Star-topped Spires and Cardboard Heroes
Soviet Socialist Realism in *Arhitectura R.P.R.*
(1950-1952)

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"Even now, the structures of future monumental buildings arise in different parts of Moscow, and, way up in the night sky, giant cranes shine like fairytale constellations over construction sites, framed by rows of electric light bulbs."[1]

A profusion of light – conveying order, truth, clarity. Bold ownership of space through the transformative action of construction. Mastery of nature at the hands of man. From the gilded spires of high-rise buildings to the shimmering, multi-colored depths of the Moscow metropolitan, this iconographic environment was the total landscape of Soviet architecture portrayed in *Arhitectura R.P.R.* during the magazine's first three years of post-war publication.

Both Soviet architecture model and the method underpinning it were intensively promoted in a bid to ensure professional adherence to Socialist Realism by contextualizing political rhetoric through the medium of specialist publications. During this time, approximately 28% of *Arhitectura*'s content was devoted to Socialist Realism[2]. Articles ran the gamut from ideologically effervescent to aridly technical, including a few academic efforts to acquaint readers with the actual theory. But it was quotes like Rudnev's which best conveyed the incongruities of a strategy with destabilizing effects for the introduction of Socialist Realism to Romanian architecture.

As suggested by the period's theoretical works and architectural production, a campaign running in the country's sole architecture magazine elicited less critical engagement than desired. This phenomenon – present, with local variation, throughout the satellite countries – had multiple, inter-connected causes. An ailing post-war economy channeled resources into industrial development, to the detriment of housing and socio-cultural programs. The professional milieu fostered split attitudes towards the method, precluding the emergence of a consistent position, while political censorship limited opportunity for debate. Nonexistent Party directives on the official direction of Romanian architecture up until 1952, doubled by the completion of pre-war designs, hinted at a possible rekindling of modernism. These issues and many others belonging to the problematic of socialist Romanian architecture have already been addressed[3].

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1   I. Rudnev, "Succesele arhitecturii sovietice" [The Successes of Soviet Architecture], *Arhitectura R.P.R.*, 2-3 (1950): 67-68.

2   *Arhitectura* published 157 articles between 1950 and 1952 (excluding purely propagandistic articles, bibliographies, news, etc.); 45 focused on Socialist Realism in either theory or practice, abroad or in Romania.

3   Excellent studies on the subject include: Ana-Maria Zahariade, *Arhitectura în proiectul comunist. România 1944-1989* [Architecture in the Communist Project: Romania 1944-1989], (Bucharest: Simetria, 2011), Augustin Ioan, *Modern Architecture and the Totalitarian Project: A Romanian Case Study,* (Bucharest: Institutul Cultural Român, 2009), and Miruna

This article focuses on the contrast between the theoretical permissiveness of Socialist Realism (as promoted in *Arhitectura*) and mandatory deference, in practice, to the Soviet architecture canon, which clashed with local conditions to further destabilize the discourse. From 1950 to 1952, this contrast was evident in *Arhitectura R.P.R.*, whose triple function of channel for political propaganda, medium for professional information and quasi-critical-forum conferred it an important role in the post-war development of Romanian architecture. Despite heavy exposure, the Socialist Realism emerging from the pages of the magazine was little elucidated, and perhaps even less understood. The method's conceptual core, apt to fertilize practice through professional debate, was irrevocably lost in translation. As presented in *Arhitectura*, Socialist Realist theory alluded to a flexibility predating stylistic canonization under Stalin. Practical application, however, was to be mandatorily anchored in the present, and emulate recent Soviet works.

Most articles by Romanian architects touted ideology and political jargon, using terms sourced from Soviet theory as abstractions with little formal implication. Texts by Russian architects targeted a Russian professional audience[4] (needing no further clarification of implicitly understood concepts), or specialist magazines abroad, promoting model over method, and Soviet buildings over design processes. In both cases, an essential part of the initial intended message disappeared via casting into an architectural language indebted to Russian architectural precedents and cultural sensibility. Consequently, *Arhitectura*'s promotion of Socialist Realism reinforced deference to the Soviet architecture model, rather than encouraged debate and a critical adaptation of the method's core tenets to local architectural context.

Was the absence of critical response to the introduction of Socialist Realism due to the closed nature of the discourse[5] at the beginning of the 1950s? Even in fledgling socialist systems undergoing sovietization[6], the political discourse displacing professional critique could be marginally subverted. By perpetuating it in ritualized form, professional practice enabled "the emergence of diverse, multiple, and unpredictable meanings […] including those that did not correspond to the constative meanings of authoritative discourse."[7] Clearly understood and engaged with, even the strictest of rules can be creatively speculated, as suggested by the Socialist Realism architecture of countries with strong classical traditions (Poland, Hungary), or republics of the USSR (Georgia, Armenia) where it yielded small-scale fusions with traditional architecture.

Even though *Arhitectura*'s Socialist Realism campaign stretched until the publication of Khrushchev's "All-union conference of builders" speech[8], the timeframe for this study is 1950-1952 – for three reasons. 1952 is the half-way mark for the approximate span of Romanian Socialist Realism. Endorsed since 1947 (mostly through oblique Party instructions), it survived Khrushchev's denunciation for another three years, for political and practical reasons[9]. At this point, possible debates following *Arhitectura*'s campaign should have been channeled into

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Paula Stroe, "Locuirea – între proiect și decizie politică. România 1954-1966" [Housing – Between Design and Political Decision. Romania, 1954-1966" (PhD diss., Universitatea de Arhitectură și Urbanism "Ion Mincu", 2012).

4 Translations from *Arkhitektura I Stroitelstvo*, *Arkhitektura SSSR*, articles written by Russian architects for *Arhitectura R.P.R.*, conference papers from members of the Soviet Academy of Architecture (Rudnev, Chernyshev, Rzianin, Mordvinov), and architecture-related entries from The Great Soviet Encyclopedia.

5 Augustin Ioan, *Arhitectura (supra)realismului socialist* [The Architecture of Socialist (Sur)Realism], (Bucharest: Paideia, 2012), 134.

6 Balázs Apor, Péter Apor, and E. A. Rees, eds., *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe. New Perspectives on the Postwar Period*, (Washington: New Academia Publishing, 2008), 5-6.

7 Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever, Until it Was no More: The Last Soviet Generation,* (Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2005), 25-26.

8 *Arhitectura R.P.R.,* 2 (1955): 30-42.

9 In a bid for power consolidation, the PCR had begun drifting away from the Kremlin, stalling the application of new Soviet instructions. Socialist Realist projects were completed (after cursory re-design to cut down on decoration) to avoid squandering significant financial and material resources.

practice. 1952 also marked the legal christening of Romania's etatized architecture system. With Socialist Realism as official doctrine applied in a country-wide network of State design institutes, limited maneuverability within the discourse was further reduced. Finally, a partial overlap in architectural discourses still endured: modernism might have met the socialist project halfway for an alternative take on the ideal built environment[10]. The Socialist Realism presented in *Arhitectura* will be analyzed on two levels: the utopianism of the socialist project, reflected via Russian architectural precedent onto the built environment, and the method's aspiration to historic continuity, reassembling the past into a progressive lineage[11] theoretically open to local contextualization.

Star-topped spires. Politics and ideology.

The strategy behind *Arhitectura*'s Socialist Realism campaign remained consistent throughout the Stalinist years, despite variations in theme and quality. Academic texts expounding on the conceptual problematic of Socialist Realism without illustrating the argument with architectural examples were oddly scarce – only one per year[12]. Articles taught by example, associating theoretical principle and architectural embodiment for an easier decryption of political directive and ideological jargon. The resulting barrage of articles pushing Soviet architecture as ineluctable model – with Moscow's metropolitan, high-rise buildings and Lomonosov University recurring in 40% of the articles[13] – effectively overpowered the campaign's didactic dimension. Representing a narrow segment of actual Soviet construction, the selection read as a demonstration of the transformative power, range and ambition towards totality of the socialist project: "the Soviet architect is, above all, the constructor of a city, of a cohesive whole, whose evolution is subordinate, for the first time in history, to a socialist development plan"[14].

 In addition to contemporary Soviet architecture and its etatized infrastructure, *Arhitectura* presented a gallery of models (cardboard heroes), assembled into a legitimizing historical lineage of Socialist Realism. Although the strategy relied heavily on Soviet architecture and Russian architectural precedents to popularize a new method, the authorship of published articles was overwhelmingly Romanian (89%)[15]. A handful of practitioner-theorists penned articles, essays and reviews, often referencing the same Soviet sources, and held columns for extended periods[16]. Even if 1950-1952 *Arhitectura* functioned as State-sanctioned handbook to Socialist architecture, it presented a unitary, but superficial view of the subject. Despite the constantly alluded to

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10 Attempts to merge socialist desiderata and modernist aesthetic were fairly common before WWII (CIAM, Karel Teige, etc.). In *Arhitectura*, modernist architecture (G. Ionescu's Emilia Irza hospital, H. Marcus' Filaret phtysiology institute) and functionalist planning (G. Gusti's plans for Hunedoara) still featured until 1952, with critique against modernist tendencies targeting buildings (image), rather than urban developments (space).

11 Ioan, *Arhitectura (supra)realismului socialist*, 90.

12 1,(1950) – Nicolae Bădescu's "Împotriva cosmopolitismului și arhitecturii burgheze imperialiste" [Against Cosmopolitanism and Imperialist Bourgeois Architecture], a 13 page essay on the tares of Western architecture movements, followed by an ideological re-education strategy aimed at architects trained before WWII; 9, (1951) – the entry on Architecture from the Soviet Encyclopedia, vol. III, 1950. An article for general audiences with a brief summary of Socialist Realist principles, such as the representation of Soviet reality in its revolutionary becoming; 6-7, (1952) – "Conținut de idei și măestrie în creația arhitectului" [Content of Ideas and Mastery in the Architect's Creation], anonymous article translated from *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 3 (1952). This is perhaps the clearest, lengthiest theoretical text affording some insight into Socialist Realism.

13 18 out of 45 articles (including reviews) analyzed these three developments.

14 Rudnev, "Succesele arhitecturii sovietice", 61.

15 Only 5 Russian authors contributed articles to *Arhitectura* - 11% of the material.

16 Arhitectura's main reviewers were H. Marcus (1950-51) and A. Moisescu (1952). Horia Maicu was the most prolific author among practitioners (4 articles), rivaled only by L. Adler and Z. Solomon (5 articles on Soviet industrial architecture). Other recurring authorial voices included architects Gustav Gusti, Pompiliu Macovei, and Gheorghe Curinschi.

flexibility of the method - never really developed into design strategies applicable in practice – few attempts were made to seek meanings behind the political terminology parroted back and forth, and adapt them to local cultural conditions. At its most explicit – summarized by architect Horia Maicu[17] - Socialist architecture would satisfy the material and spiritual needs of users (the Stalinist care for man). It would express the serene force, grandiose perspectives and humanistic ideas of Soviet society, positively influence the mentality of the masses, and depict an imminent, radiant future. Compositions should visually convey vigorous, dynamic progress, and be placed at the intersection of major urban axes, or on monumental river embankments. Detailing should be masterfully executed, combining architecture, sculpture, painting into themes reflecting proletarian life[18].

The primary dimension of Socialist Realism was political and ideological. A method of artistic creation in service to the revolution had to be ideologically active, to resonate with and further develop the psychology of the masses according to political interest. As a transformative agent, Socialist Realism targeted reality. Through representation not as it was, but as future stage attainable through the regime's visionary plan of action, reality was propelled closer to this ultimate goal, and restructured in its future image. As propaganda, Socialist Realism boosted cultural enlightenment, channeling the Party-guided, collective efforts of the masses into materializing the ideal socialist society. From a political perspective, Socialist Realist art was charged with the undistorted, effective transmission of the messages needed to secure popular adhesion to the system[19].

From conceptual core to artistic doctrine, Socialist Realism evolved under constant political influence, shaping the translation of method into artistic language, and changing the rules mid-game via meta-comments on their validity. Turning ideology into aesthetics meant the selection, from a politically 'correct' series of architectural precedents and languages, of a combination most suited to propagandistic purposes. Since it involved the professional milieu, this was also a space of creative maneuverability, either structural or idiomatic. Multiple points of view contributed to the nascent Socialist Realism of the 1920s, despite the regime's marked penchant for classicist architecture. As late as the end of the 1930s, Soviet architecture was (still) shaped through dialog, competition, and even cross-pollination between modernist and classicist idioms[20] (Fomin's red Doric, for instance), while a "richly varied and energetic architectural practice continued to develop".[21] During Stalin's climb to power, the priority shifted to assuming institutional control over the arts, making Socialist Realism more conceptually rigid[22], and stressing the propagandistic dimension of the method in detriment of its enlightening role. In the USSR, this limited space of architectural diversity within the framework of a gradually crystallizing Socialist Realism[23] extended into the post-war reconstruction years. From Arkady Langman's oblique nod to the American, high-power corporate style (STO building, 1935), to Zholtovsky's rigorously classical Sadovaya street building (1947) and the exuberant, scale-defying eclecticism of Moscow's Seven

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17 Project leader for Romania's iconic Socialist Realist building, Casa Scînteii – a gargantuan typographic institute built in Bucharest between 1951-1955.

18 Horia Maicu, "Arhitectura sovietică. Clădirile înalte din Moscova" [Soviet Architecture. The High-rise Buildings of Moscow], *Arhitectura R.P.R.*, 10-11 (1951): 12.

19 Ioan, *Arhitectura (supra)realismului socialist,* 45.

20 Anders Åman, *Architecture and Ideology in Eastern Europe During the Stalin Era. An Aspect Of Cold War History*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 53-57.

21 Andrei Tarkhanov and Sergei Kavtaradze, *Stalinist Architecture*, (Singapore: Lawrence King, 1992), 54.

22 Ibid., 35.

23 Danilo Udovički-Selb, "Between Modernism and Socialist Realism: Soviet Architectural Culture Under Stalin's Revolution from Above, 1928-1938", in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 68, no. 4, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 467-95.

Sisters, Russian Socialist Realism did enjoy a certain variety. In Romania, however, Socialist Realism was introduced towards the end of the Stalinist period as an authoritative instance of the discourse[24], without the same allowance for creative exploration. Ruling by example outweighed the need for debate and creative response – constantly invoked, but not actually encouraged. Consequently, *Arhitectura* disseminated a contradictory, bipolar image of Socialist Realism, focusing theory on the pre-war flexibility of the method, but referring practice to the superior model of recent Muscovite architecture.

For architect and historian Catherine Cooke, the transition from political project to aesthetic principle is a source of creative opportunity. She reads the purposeful vagueness of the instructions for the Palace of the Soviets design competition as briefs for functional and aesthetic requirements with no formal direction, giving professionals free range to cast ideological principle into architectural design. The right to critique based on ideological correctness remained a political prerogative. But Socialist Realism was, in essence, a flexible and permissive method, entailing a diversity of styles, constantly seeking syntheses between progressive elements (contemporary and traditional), playing a crucial role in the psychological development and enlightening of the masses with a view to increased agency, and relying on use of imagery with strong ties to collective memory[25]. Through political intervention under Stalin's hyper-centralized regime, the method gradually lost most of its original conceptual flexibility.

The following analysis leans on Cooke's "Beauty as a Route to 'the Radiant Future': Responses of Soviet Architecture" for an interpretation of the permissive dimension of Socialist Realism (often discredited through reduction to Stalinist architecture), in which she reveals the architectural opportunities hiding behind description-concepts such as *radiance, clarity* and *optimism*[26]. Lacking a crucial component (a filter of cultural translation), their partial presentation in *Arhitectura* made practice overly dependent for clarification on the Soviet architecture model, nipping in the bud experimental tendencies. Propaganda aside, a deeper layer of *ideologically active* Socialist Realist architecture targeted the collective imaginary via synthesis with the depictive arts. Through a symbiosis between architectural form, painting and sculpture, architectural objects mythologized thematic events of historical and cultural relevance to the masses[27], triggering psychological attachment to official architecture. This was the 'deep content of ideas' on whose transmission hinged the success of Socialist Realist architecture. Without delivery of political message - through culturally meaningful themes whose representation echoed local precedents with strong popular adhesion - architecture lost its transformative purpose.

Arhitectura sparingly afforded glimpses into the proper use of themes. The connection between 'deep ideas' (the victory of the Revolution), themes (storming the Winter Palace) and the appropriate blend of architectural form and decorative art needed for accurate delivery was never made explicit. The only discernible pattern concerned Russian history and the Soviet revolutionary ethos, revealing a preference for mythologizing historical events, heroic figures, or

24 Bakhtin likens authoritative discourse to religious dogma, demanding submissive acknowledgement and application without structural change or contextualization. Structurally finite, it makes artistic representation impossible without inventive subversion through social and professional practices - Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin,* ed. Michel Holquist (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981), 342-344.

25 Catherine Cooke, "Socialist Realist Architecture: Theory and Practice", in *Art of the Soviets: Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in a One-Party State, 1917-1992,* eds. Matthew Cullerne Bown, and Brandon Taylor (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 86-105.

26 Catherine Cooke, "Beauty as a Route to 'the Radiant Future': Responses of Soviet Architecture", in *Journal of Design History,* vol. 10, no. 2, Design, Stalin and the Thaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 137-160.

27 Ibid., 142.

concepts illustrating the transformative power of people working towards socialism[28]. Romanian exercises in Socialist architecture, however, missed the mark on themes apt to elicit 'profound emotional responses', by referencing traditional *architecture* – a second mythologization of an already built mythology[29]. While context-appropriate, this selection excluded historical events and characters, along with, it could be argued, a chance to appeal to the (non-professional) collective imaginary. It is debatable whether this stemmed from deliberate avoidance of the figurativity inherent to the architecture-arts synthesis, or simply from a lack of themes acceptable to the recently instated regime. Still, the use of decoration sourced from traditional architecture did little for the appeal of socialist buildings – other than, perhaps, stripping them of cultural significance and impact.

For Cooke, the *originality* of Socialist Realism meant, simultaneously, innovation, contextuality, and distinctiveness. Innovation relied on critical assimilation of progressive instances of European architectural heritage, re-structured around a mandatory socialist content into new imagery – without falling into pastiche. Original architectural objects were distinctive images (*obrazy*), whose clarity of form and meaning blended, in the mind of the audience, cultural heritage and socialist order[30]. Developing the aesthetic sensibilities and political consciousness of the masses through architecture demanded cultural and ideological contextuality. Therefore, Socialist Realism emphasized façades as essential for an iconographic urban space born from socialist accomplishment and, where appropriately progressive, historical continuity. As visual legitimation of the system, however, architecture could lose originality to ideological correctness. The assignation of architectural command, followed by design with political consultancy, often favored projects matching the Party's (fluctuating) vision of originality in architecture. Benefiting from intensive professional mediatization, official Soviet architecture – such as the Muscovite triad – pioneered Socialist Realism abroad. But true distinctiveness and innovation, notes Cooke, could be found in the use of space, scale and decoration of mass-built Socialist architecture, such as cvartals. A vibrant layer of mural decoration (painting, mosaics, reliefs), lost to time, contributed to modest, but lively and distinctive *obrazy*[31]. In this respect, the transfer of Socialist Realism to Eastern-European architecture through the strict model of official, grand-scale architecture dismantled the method's (potential) adaptability.

Future radiance and historical precedent

Despite constant references in *Arhitectura*, the *radiance* of Socialist Realism was easily its most overlooked (and misconstrued) tenet. Demoted to empty formulae sandwiching concrete information, radiance and its conceptual substrata slipped into disregard as meaningless ideological jargon: in Kurskaya station, the halls had a "monumental, radiant character progressing in crescendo […] flooded by light […] of a simple, sober, majestic beauty"[32]. As

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28 Abstract or personal interpretations were harshly criticized. Metropolitan station Botanichesky Sad (currently Prospekt Mira) received negative critiques for glorifying nature in the abstract (Anton Moisescu, "Arhitectura U.R.S.S. nr. 4, Aprilie 1952" [*Arkhitektura SSSR*, no. 4, April 1952], *Arhitectura R.P.R.*, 6-7 (1952): 44.

29 Fortified Moldavian monasteries (Sucevița, Dragomirna), Brancovenian style palaces (Mogoșoaia, Potlogi), and Walachian monasteries (Cozia, Văcărești) inspired the design of Casa Scînteii (Horia Maicu, "Despre folosirea moștenirii trecutului în arhitectura 'Casei Scînteii'" [On the Use of the Past's Heritage in the Architecture of Casa Scînteii], *Arhitectura R.P.R.*, 4-5, (1952): 9-14].

30 Cooke, "Beauty as a Route to 'the Radiant Future'", 143.

31 Ibid., 145.

32 Boris Rubanenko, "Noi succese ale arhitecturii sovietice" [New Successes of Soviet Architecture], *Arhitectura R.P.R.*, 1, (1950): 25.

architectural instruction, it was no less cryptic: buildings should be "optimistic, joyful and radiant, just like the Soviet people", and must convey "great freedom, dynamism, force and greatness […] the characteristics of the socialist regime"[33]. In Cooke's view, a radiant built environment "was both the ideological activator and the ultimate reward"[34] – a crucial ingredient of the future socialist society germinating in the present. As a compound concept, radiance carried socialist elements (the social priorities subsumed to the 'Stalinist care of the individual', or the present optimism prerequisite for a future, generalized bien-être), and distinctly Russian cultural elements, informed by historical events (a revolutionary ethos translated into dynamism) and collective psychology (a distrust of dissymmetry as chaotic formlessness and lack of planning[35]). Socialist Realism was a (never-ending) route to the radiant future, sometimes materialized with painful literalness in architecture[36]. In short, a global image of the society sublime *and* its glorified construction site.

Radiance had three dimensions – *totality of vision*, manifest in urban planning; *a realistic, humanist dimension*, mediating between the necessities of propaganda and addressing social priorities through flexible manipulation of architectural precedents; and *a mentality-altering interface of the built environment*, based on emotional resonance with the masses. In *Arhitectura* articles, however, the often-invoked radiance of socialist architecture rarely crept outside the literal connection to natural lighting, clarity of image, and the ease of perception deriving from classical, symmetric composition and schemes.

The space of Socialist Realism was one of (utopian) *totality*. From a global vision of the ideal society to urban planning, Socialist Realism strove towards a hierarchized environment whose spatial structuring reflected the irradiation of power from the Kremlin throughout the Soviet world. Following the 1937 reconstruction plan, Moscow's socialist transformation came closest to this vision. The city's radiocentric pattern and historical *obraz* (the church-spire punctuated silhouette) were updated into a large-scale system of well-balanced compositions (ensembles[37]), spatially subordinate to the Kremlin, but of distinctive imagery. Ideally, this total urban space lent itself to proletarian ownership – a well-structured, aesthetically pleasing, instructive environment, propitious to cultural enlightenment, encompassing suburban homes and administrative buildings alike[38]. In reality, it bound the masses to exterior urban space (squares, streets), partaking in the visual opulence of 'people's palaces' but barred from to the true exercise of power, practiced within by the regime's select inner circle[39]. A more positive aspect of this urban strategy - 'erasing the difference between center and periphery' - implied consistent, city-wide availability and quality of urban amenities and improved housing conditions, rather than the uniformization of urban space.

In architecture, totality required balance and unity between the parts of a formal entity, expressed clearly and simply enough to make it distinctive, identifiable and memorable. Symmetrical and easily legible, uncomplicated volumes replicated, at the micro level of architecture, the structuring effect of clear-cut urban composition, indicating the efficacy of socialist planning.

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33 Sourceless quote attributed to Mordvinov in Horia Maicu, "Despre proiectarea Casei Scînteii" [On the Design of Casa Scînteii], *Arhitectura R.P.R.,* 1, (1951): 7.

34 Cooke, "Beauty as a Route to 'the Radiant Future'", 147.

35 Cooke, "Socialist Realist Architecture: Theory and Practice", 94.

36 Like the light-flooded, torch-shaped pillars of the Palace of the Soviets metropolitan station, spreading into five-point stars towards the ceiling in an illustration of the radiant glory of the socialist age (Anton Moisescu, "Metropolitanul Moscovei" [Moscow's Metropolitan], *Arhitectura R.P.R.,* 12, (1952): 39).

37 Cooke, "Beauty as a Route to 'the Radiant Future'", 149.

38 Characteristic of the period's behaviorist theories on shaping human character through built environment manipulation.

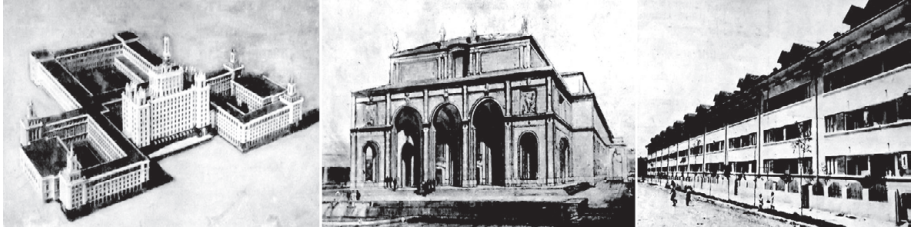39 Ioan, *Arhitectura (supra)realismului socialist*, 104.

Fig. 1. Socialist Realism in Bucharest (illustration in *Arhitectura R.P.R.,* 1950-1952).

Architectural vocabulary and decoration enhanced a building's 'wholeness' of purpose and form, merging spatial features and depictive arts into one cohesive, referential, ideologically significant entity. Compositional clarity, however, did not extend to functional explicitness (a capital sin of modernist architecture), and internal uses often stretched between distinct volumes, or were hindered by façade composition. Dissymmetry resulting from functional requirements unfamiliar to the masses produced buildings deemed "illogical and absurd in the anarchic development of volumes, triggering feelings of disquiet and disorder."[40] As a result, the systematic emphasis of symmetric, easily legible composition schemes gradually displaced the idea of unity as balance and distinctiveness.

Spaciousness was integral the Socialist Realist urban image, writes Cooke. Brought into Soviet planning theory since the 1930s in response to the overcrowding of use and function endemic to (capitalist) industrial cities, spaciousness harked back to the Russian country estate (*usadba*), whose system of low-rise buildings and courtyards afforded a human-scale, nature-integrating appropriation of open space[41]. Romanian Socialist Realism fell short of the totality of vision ensconced in urban planning, despite the better public reception of small-scale housing developments. The haze of post-war construction focused on heavy industry and a handful of iconic, regime-legitimizing architectural programs, rather than the socialist (re-)development of cities[42]. Iconic buildings strewn across Bucharest (H. Maicu's Casa Scînteii, O. Doicescu's Opera and Ballet Theatre), a few socio-cultural, infrastructure, health and sports programs designed in a classicized modernism (Băneasa airport – M. Alifanti, Casa Radiofoniei – T. Ricci) – these were the isolated foci of a future urban hierarchy. More extensively built, cvartals slotted into the built context of Romanian cities more easily. In all likelihood, the *usadba* influenced cvartal may have cross-pollinated with Clarence Perry's neighborhood unit and local, intra-muros interpretations of the garden-city model (especially in Bucharest), resulting in low-rise, low-to-medium density housing developments, popular with urban dwellers even today.

Socialist *realism* circumscribed several ideas: the depiction of an ideal-reality-to-come, serving as its anchor in the present[43]; a clarity and accessibility of themes and means of representation, making ideological messages immediately intelligible to the masses, without distortion[44]; figurativity and permanent reference to the socialist order; a traditionalist aesthetic, puzzled

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40 Horia Maicu, "Arhitectura sovietică. Clădirile înalte din Moscova", 12-13.

41 Cooke, "Beauty as a Route to 'the Radiant Future'", 155.

42 According to professor Nicolae Lascu, quoted in Ioan, *Arhitectura (supra)realismului socialist*, 201, socialist development plans for most Romanian cities, even if constantly invoked, were only drawn up in the 1960s. In Bucharest, the go-to development plan and legislation predated WWII.

43 Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 51.

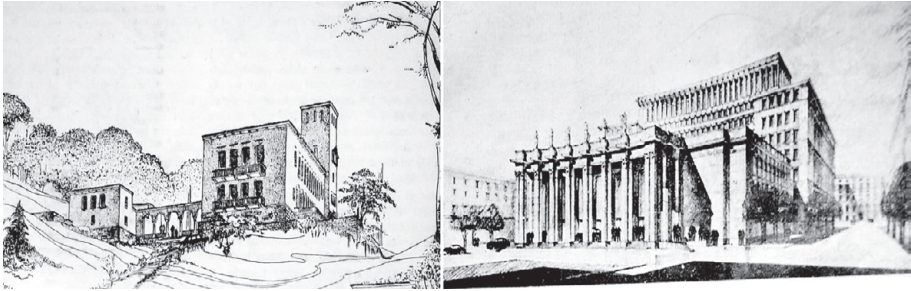44 Ioan, *Arhitectura (supra)realismului socialist*, 45.

Fig. 2. Inappropriate realism: local spatial precedent and structural honesty (illustration in *Arhitectura R.P.R.,* 1950-1952).

together from images and values historically proven to trigger popular adhesion, aggrandized to suit the heroism of the socialist project.

Cooke credits the method with additional, subtler nuances, derived from the humanism suffusing local architectural precedents (18th and 19th century Russian classicism): compositional flexibility, appropriateness of scale, correct tectonic use of architectural elements. Abstract, non-referential imagery could never bear 'a rich content of ideas', nor a socialist theme. Tectonic dishonesty (Novoslobodskaya station's pillars, dematerialized by back-lit glass panels)[45] was just as condemnable. Realism drew on local cultural context, whose traditions it speculated in pursuit of "new languages and new common myths"[46] – reductively transmitted as the 'national form for a socialist content' dictum. Bizzarely, exercises in Romanian architecture favoring local spatial precedent, like Henriette Delavrancea's Hunedoara sanatorium (*Arhitectura R.P.R. 8/1952*), were critiqued as historicist, provincial and "feudally mystical"[47]. At the same time, excessive structural clarity and less referential, but more economical types of architectural expression – Mihail and Tiberiu Ricci's Casa Radiofoniei – attracted critique for "barren, hostile" imagery[48].

In Tsarist Russia, humanistic ideals became associated with classicism under Catherine the Great's endowment of administrative cities with public, health and education programs, making the Russian neo-classical pervasive to the point of vernacularization[49]. Urban planning and architecture relied on simple, flexible compositions, addressing functional requirements in a clear, ordered, expressive language, reserving monumentality for major public buildings[50]. On the bases of classical precedent, appropriateness (adaptation of scale and language to use and context) had been filtered into early Socialist Realism. Gradually displaced by the gigantism and rigid schemes of late Stalinist architecture, appropriateness remained a theoretical desideratum with few echoes in practical examples. *Arhitectura* occasionally featured Soviet architecture from the 1930s and 1940s: smaller-scale, versatile buildings designed by the first two generations of the method's enthusiasts (Zholtovsky, Fomin, Melnikov, Shchusev), and scale-appropriate regional architecture with distinctively traditional features (Zabolotny's Supreme Soviet of the Ukraine, Tamanyan's Armenian Government House, Chiheizde's Chiatura Theatre – Georgia).

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45 Moisescu, "Arhitectura U.R.S.S. nr. 4, Aprilie 1952", 46.

46 Cooke, "Beauty as a Route to 'the Radiant Future'", 138.

47 Pompiliu Macovei, "Probleme de creație în arhitectura R.P.R." [Creative Problems in R.P.R. Architecture], *Arhitectura R.P.R.*, 9-10, (1952): 51.

48 Marcel Locar, "Pe drumul unei noi arhitecturi în R.P.R." [Towards a New Architecture in the R.P.R.] , *Arhitectura R.P.R.*, 1-2, (1952): 6.

49 Timothy Colton, *Moscow: Governing the Socialist Metropolis*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1995), 327.

50 Cooke, "Beauty as a Route to 'the Radiant Future'", 153.

Realism was bound to honesty, rejecting irony, deceitfulness or negation of tectonic purpose[51]. In theory, Socialist Realist architecture resonated with the simple, non-ironic mindset of the proletariat, and eschewed subversion (through alternative narratives) of the political messages hardcoded into the built environment. For non-iconic architectural programs less subjected to initial design modification via political instruction (industry, housing), realism as honesty demanded a correlation between architectural expression and proper use of architectural elements, avoiding excessive decoration and unsuitable monumentality. *Arhitectura*'s Socialist Realist architecture, however, had little of the method's subtlety of scale and flexibility: constant use as precedent of a few select buildings resulted in schematic monotony and an epidermic profusion of stylistic and decorative references, mixing socialist symbols and traditional motifs.

Insufficiently explored, obligatory, and collective, *optimism* was perhaps the most dumbfounding prerequisite of a Socialist Realism barred from being critical[52]. The socialist project had no use for art fostering individual perception and expression, ambivalence, tension, contradictions or doubt, as proved by the demise of the Russian avant-gardes. In contrast with bourgeois architectural expression - "sharp, harsh, technical… like industrial drawing" - socialist architecture happily merged with "the arts which best express man", sculpture and painting[53]. True Socialist architecture was positive, optimistic, and self-assured via the literally-expressed dynamism of soaring edifices (progress towards the promised, radiant future), and the exuberant polychromy of depictive decoration. Overused to the point of cliché in Soviet architecture, the simulation of vertical movement through a gradual, vertical narrowing of volumes stemmed from a revolutionary fixation with literally expressed motion[54], and the image of gilded church spires, deeply rooted into the Russian psyche. In Romania, they had less symbolic impact: a recent change in regime, lacking widespread popular adhesion, was a poor substitute for the heroic momentum of a (geographically distant) people's revolution, while the exclusive use of symmetry made little sense in an architecture culture equally inclined to dissymmetry and verticality to accent, dominate, or support complex compositional movement. Consequently, most Romanian forays into socialist architectural dynamics appeared forced and unconvincing. Maicu's team came up with several versions of Casa Scînteii before embarking on the design final design, whose symmetrical layout, once fitted with a soaring tower and 15 meters high gilded spire, met with the approval of Party officials and Moscow consultants.

Optimism through decoration linked users to built environment via lively depiction of the quotidian. A polychrome decorative layer adorned exterior and interior walls, transforming "enormous rectangular masses into housing that was indeed almost magically radiant"[55]. But the examples featured in *Arhitectura* focused, once again, on the metropolitan's stations, "crystal palaces, bathed by sunlight deep underground"[56], shimmering with "marble, mosaics, ceramics, frescoes and admirable reliefs"[57], and illustrated, to the best of the magazine's typographic abilities, in black and white. Optimism via decorative exuberance never truly manifested in Romanian socialist architecture, even for unique programs like Casa Scînteii, let alone mass-produced housing. Architects preferred subtle color palettes only discernible from up close – a possible nod to modernism or the chromatic restraint of classicism. Meager finances, technical difficulties, budget cuts and strict deadlines further reduced the polychrome treatment of façades

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51 Ibid., 151.
52 Maxim Gorky, "Soviet Literature", in *Soviet Writers' Congress, 1934*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1977), 25-69.
53 Horia Maicu, "Despre proiectarea Casei Scînteii", 6-7.
54 Ioan, *Arhitectura (supra)realismului socialist*, 77.
55 Cooke, "Beauty as a Route to 'the Radiant Future'", 152.
56 A. Cuprin, quoted by Anton Moisescu in "Metropolitanul Moscovei", 37.
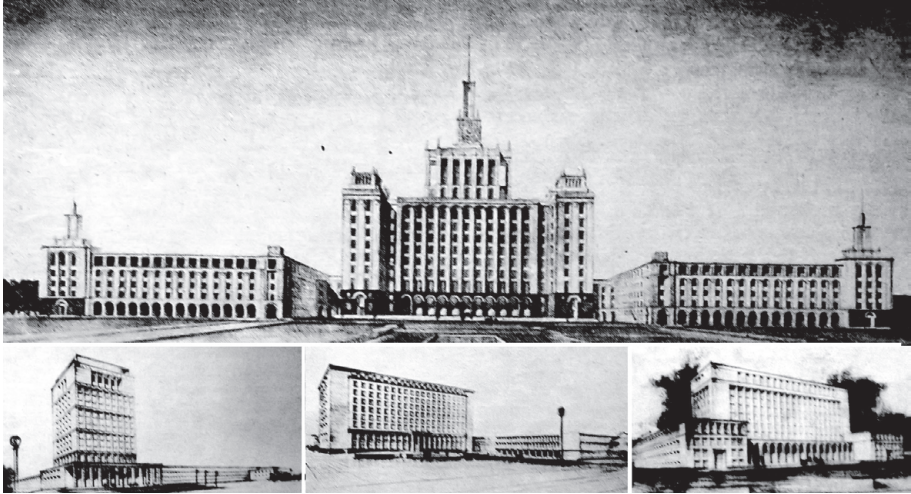57 Moisescu, "Metropolitanul Moscovei", 36.

Fig. 3. Casa Scînteii: weeding out modernist tendencies (illustration in *Arhitectura R.P.R.,* 1950-1952).

and interiors, despite the occasional incentive to ensure "an atmosphere of optimism and health" through careful detailing and use of color[58].

Cardboard heroes

Socialist Realism was conceived as the pinnacle of the world's progressive artistic heritage. Greek and Roman antiquity, the Renaissance, and Russian neo-classicism represented more than a conceptual and idiomatic thesaurus, reclaimed post-facto for the socialist struggle; they stood interconnected in a continuous heroic narrative, distorting or even rewriting the past.

The first 1950 issue of *Arhitectura* read like a summary of the magazine's content for the next five years. It also hinted at the strategy designed to facilitate the reception of Socialist Realism as unique architecture direction for the foreseeable future. The two-pronged approach of minimal theoretical exposure promising a long-revoked conceptual flexibility and considerable promotion of the Soviet architecture model was complemented by the heroic narrative of Socialist Realism's historical becoming. Hero depiction was archetypal, not individual. As idealized versions of the originals[59] and iconic embodiments of Soviet ideals, their representation was simple, clear, sometimes astoundingly literal, and improbably positive. Even the supporting imagery was collated into a perfection far removed from reality[60]. But behind the iconography, there lurked architectural precedents tributary to Russian cultural and historic antecedents, as well as to idealized aspects of a three-decades old etatized architecture system.

58 H. Marcus, "Arhitectură și Construcție, N-rele 4-11, 1950" [Arkhitektura I Stroitelstvo, 4-11/1950], *Arhitectura R.P.R.*, 3, (1951): 29-30.

59 Through use of ingenious tactics: fact distortion or omission, misrepresentation, glorification, exaggeration of positive features, concealment of negative aspects, etc.

60 In photographs depicting Soviet architecture, there is little to no overlay between people, and never any accidental visual blocking of architectural elements. See issues 1/1950, 1/1951.
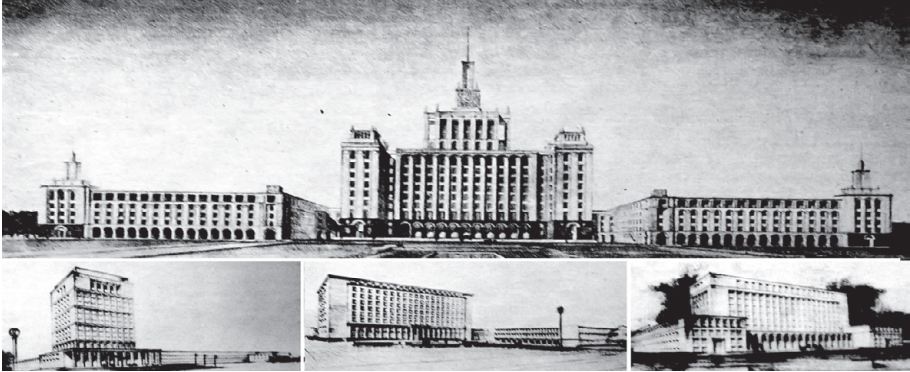
Fig.4. Clarity above all else (illustration in *Arhitectura R.P.R.*, 1950-1952).

In *Arhitectura*, Russian classicism prevailed as architectural precedent. Examples ranged from the purely neoclassical (K. Rossi) to hybridations with traditional architecture (V.I. Bazhenov), or local cultural traditions (A. I. Tamanyan - Armenia)[61]. Contradictions and misrepresentation abounded. A talented architect schooled in Russia, France and Italy, Bazhenov mostly designed for the court of Catherine II, in a Palladian or classical style. His few forays into a traditional Russian aesthetic[62] recast him as the precursor of a progressive architecture "full of national exaltation and the pride of his people"[63]. One of Socialist Realism's dearest compositional effects came from Bazhenov's Pashkov villa, whose wings interconnected through lower volumes, "making the ensemble lighter, airier, giving the main building more vertical momentum"[64]. Rossi, a key figure in the urban configuration of Leningrad, practiced classicism à la lettre, congruent with the early 19th century direction of the style. Tamanyan's work illustrated a successful merger of local architectural traditions with classical composition. Within the Socialist Realism narrative, these were referential moments of architectural innovation, unmatched in European architecture. Tamanyan excepted, the images presented in *Arhitectura* only revealed a confusing stylistic similarity with the general tendencies of their respective architectural periods.

The Russian country estate and its citadine adaptation were the unsung spatial precedents of Soviet urbanism. The scientific 'supremacy' of Soviet theory – in antithesis with 'irrational' Western urbanism, be it progressist or naturalist – obscured the use of historical precedent. In *Arhitectura*, Soviet planning came across as confusingly ambiguous. On one hand, social housing based on the cvartal model bore enough spatial resemblance to the small-scale, intra-muros garden-city developments of pre-war Romanian urbanism to allow application with a minimum of jarring notes. The model was promoted as exclusive, cutting-edge Soviet innovation, with no trace of historical precedent (*usadba*) or similar Western influences (neighborhood unit, garden-city). On the other hand, the planning of urban foci and major arteries shared, to some extent, the modernist ethos of free-standing buildings in vast green spaces, and of treating all four façades as equally important[65]. The two diverged on the scale and character of urban space. Soviet

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61 These Russian architecture heroes were featured in 1/1950 and 11/1952 - Bazhenov, 1/1951 - Rossi, and 10-11/1951 – Tamanyan.

62 The main gate, surrounding gallery and Figurny bridge of Tsaritsyno Palace, and Znamenko church.

63 Nicolae Sburcu, "Arhitectul rus V. I. Bajenov " [The Russian Architect V. I. Bazhenov], *Arhitectura R.P.R,* 11, (1952): 32.

64 Ibid.

65 Socialist buildings were dynamic, upward-sweeping, free-standing, "bathed on all sides by light and air, and surrounded by the green spaces of gardens and squares" ("Marea Revoluție Socialistă din Octombrie" [The Great Socialist October
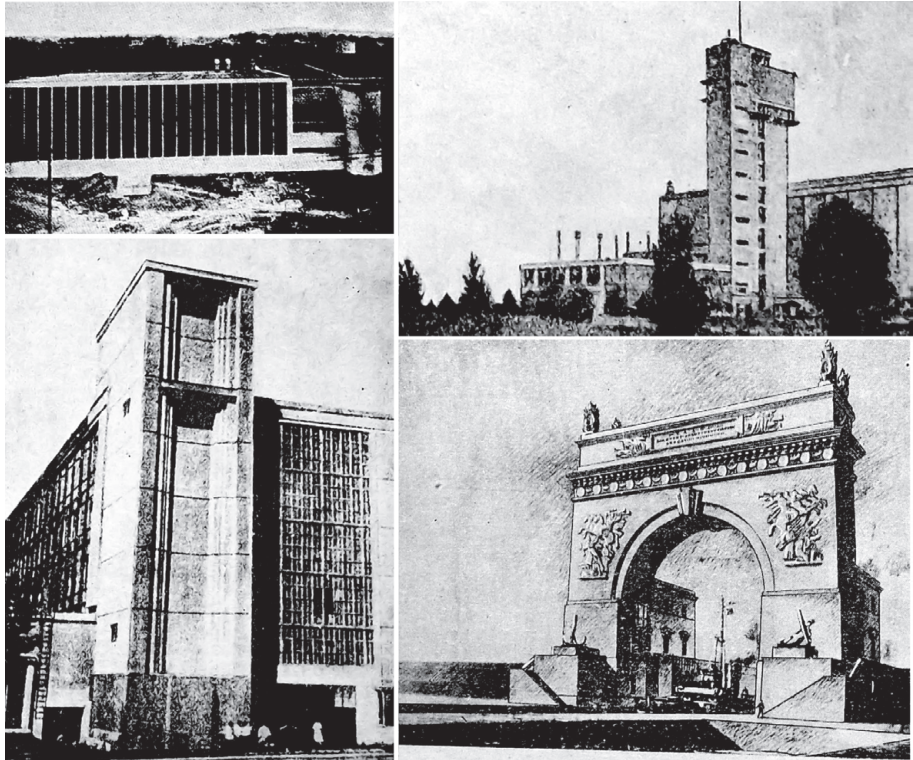
Fig. 5. Variety in Soviet industrial architecture (illustration in *Arhitectura R.P.R.,* 1950-1952).

urbanism favored monumentality (gigantism during later stages), and a building-front definition of street space, thought to reflect order and plannedness. Without clear direction, Romanian urbanism discreetly fell back on pre-war urban development plans, ensuring the continuity of urban logic after the communist take-over.

As for present-day heroes, the role of Muscovite architecture as imperative model subverting some of the more flexible aspects of the method has already been discussed. Until 1952, *Arhitectura* also promoted facets of an etatized architecture system: state design institutes, the restructuring of education according to planned economy, the benefits of an official professional magazine modeled on *Arkhitektura SSSR* and *Arkhitektura I Stroitelstvo*, etc. Far more interesting was the case of industrial architecture, a branch at the forefront of socialist development. The freedom industrial architecture enjoyed, to a certain degree, even in the USSR, was subtly speculated on the grounds of industrial-process specific schemes, scales and use of materials. In *Arhitectura*, five articles on Soviet industrial architecture featured in 1951[66] - the lengthiest and most critically interesting body of text devoted to any one facet of Socialist Realism. The authors focused on

Revolution], *Arhitectura R.P.R.*, 10-11, (1951): 4).

66 By L. Adler and Z. Solomon. Sometimes sufficing as political tribute to excuse the magazine from publishing other articles focused on Socialist Realism in the same issue (4 – 7 / 1951).

design aspects particular to modern industrial platforms, from urban re-industrialization to the complexity of industrial ensembles as ever-growing, adaptable mega-structures, and presented formal diversity as characteristic of industrial architecture – for instance, "using open industrial equipment in architectural expression"[67]. The illustrations ranged from functionalism and brutalism to the bizarre mix of industrial and classical architecture on the Volga-Don canal.

In response, Romanian architecture (tentatively) set out to create its own gallery of heroes. The pre-war coexistence of modernist and traditionalist styles disqualified most from any progressist claims, through association, from a socialist point of view, with exploitative capitalism or the pro-fascist tendencies of monarchy under Carol II. Only traditional architecture and the early, innovative stage of the neo-romanian movement could be fashioned into suitable architectural precedents. Ion Mincu and the first generation of architects who developed a synthesis between classical composition and traditional spatial or decorative archetypes were reclaimed for the socialist cause as precursors of Socialist Realism[68].

Symbol of the ruling class, erudite traditional architecture was initially disqualified, having inspired the late neo-romanian architecture of major urban programs and bourgeois villas. Popular architecture, much appreciated at the 1952 Romanian architecture exhibition held in Moscow[69], made an ideal candidate. Easily perceivable as 'progressive' due to its popular character, it did however have one major disadvantage: loss of discursive cohesion if taken to larger scales. With little architectural precedent to stand on, the early 1950s saw fervent theoretical efforts to repaint traditional erudite architecture 'progressive' enough for use in practice[70] - but with little effect outside expanding the decorative motif thesaurus. Designed before the socialist relaunch of *Arhitectura*, Casa Scînteii was the magnum opus of Romanian Socialist Realism. Of Soviet derivation in composition and spatiality (controlled as best possible by architects with solid classical training) Casa Scînteii resembled a miniature, exquisitely decorated Lomonosov University. The traditional architectural elements (towers, loggias, columns, arches) and decorative motifs used exhausted the time-range and geographical space of erudite traditional architecture, but had minimal spatial impact, remaining on a superficial, epidermic level. Instead of informing the space and composition of the building, they were overwhelmed by model-derived scale, proportions and silhouette, and reduced to cosmetic appliqués stripped of original meaning, even if masterfully executed[71].

Romanian architecture overcame this predicament due to three saving graces – industrialization, standardization, prefabrication - each given considerable space in the magazine either as built projects or research directions. From the symbolic nucleus permeating the socialist project, industrial architecture, writes architecture theorist Ana-Maria Zahariade, was able to elude political directive on technical and scientific grounds. It remained "a buffer zone between architects' aspirations to a certain freedom of expression and aesthetic interference by the political authorities"[72], a zone of experimentation continuing to eschew Socialist Realism even during the Stalinist period in favor of a modernist aesthetic[73].

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67 Ladislau Adler and Z. Solomon, "Arhitectura construcţiilor industriale în primul plan cincinal stalinist" [The Architecture of Industrial Constructions During the First Stalinist Five Year Plan], *Arhitectura R.P.R.* 5, (1951): 15.

68 Gheorghe Curinschi, "Ion Mincu, arhitect patriot" [Ion Mincu, Patriot Architect], *Arhitectura R.P.R.*, 12, (1952): 26-34.

69 Extensively reviewed in *Arhitectura R.P.R.* 9-10, (1952).

70 Curinschi's reclaiming of 15th – 16th century Walachian and Moldavian architecture in *Arhitectura R.P.R.* 4-5, (1952).

71 Studio tutor Herman Stern, advising a student stymied by the spatial and aesthetic contradictions inherent to designing large-scale programs in a 'national form': "Develop your plans and sections according to the brief and structural requirements. Then apply the Văcăreşti column or a Palladian colossal order onto the façades and everyone will be happy." (Viorica Iuga-Curea, ed., *Arhitecţi în timpul dictaturii* [Architects During the Dictatorship], (Bucharest: Simetria, 2005), 129).

72 Ana-Maria Zahariade, *Arhitectura în proiectul comunist. România 1944-1989*, (Bucharest: Simetria, 2011), 43.

73 Ibid.

The development of unified building codes made design quicker, more cost-effective, and propelled architecture practice into the economically-sound direction of standardized, prefabricated construction. *Arhitectura* devoted ample space to building codes, typified design, and synchronizing program types with the emergent industry of prefabricated construction materials. Once in full swing, modernized construction would slowly make the archaic building techniques required by Socialist Realism impractical and unsustainable. Socialist Realist architecture lent itself reluctantly to prefabrication, due to an excessive number of details and complicated junctions. Typified programs needed a significant amount of work devoted to finding non-monotonous combinations of prefabricated details that would not undermine the originality and optimism required by the method. The political focus on "prioritizing lower consumption of materials and reducing the cost of construction"[74], industrial architecture and prefabrication, enjoyed positive reception among professionals, inadvertently preventing Socialist Realism from taking deeper hold.

Health programs emerged as another refuge for alternative discourses. Supported by medical requirements, the construction and design of health programs designed in a modernist aesthetic continued throughout the period. Modernizing hospital space according to cutting-edge medical science opened up the gallery of models to German architecture, while housing and restoration were influenced by Polish works[75]. The development of programs answering social needs based on scientific, rather than ideological requirement, and the swiftness of heavy industrialization allowed a modernist aesthetic to coexist, unofficially, with Socialist Realism, before re-emerging - dubbed rationalist – at the end of the 1950s[76].

The future that did not (yet) belong

The image of Romanian Socialist Realism emerging from the comparative study of the method's core principles and their promotion between 1950-1952 in *Arhitectura R.P.R.* is not exclusively dominated by the tug of war between political control and professional agency. Censorship and deference to Soviet instruction were certainly real. So was the non-monolithic mentality of the professional milieu - subversion (via refuge in industrial architecture), uncritical compliance and, perhaps in the majority, genuine efforts to produce quality architecture by reconciling the rules of the (political) game with the financial and technical limitations of practice through talent, competence and common sense.

Romanian Socialist architecture was one of modest construction volume, inconsistent quality and bipolar expression (mass vs. unique programs) - a quick response to external demand, rather than an adaptation sprung from critical engagement with the actual method. A contributing factor was the miscommunication of Socialist Realism's potential for architectural versatility – hinted at in *Arhitectura*, but never fully allowed to transgress into practice. *Arhitectura*'s promotional campaign reveals a partial, theoretically cryptic and culturally un-filtered transmission of the original message, highlighting the distance between the method's pre-war conceptual flexibility and the limited scope of its local application during Stalinism. Architecture theory was under-represented, steeped in political jargon, and overshadowed by concrete examples from Soviet practice. The predominant perspective was Romanian, but one lacking enough information to unearth the conceptual core behind the jargon, and attempt a translation of the spatial implications carried

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74 Excerpt from the first five-year plan, *Arhitectura R.P.R.*, 5, (1951): 3.

75 See *Arhitectura R.P.R.* 4-5, (1950), 1-2, (1952), 11, (1952), 12, (1952).

76 Many architects preferred to specialize in design less given to ideological debate, and more dependent on technical and structural innovation: industry, transport, health and sports (Ion M. Enescu, *Arhitect sub comunism* [Architect under Communism], (Bucharest: Paideia, 2006)).

by concepts which were self-explanatory in a Soviet cultural context. Crucial ideas like flexibility in manipulating space, contextuality, distinctiveness, appealing to the collective imaginary through creative use of local spatial precedent, became secondary to the accurate transmission of propagandistic messages, which focused the argument on formal representation.

Socialist Realism strove towards a total vision of irradiating power and order at an urban level. In architecture, the original method had a realistic, humanistic dimension – an appropriateness and adaptability of scale and image to place, program, user, and an honest architectural expression derived from addressing complex functions in a clear, classical language. Through the dynamic, uplifting movement of representative building silhouettes, and polychrome exterior decoration (halfway between idealized depiction of life under socialism and the vivacity of popular art), the built environment was also liable to positively influence the psychology of inhabitants. Ideally, Socialist Realism was to be culturally tailored to each new environment and this was the profile emerging from the pages of *Arhitectura*. In Eastern Europe, however, it was introduced not only at a time when, in the USSR, the discourse had entered an authoritative stage (architectural language played decoration to ideology), but also as an instrument of sovietization, used against local spatial traditions.

In *Arhitectura*, this confusing contradiction came across quite strongly: a utopian vision of unprecedented scale, whose Muscovite iconography substituted itself to the permissive theory frustratingly alluded to, but inaccessible for a critical adaptation to the Romanian context. The use of 'national forms' reclaimed from progressive traditional architecture was inadequate compensation. Symbolically nullified by excessive, decorative use, they did little for the cultural contextuality of Socialist architecture. Until 1952, wide-scale, heavy industrialization and modern infrastructure development barred Socialist Realism from architectural exclusivity. Ill-suited to the technical requirements of industrial, transport or health architecture, it gravitated towards grand-scale, representative urban programs and mass housing. This helped maintain a duality of architectural discourses, transferring the modernist aesthetic across the Stalinist period.

The space of creative maneuverability afforded architects by the original method - and promised to Romanian architects in *Arhitectura* - disappeared in (mis)translation, precluding within-the-rules architectural experiment and critical discussion. Socialist Realism had two destabilizing traits affecting the emergence of Romanian Socialist architecture: a grandiose vision of fast-paced, total transformation of the built environment (unfeasible, and perceived by the profession as distant utopia), and a mandatory deference to a Soviet architecture model (built on Russian cultural and architectural precedent), working against a possible local adaptation of the method.

Grigore Ionescu's 1969 analysis of Romanian Socialist architecture was the first subtle critique of the strict compositional symmetry and heavy-handed verticality resulting from "principles promoted at the time"[77], somewhat mediated by the competent use of traditional architectural precedent. In 1982, Ionescu offered a more critical, if oblique commentary, not through text, but illustration: Casa Scînteii, photographed from the same angle as the image used in 1969, but this time, under construction[78]. As path to the radiant future, Socialist Realism had failed. The contradiction between the much-advertized flexiblity of the method and its role in sovietization, between reality-shaping grandeur and the technical and economical limitations of the period,

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77 Grigore Ionescu, *Arhitectura în România 1944-1969* [Architecture in Romania 1944-1969], (Bucharest: Editura Academiei R.S.R., 1969), 29.

78 Grigore Ionescu, *Arhitectura pe teritoriul României de-a lungul veacurilor* [Architecture in Romania Throughout the Ages], (Bucharest: Editura Academiei R.S.R., 1982), 616.

Fig. 6. Casa Scînteii: 1969 vs 1982 (illustration in Ionescu, Grigore. *Arhitectura în România 1944-1969*. Bucharest: Editura Academiei R.S.R., 1969; *Arhitectura pe teritoriul României de-a lungul veacurilor*. Bucharest: Editura Academiei R.S.R., 1982).

minimized the impact and practical application of Socialist Realism. The total vision of the socialist project would soon become reality, shaping the built environment on an unprecedented scale. Ironically enough, in a modernist aesthetic.

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