construction site due to poor organization and to stress induced by hysterical deadlines. Only four years later, in 1984, the construction site of House of the People was officially inaugurated by Elena and Nicolae Ceauşescu, in a ceremony that took naturally the first page of the press. By then the effort of designing and implementing the decoration for facades and interiors started already.

It was as if the structural part of the building had little symbolic value, and could not be exploited within the rhetoric realm of the regime. The older modernist discourse of the triumphant local industry was abandoned in the case of the House of the People project, as the client-dictator concentrated practically his supervising effort on the decoration. It is telling that one architect remembered the increasing pressure installed on his peers once the structure of the building was finished, as if that was the moment when real work had to start. At the level of design, the development of the project was organized in a very intuitive way: a lot of the work was done first at the level of scale models made of polystyrene and plaster. From there, after lengthy debates and check visits from various bosses (architects and Party officials) the next step was the description and execution drawings: then another level of larger scale models for the dictatorial couple to check upon before execution. Intuitive at the level of concept and form, this process was counter-intuitive at the level of techno-logical processes: the realization of the House of the People was equivalent with a regression in time to the 10th –12th centuries, when cathedrals were raised, slowly, in the same vernacular manner. This techno-infantilism was partly a response to the limited capacities of the client in reading technical drawings; but it was also the expression of a regression in the profession of architect, from the stardom of authorship to the serfdom of collective work.

While the invisible infrastructure had to comply with state of the art technologies, the visible part of the building was migrating towards medieval technological and social processes. The interviews stress repeatedly the triumph of manual work, the revival of old skills, and, most importantly, the paramount role of the relation master-disciple governing all the steps in production. The pastoral model identified by Foucault at the origins of transition towards modernity was of course

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54 Ibid.

convenient in a hierarchical society ruled by older men. Still, the Medieval ethos, the social and professional bonding around manual skills are facts that throw an unexpected light on the social articulations of communist Romania, where the glorification of industrial modernity was nevertheless the dominant propaganda discourse.

This contrast between the reality of the work floor and the propaganda images is even more significant considering the signature importance of the project for the regime and its leader. One could see in this chasm another form of the micro-manifestations of governmentality mentioned above, as there is an obvious degree of autonomy in the exercise of highly skilled manual work.

The interviews are stressing the relation one-to-one from master to disciple, as opposed to the generally accepted work relations, integrated in highly hierarchical, large groups; they glorifies the mystic of craftsmanship (the masons were "reading" the inside of the stone; the people modeling in clay were able to use simultaneously both hands for symmetric details; the masters were taking the youths step by step on an initiation path, etc.). The interviews are also drawing a complex image of primitivism and autonomy in terms of tools design and production, in terms of additional protection equipment, etc. All the manual carving tools were provided in private dealings by Roma craftsmen, who were by tradition excellent manufacturers of iron and steel blades, chisels etc. The very few mechanic tools provided by the enterprise were repaired and maintained also privately, through personal connections; all protection equipment was the personal responsibility of the masons, who proved actually to have no culture of safety regulations and no compliance framework. A fascinating story implies that even the production of clamps necessary for assembling the masonry to the concrete structures was controlled by a Roma clan residing in the proximity of one of the largest steel factories in the country. The general impression is of a parallel economy based on personal relations, on large amounts of (slush) money obtained sometimes through tough negotiations with the officials pressured by delivery deadlines, of a – again – Medieval level of understanding construction work at the end of the 20th century.

Complementary to this general impression come details pointing to the opposite direction, of the liberal mentality so close to what Foucault discusses in his excursions through *gouvernamentalité*. We already mentioned the human resources policy encouraging the promotion of young professionals. To that, one must add the effective involvement of women in decision-making processes, starting with the chief architect Anca Petrescu herself, and continuing with a long series of women involved at various levels of execution, in a country where the dictatorial leadership was actually two-headed: Elena and Nicolae, a couple united through indestructible bonds.

An unexpected angle is the competition between work-groups and even between state companies. Every façade unit, interior unit or important decoration ensemble was submitted to a competition of solutions, and it was not necessarily the chief architect winning the commission. The same proto-corporate atmosphere was governing time planning: like in cutting-edge companies of the 21st century, relying heavily on young specialists with flexible life-style and little personal responsibilities, in the ideologically different context of the House of the People project young specialists were supposed to work extra time, often late at night, sometimes weekends, and had to respond to any emergencies declared by the top hierarchy. The rivalry between two design institutes, one belonging to the city of Bucharest (*Institutul Proiect București*), the other directly responding to the administrative structures of the Communist party (*Institutul Carpați*), respectively between a construction enterprise coordinated by the Party (*Trustul Carpați* – no relation to the previous) and again a society under the City's supervision (*Marmura București*) was fueled by uneven levels of salaries, and by competition for important parts of the project. Monetary value was central to the House of the People project, and people who were in position to do so (mostly manual workers with high skills) were openly arguing for their rights, in a context where – again – the propaganda line was that in a true communist state the priorities were not material, but political.

All these considerations lead to a situation where the medieval (pastoral) and the (real) communist economic, societal and political models were successively and/or simultaneously

competing, fighting, and supporting each other, resulting in a synthesis that we could name "the Balkan-communist version of governmentality." A concluding narrative extracted from the "Collective Authorship" conversations illustrates quite well the conflict between these two phases. Ceaușescu's folly for grand architecture seemed to have its inspiration in Kim Il-Sung's Phenian. Experts were sent on site to see how did the North Koreans succeed so fast in raising their gigantic projects – and why Romanians failed to do so. The answer suggested that North Koreans worked with pre-fabricated stone elements and with imported Japanese technology. It seemed that this was not a satisfactory answer. As the deadlines for masonry decorations became tighter, there was a discussion with the client about the technical possibilities of execution. *Why does it take so much? Because it is about carving stone manually. What material is faster than stone? Steel. Why? Because we have the technologies in house. Then apply those technologies to stone.*

And so, the large marble arches of the building were executed in a tank factory, on gigantic circular lathes for shaping tank turrets. Military technologies, authoritarian political regimes, centralized economies, medieval representational ambitions, the mystique of elite corps of the freemasons type – all those ingredients were shaping a local version of governmentality, which enlarges the field of debate opened by Foucault's 1970s conferences.

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Fig. 1: Drawing by Sorina Vasilescu for the "Collective Authorship."