

ON BALCONY

**STATE/CITIZENS INTERSECTION IN A SOCIALIST
ROMANIAN BLOC OF FLATS**

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Abstract

This paper inquiries into the social functions, meanings and ideologies specific to balconies in the socialist architecture by suggesting that the socialist balcony lies at the intersection between the socialist State and its citizens. For that matter, the first part of the paper examines and contrasts different architectural conceptions that underpinned the functions of balconies from its bourgeois emergence, to Lenin's revolutionary architecture, Stalinist developments and to Ceausescu's style, by pinpointing how the official architectural discourse, in general, and balconies, in particular served ideological purposes and expressed the official intersection between State and citizens. The second part of the paper balances the analytic view by scrutinizing the relationship between the state and citizens from the view point of people's regular balconies, and the everyday practices attached to it, as they unfold in a Romanian neighborhood built in the 1980's.

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1. Introduction

When Manet's painting *The Balcony* was revealed to the eye of the public in 1869, most critics were skeptic if not utterly disappointed. Most of them argued that the characters depicted are in a static posture and that they are effaced by the objects around. The composition was regarded as clumsy and unrealistic (Fried 1996). What many contemporaries failed to see, however, was that the painting would set a canon: the balcony as an intermediary space between the bourgeois private realm and the public sphere. Manet was not alone in his endeavor. His close friend Baudelaire earlier wrote a poem in which the balcony was also regarded as an interval between two distinct spheres. For Stallybrass and White (1986) the overlapping of the balcony theme in mid 19th century painting and poetry is no coincidence. The depiction of balcony as an intermediary space between the secure private space of the bourgeois family and the public space of the rest of the society comes in line with the formation of the bourgeois identity as excluding the old aristocratic ethos and also the un-distinctiveness, grotesque, filthiness of the lower classes. Thus, the balcony is the ideal space from where the bourgeois can gaze at the street spectacle without having to take part in it; gaze but do not touch, look but do not get involved. Consequently, 19th century balcony appears as the bourgeois space *par excellence*, saliently expressing its ethos and worldview: on one hand, distinct from the lower classes but not totally separated; on the other situated at the intersection between the private and the public spheres, thus mediating and translating between the two. Put differently, the balcony is the embodiment and the expression, in terms of the built environment, of the bourgeois identity. Since the distinction between public and private is a political one (Bourdieu 1977, Habermas 1989), the balcony has also to be regarded as a political *topos*.

Starting from the middle of the 19th century the above definition of balcony was taken for granted and constantly reproduced. For many, balcony as a locus for private/public intersection represents an unproblematic assertion. The purpose of this paper, however, is to challenge this view. In the following pages I analyze how the social functions, meanings and ideologies underpinning the construction and use of balconies have changed in the socialist¹ architecture which was, rhetorically at least, severely anti-bourgeois. Stated differently, if the balcony first appeared as a bourgeois invention, what purposes did the balcony serve in a socialist context?

As I will show later in the paper, in the socialist architecture balcony is a closed space, subsumed either to the façade of the buildings (by the official architectural discourse), or to the interior of the living space (by people's enclosure), thus losing its mediatory function ascribed by the bourgeois conception. Furthermore, in post-socialism, due to the intrinsic nature of the built environment, the balcony still remains a closed space, despite the fact that the functions it served during socialism have become obsolete.

Albeit the meanings and functions ascribed to the bourgeois balcony differ from those ascribed to the socialist one, the balcony still remains a political site. For example, in Ceausescu's Romania the enclosure of balcony was illegal. The fine for breaking the law ranged from 3000 to 5000 Lei, while the average month salary was 2500 Lei. However, despite this fact, many people

¹ The term "socialism" became a blanket term, with a very fuzzy meaning, expressing a wide range of very often contradictory understandings. In this paper I designate as socialist the political regimes that seized power in Russia in 1917 and in the other Central and Eastern European countries, after 1945. In so doing I am fully aware that I am using too a blanket term that lacks accuracy. The political and social regimes covered by this term were very different (as I will show further in the paper concerning the issue of built environment), not only across the block, but also within the boundaries of the same country. Despite the evident limitations, I choose to employ this term for the purpose of this paper due to its familiarity.

broke the law and enclosed their balconies. Thus, it seems that the socialist balcony lies at the intersection between State and citizens. For that matter, my research puzzle could be summarized as follows: if the bourgeois balcony represents the architectural embodiment of the bourgeois identity, and expresses the intersection between the public and private spheres, what purposes, functions and scopes does the balcony serve in the socialist context?; how does the balcony express the ticklish intersection between the socialist State and its citizens; what was the nature of the relationship between the official designated use of balconies and people's everyday practices?; what new identities do socialist balconies suggest?

However, why is this site fruitful and what can one gain more by considering the aforementioned questions? My answer has three parts which should be considered as many lines of research for the present study. Firstly, being at the intersection of State and its citizens, the researcher can understand how people negotiate and renegotiate this relationship; how the two spheres collide or overlap. Second, during socialism the balcony was a particular space that, one way or another escaped the strict enforcement of law and official dispositions. Balcony was the place where one could store the food supplies, dry clothes or, in need, transform it in an extra room or a kitchen. In this view, balcony becomes the meeting point of the official, dominant discourse of the Party with the everyday practices of the people. Furthermore, since the enclosure of the balconies was illegal, the provenience of the materials used for this operation was also outside a legal framework. For that matter, balconies can provide a starting point for looking at the informal, secondary "economic" relations and networks developed during socialism that paralleled the official state system. Finally, because after the fall of socialism the need for storing things (especially large amounts of food) became obsolete, new functions had to be assigned. Instead of

storing food, people either started to deposit old things, so that balconies might be labeled as possible “*lieux de memoires*” (Nora 1989), or tried to open up their balcony in the intermediary (public/private) bourgeois fashion.

There is an abundant literature that tries to deal with the intersection and relationship between the socialist State and its citizens in terms of built environment and everyday practices, in different contexts and historical periods². However, I believe that these studies were and still are, single focused: when dealing with intimacy and private sphere, for example, most of the studies show and denounce the intrusion of the State in this realm. On the other hand, when dealing with public matters, like queues, official gatherings and celebrations issues of privacy and people’s personal practices are also omitted. To my knowledge, the study that came closest to offering an integrated look into the State/citizen relationship during socialist times is Crowley’s and Reid’s (eds.) *Socialist Spaces* (2000), which triggered the idea of this paper. The authors published in this volume analyze the State/citizen intersection in different countries (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Russia, Hungary, Eastern Germany, etc) by scrutinizing specific strategic sites: Polish bedrooms, Estonian curtains, Russian communal kitchens and dachas, Czech chatas and Eastern German rundown courtyards. My research on socialist Romanian balconies follows this line of analysis by adding another strategic site of State/citizen intersection.

In order to offer an answer to my research puzzle I will focus my inquiry on four different, but overlapping fields: the social theory of socialist architecture (with a particular view to the functions of balcony); the public/private spheres division and intersection, as the origins of bourgeois balcony; State/citizens intersections and negotiation as expressing the socialist

² For key studies on the topic see Aman (1992); Kotkin (1995); Scott (1998); Buchli (1999); Stites (1999).

intermediary function; the practices of everyday life that cast a light on the everyday usage of balconies, in contrast with the official architectural discourse.

This present study has to be seen as part of a larger endeavor aimed at understanding the relationship between the socialist State and its citizens from a spatial and infrastructural perspective. One of my primary interests is to understand how the socialist State's official architectural discourse and urban planning contributed to the creation of the "new man", and how, in turn, people responded to this attempt by developing different alternative strategies.

This paper consists of five chapters. This introduction is followed by a discussion in which I seek to integrate my topic within the relevant literature of the four overlapping fields mentioned above, while pinpointing to the salient themes of my research.

Chapter three is structured on four sections that scrutinize the architectural development of balconies from its origins to its late socialist conceptualization. Thus, the first section deals with the origins and functions of the bourgeois balcony and hints to the role this site played in structuring the bourgeois identity from the middle of the 19th century onwards. This view will be contrasted, in the second section, with the place assigned to balcony in the Leninist high-modernist and revolutionary architecture. The manner in which the Stalinist architecture confiscated the rhetoric of the Leninist revolutionary one while retaining little, if at all, from its substance and what impact this had on the way balcony was conceptualized, constitutes the object of the third section of the chapter. The last section will concentrate on Ceausescu's architecture, by hinting to its Stalinist origins and to its internal dynamics. Moreover, this section

will bring the discussion closer to the site of my research, by providing the context and the historical background in which the functions of the Romanian balcony were embedded.

Chapter four begins with a methodological section in which I introduce the site of my fieldwork, the methods that underpinned my inquiry, while also alluding to some difficulties faced in entering the field. The rest of the chapter consists of the main findings of my research by teasing out the reasons people say they had for enclosing their balconies, State's response to their actions and the characteristics of the post-socialist situation, thus seeking to offer some plausible answers and interpretations to my research puzzle.

In the concluding chapter I round up my argument and my findings while also suggesting some of the limitations of my research and further lines of analysis.

2. The Balcony: intersection of four theoretical fields

The purpose of this chapter is to circumscribe the discussion on socialist balconies in a larger debate on urban analysis, urban change, (post)socialist architecture and practices of everyday life. As mentioned in the Introduction, I envisage my topic at the intersection of four different, but at the same time overlapping fields: 1) the social theory of socialist architecture, ranging from its early Leninist conceptualization, to its Stalinist reinterpretation; 2) the public/private spheres division and intersection out of which the bourgeois balcony emerged and in contrast with which the socialist one was developed; 3) a political anthropology of everyday life during socialism, at the center of which stands 4) the relationship between State and its citizens as “seen from the balcony”. I shall focus on these four intermingling fields in this part of the paper, by discussing a series of key thinkers, major texts and heated debates.

2.1. *Theories of Socialist Architecture*

For all socialist architects, revolutionaries and reformers, Marx’s idea that the conditions of material life determine consciousness (*Capital*, vol. III, 1990) was an evident truth. Marx held that in order to change people’s thoughts, behaviors and representations, one must primarily change their material surroundings, the base. Thus, the manner in which cities are designed and buildings architected becomes a salient factor in any reform of a given society. Furthermore, according to Marx the built environment can be divided into two categories – different regarding their functions, but equally important in terms of structuring life: on one hand, the fixed items, which are used in production (factories, railroads, highways, office-buildings etc); on the other,

the consumption sites (houses, schools, shops and the like)³. Consequently, in order to shape and reform the conscience of people, any regime should consider both categories.

Following this line of thought, for the socialists space came at the core of their macro-scale project of creating a radically “New Man”. It was largely believed that new foundations for organizing workplace, home, consumption places, street-life, would give rise to new social relations, which, in turn, will accordingly mold a new conscience.

Hudson’s (1994) insightful study depicts the modernist origins of Leninist architecture by emphasizing its reformist goals in shaping the Soviet society after the 1917 Revolution. This author shows how the Leninist revolutionaries were eager to actualize the Marxist dictum, in order to quickly and effectively pave the way to the formation of a new society in keeping with the principles and aims of the Revolution. Moisei Ginzburg, the leading architect of the time, and the school formed around him, understood that space is a fundamental resource for the Revolution and that its construction cannot be placed on bourgeois foundations. He advocated for a total transformation of the built environment, with a special emphasis on the housing system. Ginzburg, as well as his companions, regarded the domestic space as a crucial locus of intervention since this is the site where the new social self of the citizens is manufactured. Thus, the entire housing system should be designed to allow the formation of the new Soviet citizen. Hudson’s study is also remarkable because it shows the importance architectural ideas had within the circles of power and for the decision-makers of which, the construction of the Narkonfim communal housing complex speaks for itself.

³ For a brilliantly more detailed discussion of this distinction, its historical origins and its function in capitalist economy, see Harvey (1984).

However, the complete architectural, and thus social, transformation envisaged by the revolutionaries had to face the real conditions of the society that was to be changed. James Scott (1998) believes that this mismatch constitutes the main reason for the failure of most of the modernizing attempts. In the case of the Leninist Revolutionaries the causes were twofold. Firstly, an economically ruined country could afford little financial support for such large scale plans. Suffice it to say that the construction of the Narkonfim complex started at the end of the Leninist period and much of it remained unfinished. Secondly, as Hudson points out, the advent of Stalinism deemed the Leninist ideas too radical and utopian. The second part of Hudson's study presents the struggle between the two architectural conceptions and the brutal manner in which the Stalinist ones prevailed. In the next chapter I will refer in more detail to the characteristics of the two types of conceiving architecture, and the role they envisaged for the balcony. What is important to stress now is that the Stalinist thinking shared the same deep belief in the structuring powers of the built environment for molding the "New Man". Thus, any attempt to understand the nature of the socialist regimes, regardless of their differences, has to pay a close attention to issues concerning the built environment.

A long series of studies have attempted to understand different socialist societies by looking at their physical structure and thus disclosing the relationship between space, architecture, town planning and their ideological underpinnings and meanings. For example, French and Hamilton (1979) are concerned with the intersection of the official architectural discourses of the former Soviet block and their actualization in different cities. However, due to the time when the research was conducted, the authors fail to include the urban renewal process that shaped

Romania in mid 70's and throughout the 80's, which represented a clear cut case of embodying state ideological architecture.

Anders Aman's 1992 book focuses on the monumentality of several Stalinist buildings that became the icons of different former Soviet block cities (e.g. People's House in Bucharest, Pioneers' Palace in Moscow) by stressing their ideological functions and purposes in visually reinforcing the respective regimes. Moreover, Aman highlights the extent to which these buildings were fundamental in shaping and delineating a genuine public socialist space that is easily recognizable by the citizens.

Tarkhanov and Kavtaradze (1992) offer an anatomy of the Stalinist buildings in the former USSR, coupled with a detailed discussion of the origins and influences that crystallized this architectural style. The two authors argue that despite its rigid ideological functions and the monstrosity of the regime that made it possible, the Stalinist architecture should be interpreted as a genuine precursor of postmodernism, at least from the view point of the eclectic mixture of styles it sported. In the same vein, Groys (1992) believes that the Stalinist architecture should not be disconnected from the broader Western European high-modernist and avant-gardist conceptions. For this author, Stalinism represents a "total art", that to some extent, realized the avant-gardist dream of shaping the society at a grand scale, though the author notes, without using the artistic methods the avant-gardists envisaged. Following this line of thought, Ceausescu's Romania, given the major architectural projects developed in the last decade of the regime, can be interpreted as the last European attempt to fulfill the high-modernist dreams.

All the studies mentioned, and many others in the same vein, are undoubtedly highly important, especially in illuminating the origins, theories and ideologies that underpinned the socialist architecture, in different periods and places. Moreover, they make apparent the strong link between the built environment and the goals of the socialist political regimes. However, I believe that most of these studies are limited by their single focus. What most of them have in common is their emphasis placed on buildings as such, and on their roles in the general aims of the different regimes that produced them. What is usually omitted is the manner in which people reacted, adopted, appropriated, subverted, negotiated those particular buildings; it is also left out how those buildings expressed not only State's power but also people's practices and meanings they attached to it. Put differently, what is worth considering is not only how built environment serves the ideological and representational purposes of the State, but also how it represents an intensely disputed *topos* of intersection between the State and its citizens.

Victor Buchli (1999) manages, to some extent, to balance the analytic view. When discussing Moisei Ginzburg's Narkonfim communal apartment building, the author depicts not only the ideological conceptions embedded in the building, but also focuses on the inhabitants' stories and daily practices. However, Buchli seems more interested in presenting the different interpretations the building had during the subsequent Soviet years, than concentrating the research on the intersection between the State dispositions on architecture and living conditions and people's routines.

As already mentioned, Crowley's and Reid's (2002) piece constitutes the starting point of my research because it manages to offer an integrated overview of the State/citizen relationship as

determined and expressed by the built environment, by examining a series of interstitial spaces, “spatial practices and symbolic meanings within specific and concrete contexts under socialism, both monumental and everyday” (2002: 4). In more concrete words, they attempt to identify the particular characteristics that define a Socialist space, the rules by which it is formed, the uses ascribed to or inscribe on it; and the manner in which this space is represented. In order to answer this series of issues, the authors engage in a study of different key spaces, both monumental (like the Pioneer Palace in Moscow), and “everyday” (a Polish apartment). The authors acknowledge the importance space had in shaping a socialist society, but at the same time they highlight the importance different practices had in shaping different spaces. In this vein, long queues for food, majestic buildings, illegal exchange of currency and imposing statues played an equally important role in defining a “socialist space”. Moreover, the authors note, since the socialist regimes envisaged a total control over space, any analysis of any particular space has to consider the intersection between the State designated use and citizens actual practices. For example, the Russian communal kitchens were small sites in a grand scale plan to form a new society. But at the same time, the communal kitchen became, in the practices of everyday life, a space for people’s resistance to that plan. All the analyses comprised in the volume are placed at this interstice between the State and its citizens with regard to particular places. Thus, my topic on Romanian balconies might be regarded as a contribution to this body of texts.

Since the Socialist state, starting with the Leninist one, defined space and built environment as a fundamental resource in achieving its reformist goals (especially the housing realm), this poses a series of questions regarding the relationship between the private and the public spheres.

2.2 Private and Public Spheres

The distinction between the public and the private sphere has a relatively short history in Western culture. If, as Habermas (1989) showed, public sphere represents a bourgeois invention dating back to the middle of the 16th century, the legal definition of the privacy, as opposed to the public sphere, was first formulated towards the end of the 19th century⁴ (Madanipour 2005). Privacy was envisaged as the necessary space where individuals could retreat from the world in order to avoid mental pain and distress. As David Brain (1997) showed, public and private are usually set in opposition in order to pinpoint to at least three major differences:

a) public as the physical or social space in which one's activities are visible to diverse others while private where are kept hidden from view; b) public as that region of relatively impersonal sociability characteristic of modern urban life, as opposed to the region of intensely personal concern; c) public as the domain which pertains to common interests and collective decision making, as opposed to that which is left to individual choice and selfish interest (1997: 242).

Marc Garcelon (1997) rightfully notes that the public-private intersection was embedded in the Western thought and legal practice in the form of four interlinked institutions: the constitutional (legitimate) state, the public sphere, the civil society and the private sphere of the personal life (1997: 308). Nonetheless, Jeff Weintraub (1997) believes that what lays behind the different historical distinctions between private and public are two pivotal types of imaginaries based on which the two realms are constructed. On one hand, private is regarded as what is hidden and withdrawn, while public as what is open, shown and accessible. On the other, private is

⁴ For a detailed discussion on the legal aspect of privacy see d'Entreves and Vogel (2000).

associated with individual and individual rights, while public, with a congregation of commonly interested individuals (1997: 5).

I believe that Weintraub's piece is highly significant in the context of this paper because the author also suggests a possible spatial analysis of the private-public dichotomy. As Philippe Aries (1962) has shown, in the modern Western thinking the concepts of privacy and intimacy have been crystallized around the spatial boundaries of the individual, personal house. By contrast, the city is the public space of Others, which represents a potential threat to the autonomy of home.

Following this line of thought, Stallybrass and White (1986) remarkably depicted the manner in which the bourgeois identity was structured along a division line that separated the private space of the house from the public space of the city. While the house was envisaged as the realm of order and cleanness, the city represented the place of immixing, indistinctiveness and danger. Thus, the contact between the two had to be severely monitored and controlled through a series of intermediary spaces and complicated *rites de passages*.

In the same vein, but with a different emphasis, Richard Sennett (1976) earlier wrote that this type of envisaging the urban culture, combined with the development of the capitalist market economy led to the "*fall of the public man*". In order to grasp the change of public and private roles incumbent to the modern Western world, Sennett used a dramaturgical analysis, first coined by Erving Goffman (1959). Goffman offered the foundations for understanding the actualization of the private/public intersection in the praxis of daily life by distinguishing between the mask an

actor has to wear during the public interactions, and the “naturalness”, unmasking characteristic of the “*backstage*” - the private sphere. For Goffman, the private sphere is the realm of the true self of an individual, whereas the public designates a stage where the self has to assume a multitude of roles for making the interactions with others possible. Thus, Goffman’s study places the private/public distinction at the core of everyday life.

2.3. Practices of Everyday Life

There is a growing body of literature concerned with depicting different aspects of everyday practices and interactions. Most of them were triggered off by de Certeau’s (1984) idea that people, through their daily practices, oppose, renegotiate and appropriate the public, hegemonic discourses and spaces of the official institutions. De Certeau focuses on the micro-resistances developed by people in their ordinary activities capable to resist, transform and shape the power of the institutions according to their own individualities. Furthermore, and in the same vein, Lefebvre (1991) noted that scholars usually addressed issues of everyday life only to disclose the banality, mediocrity and complacency associated with it. On the contrary, Lefebvre argues, practices of everyday life are crucial in shaping boundaries, meanings, interpretations and definitions. Lefebvre reintroduces the private/public divide in the context of everyday practices, by arguing that privacy, for example, should not be associated with fixed boundaries and specially designed places, but as an achievement resulting from different appropriation of spaces, either material or symbolic.

What de Certeau and Lefebvre discussed theoretically was everyday reality for people in the Eastern Bloc. Marx and Engels placed the abolition of privacy, as the very source of inequalities and oppressions, at the core of the *Communist Manifesto*. Walter Benjamin, in his Moscow

Diaries (1928), emphatically noted that the Leninist regime turned this thought into practice. However, as Kharkhordin (1997) has argued, the Bolshevik regime, and the diverse socialist ones that followed, did not in fact manage to annul the private/public distinction, but to reshape and reformulate it. The socialists formulated a “*division between the ‘social’, which consists of transparent ‘public’ and ‘personal’ lives*”, on one hand, and “*an unseen, unrecognized private which does not exceed the most intimate*” (1997: 360). Thus, this “*unrecognized private*” became a matter of appropriation, thus of resistance, in different forms and through different techniques, in the practices of socialist everyday life.

Nonetheless, Boym (1994) emphasized that everyday life under socialism should not be analyzed only along the lines of clear-cut dissident acts, but should equally consider the “*common places*” and ordinary acts, which in her view are fundamental for understanding the Soviet culture. In this light, the present paper on socialist balcony seeks to offer a contribution to this line of thought. As Andras Gero and Ivan Peto (1997) put it: “*it is not only the extraordinary but also the ordinary qualities of socialism in Eastern Europe that need to be understood*” (quoted in Crowley and Reed 2002: 6).

Since the practices of everyday life, if we follow the authors discussed here, are underpinned by acts of resistance and appropriations (on different levels and scales), in the context of the socialist regimes this entails a shift of focus from private/public divide to the relationship between the socialist State and its citizens.

2.4. (Socialist) State/Citizens Relationship

Marc Garcelon (1997) noted that in the former Soviet bloc the relationship between the State, epitomized by the Party-state elites, and citizens takes precedence over the division between the public and the private. Furthermore, Garcelon observes that the socialist states, in general, developed a hypertrophied public space in the form of state power and visibility, while fully downplayed the possibility of emergence of a public space in the form of civil society. In turn, civil society was formulated within the boundaries of unofficial, unrecognized private spaces. Thus, Arnason (2002) considers that is appropriate to speak of a profound and persistent tension between regime and society that characterized the countries of the former Soviet block. The public/private distinction hints now to a very powerful political divide between the State and its citizens.

However, as Garcelon points out, using the terms public and private in the context of socialist state is misleading in capturing the relationship with its citizens. For that matter, Garcelon proposes a new typology and terminology that would better capture the nature of state – citizens intersection in socialist contexts. Thus, *officialdom* designates the ruling elite and the state apparatus; the *social* realm encompasses the realm of work, routine administration and officially approved activities, while *domestic* refers to the family life and friendship networks (1997: 317). Garcelon further notes that while people experienced the *officialdom* as the official and omni-visible public realm, the focus of their interest was not directed toward Party's activities, but rather towards “*the instrumental-personal ties in the work place and second economy, and to the affective ties of the family*” (1997: 322). Thus, put in a nutshell, what comes at the core of the

socialist state/citizens relationship is not primarily an open confrontation, but a mismatch between the projected grandeur of the state and people's everyday interest.

David Lane (1996) analyzed the emergence, development and, finally, the demise of the socialist state in several countries of the former Soviet Block. The author rightfully notes that even though ideologically and rhetorically most of these states aimed at fulfilling the Marxist goals, none of them succeeded and moreover, bore little of the features envisaged by the socialist utopian writers of the 19th century. Lane also identifies some of the salient features of state socialism, some of which represented the very sources of its failure: state ownership; planning and administration as the main forms of governance; central control under the Party's bureaucracy; centrally defined and collectivist goals; political, rather than lawful application of rules; labor as the realm of achieving personal fulfillment. Thus, the citizens were fully expelled from the governing and decision-making process, which lead to a gap between the state and the citizens. This, in turn, forced people to develop parallel relations outside the state frame and to find alternative ways of expression.

James Scott (1998) places the relationship between the socialist state and its citizens into the larger framework of the high-modernist states. He explains the collapse of the state-initiated social engineering projects as a combination of four major factors. Firstly, the state's administrative attempt to order the nature and society which inevitably leads to exclusion of those elements and people who do not confirm to the order. Moreover, these attempts underestimate and fully neglect the agency of the citizens and their heterogeneous will. Second, the high-modernist ideology which sported a profound belief in rational planning and scientific

progress as utmost sources for resolving people's needs. Third, an authoritative state that is both willing and able to implement the high-modernist goals. Forth, a weak civil society, that is incapable to resist State's mega-plans. What distinguishes such a state is a complete oblivion of the essential features of real life processes and people, that cannot be grasped within the rigid boundaries of a centralized plan. Moreover, such a state will treat its citizens as mere dots on this large plan, or as hindering elements in its implementation than need to be reformed. Scott emphasizes that these ideas were part and parcel of the socialist states ideology and marked the relationship with their citizens.

James Scott piece is also highly significant because it places the discussion about the socialist states and the manner in which they envisaged the place of citizens, in a larger, modernist perspective, thus dismissing their exceptional character that dominated previous scholarly thinking⁵.

The purpose of this chapter was to circumscribe the topic of socialist balconies and their transformation into a larger debate, situated at the intersection of four intermingling fields. It appears impossible to grasp the nature of the balconies, their ideological function and people's everyday appropriation and negotiation of these spaces, without considering these fields together. Moreover, in order to fully understand the place of balconies in socialist architectural discourse in general, and in Ceausescu's architecture in particular one has to consider its bourgeois origins. To that I shall turn my attention in the following chapter.

⁵ For a more detailed and theoretical discussion about the relationship between socialisms and modernity see Arnason (2002)

3. Architectural Discourses and Balconies

3.1. On the Bourgeois Balcony: the politics of identity

The existence and the functions of balcony cannot be separated from the public/private divide and overlapping, constitutive of the bourgeois identity and self-formation. In order to fully understand the functions of balcony for bourgeois identity purposes, a closer look is needed into the way public/private distinction is conceptualized. However, rather than reproduce the whole debate, let me focus on what this distinction, and the emergence of the notion of balconies as pillars of bourgeois identity, has left out.

Stallybrass and White (1986) argue that the bourgeois subject continuously defined and redefined itself through the exclusion of what it marked out as low, dirty, repulsive, noisy and contaminating. The very act of exclusion was constitutive of its identity. Everything that was low was internalized by the bourgeois under the sign of negation and disgust, a negative sign of its identity. But the disgust is always underpinned by desire, or at least by curiosity. Total separation from what was excluded as negative was impossible to conceive and practice. Thus, a series of places had to be invented as correlatives to the bourgeois identity, in order to account for bourgeois' identity as separation but impossibility of rupture. The function of balcony has to be regarded in this vein: as a mediatory place between what the bourgeois wants to separate and distinguish from but not to totally and utterly disconnect. Bourdieu (1977) has shown that any pedagogy or reformist impulse has a very powerful political substratum, aimed at configuring a new identity. Likewise, Stallybrass and White (1986) following both Bourdieu (1977) and Norbert Elias (1939), have argued that the history of manners have to be understood as a

struggle to impose regulations of the body which thus becomes the site of a profound interconnection of ideology and subjectivity (pp 90). Dominique Laporte (1978) has shown that the bourgeois privileged only two senses: the gaze and the hearing, while profoundly rejecting smell and touch. Smell, any smell, was considered a trait of the lower classes, while the touch constituted a potential source of contamination. Thus, for Stallybrass and White, following Laporte, the following paradoxical relationship can be formulated: the gaze/the touch: desire/contamination (1989: 136). If the gaze represents the desire, the touch emphasizes the bourgeois fear of contamination. Thus, for the bourgeois, the world has to be grasped from a standpoint where the sight is privileged while the risk of touching inexistent.

This, according to Stallybrass and White (1986) is precisely the function of balcony: from there the bourgeois could gaze, and be gazed, but not touch and be touched. “*The bourgeoisie on their balconies could both participate in the banquet of the streets and yet remained separate*” (Stallybrass and White 1986: 130). The lower classes became the object of the bourgeois gaze “*constituting itself as respectable and superior by substituting observation for participation*” (Stallybrass and White 1986: 42). But the lower classes were not the only potentially perils for the bourgeois new ethos. Everyone else was considered an Other, potentially risky for the private sphere. As Robert Kerr suggested in his 1864 guide *The Gentleman’s House*: “*Balconies were introduced for the preservation of domestic privacy and independence of each distinct family and the disconnection of their apartments so as to effectively prevent the communication of contagious diseases*” (quoted in Madanipour 2005: 87).

Half a century later, this ambivalence determined Walter Benjamin (in his *Berlin Diaries*) to coin the term “*affluent ghetto*” through which he expressed his discontent with the bourgeoisie lifestyle that severely regulated the contact with the life of the city in general. For the 19th century bourgeois reformers, an urban environment that “*provided privacy for families, contact with natural elements, and public spaces characterized by a strict visual orderliness was considered to be physically hygienic, morally uplifting and socially integrating*” (Brain 1997: 240). Consequently, the balcony has to be regarded in the larger framework of the bourgeois built environment that insisted on rational order instead of lower classes’ unhealthy and non-aesthetically immixing (see, for a vivid example, Marx’s *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* depiction of bohemians); on gaze not on touch, on observation not on participation, on separation between public and private spheres, not on their hap-hazard mixture, specific, again, to the lower classes.

Following these sensibilities, balconies, like coffee houses, gardens or the literary saloon (Habermas 1989) can be considered as salient sites of bourgeois identity formation and affirmation. Like these other spaces, the balcony too is a mode of discourse production for which what is excluded may be indeed more important than what is present. Ross Samson (1990) suggests that one of the most important characteristics of the built environment is to organize space in a specific manner (by excluding competing possibilities), thus organizing and rationalizing human contact and interaction. Cultural identity, after all, is inseparable from limits: a boundary-related phenomenon, its rules are always constructed around the contours of its territorial limits.

For Bourdieu (1984), the organization of space in the form of built environment not only *reflects* certain social structures, practices and identities, but also *generates* specific structures and practices and imposes a social organization on human perception. The bourgeois balcony stems from a particular perception of the world and, in turn, structures this perception. Consequently, the socialists, in their attempts to dismantle the bourgeois ideology and life practices, had to reconsider the sources of social structuring potential and its effects.

3.2. Leninist Revolutionary Architecture

The underpinning idea of the revolutionaries who seized power in Russia in 1917 was the Marxist dictum: the conditions of material life determine consciousness (*Capital*, vol. III, 1990). However, the socialists were not unique in their thinking, but part of a mainstream modernist thinking. Architecture is fully preoccupied with molding people's lives, minds and inter-relations. This is visible in Le Corbusier's obsession with the Plan, in Bauhaus school's conceptions, in Futurist understanding of built environment, and in most of the other modernist trends (see Leach 1997 and Scott 1998 for a detailed discussion). For these thinkers, architects and artists, architecture is political not only because it originates from and expresses political identities and ideologies, but mainly due to the fact that architecture can influence, shape, change and improve identities and politics of representation.

Victor Buchli (1999) observed that the Leninist revolutionaries remained at war, even after they succeeded to seize power. They defined two distinct but not fully divided fronts: on one hand, the external front against the enemies of the Revolution, designed to be defended by the regular army. On the other, the internal front was envisaged as the private realm of the old bourgeois life style. The latter was conceived as the space for class struggle and imposition of the new socialist

rules and principles. Most of the revolutionaries believed that in order to achieve the socialist goals of the revolutions, the old values of the oppressive bourgeoisie must be swept away. The life of the citizens had to be set on different grounds, in keeping with the revolutionary principles, so that the citizens would internalize the goals and willingly participate in achieving them. In order to change a person's behavior and conscience, one must redesign the material surrounding and the principles of the built environment. This is a necessary, but not sufficient conditions; a new life style needs to be imposed. Thus, domestic space was a particularly important site for ideological intervention, *"both at the level of design and production and at the level of representations and efforts to shape popular tastes"* (Crowley, Reid 2000: 11). Space became a socializing project that aimed at the formation of "New Man". New ways of organizing the home, the workplace or the street would produce new social relations that would lead, in turn, to a progressive consciousness (Stites 1989; Hudson 1994; Buchli 1999).

If the public spaces of the socialist city were more or less clearly articulated in official plans and architectural schemes, the private socialist home remained a rather more ambiguous concept (Buchli 1999; Crowley, Reid 2002). The Leninist reformers and revolutionary were prone to change the nuclear structure of the family, to destroy the private ownership and private sphere, all seen as part of the bourgeois life-style. Moreover, they attempted to eradicate the public/private distinction altogether, envisaging a complete public realm for all the citizens. According to the Leninists, the new life would be communalized, organized in micro-groups that would share all the living responsibilities and tasks: from washing, to cooking, from sexual life to labor. The life within the communes would be based on objective and rational norms and rules, stemming both from technical imperatives and revolutionary purposes. The destruction of

the nuclear family was supposed to produce two effects: on one hand the liberation of women from the tyranny of the private realm, and on the other, the rearing of children would be made outside the biological family, since children should not be considered the products-objects of their parents (as it was the case in the bourgeois order) (Boym 1994, Buchli 1999).

In architectural terms, the new type of built environment should closely follow, express and facilitate the new social order. However, there is an amphiboly that should be noted. Due to the severe shortages, both economical and infrastructural, following the First World War, the revolutionary regime did not have the necessary means to reconfigure the entire built environment so that to match its ideological standards, especially in the construction of housing facilities. The only project closely following revolutionary standards was Moisei Ginzburg's Narkonfim communal housing project. The advance of Stalinism and insufficient funds let the project mostly unfinished, though parts of it were inhabited in Stalin's time by people reproducing the bourgeois nuclear family (Buchli 1999).

The revolutionary imperative for the domestic life was two pronged: nothing should resemble the bourgeois order and nothing should be superfluous, that is beyond bare functional necessity. All the bourgeois elements of the private realm were rejected as sources of filth, dust and pollution. The new revolutionary interior had to be functional, minimal and communal.

Where does the function of balcony fit in this revolutionary conception of space? Suffice it to say that since the private/public distinction that produced the necessity of balcony in the bourgeois framework was abolished, the balcony was too expelled from the architectural plans of the

revolutionaries. In other words, the balcony was dismissed based on its “unhealthy” bourgeois origins. Since the realm of the public was not considered potentially harmful through contamination (as in the 19th century bourgeois scheme) there was no need for the mediatory function of the balconies. Everything was public, everything belonged to the people, only that the space had different functions and was consequently structured according to these functions. Thus, there was no need for the inhabitants of a block to gaze the world from above, since they could (and should) easily and un-problematically take part in its spectacle. The function of the domestic space was to reproduce the labor force, and not to sever the revolutionaries from their own world. If for the bourgeois, its identity was formed through the exclusion of the lower classes - therein providing the need for the balcony - the revolutionary identity was formed by (ideologically at least) embracing the others in an indiscriminate all encompassing public realm – thus producing the need to reject the balcony.

This notwithstanding, Buchli's depiction of the Narkonfim complex, alludes in passing to the existence of “*large semi-circular balconies*” at one end of the building (pp 73). The function of these balconies, however, appears to have been quite different from bourgeois ones. First, they were circumscribed to the interior of the building, serving internal purposes (like storing old things) not intermediating ones (Buchli, personal correspondence). Second, these balconies were not attached to individual housing units: they were communal. Consequently, even though the revolutionary architecture does not envisage a particular function for the balcony (thus deeming it unnecessary), when such units appear, they serve the same communal living purposes, in sharp contrast with the bourgeois understanding.

3.3 Stalin's Regime: the "*petite-bourgeois dictatorship*"

Khrushchev's famous "secret speech" was a clear criticism of the success of Stalin's bloody personal dictatorship in usurping the rhetoric of the Leninist revolution while retaining little, if anything at all, of its revolutionary content. If Lenin's movement was circumscribed to a wider modernist and reformist trend, based on Marxist principles, Stalin's brutal regime was grounded mainly on its ruler's own personal ambitions and worldview. But how was Stalinism different from Leninist revolutionary principles in terms of architectural ideas and domestic rules? Needless to say, the spread of Stalinist ideas through half of Europe following 1945 makes such an analysis salient well beyond the territorial space of the former USSR.

As we have seen, early socialist environment, as formulated by the revolutionaries, consisted of collective living, communal dining and the end of individual housekeeping, complete with the elimination of the nuclear family that had enslaved women (Hudson 1994: 9). Stalinist thought in domestic affairs, on the other hand, flew in the face of many of these tenets. Soon after assuming power, Stalin's policies were explicitly designed to retain and buttress the nuclear family. This was most appealing for the mass of workers who made his political power -base, many of whom had found the revolutionary reforms envisaged by the Leninists (like communal living, communal sharing of everything, child-rearing separated from the natural parents) too radical and too elite oriented.

Stalin, who sought to capitalize on this discontent, re-emphasized the public/private distinction. Conceptually, however, public spheres were now constructed as realms of absolute state control, while private space, still under state control and ownership, were "*leased out to the individuals*

for use” (Buchli 1999: 97). Rather than destroying the private/public distinction, the Stalinist state effectively appropriated it to serve its own political interests. This enabled the state to maintain the features of the bourgeois order, including the exclusion of inferior Others, who could now be labeled enemies of the State in general, and Stalin’s opponents in particular.

For the Stalinist regime, architecture had, in turn, a purpose different from the one envisaged by the Leninists: “*to assist the engineers in the industrialization drive while simultaneously, like a medieval cathedral, awing the people*” (Hudson 1994: 212). Thus, Moscow State University Building, which is almost identical with Casa Scanteii in Bucharest, expresses the same architectural conception and speaks for the diffusion of the Stalinist ideas (Tarkhanov and Kavtaradze 1992, Anders 1992). If the revolutionary architecture was endowed with solving concrete, real problems in the process of building a genuine socialist environment, for Stalin, architecture had to symbolize and embody an idea: the majesty and greatness of the State and its Ruler. This idea was made explicit during the first Congress of Soviet Architects, held in 1936 and fully dominated by Stalinist imperatives (Hudson 1994). The primary concern for the architects of the regime was monumentalism, reflected most often in the use of columns, arches, towers, elaborate moldings and other stylistic features of neoclassicism (Tarkhanov, Kavtaradze 1992; Hudson 1994: 210). Needless to say this style was in flagrant contradiction with the functionalism and constructivism principles characteristic of the revolutionary style and approach of the built environment.

Following such ideological lines, the distribution of balconies in the Stalinist style was determined by the aesthetic imperatives of the “*harmony of the façade*” (Crowley 2002: 184).

Thus, the balconies were subsumed to the exterior side of the building, contributing to its visual effects. In the Stalinist architecture, balconies lost both their identity functions specific to the bourgeoisie and the functionality of communal living, characteristic of the revolutionaries. Similar to the whole society, balcony becomes a simple decorative piece in a grand-scale project of worshipping the State and the Ruler.

This said, the monumental dimension of the Stalinist buildings should not be overestimated. Indeed, the plans were gigantic, and some of their realization can be seen today in Moscow's built environment (the metro stations, Moscow University and the like). But their full actualization was hindered by nearly the same type of problems as the Leninists faced: financial shortages and the burst of the Second World War. Moreover, Stalin was more prone to invest in the rapid industrialization of the country than in domestic architecture. The housing shortage, characteristic of the periods before and after WW II, was solved by Stalin by fragmenting the old bourgeois houses into smaller, communal ones.

Thus, ironically, the revolutionary goals were achieved without the actualization of the principles that underlined them (Gerasimova 2002). Building sufficient houses for the needs of the population remained a goal for every 5 year plan, throughout the whole history of the Soviet Union (Sillince ed. 1990). Consequently, the imperative to build more and cheap eclipsed more strict ideological concerns. What is generally described as Stalinist architecture, especially in the Central and Eastern European countries of the Soviet block, designates small, cramped apartment flats (10-12 square meters per person), built in haste and with minimum concern for comfort, resulting in little more than workers barracks, with no predispositions for majesty (French and

Hamilton 1979; Sillince ed. 1990; Turner, Hegedus, Tosics 1992; Crowley 2002). The 1960's and 1970's boom in housing construction in the USSR retained little of the Stalinist ideological traits, developing instead a style of mixed influences, with no hard-line interpretations.

Within the former Soviet block, Romania constituted an exception of this period. To that, and to its influence on the role and usage of balconies, I will turn in the next section of this chapter.

3.4. Ceausescu's political balcony

Much has been written about Ceausescu's megalomaniac reconfiguration of the Romanian built environment during his despotic reign, especially between 1977⁶ until the end of his regime. The sources of his architectural inspiration have been extensively debated: from hard-core monumental Stalinist to Communist Chinese and North-Korean influences, from traditional popular Romanian motives to Indian post-colonial architecture and 1970's modernist constructions (Danta 1993), everything seems to have found an expression in Ceausescu's personal taste. For the purpose of this paper I will consider only the nature of the housing system developed during Ceausescu and the official role assigned to balconies.

Stuart Lowe (1992) emphasized that in order to understand and evaluate the development of the housing policies in the last two decades of Ceausescu's regime, the so-called program of "*systematization, modernization and civilization*" (1992: 218) has to be closely considered. These plans are important because they underwrote an intrusion on the part of the state into aspects of social and domestic life on a scale unimaginable until then. As Denise Deletant (1995)

⁶ In 1977 a major earthquake shook the eastern half of Romania. Thousands were killed and many more injured. In major part, the biggest cause of the disaster was the massive collapse of the old interwar bourgeois houses and buildings. The earthquake set the ground for the major urban renewal that followed.

wrote: “*There is no better example of Ceausescu’s autocratic rule than his program of urban and rural systematization...[it resembled] a social engineering process*” (1995: 294). What is more, the unorthodox combination of centralized and planned economy with semi-capitalist relations of production and consumption, added a special flavor to the whole project.

Two particular policies constituted landmarks in the quest to create an urban-based national-communist society, and are salient for understanding the housing policy of the time: the administrative reforms of 1968 and the program of territorial systematization which was initiated in the early 1970’s but only began to be fully implemented in the second half of the 1980’s. The 11th Party Congress held in November 1974 reaffirmed the logic of the systematization: the gradual disappearance of the differences between the town and villages by bringing the villages to the same level of development of the towns (Lowe 1992: 219-223, Deletant 1995: 296-300).

To be sure, this idea was not at all innovative. Its theoretical origins can be traced back to Marx’s and Engels’ Communist Manifesto, while the first attempts to implement it were made during Stalin’s rule. However, what represented a model for Ceausescu’s plan was more concretely formulated in 1951 by the then Secretary of Agriculture of USSR, Nikita Khrushchev. Khrushchev envisaged a total disappearance of villages and their replacement by agro-towns, with modern dwellings and infrastructure. He had to wait until 1959 in order to actually materialize his ideas, which in spite of their tremendous failure, constituted the blueprint for subsequent similar attempts in the Socialist Block. Ceausescu fully endorsed Khrushchev’s plans, but without any reference to his name. Just like Khrushchev, Ceausescu pursued with his plans only to dramatically fail.

However, the image of an almighty ruler that manages to impose all his ideas has to be corrected, which also loosens the unitary view of the regimes that constituted the Soviet Block. The power of local contexts' particularities cannot be underestimated. Like in Khrushchev's case, people around Ceausescu were resilient in implementing the plan and thought little of its utility and success (Deletant 1995). The staunchest opponents of the project were the local Party secretaries and the local mayors, all for different reasons. Some of them because they sincerely believed the plan will be disastrous for the agricultural sector and for people's lives. Others due to ideological reasons: they envisaged a more gradual road to communism. Many more had a very pragmatic rationale: they, or their relatives, were direct targets of the whole project which entailed destroying their houses in order to make room for the new blocks of flats, or assist to their families being forced to move to the nearest city. In the following chapter I will elaborate further on this tension between the central authorities of the Party and the local ones, in implementing the decisions, with regard to the illegal enclosure of the balcony, or, on the contrary, to their disclosure.

One of the unseen dimensions of the systematization project can be expressed, in a nutshell, by the following phrase: high density development. The aim of this strategy was to build housing units using as little land as possible. The official explanation for this demand was the attempt to preserve as much agricultural land as possible in spite of the fact that at the same time the Party was consistently dissolving agricultural production in favor of industry. As Arnason (2002) has noted, rapid industrialization constituted one of the most strategic goals of any Communist regime, thus Ceausescu's one represents no exception. However, the same author reminds, "*the*

dependence on obsolete industrial models represented one of the most conspicuous causes of decline and crisis” (2002: 67).

There was, however, a more realistic reason behind this high density development project: it reduced costs of building houses, while providing for the growing urgent demand. One of the official architects made the point clear: “*the design of internal spaces is in keeping with a unitary legislation. The living-room, the bedroom, the bathroom, the rooms’ height and other dimensions are therefore the same in a small or big town*” (quoted in Lowe 1992: 225).

Ceausescu’s conception of the domestic life did not differ substantially from the one depicted in the Stalinist case: the State strongly controlled both the public and the individual sphere (Verdery 1991; Deletant 1995; Kligman 1998); the nuclear family was retained and constantly reinforced by the example of the dictator’s family (Ceausescu involved most of the members of his family in key political positions and was frequently depicted as the *pater familias* of the whole country which, in turn, was nothing more than an extended family); child rearing was also entrusted to the natural parents. Thus, the foundations of the domestic sphere reproduced the bourgeois and traditional ones, but placed in a dictatorial and nationalistic framework. This envisagement of the domestic sphere coupled with the high density development plan resulted in long lasting effects on the nature of the Romanian built environment. The function and social meanings of the balconies cannot be separated from these effects.

High density development requirements and the necessity to keep the costs at a minimum, on one hand, and the growing population following the 1966 anti-abortion law and rural-to-city

migration following the destruction of the villages, on another hand, led to over-crowded, small, ill-built houses placed in over-crowded neighborhoods. The average size of an apartment built in this period revolved around 40 square meters (Turnok 1990), which meant that a person was allocated on average 10 to 15 square meters⁷.

Another effect of such construction techniques is harder to grasp and fully assess: the monitoring of the population theoretically became total and easy to handle. Unofficial statistics say that 1 in 4 Romanians were collaborators of the Party's police arm: the Securitate. The rest of the society was willy-nilly part and parcel of the surveillance system due to the incumbent nature of the built environment. The Romanian housing system as designed by Ceausescu resembled a complete *panopticon* (Foucault 1975): everybody could see and hear everybody. From Ceausescu's type of balcony nothing was to be seen except for a threatening overlooking balcony.

In the following chapter, where I discuss the findings of my field-research, the widely held idea of total surveillance will be nuanced, by placing it in the context of day to day interactions. Moreover, I will inquire more into the relationship between the nature of the built environment and State's intentions. For now, suffice it to note that the high density program clustered people together in such an unprecedented manner that fully and radically changed the nature of living conditions and social interactions.

If in the strict Stalinist architecture, the balconies served only for façade's aesthetic purposes, in Ceausescu's conception balconies were envisaged with a function, though not a clear drawn one.

⁷ Statistics from the end of 1989 renders this phenomenon more visible. Thus, in 35.5% of the Romanian dwellings lived together four or more people, while in 47% two or three people (Grecianu 1992).

This amounts to saying that a balcony made a difference in the comfort rating of the apartment. Thus, category of comfort 1 meant: a kitchen, a bathroom, a balcony and no transit room. This type of apartment becomes the norm from the beginning of the development plan. By comparison, comfort 2 meant just kitchen and bathroom and no balcony while comfort 3 stand for a small kitchen and a communal bathroom, usually built for workers near industrial construction sites. Nonetheless, this is by no means specific to Ceausescu's architectural and living conceptions, since, in general, a balcony with a view epitomizes a better, desirable dwelling. What I think is truly specific of Ceausescu's conception of balcony, is the political meanings superimposed on this space. In order to explain this, we need to make a detour and go back to 21st of August 1968.

That afternoon, with a shaky voice, Ceausescu addressed the crowd from the balcony of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in order to condemn the military intervention of the Warsaw Pact troops in Czechoslovakia. With unusual blunt terms, he labeled the intervention an aggression and calls for the Romanians support in case a similar one would follow in Romania. The impact and the success of this speech cannot be overestimated. The Romanians acknowledged Ceausescu as a good, modern leader, sensitive to the needs of the people and a peace-lover. Moreover, many intellectual dissidents, Paul Goma included, who were very critical and skeptical about the regime until then, suddenly embraced Ceausescu's doctrine and joined the Party. In the world arena, Ceausescu is perceived as the hole in the Iron Curtain and becomes a plausible interlocutor in the East – West dialogue (Campeanu 2002). Thus, within weeks after the speech, Ceausescu becomes the star on top of the Eastern Block.

After that day, balcony speeches became the norm of Ceausescu's regime, the salient manner of communication between the ruler and the citizens. To say that this is specific only to Ceausescu is indeed historically inaccurate. Many political regimes, socialist ones in particular, employed similar communication techniques and patterns. In this respect too, Ceausescu was not at all original but followed a beaten track. Nonetheless, what distinguishes Ceausescu's balcony speeches is the choreography associated with them, especially after his 1974 visit to North Korea. Balcony speeches become not only a means of communicating with people, but foremost an act of reassessing the magnitude of the Ruler. All of Ceausescu's balcony speeches were prefaced and followed by "artistic" expressions of gratitude of the Romanian people for its leader. Moreover, all the speeches were carefully orchestrated and minutely planned: workers carrying the portrait of the ruler and of his wife; pioneers reciting elegiac poems; sportsmen doing complicated tricks; recorded clapping and standard ovations and, amidst all, officials of the State security who made sure that everything goes according to the plan⁸. Thus, Ceausescu's balcony speeches were the focal point of the official intersection between the state and the citizens: the benevolent ruler addressed the masses in order to inform them about the progress of socialism in Romania, while, in turn, the masses would express their infinite gratitude. In the following chapter, I will analyze how the regular, ordinary, daily intersection between state and citizens occurred in fact and how much differed from the official one, as seen from a regular balcony.

Ceausescu's balcony speeches reduplicated, in a strange, paradoxical and twisted manner the functions of the bourgeois balcony. From the height of his political balcony, Ceausescu could see and was seen by the disciplined masses, while at the same time the physical contact was severely

⁸ These were all part and parcel of what was labeled as the "Cult of Personality" which usually designates the last decade of Ceausescu's ruling in Romania.

regulated. Ceausescu's political balcony represented the intermediary safe space between the state and the rest of the society from where the ruler could gaze at the spectacle of the crowd, without actually taking part in it. This was the case until December 22nd 1989, when what appeared to be just another carefully orchestrated balcony speech went astray. The safe limits of Ceausescu's balcony, the same one as in 1968, suddenly became the target of the angry crowd, forcing Ceausescu to fly out. When the first personal objects of the ruler were thrown off his balcony by the angry protesters, Ceausescu was already arrested and his regime ended.

Ceausescu's political balcony played a central role in the design of the People's House, too. More accurately, the whole project of building a new city center revolved around Ceausescu's future political balcony. From there he would gaze towards a wide square and a long boulevard, specially designed to connect between Ceausescu's balcony and the rest of the administrative buildings, while also capable of accommodating tens of thousands of people for the official time of the speeches. Thus, the balcony was placed at the core of Ceausescu's imagined communist Romania. However, the abrupt end of the regime left the whole plan largely unfinished, except for the balcony (which Ceausescu never used). There, today, cohorts of tourists pay to see how small the world looks from the height of a political balcony.

This chapter traced back the bourgeois origins of the balcony, as an intermediary space between the intimacy of the private sphere, and the indistinctiveness of the public one. A further theoretical emphasis was placed on the transformations the balcony underwent in the anti-bourgeois Leninist architecture and the Stalinist one, respectively. The section on Ceausescu contextualized its architectural views in the broader framework of socialist architecture and

modernist conceptions, while also pinpointing to its salient particularities. Moreover, throughout this chapter I highlighted the intersection between the State and citizens in different socialist contexts, as expressed by the place assigned to balconies in the official architectural discourse. But this paper is not concerned only with official architectural conceptions. To end it here would leave the discussion unfinished and would offer a distorted view on the State/ citizen intersection as expressed in architecture in general and in the case of balcony, in particular. What is largely missing, so far, is an emphasis on people's daily practices, on the relationship between the official architectural conceptions and purposes and people's everyday understandings and usages, on State's power and functioning, seen from the perspective of everyday events, not only from that of officially organized ones; on the actual power of the state and its officials as contrasted to the projected one. The role of the next chapter is to balance the view by investigating the daily practices and usages people from a Romanian block of flats develop(ed) and attach(ed) to their balconies, within the larger context of day-to-day intersection between the state and its citizens.

4. View from the Balcony of a Socialist Block

Methodology

The site of my research is a typical block of flats in the second largest city of Romania, the sea side resort Constanta. The block was constructed at the beginning of the 80's as part of the general urban development plan depicted in the previous chapter. The inhabitants proudly recall that their block, and the whole neighborhood, represented the newest type of architectural design at that time. The block comprises of 16 apartments – 4 apartments per floor-, of which half have three rooms, while the other half only two. All apartments, except for those at the ground floor, have balconies. All but one balcony are currently enclosed, all during socialism. The three room apartments are 64 square meters large, while the others 48 square meters. The average number of inhabitants of a single apartment is three, the same as during socialism. The block is similar with the others around it, in terms of the number of apartments, of rooms and floors, and the surface of an apartment.

Thus, the reasons for choosing this site are manifold. First, the block itself saliently represented the architectural and living conceptions of the socialist regime, during the peak of its urban renewal plan. Consequently, this matter of fact offers strong grounds for placing my inquiry on the functions of balcony in a suitable context. Second, most of the inhabitants (more than 60%) have been living in this block since it was built. Thus, I can trace the practices of using the balcony and the meanings attached to this space both during the socialist regime, and after its fall. Finally, people living in this block of flats come from a wide range of different social strata:

from engineers to prosecutors, from pensioners to job-seekers, from plumbers to police men, from navy personal to farmers. For that matter, this diverse landscape of jobs and social positions enables a comparative view across how different people with different social and economical backgrounds used their balconies during the socialism, and also how they use it now, after the fall, when the social hierarchy and the symbolic meanings attached to different jobs have changed.

My plan was to conduct interviews with at least one representative of the 16 flats comprised in the block of flats. However, after the first interview the focus of my research slightly changed. I “entered the field” by interviewing first a representative of the state. Like throughout this paper, my purpose was to contrast the official dispositions with people’s routines. Mr. Ungureanu is now in his mid fifties and works in the Mayor’s office, being in charge with granting permits for buildings around the town and for supervising the legality of their construction. This was precisely his job during socialism as well, only that back then, as he recalls, he was subordinated not to the Mayor, but to the Party’s local representative. During socialism his task was to go out in the city, identify the illegal constructions, fine the trespassers and assist to the demolishing of the building. Thus, in order to have the official point of view on the functions and usages of balconies, he was the right person to start with. One more thing about him, which will be developed later in the chapter: even though he was a state apparatus official, he did not enjoy a privileged position. His sister immigrated to United States, few years before the collapse of the regime. Albeit he retained his job (“*because I was a devoted man and I did my job*”, as he tells me) he had to explain to his superiors the reasons his sister had to leave the country, who helped her, if he was still in contact with her and if he plans to leave as well. Periodically, he had to

write a declaration for the Party representative in which he informed about the relationship with his sister.

The data acquired from Ungureanu made me realize that I should broaden my research site by including blocks of flats overlooking the main boulevard. This, I believe, requires a word of explanation.

As with most of the socialist blocks of flats, in a purely modernist fashion, the neighborhoods of the 80's were designed around a major, large boulevard. This is the case with my research site as well. The boulevard I am talking about is by far the most important in the city since it connects the old part of the city (where the city center is identified to be) with the new part of the city, where the neighborhood I am analyzing here is situated (which is considered to be the new city center). The neighborhood is constructed in such a way that a long line of blocks overlook the boulevard, while behind them a series of identical blocks are clustered together. My initial plan was to interview people living in one of the clustered blocks. The Mayor's office official recommended that I should also investigate the blocks of flats directly facing the main boulevard. In the next session of the paper it will become apparent why, and to what extent, this change of focus in the research was important.

Taking the aforementioned facts into account, I interviewed only five people from my original site of research. Then I interviewed five people from blocks facing the main boulevard, two of which had to demolish the frame with which they had enclosed their balconies. Apart from the official from the Mayor's office, I particularly benefited from two other interviews: one police

man, active during socialism, and one mechanic worker who used to enclose balconies in the neighborhood. I will come back to them in the next section. Before that, I believe here is the right place to stress two more points.

In order to capture the current usage of balconies, apart from directly asking this question to my interviewee, I took some random pictures around the neighborhood, from outside. I had direct access to the balcony of some of my subjects, but I considered that taking picture in such an occasion would be too intrusive. However, I believe that there are two strong points this strategy of taking pictures offers: on one hand it enables a comparison between what people say and what the practice really is. Second, at some point during my research I began to realize that doing interviews is futile, if not utterly misleading, and pictures would serve the research purposes best, though not fully. Why misleading? This is the second point I want to address.

My positionality in the field was awkward from the begging. I lived 18 years in that block of flats so I had a wide degree of familiarity with my subjects. This constitutes a strong point in terms of accessibility in the field, but dramatically hampers the research. Firstly, they considered me a sort of political activist, not a student trying to write a thesis. For example, before one of the interviews with an old lady, now a block administrator, I tried to explain to her what I am doing and what the purpose of the interview is. She bluntly interrupted me saying that she knows because she saw me on television. Moreover, from time to time I write articles in a cultural weekly. While these people never read that magazine or my articles, what some of them understood is that I am also a sort of journalist, and the purpose of my inquiry is to write a new article, not a thesis. Thus, they placed me in a certain social role, which was hard, if not

impossible to alter, before conducting my interviews. Consequently, my feeling was, throughout most of the interviews, that people tried as much as possible not to answer my questions properly, but to answer in such a manner so that they would confirm what they thought my expectations would be.

This was obviously the case when referring to the life under socialism. Most of the respondents employed two rhetorical strategies: firstly, they stressed the hardships of the period, and secondly they tried to show that they disapprove of the system. I know from previous occasions that they have more nuanced and mixed feelings than that. Furthermore, the nature of the topic itself posed some communicational barriers. Generally, people refrain from talking about their intimate, private habits, as a legacy of the socialist times when such a small talk could prove disastrous. Not to mention the case when such a talk should be made with a person regarded as an outsider to be impressed. I do not know if my informants considered me, what the reflexive ethnography calls a “spy” (Forsey 2004), but I surely was an Other.

Taking into account the dynamics of the field depicted above and my positionality in it, I will turn now to presenting the insights, opinions, feelings, memories and perceptions my interviews made available. I am resilient to labeling the following chapter “Results” since, in my view, what is depicted there does not amount to much of a discovery. Even though the readers are free to make what they want from what is stated here, I regard it as a partial, though meaningful story, of some people who lived most of their lives in the communist block, in all the meanings of the word.

As stated already in the Introduction, enclosing the balcony was illegal during Ceausescu's regime and still is, because the law has remained unchanged from 1977, when it was promulgated. Unlike the past, however, enforcing it is currently much weaker, almost to the point of non-existence. Ungureanu, the Mayor's office official, described the enclosure of the balconies during socialism as a large phenomenon. What reasons could have been so powerful that drove so many people to trespass the law in order to enclose their balconies? How was it possible that such a large illegal phenomenon could take place in a society where, otherwise, everything was sanctioned promptly and people fined or jailed for smaller or non-existent deeds?

4.1. The wind or the importance of local knowledge

Every one of my interviewees identified as the principal reason for enclosing their balconies the fact that it was very windy and thus very cold in the rooms connected to the balconies. Elena, now a lawyer in her mid fifties, recalls that during the winter the balcony became full with snow and sometimes, in harsher nights, the snow would go into the room, due to the poor design of the windows connected to the balcony. Before deciding to enclose the balcony, she and her husband used to sleep in the same room with her two children, because it was warmer. In the previous chapter I already showed why the flats constructed from the mid 70's until the fall of the regime were poorly built and had a number of serious flaws. Mr. Ungureanu offers extensive explanations for the poor conditions of living in those blocks, thus confirming people's discontent: *"The blocks there [in the neighborhood I study] were built on the North-East direction. But everybody knows that this is the windy direction in this city. They made a mistake from the beginning"*. Moreover, the official remembers, the types of blocks the architects chose to build were wrong. The models used followed the techniques of blocks of flats most suitable for mountainous regions, where the winds are not that strong. Consequently, the blocks were not

only poorly constructed but also misplaced and ill-fitted in relation to their context. James Scott (1998) considers that the disregard of local contexts and particular knowledge represents a salient feature of any high-modernist regime in general, and of the socialist regimes in particular, who strove to produce universally applicable principles, rules and designs.

From this perspective, people's enclosure of the balcony appears to be a form of necessary adaptation of their houses to the actual environment in which they existed. By stressing that what determined the enclosure of balconies was determined by the particular weather conditions of the city, amounts to saying that people in fact subverted the universalistic and generalistic type of knowledge of the regime, with a local, particular and pragmatic one. Consequently, I would consider the act of enclosing the balcony neither an act of resistance to the state logic, nor a form of space appropriation –with its political implication- that Lefebvre (1991) mentions. Rather, I believe that it was a clear act of adaptation to the “objective” conditions of the environment, a kind of coping strategy people were forced to adopt to make their life bearable. Put differently, since the enclosure of balcony stemmed out of the necessity to cope with the harsh weather, there are little grounds to assert a political discontent with the regime, except maybe, by hinting at its flawed logic.

But necessity stemming from the inadequacy of the built environment to particular weather conditions was not at all the only reasons people had to enclose their balconies. Another type of necessity, arguably the salient one, was the paradoxes of the official redistribution system. This brings us to the core of the subject matter of this paper: state/citizens relationship.

4.2. The art of storing scarce food

Starting with the early 80's, along with the rapid urban development plan, a severe and puzzling rationalization of different products, mainly groceries, began. One of my respondents, in his late fifties now and a father of two newly born kids then, remembers the early days of the phenomena: *“One day I went to the grocery store for my usual shopping. I looked around and there were almost only fish cans that nobody would ever buy. I was lucky: I got the last pair of sausages. The next day the whole store was empty; nothing at all. Then the whole craziness started”*.

The “craziness” mentioned by my interviewee meant that people had to cue for long hours, in order to buy basic food products like milk, sugar or meat. The quantities one could buy on the official market were strictly limited. This is when and why secondary or informal economy or “Frigidaire socialism” (Bodnar 2000) was invented and perfected. For the purposes of this paper I prefer the term *“refrigerator socialism”*. Food was very hard to find on the state official market, and if was found insufficient for the needs of an average family. Consequently, people started to develop parallel relations and networks to acquire the basic products and to satisfy minimum needs. Since the flux and exchange of goods were discontinuous due to the informal and sometimes illegal nature of the process, being capable to properly store things represented probably the most strategic advantage. The problem with buying things on this market was that one had to buy in large amounts, either for further exchange, or for those periods when that given product would not be available at all. The best example in this sense is potatoes: in October or November, from different sources, people would buy up to 60 or even 80 kilos of potatoes, to last until spring. Sugar, rice, oil, meat, prickles and sauerkraut, to name just the most

representative items, followed the same line. But buying in large amounts posed the difficult problem not only of proper storing⁹, but also of a proper storing space. Under these circumstances, the balcony came in handy. Because it was necessary to enclose it, due to the harsh conditions of the weather now it became absolutely necessary to use it, due to the harsh conditions of the market that required food storages. These two reasons for enclosing the balconies are interlinked, and considering them separately would miss the point. Consequently, I might stress again, the enclosure of the balcony answered primarily to different necessities people faced, and bore little, if any political implications.

The story of balconies is also the story of housing conditions, which are woven into my informants' narratives. To be able to enclose your balcony and store things on it meant, in those times, that you were really lucky. Not because you managed somehow to avoid the law (more on that to follow), but because it meant that a) you did not have to turn the balcony into an extra living space; b) you had a balcony to be enclosed; c) you were part of a network(s) that could provide both for the materials to enclose the balcony and for the items, in large amounts, to be stored on the balcony. I will consider all these points in turn.

4.3. Kitchen with a view

As shown in Chapter three, a flat with a balcony represented the utmost living comfort during the socialist times, irrespective of the fact that the average surface of a three room apartment ranged between 50 and 60 square meters, for three or more people. This is exactly the case of a family that I interviewed, and their situation is paradigmatic for many others. As newly weds at the

⁹ It is not the place here to make any references about the diverse and highly creative techniques that were used for storing things, but I strongly believe that this is a very fruitful site for further research, that would greatly contribute to document the mythologies of everyday life in socialist Romania.

beginning of the 80's, Sezen, my interviewee, and her husband were provided with a three room apartment in a new block of flats. This was more than they ever wanted and hoped for. Soon, however, because of the difficult conditions in the countryside brought about both by the development plan and the rationalization of food, Sezen had to bring her old parents to their place. Before the first child was born the situation was awkward - both for her parents who never lived in a block of flats before, and for the newly weds - but bearable. When the second children came shortly after, the flat became crowded. Thus, they had to face the new situation. They transformed the living room into a sleeping room and prolonged the kitchen into the balcony: the stove was on the balcony, with the fridge and the sink in the kitchen. Sezen, somehow nostalgically, remembers that from her balcony she could observe her kids playing while also cooking their dinner.

4.4. The absence-presence of balcony

If you did not have a balcony it meant two things: you either lived in an older block of flats, or were unlucky enough to get the one of the ground floor apartments of a newly built block, which had no balconies. The first category of people exceeds the purposes of this paper even though it represents an even more challenging topic for further investigation. In a Derridean manner, the absence of balconies from the ground floor illuminates more aspects about the usages of the balconies from the upper floors. Since people from the ground floors faced the same needs either for storing things or for more space, they employed, mainly, two strategies. One of them was to build the missing balconies themselves. However, this proved foul play, as Ungureanu told me, because these were the first targets of enforcing the law. All the illegal built balconies were immediately torn down.

The alternative strategy employed by most of the people living on the ground floors was to appropriate the common rooms of the blocks – originally designed to serve for drying clothes of the inhabitants- in order to store the surplus of their food products. In the block of flats that represents the focus of my research, this situation is unchanged until today. If in the original conceptions of the blocks, the drying of clothes were externalized, in special designed common rooms, the appropriation of these spaces by the inhabitants from the ground-floor determined the re-interiorization of the drying of clothes by the other inhabitants. Where else, if not on the balcony, provided it has not been turn into a room. The problem is that drying clothes on the balcony was also illegal, as Ungureanu confirmed. He went on to say that if they closed their eyes to the enclosure of the balconies as such, they took more severe steps regarding the drying of clothes, especially on those balconies facing the main boulevards. Mrs. Oveioza was a book keeper for a furniture enterprise during the socialist regime. When the neighborhood was built she received a flat overlooking the main boulevard as a compensation for her small, single unit house which was to be destroyed in order to make room for new similar blocks. However, she had to enclose her balcony soon after moving in, because of the heavy wind. But one day, Oveioza, together with 25 neighbors, received an official note saying that they have to immediately proceed to disclosing their balconies. She complied, and took the iron frame to the courtyard of her old house (which was never demolished due to the regime change). As she recalls, she was not even allowed to dry clothes anymore. She complicitly confessed, however, that she still kept some small boxes where she put her potatoes and other useful things, but being careful not to be seen from outside.

Mr. Alexandrescu, one of the 25 neighbors of Mrs. Oveioza, was less lucky. When he received the official note, he refused to disclose his balcony, arguing that his balcony (see Picture 1) does not face the main boulevard (which runs on the left of the picture), but a similarly balcony, which was also enclosed. The officials were insensitive to Alexandrescu's argument and fined him 5000 lei. Since he was a low ranking administrator, his monthly salary was around 2500 lei a month. But he still refused to disclose his balcony, especially because his opposite neighbor, though in the same situation, had not received an official note. When authorities let him know that he would also have to pay for the demolition if made by state's employees, he gave up and did it himself. The procedure was easy since the frame was wooden made and he threw everything in the garden near the block. He never enclosed his balcony again and used it only for drying clothes

Drying clothes (as seen in Picture 2 and 3) added to the functions attached to the balcony. Thus, the balcony, in this new light, appears as a real pivotal living space during socialism, providing for at least two or three basic needs and necessities, at the very same time. What I think is worth highlighting at this point, is that people were forced to attach numerous functions to their balconies, not only because of the shortcomings of the built environment and of the official state market, but sometimes also because the actions of those neighbors that appropriated the communal spaces. It is nothing surprising in this mechanism: the scarcity of resources usually leads to fierce competition. Living space and food were two of the most valuable such resources. The overlapping of the two on the balcony represents, I believe, the salient point of intersection between the socialist State and its citizens. The unofficial usages of the balconies exposed the two major shortcomings of socialist redistribution: food and housing. In my view, the case of

balconies clearly pinpoints the fact that the State/citizens everyday relationship in socialist Romania was not one of open confrontations, of radical antagonisms, but this relationship was characterized by constant negotiations, lateral confrontations, small sabotages and boycotts on behalf of the people and irregular, arbitrary and sporadic reinforcement of authority on behalf of the State.

Again, this statement can only be applied to day-to-day cases in which regular citizens were involved. Moreover, since people were themselves divided along the lines of scarcity caused by the State's action, it is even harder to talk about a unified social body that resisted and opposed the State by appropriating the space of the balcony. Naturally, a divided social body, in stark competition for resources is much easier to be controlled, monitored, organized and governed.

Many authors, who analyze the state apparatus of the socialist regime, especially Romanian ones, continuously stress the high degree of State's intrusion, through its overarching surveillance techniques, into the lives of the citizens. My study convinces me, however, that this view is somewhat exaggerated. The State was not required to be so actively involved in monitoring people; people themselves were utterly preoccupied in monitoring each other since they were in a permanent and radical competition. And while the State was not innocent - scarcity and the nature of the built environment were both controlled and driven by the state, to say that the state intentionally created these realities in order to better and easily rule over people is an overstatement. A more balanced view of the matter would be that the State/citizens relationship during socialism was characterized by a mixture of fear, negotiations, small boycotts, adaptation,

accommodation, compliance, complicity, ambiguity, arbitrary, double talk, favors, deals, duplicity and above all, necessity. I believe that the following examples ground my assertions.

4.5. Peasants to be reformed

It was largely held that the practices of storing things, of drying clothes inside the house and of cultivating vegetables in the small gardens in front of the blocks of flats were inevitable outcomes and bad habits of the people coming from the rural areas to the cities, as part of the urbanization process. The official discourse denounced these practices as backward and uncivilized and through a series of newspaper articles, guides and trainings aimed at reforming the morals. Ungureanu confirmed that he and his colleagues were often asked to sit in trainings in which they were taught how to teach people to reform their living habits and practices. Indeed, the rapid and brutal displacement of rural people to urban areas led to a series of dramatic social changes in the fabric of the population. Surprisingly, given the nature of their relationship with power, some sociologists of the time raised the issue in a number of academic articles. However, this was a blatant misrepresentation of the reality. People had those “incriminating” living habits, in most of the cases, because of their necessities and needs. Moreover, state officials knew that very well too, especially lower ranking state apparatus members like my informant from the Mayor’s office. The officials who were called to enforce the law and reform the morals were facing the exact same problems as the rest of the population. The way in which law was enforced in the case of balconies, as told to me by my informant, is representative and constitutes a second example.

4.6. *Saving the facade of the regime*

Ungureanu and his colleagues would go out on the field two or three days prior to a Bucharest official's visit. They would randomly select some enclosed balconies, take some picture and then write a warning to the owner. They would write up to a hundred such warnings. When the official came, they would show that their work is in progress. After the official left, they would throw all the warnings into the dust bin, because if they had sent them, they would have had to monitor the destroying of the enclosure. This was the positive scenario. The most unpleasant one meant that the official from Bucharest would come unannounced and would insist on going out on the field with them. The official from Bucharest would then pick, again randomly, some balconies and personally monitor their destruction. This latter scenario was more frequent before the beginning of the summer season when high ranking officials were expected to pass through the city on their way to the sea-side. I asked Ungureanu why this ambiguity and duality; why were the balconies so important for the officials passing through the city. The answer I got flabbergasted me for a moment, but then I realized that in fact represents the key answer to the nature of the State/citizen relationship during socialist Romania: *"well, you see, the balcony is part of the façade, and the façade had to be safeguarded"*. Richard Stites (1989) suggested that in socialist architecture, urban design and public interactions a strong emphasis on a disciplined and rational façade represented the norm. Stites, but also Scott (1998), further noted that this preoccupation with an ordered public façade came in sharp contrast with the state of almost anarchy that usually dominated the social body at large.

4.7. People like us

Andrei Plesu (1995) wrote about the “*insufficiently analyzed aspect of imperfect evil characteristic of dictatorship: its arbitrariness*” (1995: 64). He notes that a dictatorship regime is frequently associated with inflexible laws, immediate punishment and total vigilance. If that would be the case, Plesu concludes, it would be impossible to accommodate that regime. On the contrary, the inexplicable sudden laxity of the law, or the unexpected permissions granted by the authorities make the regime bearable; the evil is not that evil, it blends into the fabric of the society. However, the arbitrariness creates confusion: you do not know when you committed a crime, or how harsh, if any, the punishment will be. Or, on the contrary, you could get accused for an imaginary deed.

All these confusing mechanisms, in turn, contributed to the subtle reconfirmation of the regime. In this sense, the enclosure of balconies represents a typical case. As we have seen, the authorities were not too prone in punishing the trespassers and the law in this matter was enforced randomly and cyclically. This notwithstanding, there was a certain social category under strict scrutiny, that is paradoxically, the State officials. Mr. Craciun served during socialism as a middle ranking police official and now he is retired. He lived in the same three room apartment since it was built, together with his wife and daughter. Like most of the people in the neighborhood, and for the same reasons, he enclosed his balcony. However, he had to re-open it soon after, following a harsh meeting with his superior. The argument he received was that, in his position, he should set a positive example to the rest of the inhabitants in the neighborhood by sporting legal behavior and “civilized” manners. When I interviewed him, he

remembered that he was very upset for this episode. Not only that he had to cope without a balcony during those times, but he felt that his prestige in the neighborhood was lost.

This state of affairs made the confusion among citizens paramount. The “logical” deduction would be that State officials were fully benefiting from their place in the system, irrespective of other “moral” norms and duties. In fact, the situation was much more ambiguous and hardly graspable even for the people most closely related to the Party mechanisms.

I seek for an explanation to these paradoxes in my talk with Ungureanu. He believes that the uncertainties caused by arbitrary enforcement of the law led to a state where everybody suspected the others. On one hand, those who could not enclose their balconies, for different reasons, regarded those who could as having strong links with the Securitate.¹⁰ On the other hand, those who enclosed their balconies considered those who did not as having very strong links with the State apparatus, so that they need not store things on the balcony or turn it into an extra room. This, I think, fosters my argument that people were closely scrutinizing each other due to the fact that they were in severe competition for resources. In this competition, the balcony was an indicative sign of status and for Craciun having an unclosed balcony meant a lower status. Moreover, Ungureanu admitted that he experienced similar feelings. When his sister left for the United States, he was sure that he will lose his job, or at least demoted to an obscure position since this was the general rule in such cases. But when nothing of these happened, he was glad at first, but then he became aware of the suspicious gaze of the others: “*They [colleagues, friends] thought I was working for them [Securitate], but I know I was clean*”.

¹⁰ The role Securitate played in making Ceausescu’s regime possible is too broad a topic to be mentioned here. For a very analytical overview see Deletant (1995).

However, he acknowledged that his status changed: he was envied by some, and despised by others, no one, Ungureanu himself, having a real basis for their opinions.

Furthermore, during our conversation, Ungureanu made a crucial point in the same regard: the hierarchical power positions and relations were not clearly visible and marked. If everybody knew the top local Party representatives, this was not the case for the rest of the hierarchic system. Ungureanu confessed that he and his colleagues were not properly doing their job partly because of fear. I quote him at length because I believe the point he makes is crucial:

Take the example of balconies. Let's say I was on the field and saw an enclosed balcony overlooking the boulevard or full of drying clothes. Naturally, I had to take a photo and write a warning. I usually did both, just to cover my going on the field. But that's all. Because I thought: who knows who that person is. And even if I knew, I could not know the relations he had, with whom and so on. One of my younger colleagues got almost jailed. He was stupid enough to write a warning and then went to hand it himself to the owner of the balcony and not mailed it as it was usually the case. The second day Police came and took him. Apparently, the owner of the balcony said that my colleague blackmailed him and asked for money to avoid the destruction of the balcony. I had to go to the Police too and testify. After a few days suddenly everything calmed down. We later found out that the owner had some connections in the Police department, either his wife worked there, or something like that. After that, we only went on the field in pairs and never contacted the owners directly.

I believe that Ungureanu's story is salient in expressing the ambiguities and uncertainties that underpinned the life under the socialist regime in Ceausescu's Romania. Firstly, I think it pinpoints to the effacement of power at the local and lower levels thus making very difficult to say precisely identify the important actors of the regime. Second, it shows that what is usually

regarded as all mighty state apparatus members, faced a series of limitations and challenges that loosen this view. Third, Ungureanu's recollection brings the discussion to the core of the informal networks of the time: it seems that it was not that important the official hierarchical structure one was part of, but the informal networks one was being able to connect to. The next section deals with these issues more closely.

4.8. The hub of the informal networks

If enclosing the balcony was illegal, the idea of legally purchasing the materials to do it is absurd. In turn, one had to be part of one of the informal networks that paralleled the official system, capable of providing such materials. Mrs. Violan makes this point very clear. She had to retire very early due to her medical condition, while her husband worked as a tailor, in a small Cooperativa [professional association]. She admits, with some regret, that the only contacts they had were with old people willing to have a fur coat at a lower price. Thus, they never thought of enclosing the balcony since they knew they will neither be able to get the necessary materials, nor offer something in exchange.

However, all my other informants were much better placed within the informal networks of the time. Mr. Duran, a navy personal, got the materials for enclosing the balcony from a colleague, who worked as a repairman. In exchange, he brought his colleague a pair of bleu- jeans from one of his cruises. Mr. Vasile, a school teacher, remembers that he asked his brother-in-law, who was the chief of a construction site, to help him enclose his balcony. His relative took some iron bars from the construction site and asked one of the workers to weld them together. Other workers brought the iron frame to Mr. Vasile's house but, he remembers with disappointment, "*the*

workers did not help him set the whole thing and he had to do it himself'. In exchange, Mr. Vasile made sure that his brother-in-law son will be treated fairly by the other teachers.

All the other stories follow, in broad lines, the same pattern: somebody knew somebody who could provide for materials while offering something in exchange. When analyzing the gift-counter-gift exchange relations, Marcel Mauss (1932) emphasized the obligation to firstly accept the gift and then to reciprocate. Refusing one's gift, Mauss underlines, was synonymous with war and chaos, while failing to reciprocate equaled a defeat. I admit that drawing a parallel between Mauss' analysis and the socialist informal networks might prove too exotic for the aims of this limited paper. I need to stress however, that the impossibility to reciprocate, in any shape or form, in the context of the informal networks led to a total exclusion from that network(s). The driving force of any such network revolved around the tacit understanding that every participant should gain something, material or symbolic.

Thus, being part of an informal network catered not only for basic items, such as food or materials to enclose the balcony, but also represented a matter of status and of social success. Balcony was one particular instance when people could assess their symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984). In order to better understand this, let's contrast Picture 4 with Picture 5, both depicting balconies enclosed before the regime fall. The first one shows a neatly closed, very organized balcony. What strikes in this picture, however, are the materials used for enclosing the balcony. If the iron frame is more or less common, the windows and the rubber around them are a clear sign of distinction (Bourdieu 1984). These are no regular windows, but they were designed for older types of trolleybuses (thus new in the 80's). Consequently, the person who owns the

balcony (and that I could not reach for an interview) had to have strong connections both with the transportation system sector, from where s/he got the materials in such a large amount, but also with the local authorities who most probably noted the unusual provenience of the enclosure and took no steps. Needless to say this balcony overlooks the main boulevard, thus rendering it extremely visible. By contrast, Picture 5 shows a regular enclosure of a balcony, with ordinary materials, and in a very poor shape¹¹. The owner of this balcony was definitely in a different type, less strong network, which could provide only for minimal items.

Victor Buchli (1999) suggests that the adjustments people made to the built environment constituted a way of expressing their personal taste and of marking a rather impersonal space with their own personalities. He exemplifies his thought with the embroidery people used to decorate their apartments, or to the manner in which the furniture was arranged around the house. I believe Buchli's point is valid, but in the case of balconies, people's choices were more than mere expressions of taste: one had to be able first to express the taste which brings into question one's position in the informal networks. Consequently, in a society that rhetorically envisaged total egalitarianism and where most of the objects of possible distinction were more or less similar (houses, clothes, cars etc), the balcony not only fulfilled basic necessities, but also offered the possibility of differentiation, of assessing one's success, of distinguishing from the others. Thus, I believe, the socialist balcony stands not only at the intersection point between state and society in terms of practical matters of governance, but it also exposes the ideological mismatch between the state and the citizens. By envisaging the balcony as the place of assessing one's distinction, people in fact, unconsciously, reproduced the bourgeois thinking. As stressed before, for the bourgeois, the balcony, and the practices surrounding it, represented indeed a

¹¹ The glass was broken few hours before I took the picture, by a bunch of kids who wanted to have fun.

matter of differentiation. In the socialist context I scrutinize here, the distinction stemmed not so much from the practices attached to the balcony, but from its physical shape and texture, people were capable of instilling. The balcony represented thus the most indicative sign of the types of relations between the state and the citizens, on one hand, and between the citizens themselves, on the other, that characterized the everyday life of socialist Romania.

Since enclosing the balconies catered not only for basic things like storing food or drying clothes, but also for more sensitive issues like distinction and social status, I had to talk to a specialist. Mr. Georgica is now 64 and worked all his life as a “*mechanic locksmith*”, according to the official title, “*repairing things and helping people*”, as he describes himself. He is crucial in this analysis, because he was enclosing balconies around the neighborhood.

4.9. The art of enclosing the balcony

Mr. Georgica’s balcony was considered a masterpiece of the time (as seen in Picture 6). Not only that it was perfectly well closed, with fine materials, but the windows were additionally enriched with iron protections. Moreover, a special device was attached to the exterior side of the balcony, where clothes could be better dried, and thus make more room in the balcony. Georgica’s balcony was not only a sign of good positioning in the informal networks, but also stood as a visit card for his skills. He proudly admits during our interview that he enclosed the balconies of most of his neighbors, and some of them still call him today when something is needed to be repaired or changed. I asked Georgica what were the actual steps of enclosing balconies since the law prohibited and the materials hard to find? First, he recalls, there were two types of customers. On one hand, those who could procure themselves most of the materials from diverse sources, as already depicted, but could not find a person to do the job. Then, Georgica came at

handy. He was usually approached by people who either phoned beforehand to schedule a day, or, those in a really hurry, knocked on his door and ask him to start working immediately. The other group of people consisted of those who could not find the materials themselves, but had other types of connections to compensate. They approached him through an intermediary, usually a neighbor, in order to set up a meeting. During the meeting Georgica would inquire about the type of enclosure the “clients” wanted, what type of materials they preferred and, of course, their counter-offer. The counter-offer usually consisted of paying a sum of money, from a 100 up to 300 Lei, depending on the type of job he had to do, but he also accepted products, mainly food, around the time of the holydays. If the iron bars were properly welded, the enclosure would take a only a day, usually on Sunday, the only free day of the week.

Contrary to my other informants, Mr. Georgica was much more optimistic about finding proper materials, *“only that you had to be patient and wait for the right moment”*. In his small locksmith house, he organized an informal meeting point for people who wanted to trade their surpluses. *“Everybody who worked in construction sites or in the harbor, had something to exchange, because they took from there large amounts of materials. This is how I was able to provide iron frames for my ‘clients’. But everybody could, all you had to do was ask”*. Before introducing him to me, Mr. Alexandrescu praised his skills but at the same time warned me that Mr. Georgica had links with the Securitate and that is the reason he was allowed to enclose balconies: to easily enter people’s houses and in order to gather information. I posed this question to Georgica during our interview, but he bluntly dismissed the allegation, stressing that *“I got an approval from the Mayor to do this job, not at all from Securitate”*.

During our walk through the neighborhood, Georgica became sad. He noticed that people do not care so much for their balconies as they used to, and, apart from this, most of them look the same now. Why the same? The answer to this question brings us in post-socialist times.

4.10. A la recherche du balcon perdu

Judit Bodnar (2000) wrote that the main difference between the socialist and the capitalist periods is given the regime of property, and that an analysis of post-socialist cities has to account for the transition from state to private ownership and the effects it entailed for the urban space. I follow Bodnar in stressing the importance of private ownership in understanding the post-socialist transformation of balconies. After the fall of the regime two major phenomena were crucial in defining the new functions of the balconies: on one hand, people became the legal owners of their apartments, and secondly, the need to store food in large amounts became obsolete.

Private ownership, coupled with a total demise of the state in regulating the activities concerning private housing, led to a series of drastic changes. People fully reshaped their dwellings according to the new necessities and tastes, either by destroying unnecessary walls, or building new ones, by constructing balconies at the ground floor, or an extra room on top of the blocks, at the last floors. Balcony followed the same broad lines. A clear sign of economic success and prosperity in post-socialist times, among other things, was to replace the old iron enclosure of the balcony, with a new one made of better, standardized materials purchased from prestigious stores (as seen in Picture 7). This, indeed, leads to standardization as Mr. Georgica noted, and as it is visible in Picture 8. Paradoxically then, if during socialism having a balcony different from the

rest, was the real sign of prestige, in post-socialist times conforming to the norm, fulfils the exact same purposes.

When the need to store food on balconies disappeared, the balcony ceased to be a focal point of intersection. What clearly comes out of my interviews is that the new functions attached to the post-socialist balconies, are yet to be defined and refined. Some people (as it is the case in Picture 9) opened up their balconies with a view to recreate the bourgeois functions of an intermediary space from where to gaze at the world. The decorative role of the flowers is highly suggestive in this respect. But, based on my observations, such cases represent a minority. For most of the other people, balcony constitutes a hybrid space, where drying clothes, storing some old things, growing plants and, from time to time, having a coffee, unproblematically go together (see Picture 10 for such an eclectic mixture).

4.11. *Memory vs. instrumentality*

Pierre Nora (1989) discusses the formation and the roles of the places of memory in the metabolism of a nation. Analyzing balconies in this vein might prove, at a first glance, a hazardous enterprise. Nonetheless, since the balconies were placed at the core of diverse social intersections during socialism, I started to tease out this line of thought. To be sure, the nostalgic discourses that sprang throughout the interviews were very slim and limited only to personal moments. As I said, people tried to mainly emphasize the negative aspects of the regime and show their disapproval. Moreover, the type of objects that are stored now on balconies and the manner in which they are displayed suggest rather a more instrumental function of the balconies, rather than a mnemonic one (picture 11 is illustrative in this sense): balcony seems to be the

proper place to store those things one is not yet ready to throw away, but not necessarily for nostalgic reasons.

I believe that this last point opens a large discussion that exceeds the limits of the present paper. Moreover, it sets the grounds for further inquiry on balconies that would employ as a starting point this tension between memory and instrumentality, in the current usages of the balcony.

This notwithstanding, I strongly believe that balconies are traversed by meaningful traces of a disappeared world, some of which this paper tried to partially unveil, by looking at the practices people in a Romanian block of flats attached to their balconies.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to inquire into the functions of the socialist balcony both from the perspective of the official architectural discourses, and also from the viewpoint of people's everyday practices. To the widely held belief that balcony is an intermediary space between private and public sphere, I opposed the hypothesis that balcony, in the socialist context, represents a highly political *topos* of intersection between the State and the citizens.

In order to ground my point, the paper was structured on two interlinked parts. The first one investigates the official architectural discourses and the functions associated with the balcony in four historical and theoretical different instances: the bourgeois origins, the Leninist revolutionary architecture, the Stalinist re-interpretation of Leninism, and Ceausescu's Romania. In so doing my main focus was on the differences and particularities of the respective periods while also referring to the broader social contexts in which the architectural discourses were formulated and the functions of the balcony assigned. Thus I could contrast the different official architectural discourses and the official functions envisaged for the balconies, as epitomizing, at the level of built environment, the State/citizen relationship.

The second part of the paper attempted a shift of focus. There, through an ethnography conducted in a Romanian neighborhood, my goal was to assess the manner in which the official dispositions intersected and collided with the practices of daily life of ordinary people. Thus, I seek to employ my strategic research site –the balcony – as an opportunity to look at State/citizen relationship both in its official intersection (as expressed by the official architectural discourse)

and in its everyday intersection (as expressed by the practices developed by people in their everyday life). Consequently, I should stress again, my research is neither about official architecture, as embodied in the form of balconies, nor about people's everyday life, but it deals with the ticklish issue of socialist State/citizens intersection as seen from these two perspectives, at the very same time.

The balcony, as part of the built environment, emerged from the 19th century bourgeois politics of identity, as an intermediary site between the private and the public sphere. Thus, the balcony fulfilled the need of the bourgeoisie to gaze at the public spectacle of the public space without actually having to take part. Consequently, balcony was part and parcel of the bourgeois identity defined in opposition with the inferior Others, while centered around two senses: the gaze and the hearing.

The Leninist revolutionaries utterly dismissed all the bourgeois features that were constitutive of the bourgeois architecture, especially the public/private distinction out of which the balcony emerged. Thus, they did not envisage any special function for the balcony, outside a general belief in communal living. However, the Leninist revolutionary dreams, in terms of architecture, never actually materialized and were abandoned and utterly condemned, soon after Lenin's death.

Stalin's regime, though voicing a revolutionary rhetoric, reintroduced some of the bourgeois architectural features that were totally expelled from the Leninist one. On these features he, nevertheless, superimposed the total influence and involvement of the State and its Ruler. The

fundamental mark, however, of the Stalinist regime was its emphasis on architectural monumentality in which, balconies served mere decorative purposes in the facade.

Ceausescu's architectural conceptions revived, to a certain extent, the Stalinist precepts regarding both the domestic sphere and the architectural monumentality. However, he added his own personal tastes, as seen in the plans of the People's House. In Ceausescu's architectural discourse, balconies had more than the Stalinist decorative functions, by marking a difference in the comfort rate of an apartment. In that section, I also suggested that the salient feature of Ceausescu's regime was the political implications attached to the official balconies, as designating the principal means of communication between the ruler and the citizens.

The main findings of the ethnography section, as they stem out of my fieldwork in a Romanian, provincial town, block of flats, challenge and contextualize many of the features of the official discourse and dispositions that underpinned Ceausescu's regime. Seen from the height of a regular balcony, the widely held idea of the almightiness of the regime, of the monolithic- like structure of the state and of total control and surveillance exercised by authorities, become loose. To note a discrepancy between the official discourse and people's reality does not amount to much of a finding. I believe, however, that my informants, through their stories revolving around their balconies, suggested more profound insights. Thus, not only that the state was not all-powerful, but at local levels and in many of the daily issues, almost absent or acting in a chaotic manner; not only that state officials were not indulging in the privileges allegedly offered by their position, but most of them, especially lower ranking ones, had to develop inventive strategies in order to cope with the challenges of the regime, while retaining their official "face";

not only that law was not inflexible, but in many cases never, or occasionally reinforced. Furthermore, my fieldwork also suggested that the idea of people's resistance to the regime should also be nuanced, by introducing the terms of "accommodation, adaptation and negotiation". In other words, the daily intersection between the State and citizens was one of lateral confrontations, not of open oppositions.

In the same vein, this research reemphasized the crucial role played by the informal networks in people's everyday life. The enclosed balcony characteristic of those times came at the core of these networks, both because the balcony was a by-product of these networks, while saliently expressing them. Thus, taking into account all the aspects mentioned so far, the balcony proved a crucial *topos* of capturing the State/citizen relationship as developed in the daily practices of the people, while also offering the possibility to contrast this regular intersection with the officially organized ones.

I believe that my current research is limited by two main factors: a methodological one, and a more substantial one. First, the methodological one hints to the limited nature of my fieldwork which depicts a certain neighborhood, from a particular city in a large country. Thus, there are no sufficient reasons for a generalization of these findings. The more substantial factor concerns the focus of my fieldwork. My ethnographic research scrutinizes the last decade of the relationship between the Romanian socialist state and its citizens, while barely hinting to post-socialist realities. Engaging in research on everyday life during socialist Romania, from the viewpoint of a regular balcony is not utterly futile, since to my knowledge, represents a singular endeavor so far. Nonetheless, I also strongly believe that a focus on the post-socialist situation would offer

more insights into the meanings and functions of balconies. Thus, a further research, should, from my perspective, approach what I believe to be three major, interlinked questions: what is the dominant post-socialist architectural discourse on balconies? Whether or not the former socialist balconies could assume, after the fall, mediatory functions similarly to the bourgeois ones? Whether the post-socialist balconies fulfill a mnemonic function or an instrumental one, with respect to the things currently stored on these balconies? All these three questions were briefly sketched in the previous chapter, when I only suggested some possible points of departure in answering them.

If in Manet's *Balcony* people were said to be effaced by the objects around them, in the socialist one, they seemed totally absent. In this paper I tried to correct this view by re-contextualizing the picture and foregrounding the actors.

6. Annexes

Picture 1: Mr. Alexandrescu's much disputed balcony (pp 50)



Pictures 2 and 3: One of the salient features of balconies: drying clothes (pp 50)



Picture 4: The “Bus Balcony” (pp 58)



Picture 5: Low Status Balcony (pp 58).



Picture 6: Mr. Georgica's neat balcony (pp 60)



Picture 7: “Newly” enclosed balcony (pp 62)



Picture 8: Post-socialist uniformity (pp 62)



Picture 9: Post-socialist bourgeois balconies (pp 63)



Picture 10: Post-socialist hybrid balconies (pp 63)



Picture 11: Place of memory? (pp 64)



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