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Interview with Nicolae Lascu by Monica Sebestyen

English translation: Daniela Calciu

In the inauspicious ideological climate of 1980s, professor Nicolae Lascu, at the time assistant-professor in our School's Urban Planning Department, was one of the very few architects of his generation (the classes of the 1970s) who dared address in writing the architectural thinking and culture. Generally speaking, the architectural books of that period (and also those of the previous decades) were authored by acknowledged figures of Romanian architecture and historiography and were dedicated, with very rare exceptions, to architectural history or to the architectural achievements of the moment; theory of architecture was allotted very limited space. Neither the translations from foreign literature (very few¹), nor the articles published in the architectural magazine *Arhitectura* were inclined to favour purely theoretical matters or reflective approaches to architecture. Or, Nicolae Lascu's two annotated anthologies – *Architecture as Art* (with Monica Mărgineanu-Cârstoiu) and *Function and Form*, – published in the prestigious Art Library collection of the Meridiane Publishing House, brought to the fore the architectural thinking in its universal cultural bearing. Likewise, the earlier *Aesthetic Thinking in Romanian Architecture* (with Gheorghe Săsărman) was the first critical approach to Romanian theory of architecture, while the monograph *Florea Stănculescu: Contributions to Affirming Romanian Architecture* was the first real critical study dedicated to this Romanian architect, thinker and editor². It has to be said that the first two titles are still, to this very day, singular in our architectural culture and publishing activity.

After 1989, Nicolae Lascu particularly focused on the local forms of architectural modernisation and on the past and present transformations of the city of Bucharest, which resulted in many research-projects and other volumes: *Horia Creangă Centennial* (with Ana Maria Zahariade), *Marcel Janco Centennial* (with Anca Iliescu-Bocaneţ and Ana Maria Zahariade) and, especially, the monumental work “Bucharest's Boulevards before World War I” (Bucharest: Simetria, 2011). The latter is actually a deeper investigation in the research field of his doctoral thesis, *Legislation and urban development. Bucharest, 1831-1952*,³ which is an inescapable key to understanding the city; this work is still unpublished but largely referenced in the research milieu.

All of Nicolae Lascu's works are seminal, which is why we decided to open the *Printed in Red* dossier with the interview that he so kindly gave our colleague Monica Sebestyen.

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Monica Sebestyen: As far as publications go, the Communist period is associated with censorship and propaganda. To what extent would you say these are to be found in the architecture publications of the time? Did they affect you in any way?

Nicolae Lascu: I actually did not have to deal with censorship. My work may not have been among the most interesting to them. Censorship did exist, no doubt about that. However, in the 1980s, it became the publishers' responsibility. I never had any words removed, from any book I worked on. They were probably neither very interesting to the editors, nor dealing with topical issues. The only thing I was not allowed to do was to officially thank a legal emigrant who had helped me by sending me crucial works from abroad. As a result, I thought it was fair to evade also acknowledging the people in the country who had so kindly offered me their support. Therefore, I want to use this opportunity to express, only now, my deep gratitude to the renowned art historian Victor Ieronim Stoichiță, who sent me from Switzerland some crucial works for the anthologies *Architecture as Art* and *Function and Form*. I owe the same belated appreciation to our long gone colleague Alina Căiaikovschi, and to the late professor Pompiliu Macovei, who gently offered me the occasion to explore his library. That is where I found the famous "Bauhausbücher" collection, probably the only copy in Romania. He must have bought it in from Germany, where he had travelled in his youth. Besides this, I had no other problem.

M.S. Before their publication in the abovementioned anthologies, were those texts available to the Romanian architects? Could they be found in libraries or in informal networks, passed between friends?

N.L. Some of the works were in the libraries of our University, of the Union of Architects, of the Romanian Academy, in the National Library (then called the State Central Library), and in the University Central Library in Cluj, which were the most important libraries. They were thus accessible to architects and other people interested in the evolution of the architectural thinking. However, a great part of the essential books, from which I excerpted the texts, or which brought new perspectives to my later studies on the topic, did not exist in Romanian libraries. This is why I had to resort to my very kind friend Victor Ieronim Stoichiță, who sent me some fundamental works.

However, the problem of information must be regarded in strict relation to the subject matter in one volume or another. For the *Aesthetic Thinking in Romanian Architecture* (1983), I relied only on the libraries of our University, of the Union of Architects, and of the Romanian Academy. The latter is still today the most significant library in the country. For the other anthologies, *Architecture as Art* (1987) and then *Function and Form* (1989), I had to extend my research to other libraries, such as the University Central Library in Cluj, which actually had some fundamental texts that could not be found in Bucharest. I also had to resort to acquaintances and friends.

All the texts in the anthologies appeared in Romanian for the first time. This was actually my intent. The initial purpose of the *Aesthetic Thinking in Romanian Architecture* was to gather the texts that we considered essential for the Romanian architecture of the 19th and 20th centuries. It later grew into a two-volume anthology of fragmentary texts, excerpts from fundamental works, meant to outline the modern architectural thought evolution.

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For the other volumes, I generally worked for a year, a year and a half, including getting the books, selecting the fragments that could fit in the given number of pages, translating and typing. I think it was a very good intellectual exercise, because publishers always imposed a maximum number of pages, which meant we had to choose the things we thought were the most important, and put the other ones aside.

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These anthologies were actually supposed to be followed by full translations of some of the authors who shaped the architectural thinking throughout modernity, from Laugier, for instance, to Alvar Aalto. Unfortunately, it never happened, to this very day. These things are part of our architectural culture. Having access to anthologies, but especially to full translations, even of a 17th or 18th century book, is meaningful for the general and strictly professional culture of architects today. However, not even the works of architects in vogue today have been translated, with very few exceptions.

Other countries, aware of the importance of a solid general knowledge of the field, spent decades translating everything that had been published elsewhere. Such is the case of France or Italy, but also of the former Soviet Union, that translated almost everything published abroad.

M.S. You mean, after the war?

N.L. Yes, after the war. I do not know how it was during Stalin's regime, but after that time, I am positive they translated all the important publications in the world.

M.S. Were there any translations from Russian in Romania?

N.L. There were, in the beginning. Later on, architectural texts stopped being translated, as part of the generalised absolute rejection of the Russian (Soviet) culture. It was a spontaneous reaction to recent or distant historical events, but culturally, I think it was a great mistake.

In some countries, like Italy and France, the explosion of architectural texts from the 1970s and 1980s can be traced back to the changes in the educational system following May '68. In France, for instance, the famous École des Beaux-Arts of Paris was scattered into eight teaching units, the current schools of architecture from Paris. The professional literature increased considerably, because professors were required to publish in order to build their resumes and justify their positions in the higher education system. Almost all of those writings were, and still are, very valuable books. This speaks highly about the quality of their authors, namely of the architecture teachers.

M.S. Going back to *Architecture as Art* and *Function and Form*, they encompass together the architectural thinking between the 17th and 20th centuries. Did you conceive them together, from the beginning?

N.L. No, the idea emerged in time. The second volume was the result of the first one. I actually owe my connection with this activity to Monica Mărgineanu-Cârstoiu, who put me in contact with Gheorghe Săsărman for the first volume, *Aesthetic Thinking in Romanian Architecture*. I drafted the bibliographical notes, and prepared the anthology together with Alexandrina Deac. Afterwards, I worked with Monica Mărgineanu-Cârstoiu to publish the Romanian translation of a book about the architectural theory of the 17th to 19th centuries, a subject new to our country. This gave me the idea to continue with the *Function and Form* volume, which I put together by myself.

M.S. Three of the four books we are talking about were issued by Meridiane, which published important books of architecture, and art and civilisation as well. Did you have a special relationship with this publishing house?

N.L. Gheorghe Săsărman, who coordinated the first volume from 1983, *Aesthetic Thinking in Romanian Architecture*, had had his PhD dissertation published by Meridiane, under the title *Function, Space, Architecture*. Afterwards, Monica Mărgineanu-Cârstoiu and I submitted a proposal for a second volume, *Architecture as Art*, and we were honoured to be included in the very prestigious "Art Library" collection. This lead immediately to the next volume, *Function and Form*, as the publisher already knew it was going to be serious and useful.

The Technical Publishing House (Editura Tehnică) had two collections for architecture books. One of them was "Architecture in time", which included works by Gheorghe Sebestyen (*Renaissance in Transylvania*), Peter Derer (about dwellings in relation to cities), Ion Lucăcel (about the Ionian cities), Mihai Oprea (an excellent urban monograph of Timisoara), Teodor Octavian Gheorghiu (medieval defence architecture), Gheorghe Curinschi-Vorona, and others. The other collection only lasted for two occurrences: the volume dedicated to Octav Doicescu, coordinated by Peter Derer, and the volume I put together about Florea Stănculescu's work. One of the editors, arch. Ileana Nacu, always made sure to include architecture among the titles of this mammoth publisher, with an engineering profile.

M.S. The volume about Florea Stănculescu's work appeared on the centennial anniversary of the architect's birth. Was it your initiative?

N.L. It was actually the architect's daughter, Nina Stănculescu's idea. She had been my editor for the *Aesthetic Thinking in Romanian Architecture*, from Meridiane.

M.S. Were there any other events to mark this anniversary?

N.L. There was a symposium dedicated to Florea Stănculescu, at the Union of Architects.

M.S. Do you know anything about how these books were received? What was the print run?

N.L. As far as I know, the volume about Florea Stănculescu was printed in one thousand copies. This was the standard print run for architecture books at the Tehnica publishers. If I recall correctly, *Architecture as Art* appeared in 1.500 copies, while *Function and Form* in 15.000 copies. This was a big print run, even for today, and it sold out in two years.

M.S. How would you explain this big quantitative difference?

N.L. The subject was probably more topical, dealing with recent times. However, print runs resulted from surveys that publishers were conducting among the library centres of each county, about their sale estimates. I would not call it control, but there was a rather realistic assessment to establish the print run. This is why books did not stay long on the bookstore shelves. They were sold because their number was determined according to hypothetical demands from various areas.

M.S. Would you say the discrepancy in print runs could be explained by a special interest in function, rather than aesthetics, as suggested by the titles?

N.L. It is very possible. I remember Modest Morariu, chief editor of Meridiane for many years, and the one who actually led the publishing house to its glory and created all those wonderful collections, including the “Art Library.” I remember him drawing our attention to the, let us say, marketing role of the title. It had to be short and synthetic, to provide a good suggestion of the content.

M.S. How did publishers choose which books to invest in?

N.L. All books were peer reviewed. Once a manuscript was submitted, it was assigned to a reviewer who read it, made comments and observations, and finally assessed its worthiness of being published. Publishers also worked with approved translators, who were verifying the submitted translations. This ensured a certain quality of the work. However, the final decision belonged to the publisher.

Many translations today are done hastily, and lose their fidelity to the original work. I am not praising the pre-1989 system, but it was well set in some ways that allowed good works to emerge. Publishers took care of this to the extent of their possibilities.

I would also add a malicious comment. I received two awards from the Union of Architects, for two of the four books I worked on, all published in the 1980s: the volume about Florea Stănculescu, and *Function and Form*. But now, with the new professors’ and publishers’ evaluating system, these books do not mean anything anymore, simply because the publishers do not exist anymore. If they do not exist, the National Council for Scientific Research cannot approve them, and subsequently cannot recognise and take into account their publications.

M.S. This tells a lot about the present evaluation system...

N.L. Actually, it tells about something that has always happened in times of political or social turns: every change is considered a ground zero, as if there had been nothing beforehand.

M.S. Besides their contribution to the architectural culture, these books are also an excellent teaching support. Will you tell us about how architecture history and theory were being taught at the university? Did students use to study some of these texts?

N.L. The first anthology, *Aesthetic Thinking in Romanian Architecture*, appeared in 1983, and may have had an impact on the following generations. The other ones appeared later, and it is more

difficult to assess. Architecture history and theory were greatly limited in the 1980s. The very few allocated hours determined a high concentration on key elements of the subject matter. I do not know if these volumes were of any help. However, I see them now, on the reading lists of various courses of architecture theory or history.

M.S. Most of your publications are about the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. Was this a general trend at the time, or were they triggered by your personal interest?

N.L. They came out of my personal preoccupations. I was a young assistant professor at the Department of Urban Planning, so I was teaching completely different things. These preoccupations had nothing to do with planning, except for the introduction of some rather consistent urban planning texts by Cincinat Sfințescu, in the *Aesthetic Thinking in Romanian Architecture*. I would be joking to say that such a pursuit could fit in the same category as the novelists, composers or painters. There is a time in everybody's life when their culture, their energy, and their desire of novelty may lead them to accomplish new, interesting and significant things.

After the war, the number of publications grew outstandingly in all fields: architectural history and theory, urban planning, restoration of monuments, criticism of current buildings, etc. We should find a time to discuss them, not necessarily their quantity, but rather their quality. We should try to assess the effects they have had on us and our formation as architects. They definitely contributed to strengthening the Romanian architectural culture. I think the professional culture is not only about buildings, but also about the numerous books piling on top of one another, to reinforce a certain idea about architecture and about the architect's purpose.

M.S. What was the relation between the official discourse and the reality? Were there two parallel cultures?

N.L. Opinions did diverge. To illustrate the contradictions, I will use Eugenia Greceanu's "against the wind" historical studies of Botoșani, Pitești, and Roman. They were fundamental works commissioned by the Municipalities in the midst of urban renewal processes. While reality was one of demolishing and new construction, Eugenia Greceanu showed that on the contrary, cities should keep their architectural and urban historical values, and find ways to integrate them into their new lives.

M.S. When did she conduct these studies?

N.L. She did them at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s. The first one was about the city of Roman, and it was published in a professional magazine. The other two appeared in a highly regarded collection of the Romanian National History Museum, which also issued some of Andrei Pănoiu's works, and other significant books.

M.S. So, can we talk about a professional dissidence?

N.L. There was a gap between the urban practice of the time, and the concerns for history, for heritage protection and preservation. These things should not be generalised, in any way. I think we should approach them individually, case by case. However, generally speaking, things did develop in that manner, somehow in parallel.

As always, there were professionals attached to the regime. We can find a number of such people in history, from the Antiquity to the modern times, abroad as well as in Romania. This does not mean that there were no parallel discourses. They were not always made "visible" to the public. But when they did become available, it was due to publishers and magazine editors, who knew how to balance the two extremes. I find this interesting because it shows that our profession did have a rather solid base, a theoretical background that widened over time. Moreover, this situation

is impossible to avoid. In any regime, these things take awhile to settle in, and generate different points of view.

I would also add that I do not think there were many restrictions imposed on one individual or another. With some exceptions, no doubt, but any architect who wanted to publish a book could do it. I just remembered that even Constantin Joja, persecuted and even imprisoned by the regime, could publish two or three volumes, in the 1970-80s. His books painted very personal views of the architecture in Wallachia and Moldavia, but he was able to express them as he saw fit.

M.S. You were saying that many important books of architecture were published back then.

N.L. Yes, there were many books, and some were great synthetic studies, such as Grigore Ionescu's history of architecture, or Gheorghe Curinschi-Vorona's compared architecture study. The latter is no longer mentioned today, but it still presents a moment in the author's intellectual development and in our architectural history as well.

M.S. To what extent were political views reflected by the publications of the time?

N.L. I would not be very categorical. There were, of course, many architectural books made under political command, as well. Nevertheless, I think it is important that there were many publications. I also think many of the books issued before 1989 are still valid today. I forgot about G.M. Cantacuzino's fundamental work *Izvoare si popasuri (On Springs and Rests)*, published in 1977 thanks to the literature critic and historian Adrian Anghelescu. The 1970s were in fact marked by Radu Patruleius' efforts to revive the interest in the interwar period through his series of articles included in the *Arhitectura* magazine. They are still significant today, as is his monograph of Horia Creangă.

Many important things were published. Whether this rich editorial activity was a reflection of the official state policies, or the result of widening concerns of our profession, is yet to be researched.

M.S. Do you know of any cases of books rejected for ideological reasons?

N.L. I do not know of any such cases, but they may have been; I also do not know if such writings were published after 1990. As I said before, the system seemed fair. The reviewers were responsible to ensure a certain quality, and it is very possible that they found manuscripts they deemed not interesting unless fundamentally restructured. This could also happen today.

Another interesting question is whether the translations from Russian had any real impact on the development of our professional culture, on top of the fundamental works of the 1950s and early 1960s.

M.S. What works do you have in mind?

N.L. For instance, I remember an art history of an important Russian art historian, Alpatov. Before that, there was Mihailov's universal architectural history, intensely used for history courses in our school.

However, more than the foreign books translations, I think the Romanian production of architecture books is especially interesting.

Monica Sebestyen: As far as publications go, the Communist period is associated with censorship and propaganda. To what extent would you say these are to be found in the architecture publications of the time? Did they affect you in any way?

Nicolae Lascu: I actually did not have to deal with censorship. My work may not have been among the most interesting to them. Censorship did exist, no doubt about that. However, in the 1980s, it became the publishers' responsibility. I never had any words removed, from any book I worked on. They were probably neither very interesting to the editors, nor dealing with topical issues. The only thing I was not allowed to do was to officially thank a legal emigrant who had helped me by sending me crucial works from abroad. As a result, I thought it was fair to evade also acknowledging the people in the country who had so kindly offered me their support. Therefore, I want to use this opportunity to express, only now, my deep gratitude to the renowned art historian Victor Ieronim Stoichiță, who sent me from Switzerland some crucial works for the anthologies *Architecture as Art* and *Function and Form*. I owe the same belated appreciation to our long gone colleague Alina Căiaikovschi, and to the late professor Pompiliu Macovei, who gently offered me the occasion to explore his library. That is where I found the famous "Bauhausbücher" collection, probably the only copy in Romania. He must have bought it in from Germany, where he had travelled in his youth. Besides this, I had no other problem.

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M.S. Were there any translations from Russian in Romania?

N.L. There were, in the beginning. Later on, architectural texts stopped being translated, as part of the generalised absolute rejection of the Russian (Soviet) culture. It was a spontaneous reaction to recent or distant historical events, but culturally, I think it was a great mistake.

In some countries, like Italy and France, the explosion of architectural texts from the 1970s and 1980s can be traced back to the changes in the educational system following May '68. In France, for instance, the famous École des Beaux-Arts of Paris was scattered into eight teaching units, the current schools of architecture from Paris. The professional literature increased considerably, because professors were required to publish in order to build their resumes and justify their positions in the higher education system. Almost all of those writings were, and still are, very valuable books. This speaks highly about the quality of their authors, namely of the architecture teachers.

M.S. Going back to *Architecture as Art* and *Function and Form*, they encompass together the architectural thinking between the 17th and 20th centuries. Did you conceive them together, from the beginning?

N.L. No, the idea emerged in time. The second volume was the result of the first one. I actually owe my connection with this activity to Monica Mărgineanu-Cârstoiu, who put me in contact with Gheorghe Săsărman for the first volume, *Aesthetic Thinking in Romanian Architecture*. I drafted the bibliographical notes, and prepared the anthology together with Alexandrina Deac. Afterwards, I worked with Monica Mărgineanu-Cârstoiu to publish the Romanian translation of a book about the architectural theory of the 17th to 19th centuries, a subject new to our country. This gave me the idea to continue with the *Function and Form* volume, which I put together by myself.

M.S. Three of the four books we are talking about were issued by Meridiane, which published important books of architecture, and art and civilisation as well. Did you have a special relationship with this publishing house?

N.L. Gheorghe Săsărman, who coordinated the first volume from 1983, *Aesthetic Thinking in Romanian Architecture*, had had his PhD dissertation published by Meridiane, under the title *Function, Space, Architecture*. Afterwards, Monica Mărgineanu-Cârstoiu and I submitted a proposal for a second volume, *Architecture as Art*, and we were honoured to be included in the very prestigious "Art Library" collection. This led immediately to the next volume, *Function and Form*, as the publisher already knew it was going to be serious and useful.

The Technical Publishing House (Editura Tehnică) had two collections for architecture books. One of them was "Architecture in time", which included works by Gheorghe Sebestyen (*Renaissance in Transylvania*), Peter Derer (about dwellings in relation to cities), Ion Lucăcel (about the Ionian cities), Mihai Oprea (an excellent urban monograph of Timisoara), Teodor Octavian Gheorghiu (medieval defence architecture), Gheorghe Curinschi-Vorona, and others. The other collection only lasted for two occurrences: the volume dedicated to Octav Doicescu, coordinated by Peter Derer, and the volume I put together about Florea Stănculescu's work. One of the editors, arch. Ileana Nacu, always made sure to include architecture among the titles of this mammoth publisher, with an engineering profile.

M.S. The volume about Florea Stănculescu's work appeared on the centennial anniversary of the architect's birth. Was it your initiative?

N.L. It was actually the architect's daughter, Nina Stănculescu's idea. She had been my editor for the *Aesthetic Thinking in Romanian Architecture*, from Meridiane.

M.S. Were there any other events to mark this anniversary?

N.L. There was a symposium dedicated to Florea Stănculescu, at the Union of Architects.

M.S. Do you know anything about how these books were received? What was the print run?

N.L. As far as I know, the volume about Florea Stănculescu was printed in one thousand copies. This was the standard print run for architecture books at the Tehnica publishers. If I recall correctly, *Architecture as Art* appeared in 1.500 copies, while *Function and Form* in 15.000 copies. This was a big print run, even for today, and it sold out in two years.

M.S. How would you explain this big quantitative difference?

N.L. The subject was probably more topical, dealing with recent times. However, print runs resulted from surveys that publishers were conducting among the library centres of each county, about their sale estimates. I would not call it control, but there was a rather realistic assessment to establish the print run. This is why books did not stay long on the bookstore shelves. They were sold because their number was determined according to hypothetical demands from various areas.

M.S. Would you say the discrepancy in print runs could be explained by a special interest in function, rather than aesthetics, as suggested by the titles?

N.L. It is very possible. I remember Modest Morariu, chief editor of Meridiane for many years, and the one who actually led the publishing house to its glory and created all those wonderful collections, including the “Art Library.” I remember him drawing our attention to the, let us say, marketing role of the title. It had to be short and synthetic, to provide a good suggestion of the content.

M.S. How did publishers choose which books to invest in?

N.L. All books were peer reviewed. Once a manuscript was submitted, it was assigned to a reviewer who read it, made comments and observations, and finally assessed its worthiness of being published. Publishers also worked with approved translators, who were verifying the submitted translations. This ensured a certain quality of the work. However, the final decision belonged to the publisher.

Many translations today are done hastily, and lose their fidelity to the original work. I am not praising the pre-1989 system, but it was well set in some ways that allowed good works to emerge. Publishers took care of this to the extent of their possibilities.

I would also add a malicious comment. I received two awards from the Union of Architects, for two of the four books I worked on, all published in the 1980s: the volume about Florea Stănculescu, and *Function and Form*. But now, with the new professors’ and publishers’ evaluating system, these books do not mean anything anymore, simply because the publishers do not exist anymore. If they do not exist, the National Council for Scientific Research cannot approve them, and subsequently cannot recognise and take into account their publications.

M.S. This tells a lot about the present evaluation system...

N.L. Actually, it tells about something that has always happened in times of political or social turns: every change is considered a ground zero, as if there had been nothing beforehand.

M.S. Besides their contribution to the architectural culture, these books are also an excellent teaching support. Will you tell us about how architecture history and theory were being taught at the university? Did students use to study some of these texts?

N.L. The first anthology, *Aesthetic Thinking in Romanian Architecture*, appeared in 1983, and may have had an impact on the following generations. The other ones appeared later, and it is more

difficult to assess. Architecture history and theory were greatly limited in the 1980s. The very few allocated hours determined a high concentration on key elements of the subject matter. I do not know if these volumes were of any help. However, I see them now, on the reading lists of various courses of architecture theory or history.

M.S. Most of your publications are about the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. Was this a general trend at the time, or were they triggered by your personal interest?

N.L. They came out of my personal preoccupations. I was a young assistant professor at the Department of Urban Planning, so I was teaching completely different things. These preoccupations had nothing to do with planning, except for the introduction of some rather consistent urban planning texts by Cincinat Sfințescu, in the *Aesthetic Thinking in Romanian Architecture*. I would be joking to say that such a pursuit could fit in the same category as the novelists, composers or painters. There is a time in everybody's life when their culture, their energy, and their desire of novelty may lead them to accomplish new, interesting and significant things.

After the war, the number of publications grew outstandingly in all fields: architectural history and theory, urban planning, restoration of monuments, criticism of current buildings, etc. We should find a time to discuss them, not necessarily their quantity, but rather their quality. We should try to assess the effects they have had on us and our formation as architects. They definitely contributed to strengthening the Romanian architectural culture. I think the professional culture is not only about buildings, but also about the numerous books piling on top of one another, to reinforce a certain idea about architecture and about the architect's purpose.

M.S. What was the relation between the official discourse and the reality? Were there two parallel cultures?

N.L. Opinions did diverge. To illustrate the contradictions, I will use Eugenia Greceanu's "against the wind" historical studies of Botoșani, Pitești, and Roman. They were fundamental works commissioned by the Municipalities in the midst of urban renewal processes. While reality was one of demolishing and new construction, Eugenia Greceanu showed that on the contrary, cities should keep their architectural and urban historical values, and find ways to integrate them into their new lives.

M.S. When did she conduct these studies?

N.L. She did them at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s. The first one was about the city of Roman, and it was published in a professional magazine. The other two appeared in a highly regarded collection of the Romanian National History Museum, which also issued some of Andrei Pănoiu's works, and other significant books.

M.S. So, can we talk about a professional dissidence?

N.L. There was a gap between the urban practice of the time, and the concerns for history, for heritage protection and preservation. These things should not be generalised, in any way. I think we should approach them individually, case by case. However, generally speaking, things did develop in that manner, somehow in parallel.

As always, there were professionals attached to the regime. We can find a number of such people in history, from the Antiquity to the modern times, abroad as well as in Romania. This does not mean that there were no parallel discourses. They were not always made "visible" to the public. But when they did become available, it was due to publishers and magazine editors, who knew how to balance the two extremes. I find this interesting because it shows that our profession did have a rather solid base, a theoretical background that widened over time. Moreover, this situation

is impossible to avoid. In any regime, these things take awhile to settle in, and generate different points of view.

I would also add that I do not think there were many restrictions imposed on one individual or another. With some exceptions, no doubt, but any architect who wanted to publish a book could do it. I just remembered that even Constantin Joja, persecuted and even imprisoned by the regime, could publish two or three volumes, in the 1970-80s. His books painted very personal views of the architecture in Wallachia and Moldavia, but he was able to express them as he saw fit.

M.S. You were saying that many important books of architecture were published back then.

N.L. Yes, there were many books, and some were great synthetic studies, such as Grigore Ionescu's history of architecture, or Gheorghe Curinschi-Vorona's compared architecture study. The latter is no longer mentioned today, but it still presents a moment in the author's intellectual development and in our architectural history as well.

M.S. To what extent were political views reflected by the publications of the time?

N.L. I would not be very categorical. There were, of course, many architectural books made under political command, as well. Nevertheless, I think it is important that there were many publications. I also think many of the books issued before 1989 are still valid today. I forgot about G.M. Cantacuzino's fundamental work *Izvoare si popasuri (On Springs and Rests)*, published in 1977 thanks to the literature critic and historian Adrian Anghelescu. The 1970s were in fact marked by Radu Patruleius' efforts to revive the interest in the interwar period through his series of articles included in the *Arhitectura* magazine. They are still significant today, as is his monograph of Horia Creangă.

Many important things were published. Whether this rich editorial activity was a reflection of the official state policies, or the result of widening concerns of our profession, is yet to be researched.

M.S. Do you know of any cases of books rejected for ideological reasons?

N.L. I do not know of any such cases, but they may have been; I also do not know if such writings were published after 1990. As I said before, the system seemed fair. The reviewers were responsible to ensure a certain quality, and it is very possible that they found manuscripts they deemed not interesting unless fundamentally restructured. This could also happen today.

Another interesting question is whether the translations from Russian had any real impact on the development of our professional culture, on top of the fundamental works of the 1950s and early 1960s.

M.S. What works do you have in mind?

N.L. For instance, I remember an art history of an important Russian art historian, Alpatov. Before that, there was Mihailov's universal architectural history, intensely used for history courses in our school.

However, more than the foreign books translations, I think the Romanian production of architecture books is especially interesting.