MAZZOCCHIOO

MAZZOCCHIOO
ideas for architecture

Mazzocchioo is an architectural internet journal born at the intersection of academia and practice. Its main purpose is to host the thoughts and ideas of contemporary architecture through texts and conferences.

MZCH#9
Reference, time and the city

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ȘTEFAN SIMION

Intro

In just a few weeks, Bucharest will welcome Tony Fretton and Jonathan Sergison, both set to deliver lectures as part of Mazzocchioo.Talks#9. Tony Fretton will travel from his hometown of London, where he leads Tony Fretton Architects and is actively engaged in teaching and lecturing, including his recent series of nine in-depth discussions on significant buildings of the past as part of the Architecture Foundation's 100-day studio. Jonathan Sergison, based in Zurich, is currently in Japan, in Tokyo and Kyoto, participating in a joint studio organized by Kyoto Institute of Technology and Academy of Architecture, USI Mendrisio. This 9th edition of Mazzocchioo magazine anticipates this important event for our architectural and cultural community.

Starting this year, Mzch.Talks' intention is to host two architects from the same country. We are deeply honored that Tony Fretton and Jonathan Sergison have graciously accepted our invitation. This initiative aligns with the growing tradition at UAUIM, where the initial years of study emphasize architecture as an integral part of the existing urban framework, valuing the city's architectural heritage, and placing significant emphasis on both individual and collective housing.

Our interest lies not only in our guests' projects but also in delving into their architectural passions and obsessions. We aim to paint a vivid picture of their professional environments, exploring what it means to be an architect in England and the other countries where they have worked and taught. Additionally, we are keen to hear about their formative years, the influential personalities who shaped their perspectives, and other related aspects.

Furthermore, we are interested in the interwoven discourse between Tony Fretton and Jonathan Sergison, a dialogue that has spanned four decades. We are eager to capture the essence of their architectural world, which encompasses not only their creations but also their friendships, intellectual debates, and the diverse array of ideas that have shaped their remarkable careers.

Of course, inviting them to Bucharest has also been a subjective act based on a deep admiration of their personal trajectories and their built and unbuilt projects.

I remember discovering for the first time the work of Sergison Bates: the mirrored houses from Stevenage were shown into a magazine that dealt with the theme of Memory. It was somewhere in the beginning of the 2000s'. I kept watching the image that showed the houses and spoke of the suburb neighborhood. It brought to mind a folded watercolor made by a child; yet, the colors of the house are different, opposite even. The photography was so powerful, conveyinga sense of familiarity and understanding about the house, even without feeling the need to see the plans. You could simply imagine everything – its interiors, the way of life that unfolded inside the two houses;even the neighborhood's atmosphere.

Tony Fretton's projects offer profound lessons in architecture, and among them, two have always stood out to me:

The Lisson Gallery, in London, is composed of two buildings originally planned to have separate entrances, to preserve their unique characters, with the point where they connected serving as a delightful surprise. This arrangement has gradually disappeared over time, as the two have merged into a single structure. The bigger, newer one, built in 1992, renders visible much of the set of Tony Fretton's architectural convictions: "making architecture thatconstructs a positive and operable realism from the circumstancesof the project and conditions of the modern world, and offers it astransformative experience". In a post-postmodern world, when architecture was undergoing a process of formal research, focusing on the individual object, the Lisson Gallery puts into place a series of small, finite plateaus for the program to find its own way of being while opening out towards the city landscape. This is a precise intellectual stance, extremely rich in reaffirming the essence of architecture that lies in its fundamental relation with the city.

A more recent project: Hampstead Mansion block. The plan, as a radical blueprint of the project, contains spatial promises, evoking the theoretical dimensions in such a clear and powerful way: urban life always takes place in a room, a room among other rooms (bringing to mind Kahn's society of rooms), projected onto the rich landscape of the city. Each room is distinct, atypical, as it seeks its unique spatiality, light, and depth. Yet, the essence of each room finds its purpose in the harmonious unity of all spaces coming together. The beauty and strength of the sequence of rooms, experiencing the interior enfilade that takes the inhabitant from core to façade

The Red House, built almost 20 years later, is located in London, in an area of architectural and historical significance. The sequence of rooms is breathtaking: first, directly from the sidewalk, you open a door and discover a small courtyard with a tree, that leads to the entrance hall whose floor drawing recalls the historic neighborhood; you can either move towards the domestic living spaces opening onto a luscious garden in the back, or ascend to the piano nobile into the lounge: a noble space, opening on three facades towards the city. Its purpose finds expression in architectural features, such as the beautiful interplay of scale between a domestic door and a slightly out-of-scale pair of bay windows. Above, the bedrooms are arranged around a magnificent, intimate roof garden. The facades

– resonates to the elegant traces of the surroundings. The project shows that when an architectural idea is radical, it can grow free of strict formal determinations.

Every project by Sergison Bates reflects a deliberate approach to working with the existing city, embracing its built heritage and fostering a distinct urban imagination. Their work, from my perspective, didn't demand self-contained completeness. Instead, it skillfully nurtured and enriched the sense of place, contributing to the urban fabric in a masterful way.

are adorned with red French limestone, and the windows are framed in bronze.

The project embodies Tony Fretton's vision of how a new building can harmoniously coexist with the past, employing typology, materiality, scale, vertical structure, and the relationship between the parts and the whole; all these are employed to poetically translate the program into space.

As Tony Fretton has said, he is interested in conventions, in the relationship between abstraction and familiarity as a basis of living inside the city. He pursues an architecture with character while keeping it open for future use and interpretation.

Having invited Tony and Jonathan together is no coincidence. Jonathan has previously talked about the important role Tony has played in his formation as a young architect, naming him as his mentor. They met, for the first time, in the eighties, when Jonathan applied to the AA and had an interview with, among others, Tony Fretton. "He left a very strong impression on me, so much so that I felt that if he was an example of what an architect could be, I wanted to be an architect too." Later on, Jonathan worked in Tony's office; then, at the encouragement of Tony Fretton, Jonathan instigated a series of informal meetings to discuss architecture, inviting some of the most young, interesting architects of the moment: Stephen Bates, Tony Fretton, Adam Caruso, Jonathan Woolf, Mark Pimlott, Juan Salgado, Ferruccio Izzo, Brad Lachore, Diana Periton, and David Adjaye.

A last note here: both Tony and Jonathan have always acted simultaneously as practicing architects, also as teachers, writers and lecturers. This vast field of interest and dense lifelong activity is of most importance: practice and theory inform each other; the architectural project is entrusted with a much wider relevance: the morality of building the uniqueness of a singular place is strengthened by the act of passing the knowledge on to younger generations and, in doing so, by adding to the general theoretical debate on architecture and the city.

Maybe as a consequence to their double involvement within academia and the professional scene, also as a personal preference and set of beliefs, the works of Tony Fretton and Sergison Bates grow out of the respect for the preexistence of the city, paying attention to the evolving architectural and urban typologies which adapt to various social needs. Their buildings accept this rich modesty of being a part of the urban tissue and do not try to become spectacular just for the sake of standing out in the bizarre precarious contemporary culture that drowns in the short lives of fashionable images. Both their bodies of work resonate to a certain silence of architecture, understanding the ethics of the architectural project that needs to be a part of a bigger construct – the city and its vaster ecosystem. This attitude values the already present built heritage, respects the inhabitants, makes place for future generations and their new, possible uses and interpretations – all these without compromising the very core of our profession and the specific culture of our discipline.

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Mazzocchioo.Magazine#9 has been curated with the purpose of anticipating the significance of the upcoming conferences and acknowledging the importance our guests hold within the architectural community in Bucharest. To achieve this, interviews with Jonathan Sergison and Tony Fretton were conducted in July and August 2023 via Zoom. These insightful conversations, orchestrated in collaboration with our guest editor for this issue, Radu Tîrcă, lay the foundation for a comprehensive exploration of their perspectives and contributions.

Additionally, Mzch#9 endeavors to initiate discussions on key themes and theories that are significant to our guests' architectural practices, with a specific focus on heritage preservation and adaptive reuse within the intricate framework of the modern urban landscape's increasing density. In pursuit of this goal, we have invited a diverse group of architects and educators to provide succinct viewpoints related to the theories that align with the essence of our guests' work:

Janina Gosseye, a professor of Building Ideologies in the Department of Architecture in Belgium, sheds a light on the life of buildings as a reservoir of accumulated memories which become significant landmarks, shaping not only individual experiences but also the collective urban life;

Renato Capozzi, a professor in urban composition at the University of Studies of Naples "Federico II", brings into discussion the case study of the historic center of Naples and the different urban parts that have determined its structure over time;

Mark Pimlott, a designer, artist, writer, and teacher in Holland and U.K., a close friend and collaborator of both Tony and Jonathan, talks about the fundamental importance to the city of the empty space, a space outside the circuit of consumption, one disburdened by obligation;

Luca Ortelli, an EPFL professor with a deep interest in the relationship between architecture and the city within the European cultural landscape, problematizes the limits of re-interpretation of architecture in our days when the practice of dealing with an existing structure is considered positive for the simple fact of having been im¬plemented and beyond the actual results;

Irina Criveanu, an architect, urban planner, teacher and researcher in Bucharest, has shared with us a close look into the unique, real life stories of a typical historical urban island of Bucharest and thus bringing into discussion the theme of cohabitation;

Tudor Elian, a young architect, curator, academic and teacher in Bucharest, talks about two ways of thinking, making and experiencing the city: the planned city and the informal negotiation between private and common landand, in doing so, introduces the maidan of Bucharest, a very particular *terrain vague* typology that was structural to Bucharest's way of life in the 18th and 19th centuries and to its landscape, with implications into today's contemporary city.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude for dedicating their time and passion in responding to our invitation and enriching the discourse surrounding these important architectural concepts.

This issue concludes with a concise excerpt from Radu's Ph.D. thesis, titled "On Continuity and Discontinuity: A Morphological Approach to Bucharest." This in-depth research delves into the evolution of Bucharest's urban fabric at the beginning of and throughout the 20th century. Radu's study particularly focuses on the transformation of large, unused plots within the city's median ring and the processes involved in their redevelopment to accommodate increased density and functionality. His research, aligned with the themes explored by our two guests, illuminates the profound interconnection between architectural typologies shaping urban configuration and the broader, ever-evolving fabric of the city.

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RADU TÎRCĂ

Architecture, a shared language

A great deal of thought could be given to describing the subtleness of the work of Tony Fretton and Jonathan Sergison. I soon realised that my thoughts about these two professionals could not take the form of a flowing text, but rather a sequence of fragments (Note 1, Note 2, Note 3) about personal experience around their work. Thus, I might have a chance to piece together the way I see the plurality of their professional activity - from the complexity of the world in which built architecture is produced, to the world in which the idea of architecture emerges, all related to the act of teaching that feeds both.

Considering their contribution to the architectural ground, I think that a great number of recurring themes can be assessed. Each is present in their writings, teaching and design approaches. From a general but sensitive issue such as **facing the European city**, from the issue of **housing** to **public spaces and buildings,** they all take into account **the notion of scale**, **the pressure of density**, **evolving typologies** and **sustainability in the sense of finding and reusing**. And perhaps, the central point of all, or at least the most appealing, seems to be the relationship between **heritage and reuse in contemporary cities**.
The curatorial thought for this Mazzocchioo was an attemp to address these issues, **seeking a glimpse of debate**.
I'm grateful to MZCH editorial team for the invitation to develop deeper discussions based on our guests' contributions, especially as my thoughts about architecture have passed through their sieve since my student days. And with the mind of a 3rd year student, I recognise that this is a dream come true. On that note, I would like to thank Jonathan Sergison and Tony Fretton.
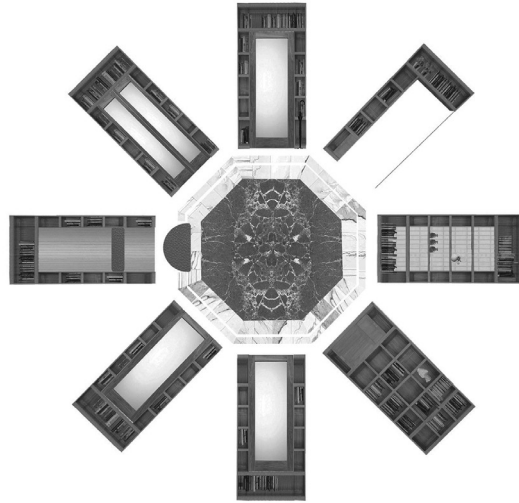
Fragment of 3rd year design studio study: the central room
(2015 - students Radu and Ștefania Tîrcă)
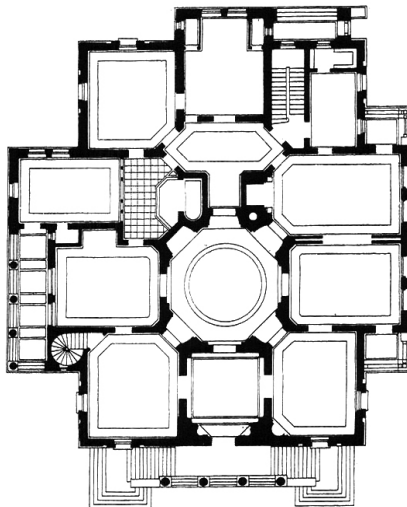
The powerful presence of a central room in a historical reference
Oprea Soare Villa, Bucharest, 1914,
architect Petre Antonescu

Note 1

The beauty of a plan | The depth of it | The clarity and the robustness of a facade | The strong presence of their context | The layout of public space as common ground of negotiations | The critical acceptance of the historical references | The importance of heritage in relation to reuse and the thoughtful way in which architects and urban planners imagined the european city |

The short enumeration above underlines for me, as a young practitioner and researcher, that some notions, ideas and concepts will never lose their strength and relevance. On the contrary. Such themes are also addressed by the main guests of this issue: Jonathan Sergison and Tony Fretton.

My first encounter with the works of Sergison Bates was in 2014-2015. As a student, working on what seemed to be a very cryptical and complex design studio theme, I think it always will be, - inserting collective housing in a specific low-rise historical fabric of Bucharest. The questions I asked myself led me constantly to repetitive moments of crisis whenever I tried to outline a clear idea: "How do I operate in the already constituted equilibrium of the historical fabric?", "How can historical reference be interpreted in order to contribute to the project?", "How could anything which implied a large-scale intervention be inserted into a particular fabric with a strong identity?" "Could historical reference, in a more specific sense, constitute a valid instrument for an architectural process?" and then "How could I apply it?". I enjoyed the task and somehow sensed a lot of of problems might emerge in such a context. I was seeking for something beyond conventional urban analysis, but I wasn't able to name it. I was trying to figure out how all the values I admired at last centuries built spaces could be continued in nowadays architecture. It was an intense searching and exploration for an answer.

I came across Sergison Bates' lectures, and I think it was "On continuity", which unfolded for me a new way of looking at things. I discovered the world of Tony Fretton, Florian Beigel, Caruso St John, Mark Pimlott, Vittorio Lapugnani, Miroslav Sik, along the works of Luigi Caccia Do-

minioni, Asnago Vender, Fernand Pouillon and so on. The long nights of reading and listening to recorded lectures taught me that historical reference can critically produce never ending possibilities and that working with historical context requires an ongoing process of introspection and interrogation, that is beside hard work.

Their architecture, writing and teaching remained a sanitary line for me. I immediately resonated with the mode of problematization on approaching the city and its heritage. From that moment onwards, I have sought out all the information and publications about their work, followed the ongoing activities at their architectural design studios (at Accademia di Mendrisio, ETH Zurich) and constantly enlarged the understanding upon their work.

Even from afar, I became close to a new kind of idiom (doctrine) regarding the architectural thought, that I wanted to be part of. I felt that there was a second school to which I could try to respond with my studio works. And I guided myself in that direction ever since.

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Note 2

I believe that the following text could anticipate and address the specificity and atmosphere of current architectural and urban concerns, to which architects such as Tony Fretton and Jonathan Sergision provide powerful and contextual responses.

It is quoted from Bryony Roberts' text of *Tabula plena*. As soon as I read it, I found it straightforward and meaningful for this kind of mindset, where architecture should be about measure and discretion in continuity with urban traditions.

The Pruitt-Igoe Myth: an Urban History,
independent filmmaker Chad Friedrichs

Corso V. Emanuele, Napoli, photography of Thomas Struth

A familiar term in both architecture and urbanism, tabula rasa evokes not only its ethimological origins in ancient wax tablets melted clean, but also more recently the clearing of urban sites for late modernist urban renewal. In contrast, tabula plena connotes urban sites full of existing buildings from different time periods. The phrase literally means a full tablet; a space where a density of previous markings remains.
Nowadays, strategies for responding to tabula plena conditions are becoming increasingly urgent. The accumulation of existing building stock and the importance of sustainability have intensified the need for reuse and preservation projects. What is needed - in discourse, education and practice - is an exploration of the architectural and political ramifications of transforming sites dense with existing structures. While earlier discourses on preservation and contextualism provide important reference points, they fall short of offering guidance for modifying contemporary urban sites. Despite the long history of altering existing structures around the world, the current discourse focuses on notions as protection and transformation of urban structures.

How could we respond to them, not taking into account the process of tabula rasa? Dealing with the existing seems to be at the heart of problems in architecture and urbanism today more than any other time.

An inspiring example is Professor Jonathan Sergison's work, not only at the Mendrisio Academy design studio, but also at the Institute of Urban and Landscape Studies (ISUP). In my opinion, multidirectional activities are an appropriate manner in which professionals should be addressing the current circumstances and the main issues i.e. heritage and urban strategies.

I am particularly fascinated with how different approaches, from the architecture school to the practice itself, transfer the process of analysing, understanding and interpreting the city as a central theme. It's a process that doesn't overlook any scale, be it territory, landscape or the intimacy of a single room. Complicated as it may seem, they seem to have found a valid way to comprehend the tools for establishing a common framework.

Note 3

Is reference a way to legitimize an architect's work?

Specificity versus ordinariness
Badia Fiesolana, San Domenico
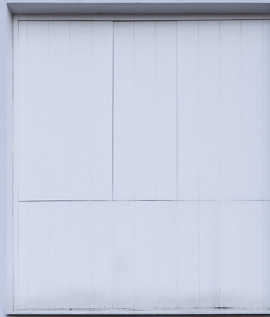
not old,

not new

SIX IMAGES

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HAROON MIRZA
15 FEBRUARY – 19 MARCH 2011

Images:

The Red House, Tony Fretton Architects
London, UK, 2002, photograph by Hélène Binet and Peter Cook

Groningen Apartment Building, Tony Fretton Architects
Groningen, Netherlands, 2001, photograph by Hélène Binet and Christian Richters

The Lisson Gallery, Tony Fretton Architects
London, UK, 1991, photograph by Nick Guttridge

Bethnal Green studio house, Sergison Bates Architects
London, UK, 2004, photograph by Ioana Marinescu

Hampstead mansion block, Sergison Bates Architects
London, UK, 2022, photograph by Johan Dehlin

Cadix harbour building, Sergison Bates Architects
Antwerp, Belgium, 2021, photograph by Stijn Bollaert

PART ONE: INTERVIEWS

The interviews were recorded online.
With the participation of Tony Fretton (TF),
Jonathan Sergison (JS), Ștefan Simion (SS) and
Radu Tîrcă (RT).

TONY FRETTON

August 4th, 2023.

SS

I propose our talk to touch three chapters: your formation, office and teaching. Let's start with your formation: how were things back in London when you studied architecture? Can you tell us something about how you decided to choose architecture?

TF

Well, when I was quite young in my early teens I wanted to be a painter, and by accident, I read an article in the Sunday Newspaper about city planning and a very adventurous scheme that was never realized in the English provinces. A scheme by a city architect. This was the mid 1960's, a time of fantastic optimism, and I was entranced by architecture because of its social dimension. It was a social art rather than a personal art. So I decided I would study architecture, and, eventually, I went to the Architecture Association (AA) school at the age of 21, which was quite late, after I had worked in construction. My family were working people. In the 1960's, the education system in England positively supported working people. All of fees were paid and I received enough money to live on, even though I had a family.

SS

So you received the money as a student?

TF

Yes, if you were offered a place at an accredited university, the municipality had to pay your fees and a maintenance grant. That has changed, and now our students have to pay a lot of money. UK universities are run on a business model.

The music of that period by bands such as The Who, and later in 1970s` Punk, originated in Art schools. My five years at the AA were very unstructured, which I found difficult, but in some ways, they were also a wonderful time of experiment, and there was a strong ecological movement in the school that pre-dated current attitudes. At the same time the techno-cratic vision of Buckminster Fuller was a very big influence.

Archigram were influential in the school in ways that I disliked. My final year tutor was James Gowan, Ster-ling's former partner and co-designer of the Leicester Engineering Building, a very intelligent, and ironic Scotsman. Gowan taught students of every ability and got the best out of them. A tutorial with him would include a discussion of the Lancaster bomber which had a geodesic structure so it could still fly home af-ter part of it had been shot away. At that time he was producing very strange, rather surrealistic buildings. He understood the role of irrationality in design pro-cesses, which I described in the foreword to the last book about his work. His teaching career was long and among others he taught Stephen Taylor and Ste-phen Bates of Sergison Bates..

Trade ad for King Biscuit Flower Hour featuring The Who, 1974

Buckminster Fuller, United States pavilion for Expo 1967, Montréal

SS

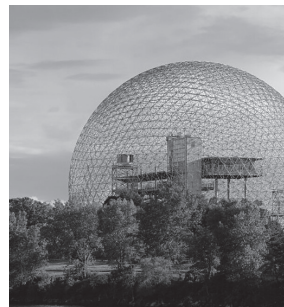So at that time, was the AA more pragmatic than to-day?

TF

It was a school of experiment rather than a formal architecture education, although we studied construc-tion and engineering. After a period of study, the very charismatic Alvin Boyarsky became head of school and under his leadership designers such as Rem Koolhaas, Zaha Hadid came to the fore.

The other candidate for head of school was Kenneth

Stirling Gowan, 1959-63, University of Leicester Engineering Building, Leicester, UK

Frampton. If had won, the AA would have been a very different, more academic and perhaps better school.

Reading your other interviews, I discovered that you had been a member of the performance group Station Opera House. I wanted to ask you if this experience was important in finding your voice as an architect.

TF

Working with them coincided with a moment of dis-illusion with architecture. I couldn't see that it had the expressive and enquiring capabilities of the visual arts I was looking at. I looked for a way to make architecture as capable, and I found it through working in performance. Station House was working with the same material as architecture: situations, paces, objects of furniture, and use but through their orientation as conceptual artists, were revealing their political and social content. I was able to apply that insight in a number of small architectural projects that were not built, such as Mute Records, and then in the first Lisson Gallery, and then in the second building that is better known and was very significant for the younger generation of architects such as Sergison Bates and Caruso St John. They and I and others from their generation – Mark Pimlott, Ferruccio Izzo, Diana Periton, formed a writing group called Papers on Architecture, to make writing by practitioners that reflected the emerging issues of that moment. Sadly that group fell apart after a year, but some of its members went on to become professors in European schools and to write from those positions.

Lissons Gallery, Tony Fretton Architects, London UK

I was visiting professor in EPFL in Lausanne in 1995-6, which was perhaps the happiest time of my life. There I met people who are still friends and with whom we still work with. In Switzerland I found a

very rigorous, academically proper architectural culture, which I also recognised when I later became professor at the Technical University of Delft in 1999. I had wonderful colleagues in Mark Pimlott and Christoph Grafe and together we educated two generations of significant Dutch architects. We hired the best young practitioners and academics from everywhere to work within the architectural department.

SS

I was thinking, of course, that practice and teaching are so interconnected that it's difficult to set them aside. You wrote in your monograph 'Buildings and their Territories designing, constructing and establishing meaning in buildings are collective activities, and that the skills of your colleagues are intrinsic to the work. I was wondering, has this plurality of voices been important right from the start, when you began your practice, or the discovery of who you are, the testing, is a more solitary endeavour?

TF

At the beginning, it would have been good to have had people who thought like me, and we could have worked as a group, but without being immodest, there wasn't anybody thinking like me. So, I had an office like everybody does, an office driven by me with capable recent graduates. We did that until, let's say, about 1990. It was a moment when I thought I needed a structure and I invited Jim McKinney who was working with me to become my partner. Later David Owen came to the practice and became a partner. Jim has extraordinary skill in organisation and finance. David is a polymath with knowledge that extends from construction to computing and he also teaches as I continue to do. We pass our knowledge on to younger staff; the office is small and undivided

The Public Interior as Idea and Project, Mark Pimlott, 2022

Oase Journal #101 bookcover, Cristoph Grafe

so they overhear all of the design and management conversations.

SS

So when you say tiny, how many people are in the office?

TF

There are five of us now. We were 20 about 15 years ago. Being a small practice when we worked outside the UK, you have to work with an executive office, who knows the local culture of building and legislation, and they make all of the production information based on our design intent drawings.

Holland and Belgium have superb technical offices, that are very sympathetic with the architects they serve. Because they work with a wide cast of design architects they bring very interesting technical knowledge to our projects.

SS

In various places architects say that this is like a loss for the architectural practises, not being able for one single office or architect to hold everything together.

TF

We do not find that, provided you have the right executive.

I want to go back to your question about collective working. My practice started to emerge at the time of star architects, and little by little, it became very clear that I rejected architectural stardom. I have always worked fairly with people to engage their talents as much as I could, but to lead as well. But it is crucial to recognise and promote your own personal talent. I had an interesting conversation with a young colleague at London Metropolitan where I teach. He said

Artsway Visual Arts, Tony Fretton Architects, Hampshire UK

something that reminded me of a moment in my early career where I couldn't see why my design was better than anybody else's in the office. My view, which I gave to my colleague is that among architects only a small percentage have inventiveness and an even smaller percentage of those have the strength and ability to form an individual practice. If you evidently have those qualities then you have a duty to lead. There has to be leadership for there to be architecture and there has to be fairness for the people who give part of their lives to work for you.

SS

What you're saying now brings back to mind what you said about the fiction of the city and to this idea, which is much debated these days, about the authorship - the architect as an author. You were talking about the buildings in British cities being made by builders and functionaries, work which is authorless because, as you said, like architects, they don't have a position. I was wondering if this idea of authorship entails a responsibility to society or to the self-evolving architect.

TF

If we only have authorless, or to say it better, uninformed and uncommitted architecture, cities are horrible. For any quality we rely on people who deeply commit their lives to architecture and are better thinkers about the built environment than everybody else. I should be clear about what I mean by a better thinker. By this I mean a thinker with a real and developed social sense, rather than an ability to conjure imagery.
We are living in a stage of capitalism that commodifies both architectural talent and the desired outcome. We can see this very clearly in the appetite of cor-

porate clients, leaders of cultural institutions and oligarchs for architectural gestures with no longevity. The outcome is cities like London or Moscow full of preposterous monuments. My mind goes back to a time, when design professionals used their scientific skills of thinking to make pieces of work that were beautiful, good and beneficial. Ove Arup, the engineer was a wonderful example of this. A great professional with intellectual authority. Underlying this, you need effective politics producing, implementing and maintaining, which was what Richard Rogers, a humanist and a political player of some skill, aimed for.

My office, like many others, is outside that realm of control but we have shown that quite ordinary work can be progressive and thoughtful and can work with two polarities: on the one hand satisfying ordinary need with pleasure, light, sun, and a feeling of wholeness, and on the other making a contribution to visual culture.

SS

You have designed an important series of projects related to art, besides galleries and museums. You also made houses and homes for very well-known artists.

TF

Our most inventive work has been made for cultivated clients who are sensitive to architectural creativity independently of how wealthy they are.

Private houses of small scale are very interesting in themselves and can be made to have a public presence. When designing the Red House I was thinking of a Dutch canal house or a palazzo in Venice, both of which are right on the public street, and reveal some of their interiors. The proximity to the street of something that was very private and beautiful has fascinat-

The Red House, Tony Fretton Architects, London UK

ing possibilities, and to think of them I had to look at historical examples.

SS

I like very much the Anish Kapoor house, how the star-shaped courtyard took form in his imagination and how it's been used after that.

TF

I can't say how he imagined it, only how I imagined it. I design aesthetic things that might become significant to people who encounter them. I seem to be successful in this. People say they like and enjoy the buildings we design, and feel comfortable and at ease in them. The Lisson gallery is quite an abstract building, but lots of people find it extremely pleasing. Mark Cousins wrote a beautiful article on the Lisson Gallery. He said that much contemporary architecture is concerned with angst as my work is concerned with pleasure, a rare phenomenon.

House for Anish Kapoor
Tony Fretton
Architects,
London UK

SS

I have another off topic question. I was thinking about the idea of composition and the fact that composition, as a method, has been recently blamed or, somehow, overcome. For example, I think Jacques Lucan has written a book, which addresses the way of doing architecture beyond composition and lists alternative strategies.

TF

Façade composition is very important for me. It is a means to organise forms and ideas into a visual story that can invigorate the world around it.
To make a simple analogy, façade composition is comparable with the way we choose and wear clothing, to keep warm and dry but also to project our-

selves into society.

SS

I particularly like, as you mentioned somewhere, this generous idea that you are happy when your architecture is open to use and misuse by people. I think this is very appealing; the idea of the open-building, as an open-oeuvre.

TF

That is what I hope, but it's very difficult to do. We and the buildings we design are shaped by our own time, sensibility and formation as designers and yet they have to appeal to people who will come in the future with completely different world views. My faith is in the conservative quality of building. Conservative in the sense that they hardly ever get knocked down and last a long, long time, sometimes hundreds of years, and they're modified by people physically but also in their imagination. I hope that the buildings I make have sufficient utility, openness to reinterpretation and generosity of spirit to last.

SS

Yes! And at this point, I think I would like to touch upon your interest in the history of architecture – as you put it, as an architect, not as a historian. I think it was during the pandemic that you gave these lectures that are online now, on the topic of modern architecture. I was particularly struck by the fact that you said that all good architecture has been modern. I wanted to ask you, how can history become instrumental in producing new architecture?

Westkaai, Residential Towers, Tony Fretton Architects, Antwerp, Belgium

TF

Let's say that intellectual history, history of politics or ideas has value in removing subjectivity from facts

and showing what really happened. But that's not the history that architects are involved in. Our history of architecture is something different. Instead of 'history' I should really say "buildings and construction that went before" that have lessons for the present time. Think of a window, thousands of years ago, somebody made a hole in the wall to let the light in and then put an animal skin over it. Then, glass was invented, but it was only available in small pieces and probably only used in churches. Later it became used in houses, but only with small panes and single glazing. Then, it became available in larger panes with double glazing and then triple glazing. Then, it became available in window frames, which had thermal insulation in the frame and proper seals, so that you can build a passive house, where you reduce the amount of heat loss or air leakage. So think of that. So a window is full of practical history, which can be made to be felt intuitively by someone who uses or encounters it. But the door of the house might remind them of something they saw when they were a child. As a designer, you can be conscious of the associations and emotional, affecting qualities of parts of buildings and, through ambiguity, make them the imaginative property of others. The attitudes I describe come directly from performance. For an architect, the door is just a thing with hinges and a handle that you can design to look in different ways. For me, it's an experiential object. The need for known objects becomes very important as we have to change construction and form of buildings in relation to climate change. Those changes need a comforting and credible architectural narrative.

Buildings of the past, Lina bo Bardi, SESC Pompéia, São Paulo, Brazil

As Stefan mentioned, we all watched your lectures. I think you beautifully stated that you are interested in

the term of calculated ambiguity in your architecture. Is there a certain relationship between this idea and Allison and Peter Smithson's idea of "as found"?

TF

Yes, if we mean the way that people use buildings differently from their original intention, then that is a valuable insight into the capacity of buildings to be used in different ways without much structural alteration. That's how I would interpret "as found". I try to make plans as open to interpretation as possible. The occupants of the Prinsedam apartment building we realised in Amsterdam invited us to see how they had reworked their homes. Some were very beautiful and others were bizarre but all expressed the idea of habitability of their owners.

You should make plans that are open to re-imagination by the people that live there while providing credible symbolism for how their building works in the city.

Prinsedam apartment building, Tony Fretton architects, Amsterdam, Netherlands

SS

Let's go back to this simultaneous activity of teaching and practicing. For me, it's somehow a complicated relationship between the two. As a teacher, you must allow the voice of the student to grow and, in doing so, you are open to the plurality of possibilities in architecture, whereas being an architect, you must get to your own convictions and always narrow the path you're taking. As a teacher it's opening, but as an architect it's narrowing. Have you thought to this relationship?

TF

As a teacher I guide students' individual responses critically to a programme and show them how that response can be refined. All of the programmes I set

have a real site brief, schedule of areas and a description of the culture of the building. My approach in part is to show that briefs need to be interpreted and how to work by designing and redesigning to produce a workable whole.

The projects I set are often buildings themes that I've designed for example the Warsaw Embassy and Camden Arts Centre. To do this, you have to go through the scheme and take out some of the reality, such as client interaction, legislation, politics so that the project stays realistic in some ways.

Then I get the students to make three studies in different forms, working quite pragmatically, so that they learn how height and plan shape affects the utility and appearance, and have them develop a single scheme from their studies. This helps them generalise their knowledge, commit to some decisions and develop them. Sometimes it is productive to put the scheme to one side and do some other course work, like writing an essay and then come back. I show them how design thinking can work. Design thinking is not logical. It's intuitive and, like all intuitive things, it has structures and realities, but it doesn't have logic. So, I get them to enjoy their creative minds by being unafraid to explore possibilities that may initially not seem good.

British Embassy,
Tony Fretton architets,
Warsaw, Poland

Camden Arts Center
Tony Fretton architets,
London, UK

SS

My question was somehow in this area. To my view, there's a certain trend among the much mediated architecture studios in Europe where, if you look to the student projects outcome of a certain studio, you'll see more or less of the same project, with minor variations. This might be the model of the student who is being exposed, experienced to his teacher's way of doing.

I think that your described method seems the alterna-

tive, where the teacher creates an environment of test, or even of mistake, of debatable issues. To my view, it's very healthy to have the courage to propose the mistakes as a teaching device.

TF

A studio being taught by a master has real value. Somebody like Hans Kollhoff would teach such a studio. It's very confined and the work does look like Kollhoff's work, but the students learn an enormous amount from it. They learn discipline. They learn a certain power of thought, so I wouldn't replace that with what I'm teaching. I teach in another way that shows students their ideas and how to develop them. Sylvia who I taught some time ago and still talk to, said "You have to understand that not everybody has your ambition or talent". I learned that you have to show students their talent, get them to value it and be more critical than they would naturally be. The UK schools educate all students as if they will be lead designers, which does not recognise the wide range of skills that are needed in an architectural office. When I was Professor in Delft, if a student found that they did not have design abilities, they could transfer to project management or construction architecture with complete honour. When my office realised projects in Holland, we met project managers who had begun by studying Interiors before graduating in project management, and they understood that design was a very important part that they could not imagine, but they could make it happen.

Leibnizkolonnaden am Walter-Benjamin-Platz, Hans Kollhoff Architects

SS

It's a pragmatic approach. Listening to you, I was thinking to the many debates we have in our university about how our school should be. It's the biggest one in Romania, having about 350 students per year

or maybe more if we count all the faculties. There's always talk of how can we perfect our university. It's about this ideal school of architecture that's always floating around us. I was just wondering if the search for an ideal school of architecture is necessary or should it be more pragmatic and more anchored into the real world?

TF

I'm much more of an idealist than a pragmatist. A pragmatist is somebody who will always do something that's expedient rather than good. I would always try to do the good in a bad situation. There's a great line from an American President, Theodore Roosevelt, who said "I did what I could, with what I had, where I was". You could see that as pragmatism, but in fact it is highly creative.

I don't believe in a perfect school of architecture. I think the ambition of a very good school of architecture is to be very aware of changes in architectural practice. ETH Zurich has a very valuable system. Its course provides a very thorough educational base, examinable lectures, calculations, building construction. There are good long term professors that are optimistic, not bureaucratic or difficult who run the school. Then there are visiting professors, for one or two years, where students' lives can be touched by wilder ideas. Most important is the political and financial structure by which a school is governed, whether that structure allows proper intellectual study or whether it doesn't. The British schools have suffered through the diffusion of neo-liberal ideas into areas where it is most inappropriate. Universities used to be places where internally they generated the ideas that spread out to the world. The system in the UK imposes constantly changing socio-economic ideas on universities. And, so, you lose intellectual

Tietgens apartments,
Tony Fretton architets,
Copenhagen, Denmark

power and the respect for intellectuals is taken away, which is very damaging.

I didn't see that in Holland and in Belgium, where architects are understood to be people who are capable of doing certain things that nobody else can do, and they're allowed to do it. These are factors in the formation of a school of architecture that are very, very important.

SS_RT

It's a mix of all that. When you come here, we'll show you and get into things more. Thank you very much for your time. We're looking forward to your presence here, in Bucharest.

JONATHAN SERGISON

SS

My initial thought was to begin with the early days, before starting the office and meeting Stephen Bates and Mark Tuff. How did you decide to go towards architecture? And maybe, you could tell us something about the architectural environment during this period.

JS

I always enjoyed art at school, painting and drawing, but it was only when I stepped into an architecture school I had a better understanding of what architecture meant and whether I really had an aptitude for it. And if I hesitated at all about what to study, it was between painting and architecture. I was accepted into art school, but I felt architecture was about more than personal creativity. I know this sounds grand, but I felt it could also be useful to society.

When studying for my A levels at school, between the age of 16 and 18, I'd been advised to take mathematics. I was told I needed it if I wanted to become an architect. I also studied art and history, which I've always been interested in. But those years of studying mathematics were horrible. I am quite numerate, but when it became more abstract, I really did not understand the subject or find it very interesting.

I applied to many universities in the UK, including the AA [Architectural Association] for the first-year course and had an interview with Tony Fretton. This first meeting was very memorable. There were maybe ten people in the interview commission, but he did all the talking. He left a very strong impression on me, so much so that I felt that if he was an example of what an architect could be, I wanted to be an architect too.

In the end, I couldn't afford to go to the AA at that point. I found that there was another art school in the UK that had a course in architecture, and that was Canterbury. It really suited me, and I felt that an art school was a good environment to study architecture. I liked being surrounded by painters and sculptors and graphic designers…

Studying in Canterbury meant that I wouldn't live at home in London, where I grew up, which seemed like a good idea, as well. Not that I had a problem with my family, I just felt I needed space. So that's how it began. Intuitively, I felt that this was the sort of thing I wanted to do. When I started studying architecture, it quickly became clear that I'd made the right choice. I know this can be construed as a lack of modesty but having entered the school with very low A level results, I did very well at architecture school.

Canterbury was a good place to start my education. At the time there was a tension between a re-evaluation of Modernism and the impact of Postmodernism, which was quite interesting. Figures like Aldo Rossi were discussed, Stirling was also very important to many of the teachers, and certainly to me as a student. James Gowan came and gave a lecture, which I remember fondly. I also met Florian Beigel as a guest teacher, who was a very important teacher at the North London School and subsequently became an even bigger influence on me and my generation of London architects. He was brilliant and supportive.

Half Moon Theatre,
Florian Beigel, 1985

Then, after I graduated, I worked for David Chipperfield for a year, when his office was almost as many people as we are now on the screen [three]. And then I reapplied to the AA and was accepted again. There was one person there I really wanted to study with, Rodrigo Perez de Arce, and I was fortunate to do this for two years.

SS

That happened in the 80s, right?

JS

Yes, I started my studies in 1983 and I finished in 1989.

SS

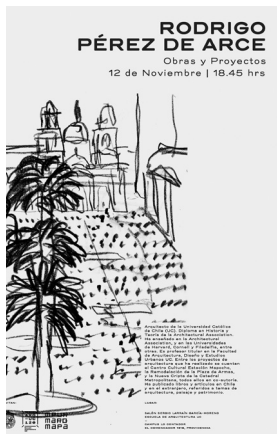So, you reapplied to the AA, and eventually studied there?

JS

Yes. I was at the AA between 1987 and 1989, when I graduated. As a school at the time, it was very competitive. I found it very stressful. I've never experienced the kind of stress I felt in the last year of my studies again in my entire career. It was a place of many egos and tremendous pressure and ambition. I'm not sure it was a very productive environment…

SS

From afar, it seems to emphasise a rather conceptual or experimental method, rather than a pragmatic approach. But I have not had the experience of studying there.

Poster of Rodrigo Perez de Arce conference Obras y Proyectors

JS

I would completely agree with you. The reason I wanted to study there was Rodrigo Perez de Arce. He had been teaching there for 15 years. This was the period just before he went back to Chile where he was from. At the time he had a fascination for Iberian architecture. We went to Spain and Portugal twice with him. He was a brilliant teacher for me – and he still is, back in Santiago de Chile. We talked about building and situated the work within a wider understanding of the culture of architecture. That was unusual at the

school then.

Later, in the 1990s, Mohsen Mostafavi invited me to teach in the school. He was a great educator and good head of school, in my opinion.

The cultural programme he brought to the school was all about building, and he gave a lot of attention to Swiss production, and figures like Marcel Meili and Roger Diener who both gave wonderful lectures. He curated an exhibition on Peter Zumthor, which included a lecture and a catalogue, and published a beautiful book on Peter Märkli, who was almost unknown at the time.

When he asked me to teach at the AA, I was quite young. I taught with Rosamund Diamond and Mark Pimlott. Afterwards, Stephen and I taught there for a few years, but it wasn't really such a pleasure. Somehow, there was a lack of generosity. There were some wonderful people in the school, and a few rather unpleasant ones. In time Stephen and I came to realise that there were better schools to teach the things that interested us.

Barcelona bookcover, Liebman Villavecchia, Quart Verlag

SS

When did you meet Stephen Bates?

JS

I was working for David Chipperfield and Stephen had studied with him at the Royal College of Art in London. David was one of his tutors. When he graduated, David rather informally offered him a job, but he wanted to go to Barcelona, which was at the time a very interesting scene. Stephen worked there with Liebman Villavecchia for a year. When he returned, he came to the office, to see if the offer of a job was still a possibility. It wasn't, there wasn't much work at the time… But I remember Stephen coming into the office, and we started talking. I knew of someone that

Casa Sant Llorenc, Liebman Villavecchia, 2016

was looking to employ an architect and put them in touch. It was the beginning of a collaboration that is now 32 years old. It began with us meeting and talking, and at some point, agreed that it might be interesting to do a competition together.

SS

And that was the public house in Walsall?

JS

It was five years before that. It was a competition for an arts and crafts pavilion for a Welsh annual festival of culture, and it was the first competition we did together. To our utter surprise and confusion, we won it. While Stephen was quite happy to leave the office he was working for, for me it was a bit of a dilemma because I liked working with David Chipperfield and I knew I couldn't work on this project and work for David at the same time. Eventually, I took the bold decision to leave the studio, and did so on good terms. We worked on this project in Wales for a while and on other small projects.

Both of us felt that we weren't quite ready for practice. I did quite a bit of teaching at that time and still worked on and off for David Chipperfield and Tony Fretton. Stephen got a job and worked in a very professional office and learned a lot about building and contracts.

In 1995 at the encouragement of Tony Fretton, I instigated a series of meetings to bring together a number of people I knew in London. Every Sunday morning, we would meet in my apartment in Bloomsbury and talk about architecture. After a few meetings, what emerged was the ambition to make a journal. Each Sunday one of us would write a paper and present it, and the discussions were quite intense, questioning almost every sentence, which would mean the paper

would need to be rewritten.

The people who frequently attended these informal meetings include Stephen Bates, Tony Fretton, Adam Caruso, Jonathan Woolf, Mark Pimlott, Juan Salgado, Ferruccio Izzo, Brad Lachore, Diana Periton, and David Adjaye. Looking back, they were some of the most interesting architects in London at the time. There were others, of course, practices like East and Muf, that I got to know later.

SS

How long did you have these meetings?

JS

We met for approximately 18 months, generally although not always, every week.

RT

And did Peter St John also come?

JS

No. Peter said that he'd rather be with his family on Sunday mornings and that was non-negotiable. Irene Scalbert attended once and upset Tony Fretton so much that the stool he was sitting on collapsed.

Unfortunately, I don't know what happened to the recordings we made of these meetings. They were on cassette tapes and got lost at some point, along with the papers. A few years ago, someone tried to print the papers, but it proved impossible to pull everything together. Stephen and I look back on this time quite fondly. It helped us to formulate our position and it was the beginning of our engagement with writing.

The most tangible output of the group was an exhibition at the Architecture Foundation, which at the time was in the Economist Building by Alison and Peter Smithson. It was rather improvised, but I think it was

quite a strong exhibition.

You mentioned Walsall. I worked with Tony on his Walsall Gallery competition. Adam and Peter won it – and they later invited us to work on the adjacent public house, which was our first building.

SS

To complete the image of your office, there's also Mark Tuff.

JS

Jonathan Sergison, Mark Tuff and Stephen Bates

Mark was the first person we employed. We formally set up the office in 1996. We had three small projects and a few months later, Adam and Peter asked if we would design the pub as part of the masterplan of the Walsall project. At that point, we knew we needed to employ someone. Stephen had met Mark when he was working in another office where he was an intern at the time. I remember Mark started working with us straight after finishing his diploma at the University of East London. He turned up for an interview with a few drawings in a plastic bag… And yes, he is now the third partner at Sergison Bates.

SS

Just a final question on how you work. As Stephen Bates teaches in Munich and you teach in Mendrisio, and you have two offices, I am curious: how do you find time to meet; how do you discuss the projects you have?

JS

Well, before I answer that, I should talk about how we worked in the first few years in practice, which might explain how things have evolved. We would work quite intensively on one project, as we normally only had one project on at a time. Stephen,

Mark and I developed a method of working based on one of the many lessons we learned from Alison and Peter Smithson, the notion of 'strategy and detail', which we realized was an interesting way of developing work. From the outset we would agree a set of concepts for a project, and rather quickly commit ourselves to how it might be built. Stephen would produce drawing at 1:5 or 1:1. Mark would make the overall, general arrangement drawings, 1:100 plans, elevations and sections on the computer. He was the only one who could draw on a computer. I always was very happy working at 1:20 because it mediates these two scales, between strategy and detail.

That was how these first projects were developed and you can still see the hand of each of us in the drawings. Mark's drawings tended to be printed from a computer and Stephen's and mine were always hand-drawn. In time, more people joined the studio, we got more work and, certainly, there was much more computer drawing. We still draw by hand but not with the same intensity. We no longer ink drawings on tracing paper.

When I look at those early projects, I see how invested we were in developing a position as architects, a way of articulating our ambitions. I look at them now with great fondness, but I must admit it was fantastically inefficient, although very necessary, because we were really working things out. There was a lot of research, a lot of trying to develop ways of building that we felt were at the time sustainable and ambitious as forms of construction. Many projects dealt with the need to re-use existing buildings. From an architectural point of view, they were quite experimental. Also, we already had a great deal of interest in what was happening in other countries. We made many trips to look at other building cultures. Rather ambitiously we wanted to build as well as our Swiss colleagues, which, when

The Economist Building, Alison and Peter Smithson, 1959-1964

you are dealing with the UK building industry, was, and remains, difficult to achieve.

In time, we came to realise that the intensity with which we worked on these first projects was unsustainable and not longer necessary. We had developed a shared position, and we now find it now more interesting to explore projects with more individual freedom. This means that there are differences in our work, although I am not sure this is so evident to the outside world. Naturally we all know what the other studios are working on, but not in great detail.

Stephen and I taught together at AA for years and later taught at Bath, ETH Zurich, and EPFL, and more recently in Oslo and Harvard. In 2007 I was invited to apply to teach in Mendrisio. Within a few months, Stephen also got a position in Munich. He has taught with Bruno Krucker, a Zurich-based architect, since 2009 and after teaching together for many years, it felt healthy to teach separately and explore our own individual interests. It must be said the programmes we set are not wildly different. Stephen is Professor of Housing and Urbanism, which is more or less what I teach in Mendrisio, too. I am Professor of Design and Construction and, more recently, I founded a new Institute of Urbanism and Landscape.

Studio Sergison, Booklet: Urban Pictureque, 2008, Accademia di Mendrisio

Studio Krucker Bates, Technical University of Munich

RT

ISUP [Institute of Urban and Landscape Studies - Mendrisio Architecture School], right?

JS

Yes, that's right.

But to address the question of why we opened the Zurich studio –we were being invited to do more and more projects in Switzerland. We had a project on site in Geneva, and we decided it made sense to open a studio in Zurich. I was in Switzerland every week

anyway, and at a certain point I felt that the studio needed more senior input. So I relocated to Switzerland with my family in 2012.

As with our teaching, this meant splitting the production of the studios. I am responsible for the Zurich studio and Stephen and Mark for the London studio.

I feel there are differences in the two studios because our work in Zurich is mostly based in Switzerland and responds to different circumstances, and slightly different interests. Most of the work in the London office is in Belgium. We also have a site office for the Kanal project in Brussels, but that relates to a specific collaborative project with NoAarchitekten and EM2N.

SS

You have touched the subject of teaching and I read about this in your very beautiful book, *On and around architecture. Ten conversations.* I really liked the straightforwardness of your first question, "Why do you teach?" Also, as we also teach, we often think about this. It takes up a lot of time and effort, and to be present in school is part of our identity as architects.

JS

I was drawn to teaching from a young age. Micha Bandini, who was a teacher at the AA and then became the head of school at the University of North London, invited me to teach with her. She said that she would help me learn how to teach, which is a most generous offer. Many schools have very young teachers who haven't had any experience or training. I find this problematic. In Switzerland this is not a problem, because teaching is quite hierarchical: there are students and student assistants, teaching assistants, and then professors. This is, in my opinion, a

very pragmatic education model. As a professor now, I feel a responsibility to teach my assistants how to teach in the hope that one day they might become teachers, too.

I found myself teaching with Micha, who also invited someone I didn't know at the time, Adam Caruso, to teach with her. That's how I got to know Adam, who just seemed so brilliant.

Micha Bandini

I was in my late twenties when I started teaching, and after my first experience at North London, I taught in Nottingham and Hull. Later, I was invited to teach at the AA, and that was quite an education. I think Stephen and I feel that teaching and practice are distinct activities, but they feed off each other. And the simple answer to the question why I teach is: not only because I really enjoy it, but also because I get a lot from it. I give a lot of time to teaching, and I take it very seriously, but what I learn from teaching I would never find in practice alone. Responding quickly to an idea or a proposal that a student makes and trying to articulate a critical response that is useful to them and respectful - that's not something you deal with in your own work. I've noticed that if I'm not teaching, I'm much slower as a designer.

Students bring things to my attention, and I learn from them. The students that I feel the most drawn to are always the ones that do brilliant things exploring their own interests. To some extent, my relationship to teaching is a bit selfish. I find that a way of working which includes teaching, practice, and a commitment to writing stimulating. It's a triangle of forms of practice. And both Stephen and I are committed to all three, and to this way of working.

SS

Yes, I fully agree from my shorter experience of already 20 years. However, if you don't discover things

while teaching, it's a sterile activity to rather mechanically disseminate your certitudes.

Let's turn to your architecture, and maybe discuss some theoretical aspects of it. For me, your architecture acts simultaneously on two fundamental levels: the room and the city [as in the title of Stephen's last book]. It's something we want to start this chapter with. I was wondering if you had any discussions or thoughts about where or what a room is. What is a room as a spatial entity, especially in this modernist approach of exploding the plan outwards and dissolving the box? The projects you have designed, from your earlier ones all the way to Hampstead, where the 'society of rooms' is varied and imaginative, have a rich genealogy in the spatiality of the room. There are so many types of rooms, and yet they're all the same, somehow.

Sergison Bates, Hampstead 'society of rooms'

JS

It's a very good question because it touches one of our core interests in practice, the making of rooms. I would argue that the room is not only an internal space, rooms exist in cities, as well. They exist in the public realm of cities, in terms of public spaces. The making of good rooms is one of our core ambitions. Another fascination is making of windows, because they mediate between inside and outside, and the way windows are organized within a facade is an element of urban decorum. And yet, the window also serves the rooms, as it offers an outlook onto the city.

There's an essay by Georges Perec we both like, *Species of Spaces*, where he starts with a bedroom – actually with a bed, and then moves to the bedroom, then the apartment, the building, the street, and so on. It's a bit like the Eames' *Power of ten*. What we have come to appreciate is an architecture that's made of rooms. The project in Hampstead you referred to ex-

Species of Spaces and Other Pieces cover, Georges Perec

plores that in quite a radical way. But, to some extent, it's indebted to a much older architecture. We have a certain fascination with northern Italian architecture from the 40s, 50s and 60s. The work of someone like Caccia Dominioni encourages and inspires our ambition in the making of rooms.

Villa San Valerio, Monza, Luigi Caccia Domioni, 1957

Our early projects were for social housing, where the space standards were horribly tight. The decision to have a corridor was a major one, because it doesn't help in terms of the overall square metres. So, I think that's part of a reflection about why we should make an apartment as a collection of rooms of different sizes. The pre-modern idea of making a home formed by a collection of interconnecting rooms is one we are drawn to.

The organization of plans is a core part of our work, particularly as housing is one of our main areas of investigation. But the plan doesn't tell you much about the spatial quality of a room. That's when you need to test spaces through models.

Both of us, in our different forms of teaching, invite students to record a domestic space and then make a model of it exactly like the photograph that they've taken, which is in turn photographed to record the space modelled. It's amazing how much we all learn from that experience.

We also learn a lot from revisiting completed projects. Whenever possible we like to see how spaces are inhabited and occupied by the residents. It's not always easy, because at that point these are private homes, but when we have been able to revisit our work years later, we've learnt quite a few lessons. The way people arrange their furniture is nothing like the way the plans might have anticipated.

SS

There's a project in Bucharest by a photo artist, who

went to one of these communist buildings, which are very repetitive. All the plans, from first to the eighth floor, are identical. He took the same photograph in each of the apartments which are of course inhabited, completely differently by each family. The variety of arrangements in the way identical spaces are inhabited was very striking.

You mentioned the facade, talking about windows and urban decorum. How do you feel about the modernist dogma of the sincerity in the relationship between the plan and the interior and how it should be represented to the city? In your opinion, do they still need to be true to each other? Or is there a certain freedom?

JS

I remember a project by Tom Hunter, an English photographer, which was similar to the one you just described, where he photographed different apartments with similar plans in a tower block in East London. It reveals how much of the atmosphere and identity of an apartment comes from the choices the residents make in terms of decoration and furnishings – the point where our work as architects stops and that of the residents begins.

I am critical of modernist notions like 'honesty' and 'truth of material'. in the long history of architecture, these were never so important. We like to work with ambiguity as a possibility in architecture.

There is a very old building in England, Hardwick Hall, which dates back to 1590 and does exactly that. It's a wonderful reference: from the outside it looks symmetrical, and the facade is formed from a lot of glass. When you look carefully, you see false floors behind the glass. The section and the tripartite organization of the facades are extraordinary. It is a building that demonstrates that you can give an impression of composition and formality, but then introduce de-

Hardwick Hall, 1590-1597
Derbyshire, UK

vices that help you make adjustments to allow other things to happen.

While it's very different, in a very early house that we built in Bethnal Green we used mirrored glass. We didn't want to reveal that there was a structural element behind the facade, and so we created a seemingly continued horizontal facade - it was a cheat. When modernists get all hot under the collar and talk about honesty, you have to ask, "is that interesting?" I think ambiguity and working with composition – this is where the artistry of architecture lies. I have never really been very interested in the notion of honesty in relation of construction. What does that mean for us, today? It's not as if we're building solid masonry walls anymore. Contemporary construction is very layered. I think it was an aspiration or an ambition that quickly proved futile. And even if you look carefully at the work of Mies van der Rohe, which I still find really moving, he was above all a classical architect. He understood composition and proportion and really knew how to build, but he was invariably pragmatic, rather than seeking some form of purity.

SS

I would like to come back to the phrase you used: "urban decorum". I was looking at your buildings and the attention you pay to how the facades are made, to a certain play of scales, and to the way the elements are articulated. Maybe it's wrong for me to use this word, but it comes across as a revaluation of the idea of ornament. Maybe the idea of room becomes even more powerful in your architecture, as the exterior is somehow dedicated to the city. So, is it wrong to use the word "ornament"?

JS

The notion of urban decorum is very important for

me. I think that, over the years, our work has been described in many ways. "Ugly" is one that I certainly remember. I think I've read "quiet" in the past, which I'm more comfortable with. "Boring" I find the most offensive.

I think a lot about that and the fact that much of our work is housing. We feel that a building that serves the needs of housing should not be spectacular. It should be decent. It should feel solid. It should not feel like an imposition on the future users of the building. I don't think many people want to live in a house everyone looks at because it's so unusual. Housing should, by definition, be a noble backdrop. It should feel like it contributes to the city in a way that does not try to make a statement, or work in opposition to what happened before. I always come back to a wonderful quote by Roger Diener, about how one house can bring order to a place. When you know Roger Diener, you know that what he says is sincere. And it's what he's done over his entire career - his projects always consider the responsibility that comes from adding to a city. The fact that a building serves a more public role is always more of a challenge. You have to ask yourself how bold or how quiet a project should be. A public building is different to one that serves a more normative programme…

New East wing expansion at Museum of Natural History in Berlin, Diener&Diener

JS

It is, somehow, the autonomy of the facade and how the building addresses the city, which is, of course, essential: the meeting between the private and the public. I was thinking about how important it was for me when I discovered the idea of analogue architecture, Miroslav Sîk's idea of a new building that seems to have been there for a long time – old-new.

I remembered this looking at one of your early projects, the twin houses. When I saw the project, I im-

mediately thought, "how can a new building seem as if it had already been lived in for a long time. The notion of atmosphere is very important. I was wondering if it can become instrumental in working on a project. Is it something you can name or articulate or, somehow, design? Can you design the kind of atmosphere you are looking for?

JS

In our work we are always searching for an atmosphere that fits the purpose, the presence of a building or an interior is at the core of our discussion. That is why construction is so important to us. If you choose to make something out of load-bearing brick, or from wood panels, the atmosphere of the interior will be fundamentally different. That's why I said earlier that to know what you want to build something out of is directly related to many decisions that follow.

It's great that you mentioned this early project – the twin houses in Stevenage – because we were exploring many things in that project. As Stephen reminded me recently, at the time we had a fascination with a photographic series that Dan Graham made, "Homes for America", where he documented ordinary houses on the east coast of the States. The brief was to make two houses that touch, a pair of semi-detached houses or a double house. When we worked on that project, we made a sketch that imitates what a child would draw as two houses. Our conscious intention was to make houses that look 'house-like'. That's why they have this almost naive kind of facade: it was the image of a house that we were exploring. And there were many, many other things in that project which we investigated: prefabricated construction, breathing wall construction, the notion of a layered form of construction, the use of Eternit tiles as a sort of fragile skin, how to achieve the abstractness we wanted

Homes for America,
Dan Graham

the corners to have and traditional forms of construction wouldn't allow. It's a good example of everything that I was describing in the early years and the way we worked. We saw everything as an opportunity. At the time we didn't know Miroslav Sîk. Later, we got to know his students, people like Andrea Deplazes, Valerio Olgiati and Quintus Miller, who are now colleagues and good friends. And I also got to know Miroslav Sîk in time.

Pfarreizentrum St. Antonius, Miroslav Sik

SS

Talking about atmosphere, I really enjoyed the anecdote that Stephen Bates remembered visiting the Wandsworth building with Andrea Deplazes, who noticed that two doors were not perfectly aligned by 18 millimetres and told you that in Switzerland, and in his office, it would have been designed to be precisely at the same height. I was thinking that this idea of tolerance and approximation is like an open work in the sense given to the term by Umberto Eco. Somehow, it seems that it is more a process of inviting people to inhabit your projects and contribute to the density of the place your work is part of.

JS

Yes, I remember that visit very well. And I remember feeling that somehow Andrea just didn't get it. His expectation of complete control of the building process didn't match our reality. Anyway, I still think that was more to do with his experience of how things are done in Switzerland, where there is an incredible control on construction. But is that any better? I mean, in Switzerland, you occasionally encounter works that are so uncompromising and so controlled... But they aren't moving, they don't touch you. Olgiati's work is very precise and very powerful. The work of Miller Maranta touches me in other ways…

La forme forte cover,
Martin Steinmann
Birkhauser Publishing

I felt Andrea was being quite provocative when he saw that project. I also remember Marcel Meili, who just seemed to think he was visiting the Third World. He was so critical of everything. Martin Steinmann was much more charming when he went to see Seven Sisters Road under construction at that moment in the construction process where all the metal studs were set out and before the walls were plaster boarded. He just thought it was fantastic…There was something about the crudeness of the construction that he found exciting. It was quite a different reaction to those other visits to Wandsworth...

At the core of our conversations is the notion of tolerance, and we've written a lot about it and pleasure that comes from being both precise and imprecise. That's why we like brick construction, because no two bricks are ever the same. The way that they are assembled has to do with the skill and the judgement of a bricklayer, it's the work of hands. This is lovely, and it reminds me that construction is still quite low-tech and sort of wonderfully crude.

SS

I was in Lausanne for a year and a half. I studied at EPFL, and being there, I had the impression that the architecture in Switzerland and the architecture in Romania are, in terms of construction and budget, two different disciplines. We often talk amongst ourselves here, in Bucharest, about what the relevant references should be.

We are looking to Switzerland, even the UK and other parts of the world where the execution is superb, and everything is great. But then, when it comes to it, the real experience of a building site – on small projects, of course –seems much closer to the ideas of tolerance and improvisation. That is not the case for a Swiss architect who has everything worked out to

the centimetre before the building goes on site. This is why I really love that. I think it's very specific and very true in the context of Bucharest. This might offer a more realistic idea about how to work.

JS

We work in so many different European countries now, and the first thing you learn to ask is what is appropriate and how buildings are built there? How can we make something conceptually meaningful without imposing a completely different building culture?" To do that can lead very quickly to a great deal of disappointment and, while I think it was true that when we first visited Switzerland, we came back with a determination to build carefully and a need for the elements of a building to be set out. There's a conceptual ambition at the heart of our work. Take, for example, our building in Geneva. If you tried to build it in the UK, you would be immediately disappointed, while in Geneva it was far from expensive in terms of building costs, and we could rely on a skilled building industry that could produce the precast concrete elements precisely. In the UK you would need a much bigger budget. In fact, something I have come to understand from working in these two building cultures is that the building costs are much higher in the UK than in Switzerland and quality is invariably inferior. I find your question absolutely pertinent.

You know that we have never had the chance to work in Romania. I hope one day I might because, of course, I have an emotional attachment to the country. What I always say is that to build is a huge responsibility. I'm always reminded of this when I'm in London, where so much building has gone on in the last 20 years, and most of it is so bad, and it will last… Well, it's not very well built, so it probably won't last very long, but even bad buildings do tend to last a long

time. That's something that I fundamentally appreciate in Swiss society – the sense that, if one builds something, it should last for a long time, it should have quality. I think that's a very Swiss mentality, and it's quite different to the Anglo-Saxon attitude, which is more focused on capital returns than longevity.

If it is still possible to continue building –as we know that in environmental terms this is now in question –, we need to be much more demanding about the quality of what is allowed to be built. We should, as a default, be trying to re-use buildings. I tell my students that, while I have had a career that has allowed me to build a few things, they should think about re-use in a creative and conceptually ambitious way. This is where their work lies, in 'maintenance', because our cities are already built, and we need to re-use what exists.

SS

I noted, before our talk, your ideas on sustainability and I really like how you put it in the terms of 'intelligent building'. It is so common these days to talk about sustainability in technical rather than architectural terms, such as installing technical equipment to make a building sustainable. The idea of a building as a series of layers, some of which are very durable, have a long life and some of which have a shorter life span, and can be replaced. Architecture can then continue to be something that shapes the city. We find it very interesting, especially in the context of the school of architecture.

JS

Botte House,
Bob van Reeth,
1968-1970

This notion of the 'intelligent ruin' is something Stephen is particularly interested in and the term is borrowed from the Belgian architect Bob Van Reeth. He argues that the most permanent part of a structure is

the one that needs to be most carefully planned, considering how to allow for future re-purposing.

But sustainability has been something we've always discussed since our earliest projects. One can look at the ideas we were developing as a result of the need to build economically, not only in terms of capital investment, but as a holistic consideration. It's not just about one aspect, it's about everything being appropriate. It's about climate, place, economics, and the needs of future users, as well and the relationship between what is durable and what is more ephemeral.

SS

I think we are getting close to the end of our meeting. I wanted to ask you if you have been to Bucharest before?

JS

Several times. Yes!

RT

And you have been here with your students.

JS

Yes, we worked on Bucharest for one semester, you probably saw the projects on the studio website. It is a very important city in my life because I'm married to someone who grew up there. Bucharest often features in our conversations, some of Irina's family live there, and that's always a reason to visit.

Bucharest, 1968,
George Serban photography

I find it absolutely fascinating as a city because the urban character of the older city is particular to Eastern Europe. It is rich and, in my eyes, wonderfully different. You see so many different influences and qualities. It has a particular history that I find fascinating.

I hear the Romanian language almost every day, al-

though I am ashamed to say I do not speak it. Romania is an amazing country, which I haven't explored nearly enough. My knowledge of it is limited to Bucharest, where I've been several times, and its surroundings. I've never been to the north. Culturally, I find it very diverse. After all, it's a very big country…

SS RT

Thank you very much for this conversation. We're looking forward to welcoming you here!

JS

I really look forward to coming back! It's been a wonderful conversation. And thank you both for your carefully prepared questions.

PART TWO: CONTRIBUTORS

We sent our guest the following invitation:

We would like to invite you to contribute to this issue with a short text, accompanied by an image. Our main inspiration in selecting the ground of discussion is the book "On and around architecture. Ten conversations", by Sergison Bates architects, published in 2020. Thus, the text may refer to one of the following extracted themes:

*The relationship between **heritage and reuse in respect to the contemporary city** based on (the notion of) continuity with historical forms of urbanism and negotiation with existing conditions. In the aforementioned book, reference is made to Rafael Moneo who stated in his essay about the "life of buildings", architecture will remain open to new interpretations which extend its life indefinitely if it's firmly established.*

*Addressing the notion of **scale under the pressure of density**, as a base unit for the development of (new) textures of the city as opposed to a quantitative process*

*Evolving **typologies adapting to different social needs** - witnessing the increasing pressure towards the historical city, we agree with the view reflected in the book that it rises the mission to create spaces that relate to our living conditions without neglecting the beauty and historical or social relevance of the existing structure. Can we make sense of a certain place and retain our loyalty to it within a new project?*
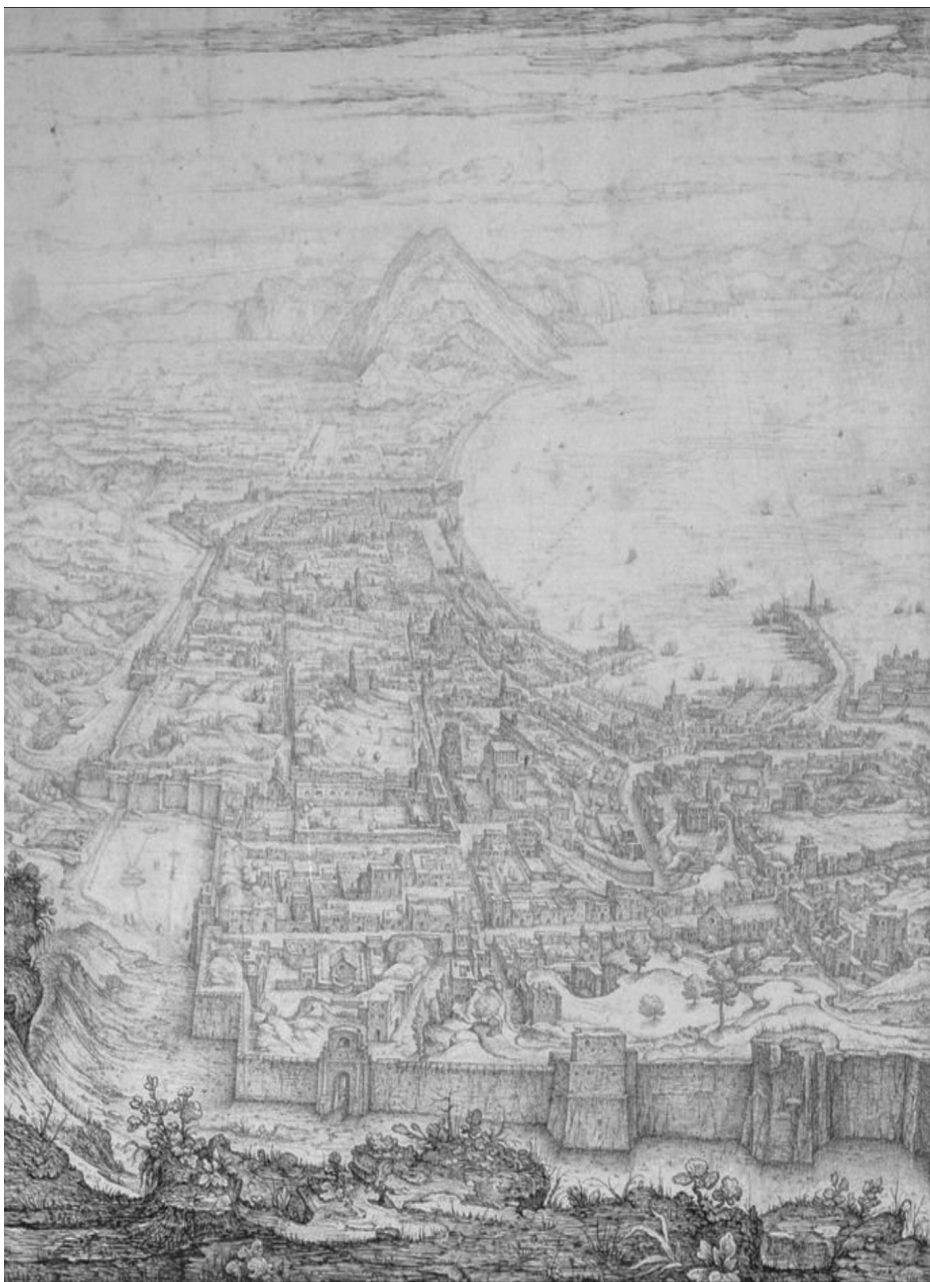
RENATO CAPOZZI

The reuse of the historic city
through discontinuous nature hiatuses

In the sphere of morphological studies on the historic European city, which especially in Italy has seen relevant contributions both theoretical and operational - from Muratori to Caniggia, from Rossi to Aymonino - the theme of formally completed urban parts and their fixity or their organic evolution has seen different orientations facing each other. The Muratorian-Caniggian idea of urban fabric as a mutable organism, of palimpsest is contrasted by the Rossi-Aymonian idea of the finiteness and architecture of the part, of original layout, of individuality. The notion of specialised buildings in some way derived from basic construction by means of recasting and thickening is contrasted with that of primary elements and urban facts that in fixing certain types direct urban dynamics. In such a theoretical and cognitive context that has represented and still represents a very important cognitive contribution to the understanding of the reasons, developments and characters of the urban form, the recent emergencies linked to climate change, together with those welds that over the centuries have made the parts, their limits and their underlying structure indistinguishable, propose new lines of research directed towards a possible renewed relationship between settlement and natural stratum, between urban parts and the hiatuses of nature. The case study of the historic centre of Naples and the different urban parts that have determined its structure over time is, in this sense, really paradigmatic.

The so-called 'ancient Greco-Roman centre', the gothic 'lower districts' (quartieri bassi), the Viceregal and Renaissance extensions, the extra-mœnia 'boroughs', the Enlightenment interventions up to the 19th century make up a complex mosaic that is represented in a 'jumbled and indistinguishable' image. Recovering and 'reusing' certain discontinuities of the substratum, bringing back to the surface ancient watercourses and with punctual de-densification, Mauritania could be reintroduced into the living body of the city, not as an embellishment and a mere necessity of well-being against heat islands, but more and more like a morpho-

logical and distinctive function to determine the appropriate hiatuses - as precious as the golden filaments in the art of kitsugi - capable of both recomposing the parts and distinguishing them. Such natural corridors could accommodate collective facilities and public spaces where the entire citizenry could be represented.

*

Image caption: View of Naples 1582, detail
Image credit:© Jean van Stinemolen

IRINA CRIVEANU

The old Bucharest housing
is only deceptively individual

In the early 19th century, households usually had 8-10 people - in a court-yard lived several generations of owners, servants with their families, gardeners, coachmen, each in his own house. The historic dwelling is collective.

The courtyard of which I tell the story is, like many others, a collective character. In 1852, it was 3,000 square metres; the owner, a certain Ioniță, had a small wooden house facing the street. After him, towards the end of the 19th century, Gheorghe appeared as owner, followed - in 1911 - by Iancu, probably his son. The house facing the street was probably extended by Gheorghe; it had rooms for rent with direct access from the street, good for living in, and also good for a shop. Later, he also built a new house for the family on the south-east side of the courtyard, with a short front facing the street, around 1890. The annexes were slightly set back from the street, and the back of the yard was used as a garden or orchard. The courtyard was reduced to 2300sqm.

Before the First World War, Iancu also constructed several buildings: a building at the back of the yard, on the north-east side, with the living quarters upstairs and, on the ground floor, two garages and a servants' accommodation; two ground floor buildings on the north-west side, each for a daughter of the family; other smaller buildings on the south-east side, also for servants, as a continuation of the main house. In front, set back from the street, he demolishes the outbuildings and builds, in the 1920s, on their footprint, a large, one-story house to rent for two families. The centre of the courtyard remains orchard - and garden.

The owners' family, who had remained living only in the houses at the back of the courtyard, died out at the beginning of the 21st century. The other houses had been rented in the 1940s or lost by the family in the 1950s, after nationalisation, when tenants were brought in by force. From modest families, they found their way through all the cottages, and the

courtyard became a theatre of war, each wanting an extra patch of land either for vines or a place to live.

The old house on the street was demolished at the end of the 1960s, when a block was built in its place, in private ownership, on about 400sqm torn from public property. The 1890s house was demolished soon after 2000 and a block of flats, with access from the street, was built in its place and sold. The site of the garden has also been sold and a two-family dwelling of three or four levels has recently been built here.

The courtyard was slowly cleared and a period of calm followed in the 1990s: the old families, fewer and fewer in number, moved away or disappeared; then came the wave of retroceding and buying, then sales of the land and other construction. With the emergence of new owners, the wars for vacant land have resumed and are manifested in fences dividing intimacies that are lost in the overall disharmony and with the disappearance of gardens.

In the 1940s, about 25 people lived here; in 1950, more than 45; in 1980, 35 people lived in the courtyard, plus four families in the first block, so a total of about 50 people. Today, in what remains of the courtyard (about 1400sqm), seven people live and in the blocks, about 20. In total, less than 30 people live in the former courtyard, a population roughly equal to that of the 1940s. In the last three decades, four cherry trees, a walnut tree, two peach trees, cork and olive trees, lilacs, roses, cypresses and others have given way to buildings. People have been driven out of their old homes in favour of commercial activities.

The new type of cohabitation is not of several social classes, but of several activities, hardly compatible. The population is shrinking and the living space is shrinking; the social mix is disappearing. The modernisation of the last thirty years has not affected the density of historic housing, nor the surface area, but its intimacy, comfort and structuring order.

*

Image caption: drawing by Raluca Bob and Denisa Turcu, part of the studio project of the 3rd year in Atelier Mazzocchioo, studying the urban islands of Bucharest, UAUIM.

TUDOR ELIAN

The land of opportunity

I grew up in the '90s in Bucharest. In the first decade of post-communist transition, the city seemed wild to me. Even in semi-central neighborhoods, entire blocks had been left demolished or in ruin, abandoned after the largescale plans of the fallen regime had been abruptly stopped. I still remember very vividly traversing such areas by tram, seeing what seemed to be urban wastelands or looking at the concrete skeletons of unfinished flats, noticing small fires burning during the night. People left behind by the ancient regime and by the new system found refuge there. My family would call these places "the dead city". Much later, I grew to understand things a little differently. In fact, Bucharest has always been the result of two ways of thinking, making and experiencing the city.

The first, the so called „planned city", focuses on producing regulated and coherent urban areas where the public interest shapes private land. This coincides necessarily with attributing clear boundaries and functions to places, be they built or unbuilt.

The second way, is shaped by informal negotiation and local customs, by a continuous friction between private and "common" land: a city open to opportunistic use(s) and to happenstance. One of its historical embodiments is the maidan – a historical type of unbuilt space intended for the social life of the neighborhood; its "vague" character allowed for free and diverse uses. In the '90s, homelessness along with many other far less tragic informal spatial practices had found a temporary solution in this type of free space. And the maidan had gradually slipped into the interstices left by the planned city – both private and public, built and unbuilt, single and multilevel. In the current decade, it appears there is no space left for this more informal city, especially as all the unbuilt plots or blocks in the city are aggressively consumed by new gated developments.

While these two distinct urbanities have each been associated with urban

and rural habits respectively, both are quite urban in nature, albeit indebted to two very different urban traditions: one more western, the other (post)byzantine.

It is hard to see a future for the later. That being said, its persistence would align with contemporary approaches to urban design and politics, such as the rising relevance of the discourse regarding the urban commons. Is it possible to think of such urban situations as a social and historical heritage worth preserving? Is there still a place for the wild city?

*

Image caption: Historical urban tissue around an old mahala - Borroczyn plan, 1846, Sfințescu copy. Image credit:© Tudor Elian

To keep her fortress warm Laïsm looks beneath the bridges in the colonnade. They have clothes hanging from them. As she walks through the very high space, Laïsm quickly finds a large tablecloth that has fallen to the ground...
"AHA, this will make my fortress warm!"

She hears the sound of the market on the meidan, that's her favourite sound. Often she wakes up hearing the market people and her neighbors haggling over the prices.
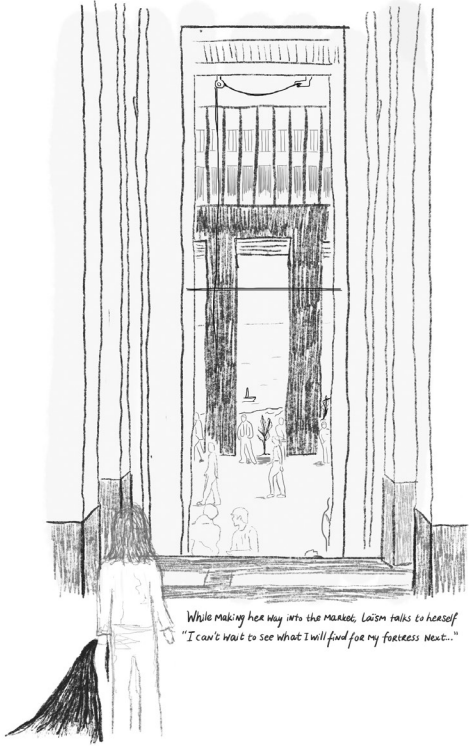
While making her way into the market, Laïsm talks to herself
"I can't wait to see what I will find for my fortress next..."

JANINA GOSSEYE

Building Stories

In the foreword to his 1987 graphic novel The Building, Will Eisner, the celebrated American cartoonist, writes:

As I grew older and accumulated memories, I came to feel more keenly about the disappearances of people and landmarks. Especially troubling to me was the callous removal of buildings. I felt that, somehow, they had a kind of soul. I know now that these structures, barnacled with laughter and stained by tears, are more than lifeless edifices. It cannot be that having been part of life, they did not somehow absorb the radiation from human interaction. And I wonder what is left behind when a building is torn down.[1]

The Building imaginatively examines how the lives of four ordinary people unfolded in and around a fictional 14-storey edifice that for 80-years stood tall at a busy street corner until it was demolished to make way for a gleaming new tower. There is Monroe Mensh, who worked for two children's charities housed inside the building; Gilda Greene, a dental assistant who every Wednesday met with Benny, her lover, in front of the building; Antonio Tonatti, an amateur musician who played the violin at the building's entrance at noontime every day; and P.J. Hammond, a once ruthless real-estate developer who lost his fortune as he became obsessed with the building.

The Building narrates the life of a building not through physical changes or spatial interventions – the moving of walls, the adding of wings, the construction of new floors – but through the social interactions that it shapes and affords. In doing so, it reveals how buildings are full of the layered residue of the remembered past and how they derive meaning, in part, from the ways in which people inhabit and use them. Building stories, such as Eisner's, are a valuable tool to highlight the social and cul-

tural importance of our built environment.[2] Examining the life of buildings in this way allows us to better understand their (hi)story, as well as our place within it, as we imagine possible future stories that they might provoke or accommodate in response to evolving societal needs.

*

Image caption: Spread from the graphic novel, entitled 'Laïsm', produced by Dina Al-Hamdany for the course 'Building Stories' taught at TU Delft (The Netherlands) by Janina Gosseye. In her building story, Dina examined Climat de France, designed by Fernand Pouillonin Algiers, through the eyes of a child living in the complex in 1961. Image credit:© Dina Al-Hamdany.

1. Will Eisner, The Building (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006 [1987]),
2. Another beautiful example is Chris Ware's Building Stories, from which the title of this contribution was borrowed. Chris Ware, Building Stories (New York City: Pantheon Books, 2012).

LUCA ORTELLI

A problematic aspect of reuse

Taking inspiration from Rafael Moneo's famous text on the life of buildings, as proposed by the Mazzocchio editorial team, the following considerations pose the problem of the limits of the re-interpretation of architecture.

Although the current notions of reuse in relation to heritage should be looked at with a positive eye, the absence, in this area, of articulated theoretical positions should not be underestimated. In fact, it seems to me that beyond the virtuous examples of reuse, in many cases this practice is conducted in a hasty and superficial way. In fact, very often reuse practices are considered positive for the simple fact of having been implemented and beyond the actual results.

Reuse as an architectural strategy is establishing itself within the "Western" architectural debate and practices, conveyed by the general awareness of the limits of development and the consequent need to produce sustainable architecture (as everyone knows, the sustainability of a building has not to be measured only on actual energy consumption but takes into consideration the entire life cycle of buildings, with particular attention to gray energy).

The problematic aspect of reuse consists firstly in the dimension of this practice and precisely because of the absence of solid theoretical assumptions, today we talk about reuse both when an existing building - perhaps destined for abandonment or demolition - is made usable again, or when components or parts of existing buildings are used in the construction of a new one.

Beyond the technical aspects, the fundamental problem consists in the ability to recognize the practical and intellectual value of reuse and, in general, in the capacity of architects, engineers and authorities responsible for heritage to express well-founded judgements.
From this perspective, the question that arises spontaneously is the following:

are our schools of architecture capable of transmitting the knowledge necessary to operate conscientiously in this delicate area?

I would tend to give a negative answer to this question, given that I believe that the simple fact of proposing reuse projects to students is not sufficient to guarantee future architects the knowledge necessary to successfully carry out any type of intervention on the existing heritage, beyond of the historical/artistic value of the building on which the intervention is carried out.

Following what has been said, the question is always the same: to what extent can we rely on "learning by doing"?

*

Image caption: Andreea and Nino Pisano, Architecture, 1348-50 lato est
Image credit:© Luca Ortelli

MARK PIMLOTT

Gimme shelter

Amidst the profound 'homelessness' that is produced as a desired default condition within neoliberalism, where there is only within, a shelter without purpose has become an urgent necessity. The all-over condition of urbanisation fused with the boundless reach and demands of neoliberal capitalism has created a continuous interior—for Peter Sloterdijk, a 'world interior of capital'—in which the realms outside the spaces of speculation and production, and the concomitant spaces of consumption, are not allowed to lay dormant or unproductive. These, too, must become spaces of extraction, spaces in which consumption reigns all-seeing, all-pervasive. One's time must be commanded; one's attention must be always held. Every idle moment is exploited as a market opportunity, a gateway to individual desires within a system of surveillance, where those desires are transformed into engagement and then capital, and one's measure of worth is elided with one's connection to a currency of commodities.

A space that refuses the algorithms fitted to nuances of taste of individuals, one that cannot be absorbed, commanded, branded, sold as anything other than a space outside the circuit of consumption is, by necessity, an empty space, or one disburdened of obligation. It is a space that one can hardly imagine existing any longer, so often it is called upon for action, as a market, a space for spectacle, a zone for 'performance'. But this space has existed, usually protected by some institution that allows 'non-happenings' to happen, naturally. These spaces found currency in the 1970s as embodiments of political and cultural critique, housed within larger structures, from Frank van Klingeren's 'T Karregat outside Eindhoven, to Lina Bo Bardi's SESC-Fábrica Pompéia or the undercroft of MASP in Sao Paulo, Peter Celsing's Kulturhuset in Stockholm, and the ground floor of Piano + Rogers's Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris; and recently, Robbrecht and Daem, with Marie-José Van Hee's Stadshal in Gent. Their attachment to institutions is central. The institution acts as guarantor and protector of a space in which one can do nothing. People are both welcomed and legitimated within a space that is recognised

as significant by a body that represents them. There was and remains a purpose to all these spaces: they were intended to be used by individuals and groups for leisure, and the pleasure of looking, acting, and relating to others; for being aware of themselves as citizens, and free to be so.

*

Image caption: Center Georges Pompidou, Paris
Image credit:© Mark Pimlott

the city
lessons
relevant

holds
that are
today

PART THREE:
ON CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY
A MORPHOLOGICAL APPROACH
TO BUCHAREST

Map of large vacant land between the center and the periphery of Bucharest in 1911
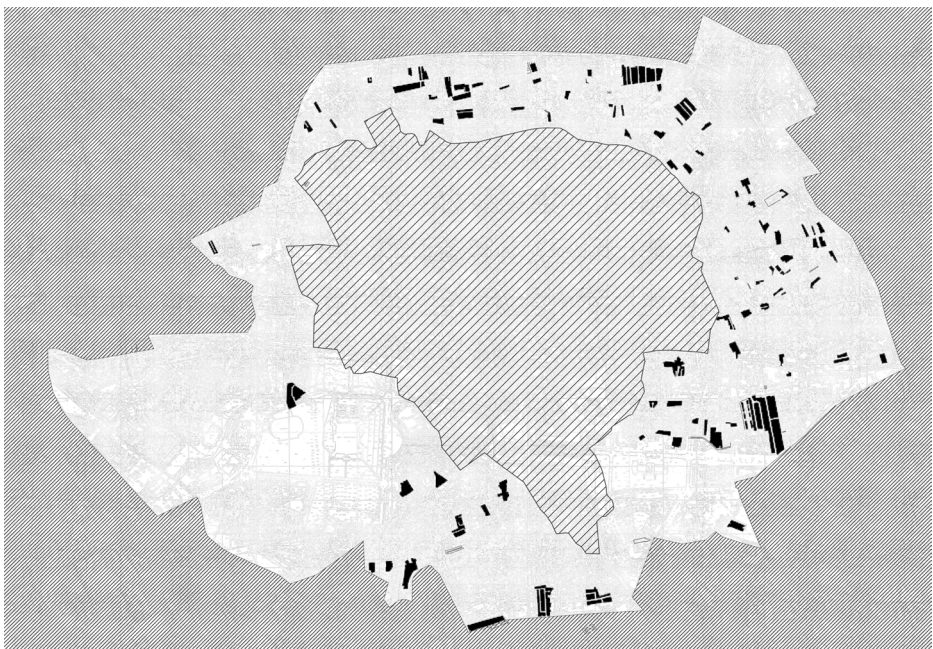
Map of planned parcel interventions carried out during the studied period

RADU TÎRCĂ

I think that focusing on and working with cities, and especially within historical structures, is one of the most beautiful tasks in the life of an architect. Perhaps the most beautiful. My concern is how to understand, interpret and learn the messages of different urban contexts and their specific architecture. How can we approach these tasks in order to heal the vulnerable areas and contribute to the natural evolution of historical cities, their urban pattern and built heritage?

My interest lies in investigating the architecture of the city and its history through the lens of the morphological process as I consider this tool to be relevant and adequate in combining theoretical aspects with practical ones, in order to form a robust and multilayered approach within architecture ideas.

The text below was presented at the SUDHT (Symposium of Urban Design History and Theory) at TU Delft as part of my current PhD research and it is concerned with the evolution of the large vacant plots between the centre and the periphery of Bucharest during 1911-1949 and how their transformation over time has influenced the urban image of the present day.

It can easily be noted that the historical urban fabric is dominated by the buildings constructed in the first half of the 20th century. The inter-war period defined an entire morphological stratum, that marked the evolution of Bucharest, triggered by contextual factors such as: urban population growth, the housing crisis, the process of administrative reform, the increase in industrialisation, etc. The instrument that guided the transformation of the urban fabric was a legislative framework that was constantly adapted to the accelerated pace of modernisation.[1]

In terms of methodology, typomorphological studies have been combined in the current research with a more deductive, quantitative approach, in the aim to reach an understanding of the relationship between formation

processes, contextual factors and spatial characteristics of the area under study. The theories of the Italian and British schools[2] have only been used as a referential framework.

The paper focuses primarily on the transformations that took place at the level of plots, considered as the ordering structure of the urban fabric, and specifically approaches planned interventions, without excluding spontaneous development. The plots determined the urban parameters with which modern interventions interfered, generating new building typologies or typological mutations.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the urban fabric of Bucharest had not yet reached the maturity that characterises most other European cities with a long tradition of urbanism. Many of the urban blocks that were gradually incorporated into the city contained large areas of wasteland or were occupied by small, temporary buildings. This was due to the fact that the poor people who lived on the outskirts used to cultivate the land. Through the identification and analysis of these vast areas of vacant land, it can be established that the greatest potential for creating the required housing density layed between the 19th century central core and the outskirts boundaries which were recognised in 1928. I will refer to this demarcation of the study area as the pericentral area, or the area corresponding to the basic fabric (the vocation of the plots of land being rarely other than residential).

This type of reading and analysis of the urban fabric depends to a great extent on the interpretation of cartographical sources and involves correlating the information obtained through a series of steps: the interpretation of overlapping plans, the identification of the persistence of historical substrates in the urban fabric, the decoding of the urban components to identify the building typologies and their derrivates. The main cartographic sources used are the 1911 and 1974 cadastral plans of Bucharest, but other historical plans (1789, 1844-1846, 1895-1899, 1990) complete the picture of the urban fabric's formation process. In the absence of a detailed cartographic representation of the city in the mid-twentieth century, the 1970s plan is the closest reference to the situation after the Second World War, especially that for some area maps the measurements started in the 1950s.

In its new role as the capital of the unified Romanian territories, the city came under the pressure of an accelerated twofold growth: on the one

hand, the population multiplied exponentially in a very short time and, on the other hand, the urban area doubled in size (from 3,000 hectares in 1911 to 7,800 hectares in 1939).

Unlike other European cities, Bucharest was never confronted with the problem of congestion in the central area; in the absence of any form of fortification, it had the possibility of unrestricted expansion, which is why, despite the growing demand for built space, in 1930 the amount of courtyards and gardens still represented approximately 67.5% of the total surface area of the city.[3]

In 1931, Cincinat Sfințescu,[4] one of the leading voices of interwar urban planning in Bucharest, estimated that 245,000 housing units were needed to accommodate the population in hygienic conditions, taking into account demographic trends and the state of the existing housing stock.[5] This meant four times more than in 1912. In reality, however, the municipality did not have the levers to build this number of homes, but created the legal framework and instruments for private initiatives. The wealthier sections of society have addressed the housing shortage with their own investments, seeking a return on their land in an economic boom.

The incentives of interwar urban regulations

The development of Bucharest's urban fabric during the inter-war period was governed by two consecutive sets of laws, reflecting both the city's stage of development and the municipality's vision: the Systematic Plan of 1921 with its Building Regulations of 1928, and the Systematic Master Plan of 1935 with its Building Regulations of 1939.[6] The aim of this legislative tandem was to saturate the main urban morphological relationships and complete the evolutionary process begun in the previous century. The intention was to achieve density by establishing continuous urban frontages, a system of arteries with appropriate width and flowing connections between routes, medium-sized plots, suitable for both single and multiple family dwellings. All the aspects in which urban planning regulations were applied contributed greatly to the rationalisation of the building act and the partial disappearance of spontaneity in the progressive evolution of urban texture.
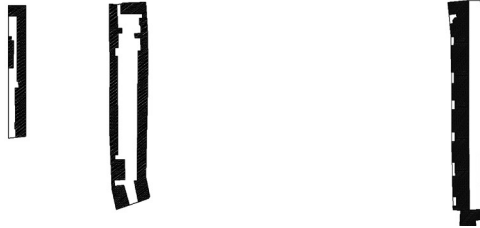
Left: remains of the pre-modern substrate; Right: the case of the Licurici Alley - a long plot on which 9 multi-family 4-storey buildings have been built along the lateral property line, whose unbuilt space has been converted into a public alley. It introduces high density in a specific low rise plan form

A priori building type

1907   1910   1910   1915(unbuilt)   1926   1935
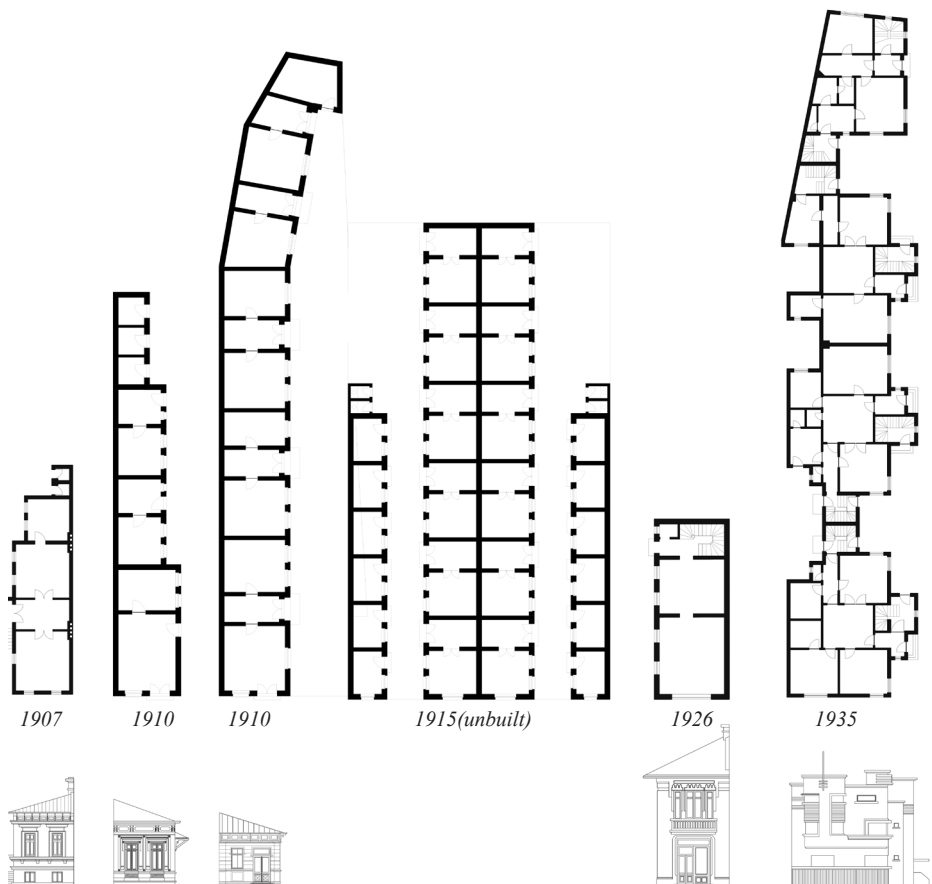
Evolution of a priori type: the progressive adjointment of rooms
The 19th century typology has witnessed multiple variations, representing a widespread
method for poor land speculation. Gradually, the regulations tried to address the under-
use generated by them, determining slow eveolutions to ordered forms.
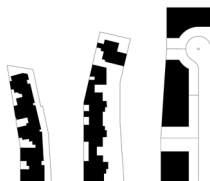
Severe declines of the a priori type of land use – from the plot to the cul-de-sac

Morphological permanences of the substratum. A priori types

The urban texture of the basic fabric has shown relative resilience un-
der the action of development pressures which brought to the fore those
urban fragments that were not adaptable, that became permanences of
the previous morphological stages: the narrow and long plots that condi-
tioned the development of buildings by repetitive addition along property
boundaries, forming long rows of rooms. This kind of arrangement kept
the buildings to the ground, encouraging low-rise sprawls.
The need for efficient use of the available land within the city was strong-
ly emphasised in 1916[7] by Cincinat Sfințescu, in the first comprehensive
urban planning study. It concluded, among other things, that the exces-
sive expansion of the town had kept land prices low, and that the city
centre had been able to retain a large number of such poorly designed
properties. The long period over which this kind of land underdevelop-
ment occurred, combined with the lack of municipal response to the phe-
nomenon, had the effect of perpetuating it.[8] One of the main reasons for
the persistence of the pre-modern plots is probably the fact that, until
1935, the freedom to build in any area of the plot tended to lead to the
construction on the properties limits, which inherited the inappropriate
geometries and made subsequent corrections impossible.
This type has undergone many transformations, adaptations under the
influence of legislative changes and social factors and even severe de-
clines as planned projects i.e. Licurici Alley, basically a long narrow plot
containing not a series of rooms, but a series of four-storey dwellings.

Forming a new land-use pattern

In an attempt to analyse, represent and understand the urban dynamics
and the existing fabric undergoing transformation and redevelopment,
I have selected three different urban situations that can be examined
through a series of criteria.
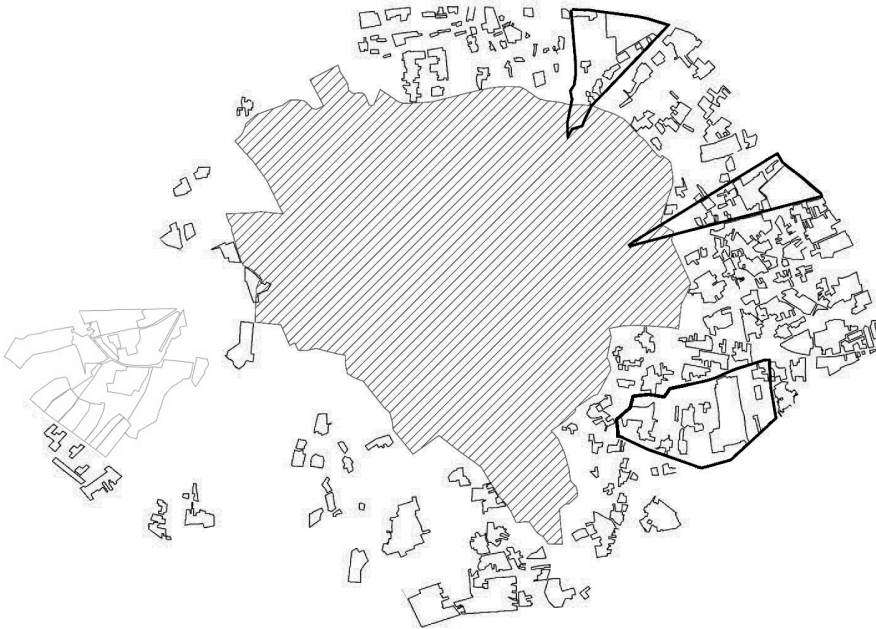
1) the case around the south-eastern area, with fragments recently intro-
duced into the city, containing the most deficient structural relationship
between plot and street network, punctuated by a multitude of extensive
areas of vacant land;

2) the situation of the eastern fragment, contained between two ordering
boulevards, a mark of the consistent pre-war modernisation effort, sub-
ject to special regulations and urban restructuring pressures;

3) the north-eastern area, the most common situation, that of a fragment
of minor tissue already formed, but still preserving reminiscences of the
old gardens and orchards, and therefore large unbuilt areas in the island
core.

In all three cases, a number of key features of urban development have
been studied: street irrigation of the urban fragment, size and geometric
shape of urban blocks and plots, percentage and type of land use. These
are all instrumental concepts that have been taken into account at the
beginning and at the end of the period under study.

1844   1895   1911
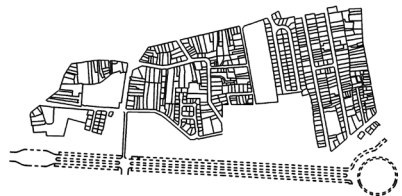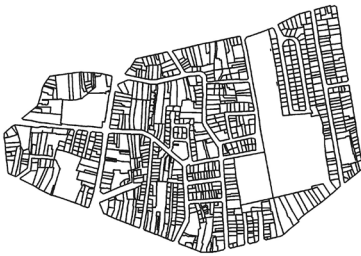
1974　　　　　　　　　　　　1990
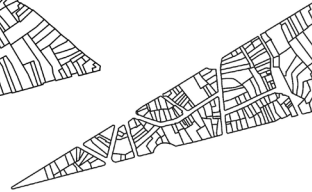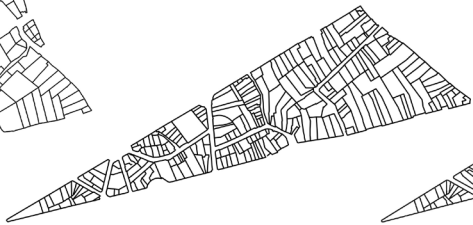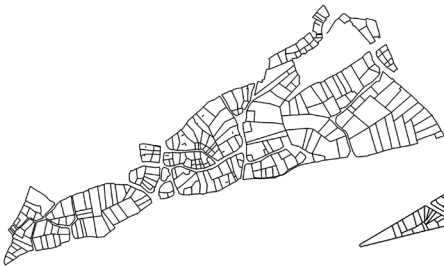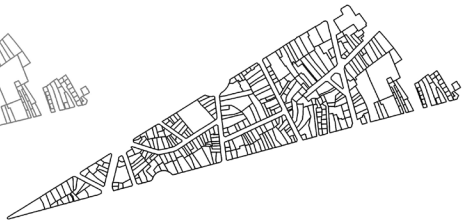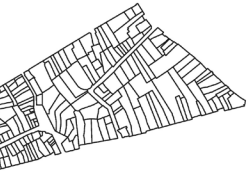
1844   1895   1911

1974   1990
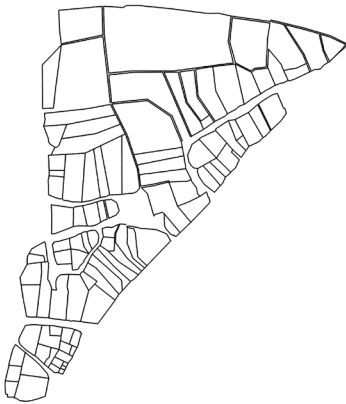
1844   1895   1911

11   1974   1990
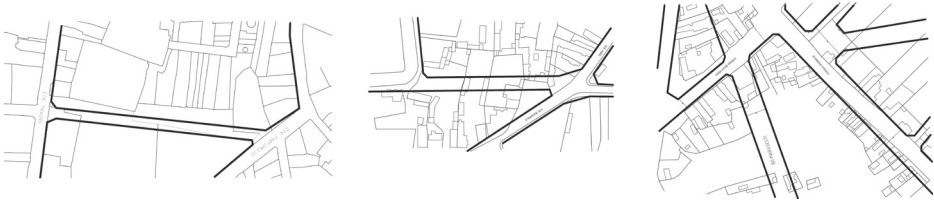
Planned break-through routes

The street network retains its old routes unchanged, excepting regularisation and alignment. However, it was developed by adding new connecting routes and, as a result of this development, new urban blocks have been created. This process accelerated the frequency of parcel transformations.

Both M.R.G. Conzen and S. Muratori consider the parcel to be the most stable and resilient of all the basic elements of the fabric. In this sense, by superimposing the successive plans of the areas studied, it can be seen that the parcel retains a relative organisation and historical pattern. However, its changes are significant, given the short interval studied. The extent of the modernisation can be seen by looking at the number of new boundaries that have appeared within the old system. Many of these are the result of planned interventions in the parcel, while the spontaneous cases are simple divisions along the street side.

In most cases, the newly created plots followed the average size of the existing plots, which are suitable for housing. However, they differ in the regularity of their forms. Based on past tradition and supported by legislation, theory and practice, these can be attributed to the choice of a particular development pattern - single-family housing. As Irina Calotă argues, this choice was motivated by the adherence to the Garden City model and the conviction that developing single-family assemblies was the most appropriate form of housing for Bucharest society.[9]

In terms of built density, the three selected areas show similar characteristics; in 1911, buildings unevenly occupied the urban blocks, with large differences from one property to another, and were mainly oriented towards the street, the middle of the islands remaining vacant. Naturally, these situations would have led to the emergence of a new artery running through the centreline, allowing the whole area to be occupied by approximately the same small and medium-sized plots, suitable for the existing way of living. However, as can be seen from an analysis of the

Evolution of the road layout. From black to light grey: matrix routes, connecting route, back routes, arteries that appeared between 1911-1974. Unfinished back routes aare marked with dotted lines.

New limits of the plots during 1911-1974 (the period 1950-1974 is unlikely to have modified the urban texture of the studied areas)

1970s plan, this type of process did not take place; the transformations with the greatest impact on the existing urban fabric were the planned divisions of the existing larger plots, capable of bringing their own coherence and a new order to the urban fragment concerned. In most cases, the subdivision of the plots involved opening new arteries that created the conditions for the local restructuring of the urban blocks and increased the percentage of occupied land. For this reason, this paper focuses primarily on the changes in the logic of land restructuring through planning, i.e. the programmed tracing of plots with the aim of building or selling them.

Plot occupancy percentage diagram 1911;
average land use indicators: 25-41%

Plot occupancy percentage diagram 1974;
average land use indicators:55-70%

Land use efficiency through planned interventions has been achieved through processes such as merging two or more parcels for reparcelling or dividing a single larger lot, resulting in several types of regulatory interventions ranging from lot to island scale.

The most remarkable cases are the planned subdivisions that transformed the urban fragment in which they were built. They are invariably synonymous with the opening up of new arteries and the reconfiguration or

Planned interventions transforming the urban fragment

creation of new islands and plots, and are the most common way of occupying large areas of wasteland. In a certain sense, it can be said that the pressure of the Garden City ideal of the time was also felt in the centre of the city, taking the opportunities offered by large available plots of land. In order to adapt to the constraints of the existing urban areas, plots were also planned inside the urban block, on average areas, where the existing island was not fully occupied or where there were larger-than-average plots. The new structure is inserted into the existing fabric, subordinating itself, continuing the existing arteries and the predefined scale of the urban texture.

Planned interventions transforming the urban block

The variety of planned interventions also includes plot-level subdivisions, meaning a small grouping of parcels along unfinished secondary routes that contribute only locally to the development of the fabric, but that could indicate a possible future direction. The solutions of these interventions vary, both in terms of the plot's shape and of the planned building type. At the same time, it is noteworthy that some of them were carried out illegally, without respect for the town planning regulations in force, in order to speculate as much as possible on the value of the land. This shows that the pressure exerted on the fabric has not always led to optimal configurations, but has to some extent encouraged the sedimentation of land texture deficiencies.
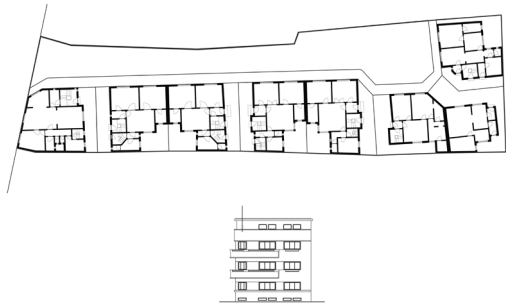
Planned intervention transforming the plot (subdivision of the plot)
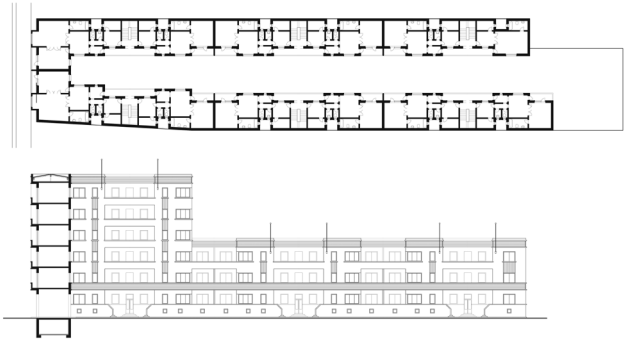
Introducing the height parameter for raising density

However, the planned interventions would not have been able to achieve a sufficient density and number of housing units without optimal construction using the maximum permissible height. Although it was not considered an ideal solution, the apartment building was not completely rejected; on the contrary, it was appropriated by the wealthy and educated classes as a symbol of modernity and was initially reserved mainly for central areas. From 1927 onwards, the multi-family dwelling typology became widespread as a response to the needs of the middle class and as a profitable solution for landowners. Often, this typology, designed in accordance with the principles of the modern movement, was adapted and diminished by the constraints of the irregular forms of the pre-modern plot, resulting in new morphological relationships and adaptations of the interior spaces. Nevertheless, the introduction of this typology was the only response to the need to increase the number of houses within the plot. Multi-storey buildings brought with them the modern urban image, the necessary density, but also broke the interdependence between the plot boundary and the built form by separating the interior from the courtyard. Although they were scattered throughout the studied fabric, they rarely formed coherent fragments, except in the case of planned ensembles. They remained contrasting in scale and height in relation to the low rise single-family houses.

Irrespective of the housing type, the new structures of the inter-war period made their presence felt in the pericentral area, creating a mosaic of plots designed and built at different times, at the initiative of various investors, with different architectural and urbanistic approaches.

The fabric morphology of the analysed area remained latent as the development pattern of the city took a different turn after the 1950s. All the described transformations were interrupted at an intermediate stage of the evolutionary process, resulting in a complex urban texture characterized by a multitude of particular situations, contrasts and adaptations. Although far fewer than spontaneous transformations, planned interventions have acquired the capacity to order and develop multiple morphological relationships within the fabric, regardless of scale and size. Even today, they are highly resilient, largely retaining their original coherence and becoming morphological permanences of the inter-war period and landmarks within the urban texture.

Post-1990 interventions (black) inserted in the historical fabric and in relation to urban forms that emerged in the post-war period (white). Uncritical attitudes of the recent interventions in the historical fabric, producing atypical use of land.

None of the subsequent morphological periods have been able to contribute to the same extent to the enhancement of urban development. The urban interventions of the 1970s and 1980s made use of the notion of tabula rasa, producing structural ruptures between the existing and the new urban forms of high rise - high density. Significant parts of the studied areas disappeared with the major demolitions of the 1980s, so that analysis of the evolution to date has only been partially possible.

Meta Berghauser Pont argued in *Space Matrix* that the traditional planning process has now largely been reversed. Urban development has moved away from normative master planning towards more strategic and project-based local intervention[10] approaches that require detailed contextual insight. Therefore, a deep understanding of the historical context could serve as a source for making an inventory of practical applications in further development and also for distinguishing different positions on future theories regarding new urban forms. On the other hand, the recent attitudes and typologies introduced by the interventions of the 1980s and post 1990 have produced a rupture of scale compared to the historic fabric and also have generated unspecific latent land around them, imposed by different regulations or pragmatic issues (natural light, parking etc.), developing uncontrolled urban patterns. Will the historical urban fabric have the strenght to remain relevant for new strategies of intervention? Should it? And let us think how can the notion of density would play a decisive role in saving it.

*

Endnotes

1   *Nicolae Lascu, Legislation and Urban Development. Bucharest 1831-1952, PhD thesis, Ion Mincu Institute of Architecture, Bucharest, 1997, p.5*

2   *Studies of Saverio Muratori, Gianfranco Caniggia and Gianluigi Maffei for the Italian typomorphological school, and M.R.G. Conzen and Jeremy Whitehand for the British one.*

3   *Bogdan Suditu, Bucharest in dwellings and inhabitants from the beginnings until yesterday (1459-1989), ed. Compania, Bucharest, 2016, p. 123*

4   *It should be mentioned that the engineer Cincinat Sfințescu had completed his studies in Germany, and his practice was deeply influenced by Western European theories, especially Unwin's garden city concept, his studies showing his vision of reconfiguring Bucharest through administrative projects.*

5   *Urbanism magazine no. 3-4/1934, p. 117*

6   *The Systematisation Plan of 1921 was only an improvement on the old regulations of 1894, which remained in force until 1928. The new building regulations were more restrictive and modern in their approach, but in terms of land use they allowed any type of settlement within an urban plot. The limitation of the buildable area was defined in 1935, when the Systematic Master Plan envisaged a rational urban development, taking into account all the parameters of the urban fabric*

7   *Sfințescu,<<The plot>> and <<block>> in the constitution of cities, Excerpt from Buletinul Societății Politecnice, Bucharest, 1916, Chap. V, paragraph 1), p. 94*

8   *Irina Calotă, Beyond the Centre, ed. Ozalid, 2017, p. 369*

9   *Ana Maria Zahariade, Coord., From Cul-de-sac to the Alley, University of Architecture Ion Mincu Publishing, 2016, p. 25*

10   *Meta Berghauser Pont, Space Matrix. Density and Urban Form, ed. Nai010 publishers, Revised edition, 2021, p. 12*

SELECTION OF STUDIED ARCHIVES PROJECTS
1912-1949

The following selection is composed of two main categories:
basic buildings - *housing premises such as individual houses, apartment buildings and planned ensambles*
specialised buildings - *category containing programs such as banks, educational buildings, commercial buildings etc.*

1935 *1938* *1931*

1939 *1927* *1931*

Basic buildings: individual houses
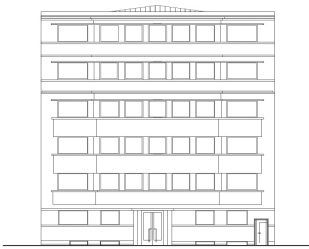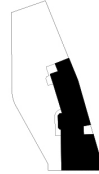
1945

1930
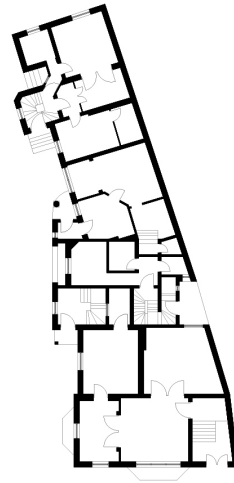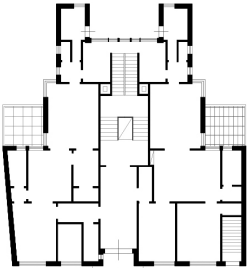
Basic buildings: collective dwellings
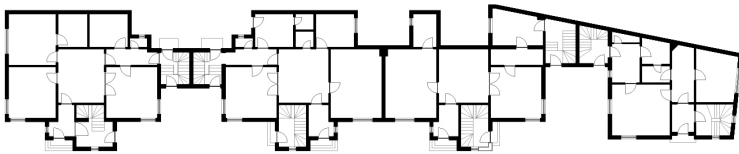
Basic buildings: planned dwellings ensambles 1943
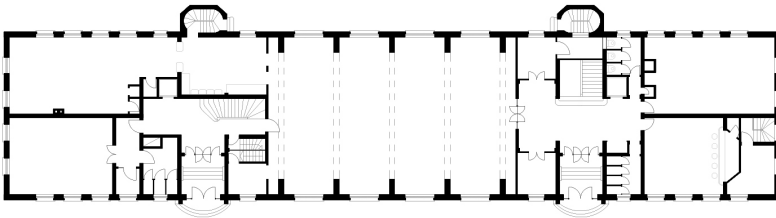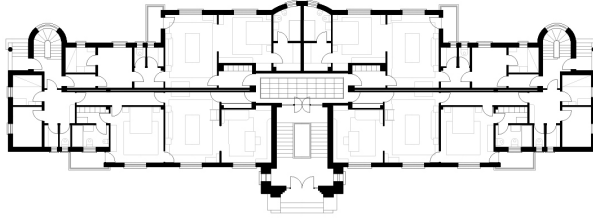
Basic buildings: planned dwellings ensambles 1923-1945
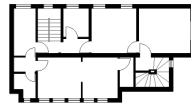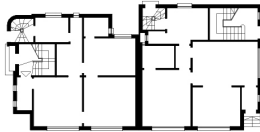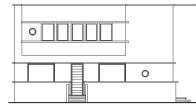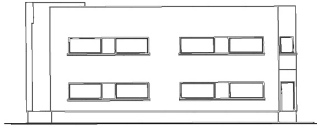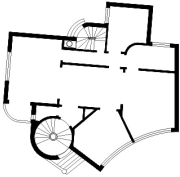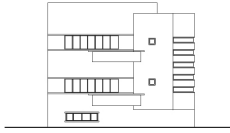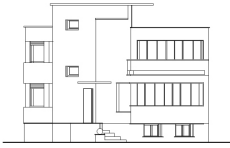
Basic buildings: planned dwellings ensambles 1922-1933
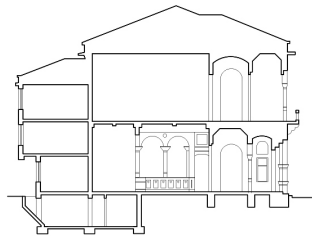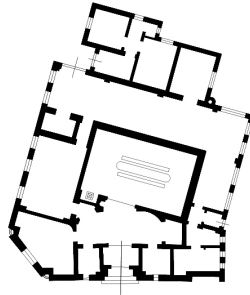
Specialised buildings: Romanian Popular Bank, 1926
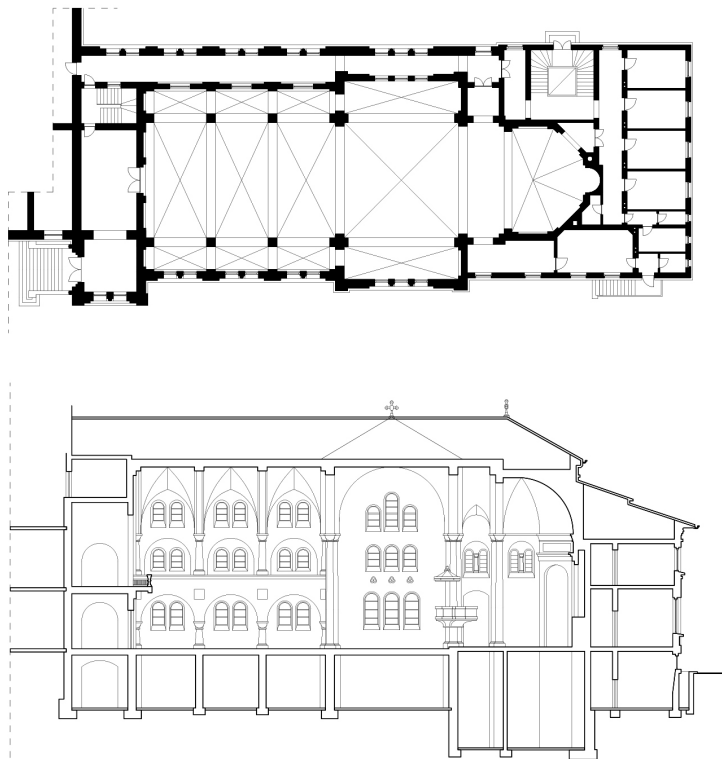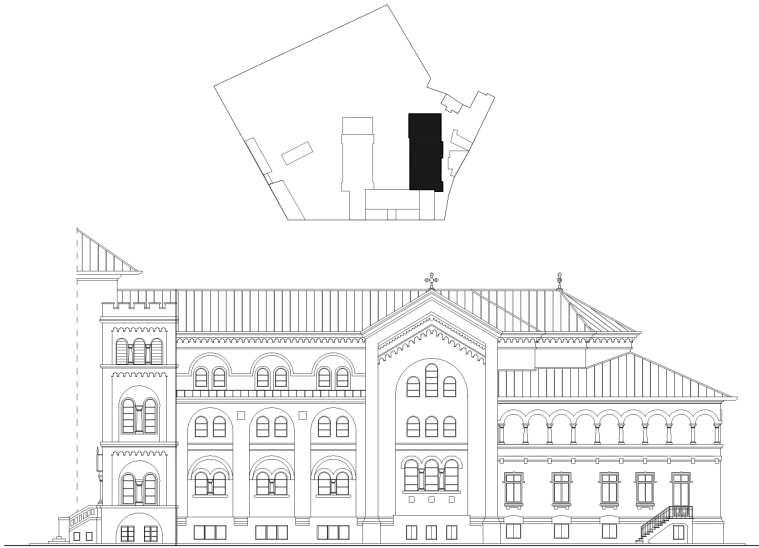
Specialised buildings: former convent of Notre Dame de Sion, 1920

About

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Stefan Simion is an associate professor who teaches architecture at UAUIM Bucharest, where he serves as the head of the studio. He has also taught at EPF Lausanne, Ecole Internationale de Rabat, Pratt New York, and Politecnica di Milano. Stefan Simion is the author of the award-winning book "Ambiguity of the Masterpiece: LivioVacchini in 11 Dialogues," which was published in Arhitext design as a result of his post-doctoral research at EPF Lausanne. Alongside Irina Melita, he is the co-founder and chief editor of Mazzocchioo magazine. Additionally, they co-founded Poster, their architecture office. Poster curated the Romanian Pavilion at the 17th Venice Biennale, titled "Fading Borders," a project exploring the intricate relationship between migration and urban environments. Poster has received several prestigious architecture awards, including the Prize and a Mention at The Timișoara International Biennale of Architecture BETA 2020.

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Renato Capozzi was born in Naples in 1971, where he graduated in Architecture in 1997 with a thesis in Architectural Design – on the east area of Naples (professor supervising of the thesis Alberto Ferlenga). In 2004 obtained the title of Doctor of Research in Architectural Composition at the IUAV of Venice, in 2005, at the University of Studies of Naples "Federico II", he attainted the Specialization In Urban and Architectural Design. Since the academic year 2006 he teaches at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Studies of Naples "Federico II" to which he holds the teaching of Theory of contemporary project linked to the degree course in Architecture 5UE.He is currently associate professor of Architecture and Urban and holds the Course of Design Theory and the Laboratory of Architectural and Urban Composition 1 at the CdS single cycle 5UE and the Final Synthesis Laboratory in Architectural Design in CdS MAPA

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Tudor Elian is a Romanian architect, curator, exhibition designer and academic based in Bucharest. His personal projects and collaborations address spatial practices, urban behaviour, banality and active heritage, through temporary interventions, non-formal pedagogies, field research, publications and, more recently, exhibitions. He is the co-author of the Romanian Orthodox Church Centre in Munich, Germany, alongside arch. Șerban Sturdza and arch. Matei Eugen Stoean.
Since 2012, he has been teaching in the 2nd and 3rd year design studio as well as theory seminars at the "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism. Here, he is also part of the team developing the live project pedagogy. As curator of the Image and Sound Archive of the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant in Bucharest he is focused on finding new, imaginative ways of opening its collections to researchers, artists, creatives and the general public.

JANINA GOSSEYE

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