THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF TRAFFIC CONGESTION: SYSTEM, LIFEWORLD AND THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE IN BUCHAREST

By
Ştefan Guga

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Supervisors: Prof. Judit Bodnár
Prof. Alexandra Kowalski

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Abstract

This thesis deals with traffic congestion in Bucharest, Romania, from the perspective of the production of urban space. Congestion is analyzed both in its political-economic determinations and in its implications for everyday life, while the linkages between system and lifeworld are traced out theoretically and empirically in order to show, on the one hand, how traffic congestion emerges as part of the process of the urbanization of capital and, on the other, how the politics of congestion are embedded in the lived and conceived dimensions of the space of congestion. If congestion appears at first to point toward space becoming a barrier to capital accumulation, the political process whereby the creative destruction of space is legitimated is unraveled by looking at the ways in which space becomes a subjectively perceived obstacle to be overcome. In fulfilling this function, space itself proves to be hegemonic, as the problem of congestion is displaced into the lifeworld where it appears as a crisis of everyday social relations.

Contents

Introduction: Watching the Traffic Go By

Traffic congestion in cities has been one of the major characteristics of capitalist urbanization for the last century or even more; there is, however, surprisingly little sociological or anthropological research on the subject itself and, for that matter, on urban transportation in general.[1] In the division of academic labor, transportation in general and congestion in particular have been accounted for as objects of research either by urban economics or by specialized branches of engineering (see, for example, Smeed 1968); in any case, the reality of traffic is generally regarded as being highly technical in itself, something to be dealt with by means of complex mathematical modeling. The fact that the "urbanization of social relations" which paralleled the urbanization of capital implied "the [spatial] separation of workplace and living place" (Harvey 1985a:xvii) and, further, the fact that the study of these two spatial entities and the relationships therein were claimed to be at the cornerstone of critical urban studies (Harvey 1985a; 1985b) made the space of transportation—as the space literally in between the two—less attractive for sociological research. As John Urry (2000:59) remarked, "urban sociology has been remarkably static," and it seems to be to a great extent at a loss when it comes to providing adequate interpretations and explanations of what traffic as a form of mobility is about. This situation has slowly been changing, as transportation is becoming an object of interest for social scientists, either in the form of studies of mobility and mobility systems (Urry 2000), or in terms of looking at the production of urban infrastructure (Graham and Marvin 2001). Nevertheless, critical scholarship—namely, urban political economy—has as of yet failed in meeting the challenge of understanding urban transportation in a systematic manner. If it is conceivable to think of urban transportation and mobility from a critical perspective in terms of the circulation of labor, commodities, and capital within urban space, and thus to conceptualize urban mobility as being part of the

[1] For an interesting account of early congestion problems, see Abu-Lughod (1965:446ff).

urbanization of capital (Harvey 1985b), seeing how this can be linked with changes in everyday life and the politics of urban space, or what Harvey (1985a) calls "the urbanization of consciousness," is less clear.

In this thesis I critically analyze traffic congestion in Bucharest, Romania, by strategically focusing on the ways in which it is intertwined with the broader issue of the production of urban space. I start from the assumption that congestion needs to be tackled mainly as a spatial phenomenon, and thus attempt to understand it in both its complex political-economic determinations and its wider implications for social relationships in everyday urban life. While the starting goal was to understand congestion in terms of the circulation of labor and commodities in urban space, thus enabling me to use the theoretical framework of political economy, empirical research in Bucharest revealed the importance of the everyday experience of congested transportation and its implications for broader political processes of legitimation and the workings of ideology. The critical theories of David Harvey, Jürgen Habermas, and Henri Lefebvre proved instrumental in understanding congestion as a peculiar urban phenomenon that takes its toll on both the process of capital accumulation and the everyday practices and lived experience of real people. The challenge was to understand the ways in which these apparently distinct levels of analysis are interlinked and, as noted before, the explicit focus on space served as a linchpin in coming to terms with this difficulty. This made possible the unveiling of the underlying politics of traffic and traffic congestion, in which the issues of an urbanized consciousness and political action are just as important for the making of urban space as the more familiar processes of consciousness-formation that take place at home and at work (Harvey 1985a).

In terms of methodology, the task also proved daunting, as I had to deal with many different types of data and techniques: from the analysis of statistical data and official documentation to ethnographic inquiries into the lived experience of traffic congestion and

interpretations of the more structured representations of congested space found in daily newspapers, photographs, and films. All of these were required in order to grasp as much as possible of the complex relationships between the political economy of traffic congestion and the production of space. The case of Bucharest proved to be particularly advantageous, especially because of congestion's rather recent emergence as one of the city's major problems, this allowing me to easily trace its historical determinations and understand its present and future implications.

The structure of the paper comprises of four chapters. In the first chapter I review the main approaches in the sociological and anthropological literature that deal with traffic and congestion, while at the same time arguing for a distinctively Marxist interpretation that engages critically with traffic congestion from the perspective of the production of space. Each of the following three parts deals with a different aspect of how traffic and congestion are shaped by and at the same time influence the production of urban space in Bucharest. In chapter two I present a historically-informed political-economic analysis of urban transportation in Bucharest. Starting from Castells's (1977) structuralist account of spatial circulation, I show how congestion emerged as a symptom of a broader transformation in the political economy of the city and of the fact that space became a barrier to capital accumulation; from a historical point of view, I hypothesize that we can interpret this as a shift from an abstract space whose production was dominated by the state, to an abstract space dominated by the logic of capital (Lefebvre 1991). By harking back to the level of spatial practices, in chapter three I analyze how the above shift in the logic of space production required a different system of coordination of spatial practices within urban space, as transportation became individualized on a massive scale in the post-1989 era. Habermas's understanding of everyday life in terms of instrumental and communicative rationalities sheds light not only on how abstract space is in fact a "real abstraction," meaning that it is

lived as such, but also on the “communicative pathologies” (Habermas 2001) that are inherent in the lived experience of congested traffic. This makes it possible to see how spaces of representations (Lefebvre 1991) emerge and, more importantly, of how they serve to legitimize specific interventions in space that are economically and politically very significant, even though apparently they are less so. This latter process is analyzed in chapter four, where I look at the recent major infrastructural projects undertaken in Bucharest and the way they were made possible by the emergence of a hegemonic understanding of congestion as a problem of public interest. The argument comes full circle, as space is transformed from being an objective barrier to capital accumulation into a subjectively perceived obstacle to be overcome.

1. Traffic Congestion and the Production of Space

Mapping the literature on traffic congestion can be regarded as either a very simple task, considering the scarcity of systematic accounts, or a mammoth one, considering that dealing with congestion requires, first, placing it within the literature on car traffic and, second, understanding congestion as part of the much broader issue of urban transportation. Traffic and congestion have, naturally, been very important for the sociology of transportation (Yago 1983) especially when it came to understanding the part played by congestion in urban politics and, consequently, in the shaping of urban structures and infrastructures. However, most critical accounts (e.g. Blair 1974:ch.3) don't go far beyond deploring the systematic destruction of urbanity and of public space, and the subsequent emergence of the “anti-city” under the dominance of car-based transportation. In this chapter, I will draw on the most significant approaches in the literature on traffic and car transportation, while focusing specifically on the way they are related with the issue of urban space. The aim is to provide a critical interpretation of these theoretical and empirical accounts, in order to understand how an approach centered around the production of space can contribute to a better understanding

of the phenomena at hand.

A Review of the Literature

The dominant perspective on traffic and congestion derives primarily from the disciplines of transport economics and engineering (e.g. Smeed 1968). Equipped with the tools of mathematical and economic modeling, and dealing with transportation in terms of travel behavior, aggregate supply and demand, economic costs, gains and losses, this literature is quantitatively abundant and mostly oriented toward solving various problems concerning transportation systems. This, of course, comes as a consequence of the fact that transport economics is specifically meant to serve in the elaboration of transportation policies and has a key role in urban planning (e.g. O'Flaherty 1997; Small and Verhoef 2007). While some of this literature (e.g. Næss 2006) does shed light on our understanding of how urban structure is linked with specific forms of travel, and serves as a starting point for a political-economic analysis such as the one made by Castells (1977:191ff), there are several aspects which need to be approached with caution, and even skepticism. On the one hand, the technicization of urban mobilities has rendered this aspect of social reality banal, uninteresting, or even invisible for other disciplines, and this led to the 'black-boxing' of an entire array of social relations which came together with its being rendered simply technical and, consequently, apolitical (Graham and Marvin 2001:16ff). On the other hand, this taken-for-grantedness needs to be seen as an integral part of what Lefebvre (1991) calls “representations of space.” If we admit the latter to be “the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers . . . all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived” (Lefebvre 1991:38-9), then we might need to emphasize the combination of knowledge and ideology (Lefebvre 1991:45) that underpins this entire corpus of literature and the ways in which it is intertwined with the dominant relations of production and “the 'order' which those relations impose” (Lefebvre 1991:33). In other words, rather than

serving as a starting point, this kind of literature should constitute part of the very object of analysis of a critical understanding of traffic and traffic congestion.[2]

A series of historians of urbanism and technology (Bottles 1987; Fotsch 2007; Holtz Kay 1998; McShane 1994) have been interested in the relationship between the rise of the automobile as the dominant means of transportation and the shape, culture, and politics of cities. These accounts are mostly empirically-driven and case-focused, the city of Los Angeles serving as a prime example of how the automobile transformed the way we live in and think of cities. There are several important contributions made by this corpus of literature, especially in understanding how automobile transportation is linked with the development of family-centered ways of life, suburbanization, the decay of urban public space and the experience of isolation, etc. Some authors (McShane 1994) stress the importance of the car as a cultural artifact, a symbol of freedom and modernity, while others (Fotsch 2007) show how cultural representations served as a legitimating force in reshaping the US urban landscape. Bottles (1987), on the other hand, emphasizes the underlying democratic politics and alliances that made the dominance of the car and road transport possible and Holtz Kay (1998) focuses on the multiple problems brought about by car-dependent urbanism, the inherent inequalities regarding access, and the dangers for the environment. These studies also have significant drawbacks which are related mostly to their overemphasis on the cultural dimension (especially when using "car culture" as an independent variable), and to their being more or less limited to the same case—that of Los Angeles in particular or of suburban America in general. While standing in direct opposition to the above economistic approaches, these studies are less useful in understanding urban

[2] This very short account of transport economics, engineering and planning does no justice to the immense variety that exists within this field. At the risk of conflating approaches that use different starting assumptions and explanatory frameworks, or even some that often have very opposite social and political goals (e.g. improving and increasing car-usage *vs.* alleviating the strain on the environment), a more detailed treatment would have been impossible, considering the aims of this paper and the minimal input this literature had throughout my research.

traffic in its relationship with the logic of capital accumulation, and are thus quite far from pointing in the direction of a more theoretically-encompassing perspective.

By far the most complex and comprehensive approach dealing with car traffic is that of mobilities studies. Starting with the work of John Urry (2000), a number of authors have followed up on the challenge of making the multiple modes of physical and virtual mobility into a legitimate object of study for sociology, geography, and cultural studies. Within this framework, car-based transportation has a special role, as a great deal of attention has been drawn toward Urry's concept of "automobility," and several recent works have been dedicated to the topic (Böhm et al. 2006; Featherstone, Thrift, and Urry 2005). While Urry's understanding of automobility—as "a self-organizing autopoietic, non-linear system that spreads world-wide, and includes cars, car-drivers, roads, petroleum supplies and many novel objects, technologies and signs" (2005:27)—pays tribute to Luhmann's systems theory, to certain postructuralist theories, and to chaos and complexity theories, it does this at the cost of putting forward somewhat of an eclectic account of what automobility is and how it functions as a system, and this unavoidably takes its toll on the multitude of writings belonging to this paradigm. Paradoxically, then, even though Urry and his collaborators try to construct an appropriate framework for grasping the complex ramifications of car transportation, the theory of automobility fails precisely at making this framework coherent. Furthermore, insofar as Urry brings to the fore the important question of how automobility is being globalized, his account brackets issues concerning politics and agency (Böhm et al. 2006) and in this sense his theory strays away from the above-mentioned historians' detail-rich descriptions and interpretations. When it comes to understanding the relationship between traffic and urban space, Urry (Sheller and Urry 2000; Urry 2005) surreptitiously falls into the trap of technological determinism precisely because he tends to subsume the

dynamics of capital accumulation and the state to the logic of the system of automobility.[3]

Finally, yet another perspective on traffic and congestion is given by authors concerned with everyday life. Even though the everyday experience of urban space and its transformation and functioning under the dominance of car-based transportation and traffic has long been a topic of interest for classical authors in the field (Debord [1959] 2006; Lefebvre 1971:100-9; [1961] 2008:212, 303; Sennett 1996:329-66), these are rather scattered accounts and lack systematic treatment. Nevertheless they inspired a more abundant literature emphasizing the routine aspects of commuting and the journey to work (e.g. Lefebvre 2004; Moran 2005:chaps.2 and 3; Taylor, Evans, and Fraser 1996:ch.4). Drawing attention to the fact that "[t]he daily commute to work is perhaps one of the most distinctive of modern routines" (Highmore 2004:310), these authors argue that traffic, as an object of analysis, can be used strategically in understanding and interpreting the modern experience of urban time, space and rhythms. By revealing the interactions, emotions and representations which surround the daily commute and congested traffic, these studies show that a critique of everyday life needs to account for the space and time of the journey to work, and that the more familiar emphasis on work and leisure is bound to be incomplete. However, while such a critique underlines the lived dimension of traffic congestion, it proves less useful in grasping the linkages between the level of everyday practice and broader dynamics of capital accumulation that shape the urban built environment. In order to accomplish this, and thus formulate a more comprehensive critique that sees the urban experience as being related to the urbanization of capital, we need to turn to Marxist political economy.[4] The advantage of focusing on the dialectical relationship between capital accumulation and everyday life is that

[3] See especially Urry's emphasis on the dialectic of freedom and coercion and the reshaping of urban space in accordance with the requirements of car transportation. According to Gottdiener's (1994) critique of technological determinism in theories dealing with urban space, these approaches tend to elude the political and economic processes involved in the production of urban space, while emphasizing technology as an independent and determinant variable. While Urry does not do this overtly, his argument can easily be read in a like manner.
[4] See also Bleitrach and Chenu (1981).

it makes it possible to integrate many of the aspects that are presented in the literature on traffic in a one-sided manner. There is no doubt, for example, that the systemic complexity of urban traffic emphasized in the technical literature on transport economics, and the focus on the spatiotemporal nature of routines by scholars working on everyday life are equally important and research should be aimed at connecting these two aspects of reality rather than at reinforcing pre-existing disciplinary boundaries. The challenge is to grasp the reality of congestion from the perspective of both system and lifeworld, and to empirically draw out the relationship between these two facets of the social dynamic. At the core of such an approach lies the tenet that a theory of urbanization must inquire into the nature of the production of urban space and, subsequently, that seeing congestion as an essentially spatial phenomenon can prove useful in simultaneously dealing with both its political-economic determinations and its routine-like everyday character.

Political Economy and the Production of Space

The question remains as to how we are to integrate the reality of traffic into our general understanding of urban space, and even though the existing literature might indicate some points of reference, we are still very far from putting together a coherent theoretical and methodological approach to urban circulation. Nevertheless, if urbanization is characteristic of the internalization of space within the social relations of capitalist accumulation, it might prove useful to approach congestion as a specific characteristic of capitalist urbanization. How are we, then, to understand congestion as an outcome and part of the production of the space of accumulation? More specifically, how would the theory of social space (Lefebvre 1991) account for congested traffic as part of the more encompassing process through which capitalist social relations are spatialized? Lastly, if the space of congestion is indeed produced in such a way, can there be a politics of traffic and of traffic congestion? What is certain from the outset, however, is that grasping such a politics of space would be impossible without

accepting space itself as being political (Lefebvre 2009:174), and this means that we have to consider traffic as being part of the production of both "urban reality" or "the urban level"—of the "second nature" consisting in infrastructural networks and spatial flows which function as spatializations of the social order situated on the global level—and "daily reality" or "the everyday"—the lived experience which comprises the space of congestion.[5] Since the production of space entails the production of an urban environment that mediates between the level of abstract forces of power and accumulation and the level of the everyday, the political economy of congestion needs to be understood in its interrelationship with the everyday experience of congested traffic.

In the *Grundrisse* ([1858] 1993) and later in the second volume of *Capital* ([1884] 1978), Marx underscores the fundamental significance of transportation and communications for the reproduction of both individual capitals and total social capital. At different points in the circuit of capital, or at different moments of its reproduction, transportation proves crucial for production, exchange, or consumption in that it determines the importance of circulation costs and contributes to either the shortening or the lengthening of turnover time. Consequently, for Marx ([1858] 1993:524-33; [1884] 1978:327), improvements in transportation infrastructure and the spatiotemporal coordination of different flows of commodities, capital, and labor were essential in the permanent struggle to reduce the socially necessary turnover time of capital. Harvey later picks up on these ideas and incorporates them into his theory of urbanization and argues that the setting into place of infrastructural systems is part of a broader process through which capital produces a space fit for its expanded reproduction. The built environment of cities thus becomes a "second nature" representing the congealed, spatial and material forms of production, exchange and consumption. This "objectification in the landscape" (Harvey 1985b:xvi) of the logic of

[5] On these dimensions and levels circumscribed by the theory of social space, see Lefebvre (1991:38, 229; 1996; 2003), and also Ronneberger (2008) and Shmuely (2008).

capital accumulation requires massive, long-term investments in fixed capital and these usually take the form of infrastructural arrangements which are aimed at rationalizing movement in space and time and effectively transforming the city into a “transaction maximizing system” (Harvey 1988:264). However, as Marx ([1867] 1977:1013) once noted, “the capitalist mode of production itself raises obstacles in the way of its own tendency,” and herein lies the contradictory character of capitalist urbanization: the permanently shifting requirements of capital's expanded reproduction render the fixed, long-term investments in spatial configurations obsolete and as a consequence of this, at specific moments in time, the capital that was at one point invested into the built environment must be destroyed and new spatial arrangements must be put into place (Harvey 1984:ch.12). This process of “creative destruction” does not come about naturally, but rather depends on which side the scale of politics inclines and it is here that the importance of struggles over legitimacy and hegemony is made obvious: because the structure and form of urban politics are dependent on processes of consciousness-formation that are directly and permanently influenced by the everyday experience of that same space which becomes contentious in moments of crisis, the political economy of urban space needs to account for this hegemonic potential of everyday life.

For the political economy of spatial circulation, however, the analysis of infrastructure networks reflects only one side of the matter, and the question remains as to how we are to account for the actual movement of commodities and people through urban space; if focusing on infrastructure might reveal the ways in which spatial flows are channeled through the city, it has yet to allow us an interpretation of these flows themselves. Nevertheless, if we deal with circulation in terms of “a specification of a more general theory of *exchange* between the components of the urban system, which means, in concrete terms, that one must establish the *content* of the traffic if one is to explain the mode of circulation” (Castells 1977:192), it can be argued that spatial flows can be operationalized as aggregate exchanges between

different elements of the urban structure. This makes it possible for us to extrapolate circulation from an analysis of the spatial distribution of different loci of production and social reproduction and thus introduce movement itself in the political economy of urban space. Indeed, this is an intuitive, yet highly effective way of comprehending an apparently very elusive phenomenon, as it entails the disaggregation of circulation flows into commuting, "journeys for leisure activities," "journeys on business," "journeys for social relations, but also "goods traffic," "industrial traffic" and so on, and thus allows us to grasp circulation by way of looking at the spatial distribution of specific types of origin and destination points.[6] Such an analysis of urban structure would have to supplement the inquiry into the production of infrastructural systems emphasized by Harvey, and therefore constitute a more comprehensive account of how transportation (understood as spatial circulation), the urbanization of capital, and the production of the built environment are intertwined.

Still, such an analysis cannot exhaust the social space of congestion, since dealing with circulation in terms of flows is, as Lefebvre (1991:206) put it, "self sufficient only in political economy." If the language of capital accumulation and circulation flows is appropriate in understanding the spatial requirements for the expanded reproduction of capital—or, in other words, in grasping the inscription of the abstract forces of power and capital into urban space—it proves to be less useful in gaining insight into how this space relates with the level of the everyday. From the above political-economic interpretation, we must thus go back to the level of everyday practices and interactions and inquire into the nature of the experience of congested traffic and how it shapes the ways in which people think of, and act in, urban space. We must move from the *congested space* of political economy, to the *space of congestion* as part of daily reality. Seeing the space of congestion as being produced by the superimposition of multiple rhythms makes for an excellent point of

[6] Even though similar approaches can be found in the literature on transport economics and engineering (e.g. Næss 2006), Castells' framework has the advantage of putting forward a political-economic interpretation of these realities and, by way of this, it opens up the space of circulation for critical scholarship.

intersection between the spatiotemporal logic of capital accumulation and the routines of the everyday. Indeed, the concept of "flow" must be abandoned and replaced with the concept of "rhythm," for "[w]hat we *live* are rhythms—rhythms experienced subjectively" (Lefebvre 1991:206, original emphasis). Herein lies part of the political scope of Lefebvre's theory of space as he argues that the immediate experience of space is itself very significant for understanding the political underpinnings of the production of space. The goal of the theory of social space is thus to reveal "the active—the operational or instrumental—role of space, as knowledge and action in the existing mode of production" and to show "how space serves, and how hegemony makes use of it" (Lefebvre 1991:10). According to Lefebvre, in order to accomplish this we need to comprehend the relationships between the perceived, lived and conceived dimensions of space. If the first refers to the material, practical and physical aspects of space—space as an object and product of practical usage—lived space refers to the immediate subjective experience of space in its multiple interactional and communicative dimensions, while conceived space refers to the realm of structured images, discourses, representations and ideologies.[7] The hegemonic function of the production of space is fulfilled "insofar as it fuses the contradictory immediate realm of lived space with processes and strategies of producing conceived and perceived spaces" (Kipfer 2008:200).[8]

The theory of the production of space ultimately has to inquire into the relationship between the congested space of circulation and capital accumulation and the lived space of congestion. Since the space of networks and flows serves as an organizational framework for production and social reproduction, thus being "simply the physical reflection . . . of the

[7] While a fixed and definite meaning of Lefebvre's threefold understanding of space is notoriously difficult to pin down, the interpretation I put forward here is similar to the ones made by Edward Soja (1999) and Stefan Kipfer (2008).

[8] This point is in itself contentious since scholars such as Soja (1999) see lived space as the realm of empowerment and collective resistance. While Soja's interpretation is consistent with Lefebvre's account of the contradictory nature of lived space, it downplays the possibility of lived space acquiring a hegemonic role in the production of capitalist urban space. My argument leaves open this possibility while stressing the inherently political nature of spatial practice and experience.

abstract and contractual network which bonds together the exchange of products and money" (Lefebvre 1991:266), it necessarily mirrors the abstract character of power and capital and is itself produced as an abstract space where technology, instrumental rationality and the dominance of abstract time (Postone 1993) prevail, a space that replaces the difference between use-values with the homogeneity of exchange-value. For Lefebvre, this abstract space only gains dominance once it engulfs the level of everyday life, thus becoming a concrete, lived, or real abstraction; this hegemonic meaning of abstract space is, in the last analysis, synonymous with an alignment between the lived, conceived and perceived dimensions of space.[9] As far as congestion is concerned, the concept of abstract space compels a reformulation of the questions posed so far. First, how can we position the congested space revealed by political economy within the broader dynamic of the production of abstract space under the domination of state and capital? Second, how is the space of congestion related to abstract space in its lived dimension, and how is this to be placed within the overarching dynamics of power and accumulation? Finally, how are the perceived, lived, and conceived dimensions of congested space related—can the space of congestion itself become hegemonic or does it rather offer the possibility of empowerment and resistance?

On Method

The analysis is constructed as a city-scale case study of Bucharest, Romania. The city has been experiencing endemic and spatially generalized congestion problems since the early 2000s and, as I will describe in the following chapters, this led to space being problematized in its relationship with economic development and capital accumulation, the everyday reality of spatial mobility, and the requirement of state-action. If at the beginning of my three-

[9] Harvey (1985b:ch.1) also draws on Marx's theory of abstract labor in showing how capitalist urbanization transforms space and time into "real abstractions," meaning that urban space and time are in themselves lived in accordance with the logic and expectations of capital accumulation as the "annihilation of space by time" (Marx [1858] 1993:539) impinges on the way we experience and interact in urban space. Following Lefebvre, the key tenet behind this theory is that the experience of urban space is conducive for the formation of various urban forms of consciousness and, further, that the latter are the decisive factors in understanding the politics of everyday urban life.

months research period (January–March 2010) I was mostly interested in placing congestion within the logic of the urbanization of capital, the more I looked into the matter, the more I was convinced that I would not be able to put forward an argument on the production of space without integrating the level of everyday life, of lived space and its representations. This, however, meant that I had to engage with a multitude of different types of data and techniques.

The spatial and political-economic analysis presented in the next chapter is to a great extent based on the interpretation of statistical data from the National Institute of Statistics and the Bucharest Regional Statistical Division. At the same time, I draw on various development and policy reports put together by public and private organizations, while reports on the real estate market proved to be an excellent source of data for the post-2000 era. Secondary data found in various traffic surveys were also of great use in confirming some of my findings. Even though I managed to obtain most of the information concerning the socialist period from secondary sources, what in the end proved instrumental were the conversations concerning everyday life in socialist Bucharest I had with various people throughout my research period. Further, spatial representations were an absolute must and, as much as possible, I tried to put together a set of maps that illustrate my argument in the best possible way.

Everyday conversations in which I took part and the multitude of stories about the traffic in Bucharest helped me grasp the daily "mythologies" (Moran 2005:ch.3) of congested traffic. There is indeed an entire array of myths and meanings attached to the space of congested traffic and to the relationships and interactions therein; since traffic is such an important issue in Bucharest, gaining access to these stories proved to be an effortless task. As an inhabitant of Bucharest, my background knowledge into these issues also proved to be very important even though objectifying my own experiences and the "myths" I myself

believed in proved at times to be more than challenging. What was baffling at first was that these representations endow congestion with an apparently unproblematic, transparent character, while at the same time rendering the very experience of the space of congestion inaccessible and opaque. Narratives, therefore, provide a very limited understanding of what is referred to here as the lived experience of congestion for they preclude an understanding of the spontaneous, practical and material aspects of participating in traffic; the chapter on lived space is thus largely based on my own experience of participating in everyday traffic in Bucharest. I was only able to fully understand this opaque nature of the everyday experience of congested traffic and the fetishisms attached to this experience once I decided to participate myself, not as a pedestrian or user of public transport—as I could easily have done before—but rather as a car driver. Enrolling into driving school and having to take many classes in legislation and practical training was of immense help in understanding the relationship between the instrumental and the communicative dimensions of traffic and ultimately led to my interpretation of the above stories and mythologies in terms of what Habermas (2001) calls "communicative pathologies."

Pursuing this latter issue also made me understand how specific representations of congested traffic space emerged and made their way into the public sphere, and the way they found a grounding in, and at the same time reinforced the fetishistic character of the traffic experience. In the last chapter, I return to the representational dimension of traffic congestion; seeing how these representations were produced and reproduced in the local mass-media made me aware of the possible ideological and legitimating functions they might have. My decision to focus on specific representations, such as Alexandru Solomon's (2008) documentary, suggestively entitled *Apocalypse on Wheels*, was a methodological one, for they provided me with a point of anchorage in understanding the underlying structure of the representational space of traffic congestion. Even though it can be regarded as an attempt to

simplify or reduce what is in fact a highly complex reality, this was necessary considering that an extensive treatment of the multitude of representations would have required much more attention than could be offered here; the focus on *dominant* representations should thus be seen as strategic, rather than exhaustive. Furthermore, by connecting these representations with the perceived need of state intervention, I was able to understand how massive infrastructural projects that epitomize the creative destruction of space were legitimized as traffic became a problem of public and electoral interest.

2. Circulation and the Political Economy of Abstract Space

From a political-economic point of view, traffic can be interpreted in terms of the physical circulation of capital (especially in its commodity form) and labor within urban space.[10] Conversely, transportation systems—comprising, on the one hand, the urban network of infrastructures and, on the other, the various forms of public and private (or collective and individual) means of transport and their respective ratios—are part of the general forces of production (Marx [1858] 1993:523) and the reducing of the turnover time of capital depends to a great extent on their efficiency. Since the latter is measured in accordance to the capacity of existing transportation arrangements to transform spatially absolute distances into temporally relative ones, transportation systems need to be thought of in spatial terms; the production of circulation space is, therefore, part of the more general production of urban space required by the reproduction of specific arrangements of capitalist social relations (Harvey 1984; 1985b). Nevertheless, even though the movement of capital tends to produce "a physical and social landscape in its own image, appropriate to its own conditions at a particular moment in time" (Harvey 1985b:162), this does not always happen under the best possible circumstances for capital itself, as new spatialization tendencies have to confront the

[10] It is obvious that, from a political-economic perspective, the issue of circulation is more encompassing than this. However, in order not to unnecessarily complicate the matter, throughout this paper I will refer to circulation as being limited to transportation.

space produced under past social arrangements. What is implied here is that even though congestion and other traffic-related problems emerged in Bucharest starting in the early 2000s, a historically-informed analysis is required in order to understand what these problems mean in the political economy of the city. The fact that transportation systems require long-term investments in fixed capital, and that the transportation infrastructure in Bucharest has virtually remained unchanged since its massive overhauling in the pre-1989 period, further adds to this argument.

This chapter deals with the transformations in the political economy of the city, while attempting to trace out the production of urban space both during the pre-1989 socialist period and over the past two decades. Of central importance here is the movement from a state mode of production to a capitalist mode of production, as this entailed a double transformation: on the one hand, important changes took place in the political economy of Bucharest as a consequence of the changing social relations in the realms of production and social reproduction; on the other, these changes need to be traced out in order to understand the parallel tendency to remake the spatial underpinning of accumulation.[11] As said before, circulation is understood here in terms of forms of exchange between spatially distributed elements of the urban structure, the backdrop of this sort of analysis being that we "consider methodically each of the possible transfers within the urban structure and show their different forms of spatial realization, according to the interaction between the structural content of each transfer, the historical specificity of the space in which it is realized and the social differentiation of the process in question" (Castells 1977:192). For Castells, there are four important elements of the urban structure which need to be considered: spaces of production,

[11] Lefebvre (2009:157-9, 206) talks about state capitalism and state socialism as "species of the same genus," the state mode of production. A more detailed discussion of the differences between urbanization under state socialism as opposed to state capitalism would be required here, considering that many of the elements of socialist urban planning discussed below are not specifically socialist, but rather had more to do with it being a variant of modernist urban planning (Enyedi 1996; Smith 1996); such a discussion, however, would complicate matters beyond the purpose of this paper.

consumption, exchange, and administration. Since Bucharest has seen no major changes (in spatial terms) concerning the last, I will only deal with the first three and thus look at the spatial distribution of the various loci of production, exchange and consumption. This spatiality of the reproduction processes of both capital and labor needs to be analyzed, first, in terms of the relationships between its individual elements and, second, as constituting a systemic whole. The reason for this is that the built environment functions as a "complex composite commodity" (Harvey 1985b:171), meaning that each of its respective elements has "externalities" on the other elements and on the efficiency with which these elements function together as an integrated ensemble in sustaining the expanded reproduction of capital.

Urban Space and the State Mode of Production

Between 1948 and 1992, Bucharest more than doubled its population from just over 1 million inhabitants to almost 2.1 million and, while population density increased twofold as well, the city expanded spatially and suburban areas were gradually urbanized.[12] Beginning already in the 1950s, and continuing throughout the entire socialist period, the city underwent a substantial overhauling of its urban fabric which came as a consequence of the implementation of a massive long-term program of *sistematizare* (systematization) which was specifically aimed at the spatial rationalization of the city and of urban life as a whole (see, for example, Oroveanu 1986).[13] The systemic coordination of the spatial distribution of workplaces and residences together with the entire transportation system was the cornerstone

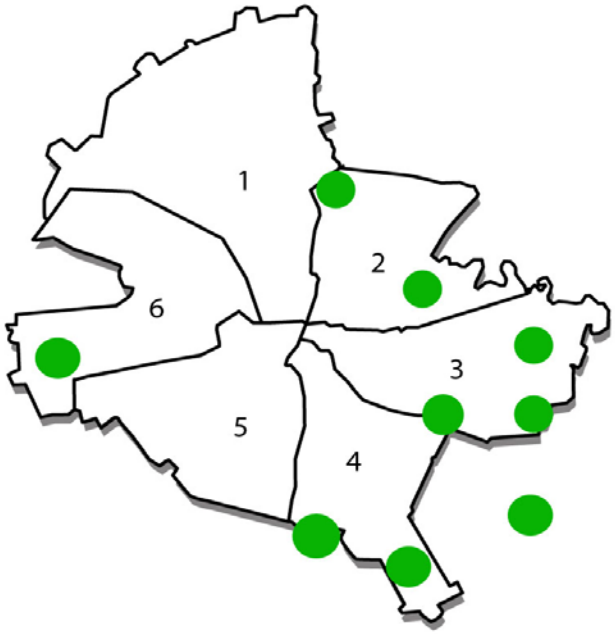
[12] Unless mentioned otherwise, all statistical data used throughout the paper were provided by the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) and the Regional Statistical Division of the Bucharest Municipality; all calculations are my own.

[13] The sources on territorial systematization in Romania are legion, and the purpose of my presentation is to sketch some general principles rather than give a detailed account of what it meant in theory and practice. What should also be kept in mind is that the systematization process spread across more than three decades and a precise chronological presentation is beyond the purpose of this paper. What is important here is that systematization was an official, legally instituted state policy for spatial planning in general and urban planning in particular (e.g. legal act 59/1974). Apart from the sources cited in the text, numerous secondary sources (*Bucureşti* 1968; Croitoru and Târcob 1985; Cucu 1977; Gusti 1974; Oroveanu 1986; Posea and Ştefănescu 1984) also proved useful.

of the production of an abstract space dominated by the power of the state. The city developed as an integrated, polynuclear system, each nucleus comprising of spaces of production, exchange and consumption that were supposed to be rationally and scientifically distributed and organized; each spatial concentration of productive activities corresponded to a specific residential area situated in its proximity that was to serve as a space for the reproduction of labor-power. The transportation system had the functional purpose of making sure that space and time were used as rationally as possible: investments in infrastructure and public transport, as well as the scheduling of the latter were aimed at providing an efficient system of circulation within each of these urban nuclei—e.g. between workplace and living place, between spaces of living and spaces of leisure—and between these centers themselves. This spatial system was, of course, grafted on top of deep transformations in the structure of both production and social reproduction. The new spaces of production mirrored the division of labor and organization of the labor-process under the state mode of production—monopoly ownership and the centralization of the means of production in the hands of the state, economies of scale and so on—while new urban quarters were likewise built as appropriate spaces for collective consumption. The entire circuit of accumulation and its individual moments—production, exchange, consumption—were viewed as a totality to be molded according to scientific criteria in a comprehensive attempt to create a rational state space.

As it was generally the case with socialist urbanization (Enyedi 1996:115; Szelenyi 1981), massive investments in industry proved to be the essential determining force behind the city's growth during socialism (see Ronnås 1982; 1984; Sandu 1984). In post-war Bucharest, industry quickly became the main economic branch, as industrial production dominated the city's political economy: if at the time of the 1930 census only 29.2% of the population was employed in the industrial sector, the percentage had already grown to 44.9% in 1956 and continued to grow by approximately 5% per decade, reaching 50.4% in 1966 and

55.7% in 1977; at the same time, jobs in agriculture fell to under 1% and the service sector also shrunk in relative terms (Ronnås 1982; 1984:ch.4).[14] Equally important was the transformation that took place in the structure of enterprises generally: on the one hand the average number of employees per firm increased from 480 in 1955 to 1,330 in 1970 and 2,380 in 1985; on the other hand, the number of industrial enterprises decreased from 326 in 1955 to 215 in 1985 (Turnock 1990:116). Industrial development—and, for that matter, economic activity in general—underwent a process of purposeful rationalization (Turnock 1990), and these changes in the size and structure of enterprises were determined by the general favoring of economies of scale and agglomeration at the expense of smaller-sized, dispersed economic activities (Hamilton 1979:221; Sailer-Fliege 1999:8). Urban growth was intertwined both quantitatively and qualitatively with this particular type of expansion of industrial activities. As illustrated in map 1, the spatialization of the structural concentration of means of production and labor-power in the form of massive state enterprises consisted of several industrial platforms situated mostly on the urban fringe. While most of these were newly planned and constructed during the socialist period and were mostly used for supporting heavy industrial activities, some were developed in industrial areas inherited from the pre-socialist era; light industry was more spread out throughout the city, especially in



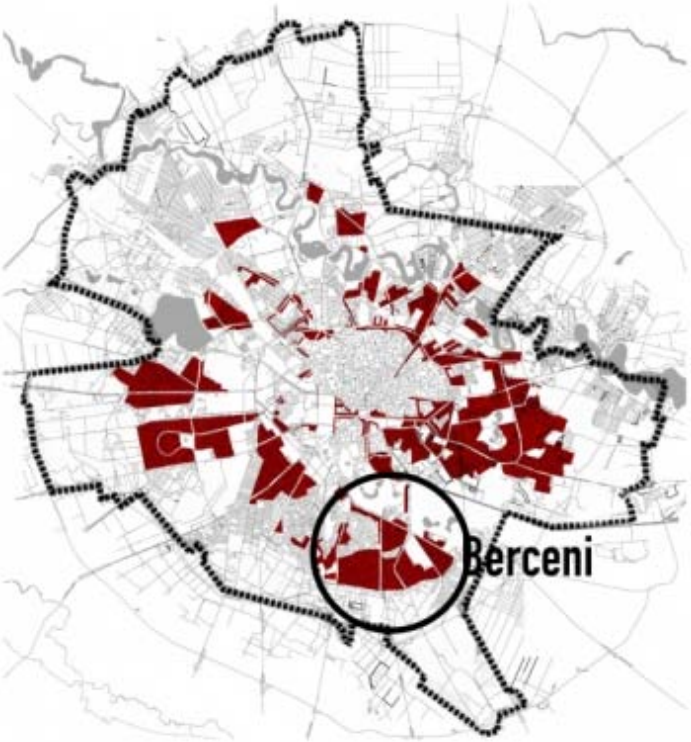
Map 1: Industrial platforms.
**Source:* ADRBI (2005).

[14] Church (1979:496-7) notes that between 1951 and 1970 the rate of industrialization reached 12.9%, "among the highest in the world."

the western part (Chelcea 2008:238-42; Cucu 1977:94; Turnock 1990:108). The placement of the old industrial areas within the perimeter of residential areas was considered to be detrimental to a proper development of the city (see Croitoru and Târcob 1985:139) and, consequently, a central goal of planning was to place new productive activities as far as possible from the urban core, while at the same time pursuing the intensive, rather than extensive, development of the city and its maintenance in a compact form. Supporting the activities of many of the above-mentioned massive enterprises, these industrial platforms functioned as "urban attraction zones" (Enyedi 1996:115) for both urbanites and rural-urban commuters from the adjacent suburban communes. Their spatial distribution—concentrated in the eastern, southern and western parts of the city—was also characteristic for the more general pattern of development of the city during that time (Danta 1993) and, of course, the placement of industry had a considerable influence on the spatial distribution of residential areas and infrastructure networks.

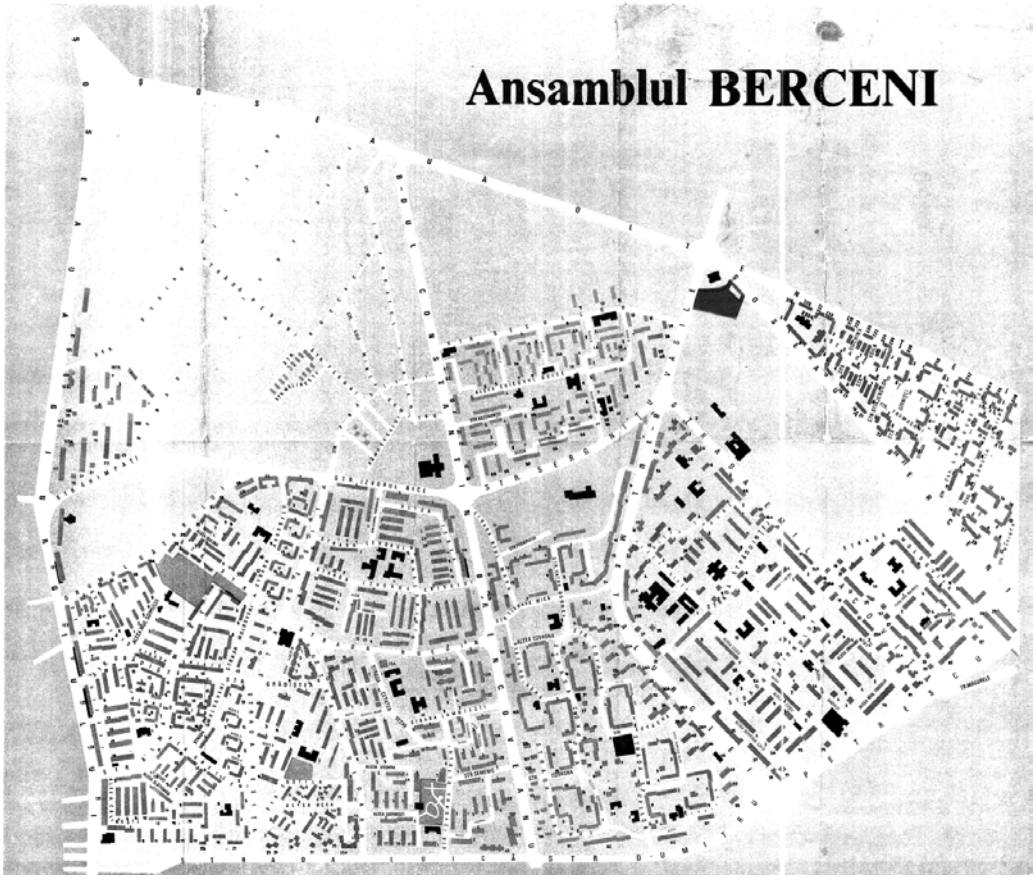
Housing development followed in the steps of industrial development, and the size, structure and spatial distribution of new residential areas mirrored those of industrial areas. At the scale of the entire city, several principles were put in practice when it came to housing construction. The separation between residential and industrial areas was considered to be a priority and, as a consequence, the new residential quarters were located in the areas immediately adjacent to the urban core, while industrial platforms were situated at their margins. Residential development was to be spatially coordinated with industrial development and this meant that housing distribution was administered by the state enterprises themselves with the explicit purpose of distributing to their employees dwellings that were in the closest possible proximity to their place of work (Oroveanu 1986:51). The reason for this was that planners were trying to establish "rational rapports between workplace and place of residence" (Cucu 1977:94), these implying, among other things, the

shortening of commuting times and other measures of spatio-temporal planning (see also French 1995:173; Hamilton and Burnett 1979:267-70). The pattern of residential development was characterized by the construction of housing in concentrated form as the growth in population density was also actively pursued as part of the broader policy-goal of using space in a rational manner. The new residential quarters were seen as cities in themselves, not only because of their size—each quarter could house between 100,000 and 300,000 inhabitants—but also because they were meant to spatially circumscribe the everyday life of their inhabitants. Investments in residential areas started in the 1950s mostly in the northeastern part of the city (Church 1979) but were later coordinated with industrial developments and thus concentrated in the eastern, southern and western districts. Map 2 illustrates the spatial distribution of these investments (marked in red) in the general structure of the city while highlighting the location of one of the individual quarters, Berceni.



Map 2: Spatial distribution of residential development.
**Source:* Pouchard Serra (2010).

At a more micro level, the structure of these residential quarters is also significant in understanding the breadth and scope of the socialist state's pursuit of spatial rationalization. Each quarter was to function as an integrated urban unit consisting of a series of urban ensembles that were in their turn formed out of multiple smaller units built according to the principles of the *mikroraion* (see Smith 1996). In part, the purpose of this nested hierarchy of residential organization was to structure collective consumption of goods and services, as



Map 3: The Berceni Quarter.
Note: Residential spaces are colored in grey; service buildings are colored in black.

residential areas were provided with a coherent system of public and commercial services which was structured along similar lines (see Cucu 1977; Enyedi 1996; Hamilton 1979; Smith 1996; Stoian 1965; Szelenyi 1996). The provision of these services and their spatial distribution was decided on a per capita basis, meaning that the most basic services were to be located within each of the smaller units whereas others (e.g. hospitals and universal stores) were to be located in such a manner so that they could serve a larger ensemble or an entire quarter. The goal was to provide all the urban amenities and services required for the reproduction of labor-power (education, exchange and consumption, leisure etc.) in an efficient and rational manner and this meant that the spatial distribution of such spaces had to follow that of the residential areas. Some of these principles of spatial organization, including the nested hierarchy of residential and service spaces, coupled with corresponding infrastructural arrangements, are illustrated in map 3.

Beside the spatial coordination of places of work and places of residence, the transportation system itself also underwent rationalization when it came to both the network of infrastructures and the actual forms and means of transportation. The development of railway and road transportation infrastructures was coordinated with the growth of the industrial platforms as these required massive transfers of goods either by way of rail or by using freight trucks along the outer ring road. Between 1950 and 1983 the street network grew from 376km to 1,850km (Croitoru and Târcob 1985:147), most of the transportation infrastructure being developed at the same time as the new spaces of production and reproduction. The proposed shortening of commuting times also took its toll on the spatial organization of the supporting infrastructure, as the new residential quarters were organized around one or two main arteries which were meant to ensure quick access to the adjacent industrial areas (Posea and Ştefănescu 1984:252). The metro was built with a similar goal in mind, its purpose being to link different nodal points of the city: starting in the early 1980s it was to constitute the backbone of the public transportation system and its network connected the most important industrial areas with the densely populated residential quarters while also providing easy access to the inner core of the city. More generally, the time spent on all daily travels was to be minimized (Gusti 1974:63), as places of living were spatially coordinated not only with spaces of work but also with spaces of leisure and consumption which were to be located as much as possible within walking distance. All of this structural and infrastructural spatial coordination was supplemented by the dominance of public transportation, which also took up the function of spatio-temporal coordination of practices to be discussed in the next chapter.

The state monopoly ownership of the means of production, its control over financial resources and the construction industry, and the fact that planning was less constrained by land prices and rents (Szelenyi 1996:301) meant that the state had greater freedom and power

to remake space in accordance with the requirements of accumulation and with the dominant representations of abstract space. These overarching social relations were crucial in determining the city's development from both political-economic and spatial points of view. It is clear that socialist urban planning attempted to organize each element of the urban structure individually, just as it prescribed specific relationships that were to be established between these elements—the spaces of production and social reproduction were therefore subsumed under the dominant "science of space" (Lefebvre 2009:ch.7) for which the spatiotemporal coordination of stocks and flows was a prime objective. The long-term systematization of the urban fabric thus implied the distribution of people and things in space, both at the level of the city as a whole and at the micro level of everyday life. The end-result was a space designed to be "at the same time quantified, homogenized and controlled" (Lefebvre 2009:129), an abstract space dominated by the power of the state, and molded according to the imperatives of efficiency and rationality. Systematization started from the premise that the city was a unitary mechanism in need of both massive technical upgrading and detailed fine-tuning, and it was only the overarching socialist state that had the economic and political means to intervene in space at multiple scales. On a global level, the totality of urban space represented a homogeneous technological utopia that was underpinned, at the level of singular spaces, by the fragmentation of rigid functional separation.

To conclude, this "second nature" (Harvey 1985b) of the state mode of production was to ensure that the spatial flows of people and commodities were strictly coordinated and regulated, either directly—by way of scheduling and channeling circulation itself—or indirectly—by modifying the spatial distribution of jobs, residences and spaces of consumption in as much a rational manner as possible in order to ensure spatiotemporal efficiency. This dominated space of the state thus imposed coherence on urban life as a whole, while at the same time it mirrored and reproduced the underlying relations of

production and reproduction. This is not to say that this space was free of contradictions; rather on the contrary: just it had to go through the birth pangs of creative destruction (see Giurescu 1989), so it produced its own forms of uneven development. Locations such as the historic core as well as peripheral parts of the fifth district were spaces of disinvestment, despite the official policy of balancing investments across the city as a whole. Likewise, this abstract space of the state should not itself be fetishized. While plans often failed in fulfilling their functional purpose—as, for example, happened in the case of the rationalization of circulation (Hamilton and Burnett 1979)—the production of a technicized state space also left room for disjunctures between the conceived, perceived and lived dimensions of space, these ruptures introducing difference into the homogeneity of spatial domination. It is important not to forget that abstract space is not in itself homogeneous, but rather "simply *has* homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, its 'lens'" (Lefebvre 1991:287, original emphasis), and this dominant tendency toward remaking Bucharest's urban fabric in accordance with the abstract principles of spatial science stands testimony to the internalization of urban space and its being rendered appropriate for the specific regime of accumulation of the state mode of production. The importance of all this is made obvious once present-day congestion is seen as a symptom of the broader transformation by which this state space became unraveled.

The "Pulverization" of State Space

The post-1989 dismantling of the above spatial system was determined by significant transformations in the political economy of the city. As new branches of production and a new division of labor were set into place, space itself changed and, since it was now endowed with exchange-value, entered the circuit of accumulation. New residential areas and spaces of consumption quickly followed the transformations in production, and the shift in the urban geography of power became obvious once new forms of uneven development emerged. However, the spatial system of circulation remained fixed and, from being a central

component in the production of a rational state space, infrastructure became a spatial barrier for development under the dominance of capital. As the spatial distribution of elements in the urban structure changed, so did the circulation flows of commodities and people, and traffic congestion emerged as a symptom of this transformation in the economy of the city and in its spatial structure.

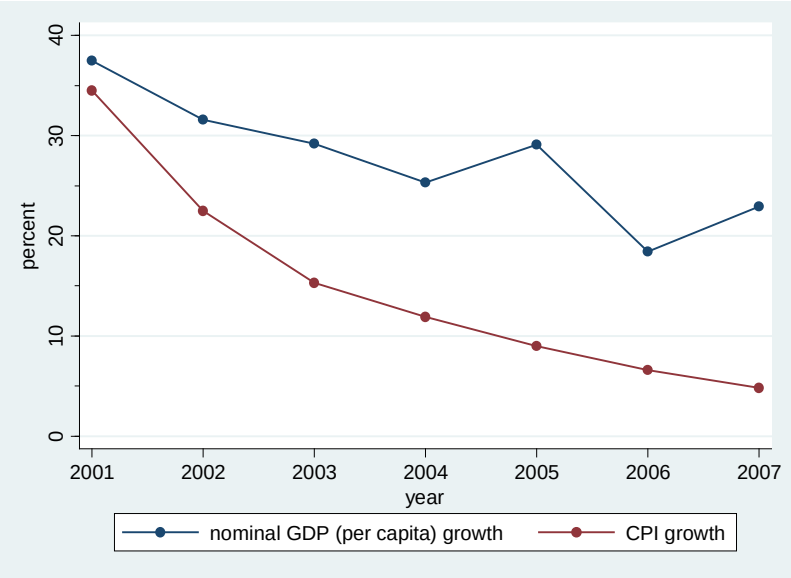


Figure 1: GDP and CPI growth, Bucharest-Ilfov region.
**Source:* NIS data; author's calculations.

Starting in 2000, Bucharest witnessed a substantial intensification of its economic activity; the economic boom over the last decade has seen nominal GDP growth rates of over 20% annually, with an inflation rate that dropped under 10% toward the end of the period (Figure 1). This acceleration of accumulation came along with the replacement of industry as the dominant branch in the economy, as sectors of the so-called new economy developed: compared to the early 1990s, only a fraction of the total number of employees are still working in industry, while trade, finance and real estate grew exponentially. Industry also stopped being the most productive sector of the economy and, as of 2007, the highest percentage of value added is produced by the real estate sector with industry having negative growth rates, in relative terms, for the past eight years (Figure 2).

Significantly, a transformation in the structure of enterprises indicates that there was not only a shift in the dominant productive activities but also in the division of labor and, further, in the organization of the labor-process itself. While the total number of enterprises

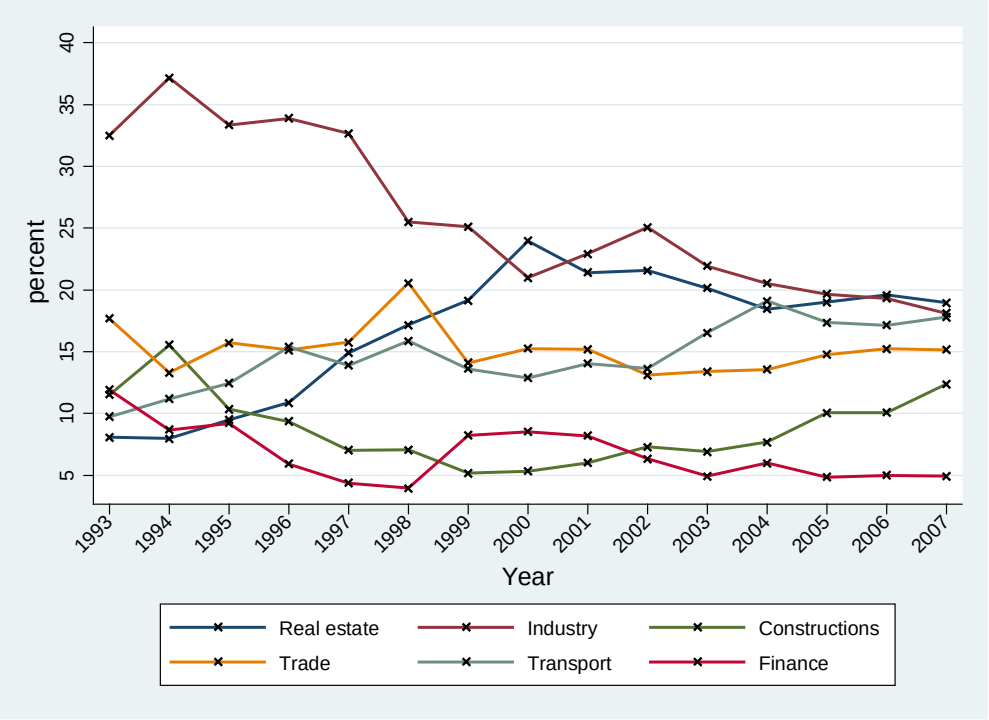


Figure 2: Value added by economic sector (as percentage of total value added), Bucharest-Ilfov region.
**Source:* NIS data; author's calculations.

grew by just over 200% between 1998 and 2008, most of this growth concerned enterprises having less than 250 employees, whereas the number of large enterprises grew by 115%; at the same time, the proportion of employees working in large enterprises dropped from 44.8% in 1998 to 30.3% in 2008. The average size of enterprises also decreased in this interval from 13.8 to 8.1 employees per firm and large enterprises also followed this trend, their size decreasing from approximately 780 to 543 employees on average. The case of manufacturing is paradigmatic in illustrating these tendencies: on the one hand, even though during 1998 and 2008 the number of manufacturing enterprises grew by 196%, the number of enterprises with more than 250 employees dropped by more than 40%; on the other hand, the size of manufacturing enterprises fell from 48.1 to 15.4 employees on average, and the average size of large enterprises decreased by more than half, from 770 to 380 employees (see table 2 in the appendix). Similar changes occurred in other branches of the economy, including transportation, with trade being the only branch that experienced a slight tendency toward the centralization of capital.

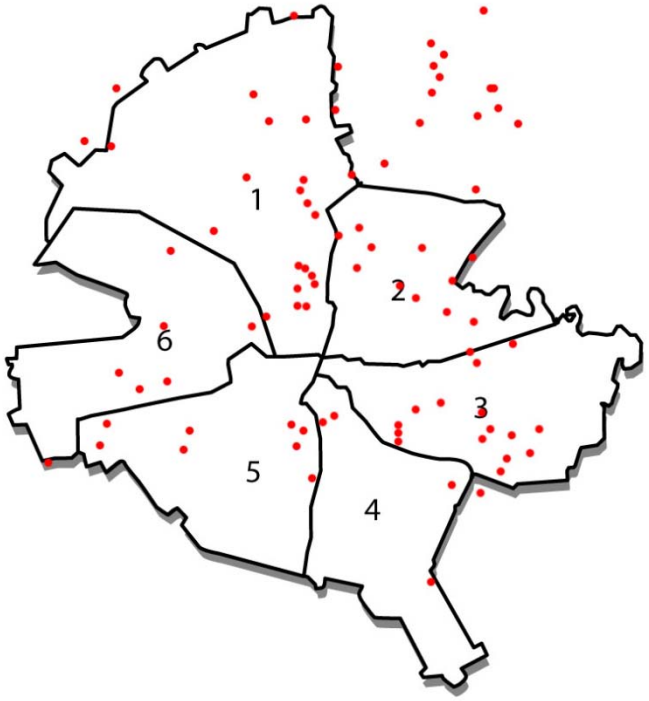
These multiple transformations in the political-economy of Bucharest point toward a more general shift toward a regime of flexible accumulation (Harvey 1989:ch.9) as the pre-1989 organization of production, exchange and consumption was replaced with a different arrangement of social relationships that required and tended to produce a space fit for its expanded reproduction. While it is correct to assume that the passage from one mode of production to another makes its mark in space, it is also important to understand the emergent contradictions in and of this new space. Can congestion be in fact an outcome of the unfolding of such contradictions?

In terms of space, the changes in production were translated not only into an increased demand for new types of industrial locations and amenities, but also in endemic disinvestment in many of the old industrial areas. In becoming such spaces of disinvestment, the city's industrial platforms experienced dramatic decreases in the number of employees, productivity and profit rates, as well as massive devaluations of their fixed capital (ADRBI 2006:12-9). While some of these spaces continued to support economic activities at much smaller scales, others were simply abandoned or sold and rented out on the real estate market (Chelcea 2008:ch.4). This spatial transformation came as a consequence of the fact that new branches of the economy, as well as the reorganization in production, required new spatial arrangements in order to function efficiently; this rendered most of the old platforms obsolete, and the city's geography of production changed accordingly.[15] Light industry, fast moving consumer goods and logistics companies could make no use of industrial spaces that were meant to serve concentrations of heavy industrial activities, while producer services such as finance, banking, IT and real estate required high-end office spaces that had to be built from scratch. Competition between individual capitalists for prime locations replaced the centrally-planned industrial development which was based on the monopoly ownership of

[15] An excellent source of data on the Bucharest real estate market are the annual reports published by Colliers International (various years); these reports present detailed accounts of the state of the supply, demand and spatial distribution of office, industrial and residential spaces

both land and productive capital as the dominant logic behind Bucharest's workplace geography. As a consequence, most of the new industrial developments currently concentrate in the western part of the city, while the northern area has a monopoly over producer services and global city functions (Sassen 2001).

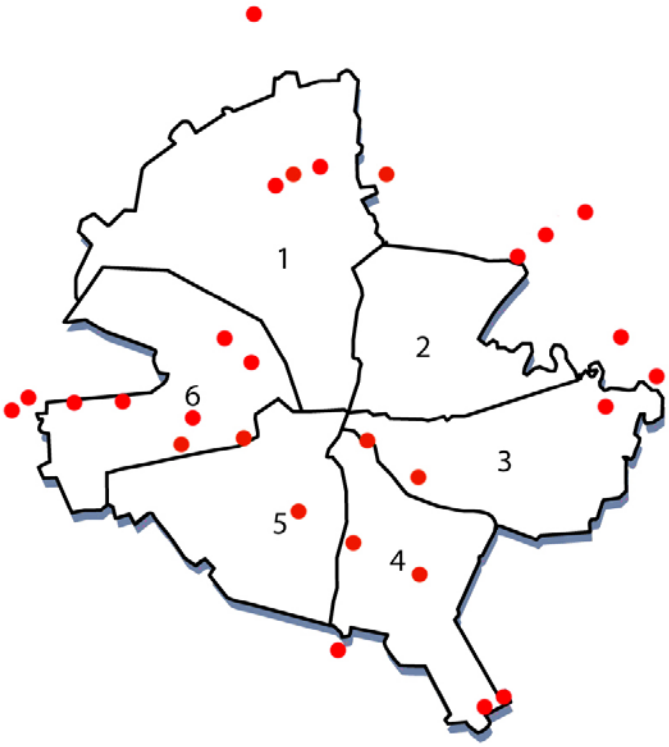
In 2008, public funding for housing had dropped to 3.5% of all finished residences and for the past years new spaces of living have been almost entirely provided by private capital; the spatial distribution of new residential developments changed along with its underlying political-economic logic. If in the early 2000s new housing came mostly in the form of upper-class villas in the northern part of the first district, the market for new residential spaces was booming by the middle of the decade because of supply shortages and the demand-boost given by the new availability of cheap mortgage credit. Since specific areas offered higher rates of return on invested capital, the geography of housing development became highly uneven: in 2007, the number of new apartments in the north was more than 22 times higher than in the south, while the stock of new housing in the northern part of the first district and in the northern outskirts was almost equal to the total stock for the rest of the entire city (see Colliers International Romania 2008). These numbers do not account for the many individual upper-



Map 4: New residential complexes.
**Source:* Patroescu et al. (2009).

class suburban housing projects which are also concentrated in the north.

As far as the spatial distribution of places of consumption and exchange is concerned, it no longer followed a closely coordinated development alongside that of places of residence. The appearance of large-scale retail outlets in the form of hypermarkets and shopping malls mirrored the tendency toward the centralization of capital; most of these new spaces of consumption are located either at the outskirts or within the densely populated socialist residential neighborhoods, with significantly less development in the central and northern parts of the city. As opposed to the previously existing diffuse network of commercial services, these new spaces, alongside the quickly gentrifying urban core, now constitute clearly defined nodal points when it comes to consumption and leisure. Furthermore, their spatial distribution is no longer determined by way of mathematical ratios but rather comes as the outcome of competition between individual capitalists over higher rates of profit which translate into the availability of cheap land with good access to transportation and, most importantly, a "catchment area" that is as densely-populated as possible with middle-income individuals and families. This explains not only the high concentration of large commercial spaces within the sixth district for example, but also the



Map 5: New large-scale consumption spaces.
**Source:* Colliers International (various years).

acute lack of any but the most basic services in the much poorer parts of the fifth district.[16]

What this brief picture shows is that the logic behind the production of urban space changed alongside the city's political economy. While the homogeneity of the abstract space dominated by the state was given by its subsumption under the principles of a spatial science that aimed at its extensive rationalization, the homogeneity of the post-89 abstract space dominated by capital is rather given by its commodification and the overarching logic of exchange-value. The immediate consequence of this "pulverization" of space (Lefebvre 2009:189) was that previously coordinated elements of the urban structure now came to be developed separately: residential development no longer followed in the steps of industrial development, just as the organization of spaces of consumption no longer formed a parallel system to that of the spaces of living. As the development of each element of the urban structure became uncoupled from the others, the dominant form of mediation both between these different sectors of urban development and between individual capitals active within each sector became that of land prices and rents, and this meant that investments were being channeled not according to a plan of the central authority of the state but rather according to where profits were higher.

Area	Office	Residential	Commercial	Industrial
North	1,500 – 2,500	1,500 – 3,000	–	80 – 250
Center	1,800 – 2,500	1,500 – 3,000	–	–
West	700 – 1000	700 – 1,000	500 – 800	50 – 100
East	–	600 – 900	600 – 900	50 – 80
South	–	400 – 600	300 – 500	50 – 80

Table 1: Land prices (€/m^2) by area and type of development in 2007.
**Source:* Colliers International (2008).

The land price differences between different parts of the city are very telling of this tendency, just as they point out the extent of uneven development at the urban scale. When it

[16] A caveat is worth mentioning here: discussing these issues in terms of distribution between districts is to a certain extent misleading, considering that uneven development is very much present at the district scale in Bucharest. Even though this does not change much in terms of the interpretation put forward here, a more detailed analysis would require qualification in this sense.

comes to the capital invested, numbers speak for themselves: in 2007, the year with the highest prices in real estate, 44.4% of total investments were concentrated in the first district, while the southern two districts only received 9% and 7.3% respectively; at the same time the first district concentrated over 40% of the total capital invested in real estate and approximately two thirds of investments in construction. Concretely, the dominance of the abstract principle of exchange-value, led to a fundamental transformation in the urban geography of power: competition for the highest rates of profit between individual capitals translated into a new form of uneven development at the urban scale as the central and northern parts of the city now concentrate not only most of the new economic activities but also the newly built upper and upper-middle class housing projects. Moreover, while high prices have led investors to look elsewhere as well, the peripheral parts of the southern districts have remained marginal.

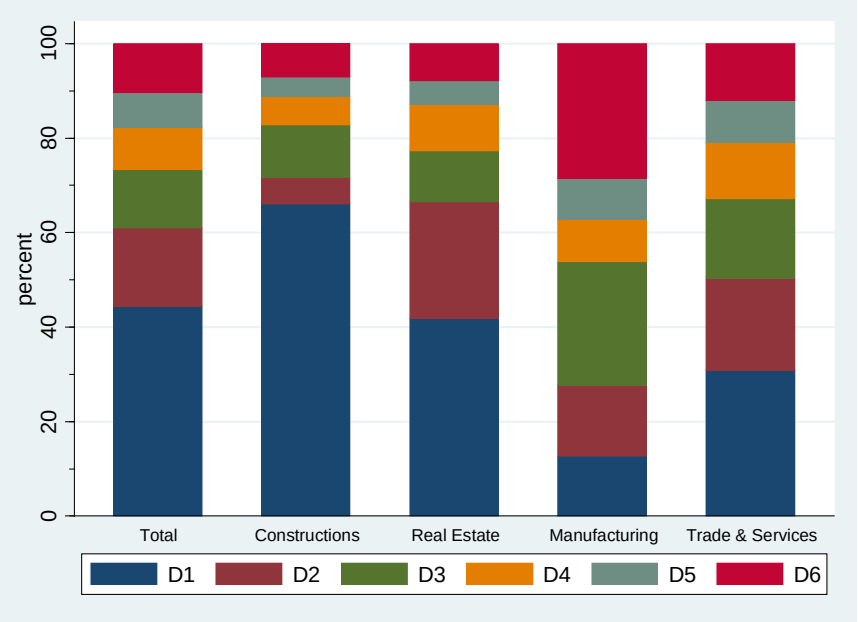


Figure 3: Investments by economic branch for each district.
**Source:* NIS data; author's calculations

This concentration of investments and economic activities in the northern and western parts of the city stands in direct opposition with the previous polycentered structure of multiple integrated units which were meant to spatially circumscribe both production and social reproduction. When it comes to circulation—since points of origin and destination are no longer spatially coordinated according to criteria of minimal travel times and distances—this translates into a changed structure of flows. The old industrial platforms no longer serve

as nodal points, since they are now spaces of disinvestment; the journey to work now entails going from one part of the city to another, just as places of leisure and consumption are no longer located within walking distance but rather tend to concentrate in large-scale developments that are scattered throughout the city.[17] Since behind the homogeneity of commodified abstract space lies the concrete geography of fragmentation, unevenness and separation, the previously established "rational rapports" between spaces of production and reproduction were dismantled and new relationships of center and periphery were put into place. Endemic traffic congestion appeared in the early 2000s partly because of these changes in circulation flows which were determined by the shifting dynamic of space-production.[18] Just as the changed relations of capital accumulation reconfigured the spaces of production and reproduction, so they required a different spatio-temporal circulation system; however, even if we can understand the spatial requirements of the changed regime of accumulation by looking at how the city's urban structure was transformed, and subsequently deducing the changes in circulation flows, the space of circulation itself needs to be problematized in order to grasp the full scope of these transformations.

Circulation Space as a Barrier to Capital Accumulation

By the time the geography of the city changed, and the new relations of production and reproduction were spatialized, congestion emerged as an important phenomenon in Bucharest. Because of its endemic character and its spatial spread throughout the city, it soon became a major problem for the reproduction of both capital and labor-power. On the one hand, congestion tended to increase the turnover time of capital, as circulation now introduced extra costs and time requirements; this took its toll directly on industry, producer

[17] These trends were already visible at the beginning of the 2000s, and they accelerated toward the end of the decade (see Bucharest Municipality 2007; JICA 2000). See also Popa, Raicu and Rosca (2008).

[18] The second factor which contributed to the emergence of congestion was, of course, the massive increase in the number of automobiles. Both the changed structure of flows and the shift to individual consumption when it comes to transportation should be seen as being part of the transformed political economy of the city (see the next chapter).

and consumer services and, significantly, on constructions and the development of real estate (e.g. *Ziarul Financiar* 2007b).[19] On the other hand, it tended to make its mark on everyday life by reducing the amount of "free" time available to individuals, thus serving as an extension of the working day. Again, this is problematic for capital, not only because it reduces the productivity of labor, while at the same time increasing its price (see *Adevărul* 2006; Pahoncia 2007; Rotariu 2007), but also because increased commuting times tend to reduce the scale of the urban labor market and thus introduce fissures in the cohesiveness of the urban scale, bringing about a possible "fragmentation and disequilibrium in the universalization of abstract labor" (Smith 1990:137).[20]

As argued so far, this is partly determined by the reversed structure of circulation flows: the centrifugal flows of socialist Bucharest (with the dominance of journeys from the residential quarters situated around the urban core to the industrial platforms located on the urban fringe) were replaced by centripetal ones (with the spatial origins in the same residential quarters, but having as destination the new central, northern and, to a certain extent, western parts of the city). If understanding this transformation of spatial flows entailed the tracing out of the process of reconfiguration of the urban structure, it did not account for the production of circulation space, i.e. of the infrastructural networks which underpin movement itself. The relationship between circulation (flows) and its material basis (infrastructure) needs to be problematized in order to understand how congestion is a symptom of deeper transformations and contradictions.

The fact that congestion simultaneously constitutes a problem for production and for social reproduction is a reflection of the fact that transportation infrastructure is part of both fixed capital and the consumption fund (Harvey 1985b). If the spatiality of production and

[19] Congestion is affecting important branches of the productive sector, such as transportation, logistics and fast moving consumer goods companies, and generally it is considered to be a problem for capital (see also Amariei, Zamfir, and Stan 2007; Grigorean 2007; Nartea 2007).

[20] On this latter point, see also Smith (2002:88). For accounts of this happening in Bucharest, see *Ziarul Financiar* (2007a), and Iloviceanu (2008).

reproduction under the state mode of production entailed the rationalization of the city's structure as well as its infrastructure, the dismantling of the socialist urban machine and its structural reconfiguration also required new circulation networks to be put in place.[21] Nevertheless, the changed relationship between state, capital and space that rendered the former much less potent after 1989 and the fixed character of previous infrastructural investments made it so that the development of circulation space lagged behind. Just as the networks of road and railway infrastructures that were intended to serve the socialist industrial platforms now lay idle and were subjected to devaluation, so the network of streets and arteries of the socialist quarters had to support shifting circulation flows. At the same time, increased strain was put on the infrastructure networks serving central and northern areas that had previously either been spaces of disinvestment or had simply not been designed to support the increased intensity and flexibility of circulation required by the new regime of accumulation. In other words, this shows the impossibility for a built environment that represented the spatialization of previous social relations to serve the present conditions of capital's expanded reproduction.

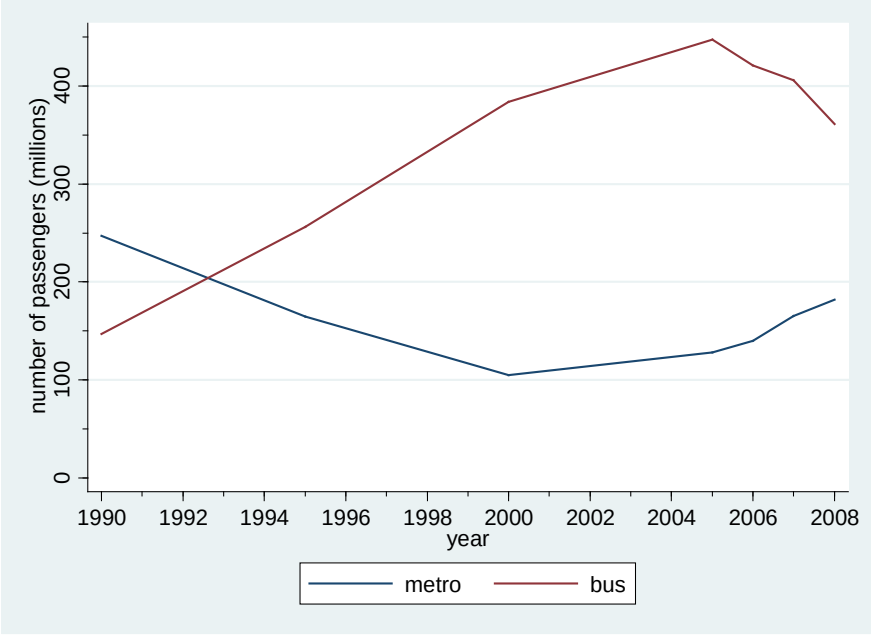


Figure 4: Metro and bus passengers per year.
Note: missing data for the 1994-6 and 1996-9 periods.
**Source:* NIS (*Anuarul Statistic Bucuresti* 2010).

This is obvious in the case of Bucharest's metro network. The main reason behind the

[21] See, for example, Nicolau and Molan (2004) and official reports on this issue (Bucharest Municipality 2007).

substantial decrease in the number of passengers carried per year starting with 1990 has to do with the fact that the network was to a large extent designed to serve a structure of relationships between places of work and places of living that is no longer there. The contradiction between the new requirements for spatial circulation and their available spatial support is evident from the fact that the activity of the metro circulation still hasn't reached the level of intensity it had at the beginning of the 1990s, even with the post-2000 increase in mobility needs, and despite the active seeking by individual capitalists (especially when it comes to the development of spaces of consumption, but also to residential ones) to locate their investments in such a way as to have the easiest possible access to the existing underground network.

This disjuncture between spatial flows and their infrastructural support and the subsequent challenges for the expanded reproduction of capital indicate that the space of circulation has become a barrier to capital accumulation as it stands under present social relations. Viewed as such, all the issues arising from congested traffic concerning the hindering of production and social reproduction are in fact determined by the fact that congestion is merely a symptom, albeit an important one, of a broader contradiction between the need for expanded reproduction and the physical landscape produced under past social arrangements. Since producing a new space of circulation would entail the destruction of the previous one, an immediate question concerns the ways in which this barrier is to be overcome from both practical and political points of view.[22] If space is to be remade, and if this is ultimately reduced to an exercise of power, it remains for us to account for how this power is exercised or, in other words, to understand the dialectic between command and demand (Lefebvre 1991:115-6), between the power to remake space and its legitimizing backdrop. In order to fully grasp the underlying political dynamics of creative destruction,

[22] Bucharest's high population density and intensive use of land makes the development of new infrastructures extremely difficult, precisely because it necessarily entails the destruction of previously existing spatial arrangements.

however, we must leave the political economy of congested space aside, and turn to the lived and conceived dimensions of the space of congestion.

3. The Space of Congestion

A shift in vantage point—from flows to rhythms—entails, on the one hand, that we deal with the concrete aspects of circulation, i.e. with circulation as a spatial practice which is at the same time objective—by virtue of being material—and subjective—by virtue of being lived. On the other hand, we need to consider that, in its concrete dimensions, the spatiality of frameworks of power, of state and capital alike, is necessarily the outcome of political struggles over the dominant representations of space. Therefore, the process of consciousness-formation which stands at the basis of political action (Harvey 1985a) ultimately relates to the conceived dimension of space, to the development of ideologically-laden representations of space. It is the immediately lived, however, that leads to the formation and structuring of spatial representations, and an inquiry into the politics of congestion must begin with an analysis of the experiential aspects of congested traffic. While an analysis of the lived space of congestion must lead to an understanding of the way in which this space is conceived, it must also be based on an understanding of the spatial practice of circulation itself, i.e. to the actual unfolding of individual mobility acts in their dual—abstract and concrete—character. It is to this latter aspect we must turn first.

A Political Economy of Rhythms

The immediate challenge is to understand the connection between the rhythms of everyday life and the flows of political economy. This implies, first, that we think of circulation flows as essentially being temporally coordinated and spatially synchronized multitudes of individual spatial practices and, second, that we understand that the rhythm of flows itself points to the homogenization of individual rhythms into the dominant spatiotemporal

framework of production (the journey to work and the regularity of the rush hour) and social reproduction (congestion and the rhythms of consumption, the work-day as opposed to the week-end etc.). Going further, we need to consider the double character of spatial practices: on the one hand, the practice of circulation is a concrete action, endowed with purpose and meaning which, by virtue of this, is related to the lifeworld of subjects; on the other hand, the practice of circulation is an abstract performance—an objective, material practice which serves a functional purpose for capital accumulation.[23] A political economy of spatial practices (or of rhythms) would thus constitute a point of connection between the political economy of congested space and the lived experience of the space of congestion; this distinction between action and performance is, of course, to a great extent an analytical one, the end goal being to understand the relationship between congested space and the space of congestion.

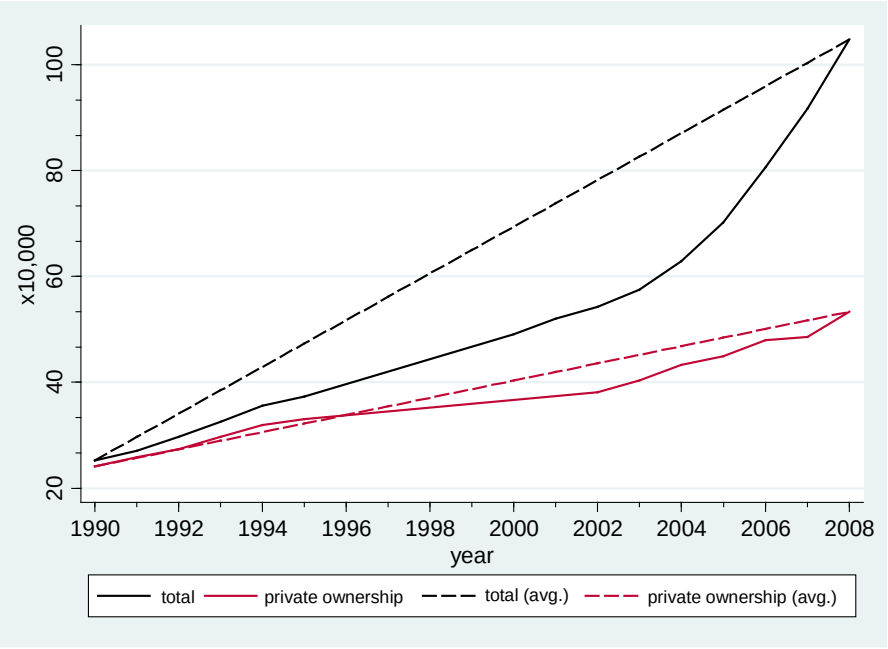


Figure 5: Number of cars.
**Source:* NIS data; author's calculations

Of crucial importance when it comes to dealing with the material dimension of the practice of circulation is the respective mode of transportation associated with it. In most cases, congestion is related to the dominance of the car and, generally, of individual forms of transportation as opposed to collective ones and, indeed, the Bucharest

[23] This starting point is required in order to grasp the relation between system and lifeworld; see Habermas (1987:335).

urban landscape has changed dramatically as a consequence of the more than fourfold increase in the number of personal automobiles since 1990 (see figure 5). Along with the changes in spatial flows, this development is the second determinant factor for the emergence of traffic congestion, and the ways in which it is related to the previously-discussed transformations in the city's political economy need to be traced out; significantly, the emergent dominance of car-based transportation is related to both the logic of capital accumulation and to spatial practices, rhythms and, in the end, to the lived experience of space.

Apart from the obvious fact that the car itself is a commodity—and not just any commodity—there are a number of ways in which the increase in car usage can be linked to the changed relations of accumulation of the post-89 era. On the one hand, the purchase of cars under state socialism was highly restricted and the constant increase in the number of cars starting with 1990 reflects the deregulation of car ownership and the virtual disappearance of supply shortages. On the other hand, it is clear that the number of automobiles grew at a much faster rate after 2000, and this came as a consequence of, first, overall economic growth coupled with an increase in the value of money—and, therefore, with a rise of real wages—(see Figure 1 above on the parallel evolution of the GDP and inflation rate) and, second, the increasing availability of cheap credit. What is also significant is that even though the total number of cars increased substantially, this had a great deal to do with the fact that companies themselves used more and more cars, and towards the end of the decade private ownership accounted for less than 50% of total ownership. Again, this development had at least two determinations: on the one hand, it came as a consequence of the development of the car leasing industry; on the other, it reflects an objective requirement for the reproduction of individual capitals—flexible accumulation requires flexible means of circulation. This last point is also suggested by the fact that for the past decade the transport

industry in Bucharest has undergone extensive growth and flexibilization, with a substantial increase in the number of enterprises and employees and a simultaneous downscaling of activities (see table 2 in the appendix).

But increasing car ownership paralleled significant developments in the public transportation system as well which provided further incentives for using the car as the basic means of transportation. As we have already seen in the case of the metro network, fixed public transportation infrastructures could no longer serve their purpose and the substantial decrease in the number of people using the metro occurred at the same time with an intensification in the usage of buses (see figure 4 above); again, this came as a consequence of the generalized requirement for flexible means of mobility, something which the metro and, to a certain extent, the tram networks could not provide (see Bucharest Municipality 2007:16-7). Apart from this, investments in the Bucharest public transportation system have been on the downslope ever since the 1980s as the number of personnel, size of the rolling stock, and service frequencies and speeds have decreased substantially over the past three decades (Bucharest Municipality 2007; Sterian 2001); in the case of surface transportation, congestion further added to the crippling of the service. More recently, workers' strikes followed this year's budget reduction and cost-cutting measures (*Financiarul.ro* 2010), and financial problems have continuously plagued the public transit system; the public surface transportation company has recently been labeled by the mayor as a "black hole" in the city's budget (*HotNews.ro* 2010) with subsequent rumors of its possible restructuring and even privatization looming in the mass-media.

When it comes to mobility and circulation, this major shift from collective to individual consumption marks an important change in the economy of spatial practices. This refers to the de-institutionalization of routines, as personal rhythms no longer have to fit into the institutional rhythms imposed by the rigid schedules of the public transportation system.

Indeed, the pre-89 “etatization” of time (Verdery 1996:ch.2) implied a strict coordination of public transportation schedules with the rhythm of industrial production and the time table ensured the coordination of mobility in time and space. This fulfilled not only a functional role of coordination between multiple individual performances, but it also collectivized the experience of mobility and replaced individual rhythms with the homogeneous time/space of a unique schedule. For the car driver, however, both these aspects appear now as transformed: on the one hand, functional coordination has been displaced at the level of interaction between individuals in space while, on the other, the experience of spatial mobility has itself been individualized. From the functional perspective of the urban circulation system, increased car usage is synonymous with an accelerated complexification, as the flexibilization of circulation parallels the changes in the realms of production and social reproduction discussed above. As for experience, since the material, or perceived, dimension of space is fundamentally transformed, lived space must change accordingly. These changes in both the action and performance dimensions of spatial practices are determined by the transformed nature of the relationship between individual and collective rhythms which is ultimately related to the transformation in the material characteristics of the spatial practice of mobility itself. In order to grasp the importance of these connections we must turn to the essentially interactional character of the space of congestion, for when it comes to urban mobility it is only by way of interaction that both systemic coordination of performances and the pursuing of individually meaningful actions can be achieved. From this perspective, congestion is a disruption which concerns both these dimensions, and in order to be able to interpret the meaning of this, we must turn beforehand to the lived space of traffic as such.

Dead Space, Abstract Space

We have seen in the previous chapter that congestion can be regarded as being a systemic problem for capital accumulation; it also represents, however, a disruption of individual and

collective routines, and to a certain extent it is experienced as a breakdown of everyday life in its practical and taken-for-granted character. This latter aspect is crucial for a spatial understanding of how congestion is lived: the space of congestion is produced in and on top of the space of traffic, the everyday space of circulation. Understanding the former is impossible without grasping the latter.

From the car driver's perspective, the immediate experience of traffic relates to the problem of cooperation.[24] Indeed, the scarcity of space implies that individual drivers have to coordinate their actions in both space and time in order to ensure that each driver can pursue her proposed goal successfully—e.g. getting from point A to point B in a specific amount of time. From the point of view of actors' lifeworld, therefore, traffic is essentially intersubjective, the carrying out of ego's plan of action requiring that alter continues interaction in a desirable way; this requirement for the action orientations of individuals to be harmonized in space and time has to be fulfilled in order to prevent the failure of individual projects.[25] As it is generally the case, if ego wants to move from point A to point B she must negotiate a series of spatio-temporally ordered micro-interactions with a multitude of alters who are also making claims on the space of the street, these situations ultimately comprising intersections of different paths, trajectories and rhythms. The entire circulation system is in fact a huge network of such micro-coordinations between individual actors; what appears from a lifeworld perspective to be the achievement of subjectively significant ends by way of intersubjective means which require the accommodation of multiple action orientations is, however, from a system perspective, a problem of "functionally intermeshing action

[24] This account only concerns the lived experience of traffic and traffic congestion from the perspective of car drivers. This reduction, however, is useful only for making the general argument clear and simple; the spatial claims of pedestrians are very similar, just as the street is not only a space which pertains to car traffic and congestion, especially if we consider that they both circumscribe other issues such as, for example, parking spaces. In the case of public transportation, however, the problem of coordination is posed in a significantly different way, just as the social relations between users of the public transportation system is to a great extent based on different principles (see Augé 2002).

[25] This is valid not just for traffic but also for the more general practice of mobility in urban space (see Bridge 2005). This understanding of coordination is taken from Habermas (1984:101; 1987:179).

consequences" (Habermas 1987:117). In other words, what is important for the circulation subsystem is the functional role these coordinations play for the material reproduction of the social system itself—what has been discussed so far under the rubric of capital accumulation and congested space.[26] Individual coordination acts function as parts in relationship to a systemic whole, and from this standpoint the achievement of individual goals appears to be only secondary: circulation must flow and circulation space must function despite the simultaneity of multiple individual trajectories and rhythms. This functional role of individual actions cannot be grasped from within participant's lifeworld (i.e., from the grassroots level of interaction), this task requiring specialized forms of knowledge which function counterintuitively (e.g. traffic engineering).

The complexity and spatio-temporal density of these interactions, however, does not allow for coordination to happen via the lifeworld mechanisms of communicative action; coordination between drivers is uncoupled from consensus-formation via language-based communication and is replaced with the formal legal system of the traffic code.[27] This "juridification" (Habermas 1987:356) of social interactions is meant to reduce the immense costs required by a coordination mechanism based on mutual understanding while also providing a way of decreasing the chances of possible failed interactions. Since this legal code is supposed to manage as many types of situations as possible, its content is extremely diverse and comprehensive: speed limits, boundary markings, visual stimuli, and so on; the common trait of all of its components, however, is that they function according to the logic of abstraction, in the sense that they displace the entire semantic field of social interaction to the level of a much simplified system of signals (see Lefebvre [1961] 2008:274-300). This legally-buttressed, delinguistified system of signals serves both as a medium of coordination

[26] The circulation system is seen here as a functional subsystem subordinated to the broader system which concerns the level of capital accumulation (see Habermas 1987:171).
[27] This is to a certain extent valid also from a historical point of view, and not just an analytical one (see McShane 1994:ch.9).

between individual drivers, and as a steering-mechanism for the circulation system as a whole.[28]

The traffic code functions by reducing the complex nature of everyday interactions to the functioning of a formalized, abstract system of pre-established action-situations. First, the traffic code atomizes individuals as it replaces coordination based on mutual understanding with a mechanism external to individuals themselves and to the interaction between them; this means that no common definition of a specific situation is required since a quasi-objective definition is established in advance, thus reducing the intersubjective dimension of interaction to a minimum. A green light automatically gives right of way and assumes that any conflict or danger is controlled for by way of an opposite signal, a red light—this is just a basic example of how coordination is displaced from being dependent on the interaction between people to being dependent on the relational connection between different elements of the traffic signal system. Second, subjectivities are reduced to abstract entities—the driver, the pedestrian, the "traffic participant"—that are legally defined according to specific criteria of required competence and expected performances (being able to drive a vehicle, to understand the meaning of signals and act accordingly, etc.). Along with atomization, this process of subjectification implies an abstract obedience to the traffic code—this, however, becomes obvious only in particular situations such as the one in which we are still required to stop at a red light, even if it is clear to us that doing otherwise would be entirely safe. The traffic code takes no heed of the personal needs or interests of individuals, as it is "independent of concrete value orientations and action dispositions" (Habermas 1987:172); it is also an instrument tailored for the homogenization of individual rhythms into collective ones (flows). Whether or not one is in a hurry is immaterial from the point of view of the traffic code, just like every driver is compelled not to linger on the street. Third, the traffic

[28] See the Government Emergency Ordinance 195/2002 which regulates circulation on public roads.

code eliminates as much as possible all the contingencies and ambiguities which otherwise are present in coordination based on communicative action; this means, on the one hand, that the meaning of traffic signals is strictly stipulated and leaves no room for interpretation and, on the other, that negotiation is made impossible, situational differences being standardized and placed into pre-defined slots. Fourth, individual decisions are regulated in a nonnormative manner, meaning that they are conditioned by legally determined rewards and punishments. The process of decision-making does not depend on reaching mutual agreement but rather actors are guided by their action consequences—the traffic code assumes that individuals are acting instrumentally, and not communicatively. Finally, what the traffic code does is to fuse the requirements for system coordination with the ones for the attainment of individual goals: even though the functional intermeshing of action consequences does indeed happen behind the backs of individual drivers, this is possible only by reducing each singular coordination act to the abstract logic of the traffic signal.

Traffic is thus defined as a subsystem, an autonomous organization which pertains to its own structure of social interaction and its own mechanisms for coordinating action. The organizational power of the traffic code comprises a legally defined structure of legitimately regulated social relations in which "abstract obedience to law becomes the only normative condition that actors have to meet" (Habermas 1987:180). Conversely, this organizational framework is itself institutionalized in the lifeworld of subjects, meaning that its functioning is dependent on its being regarded as legitimate; this is achieved precisely by virtue of its constituting a legal framework and comes not only from the apparent external, objective relationship between the traffic code and individual subjects, but also from it being backed by the authority of the state. The traffic code thus functions, on the one hand, as a medium (in coordinating actions) and, on the other hand, as an institution (in being grounded in the broader context of social relations, which presupposes, for example, specific stances towards

legal arrangements generally) (Habermas 1987:365).[29] Subsequently, the prescriptions of the traffic code become moralized and constitute the cornerstone of a spatial *doxa*: they are endowed with "propriety" (de Certeau, Girard, and Mayol 1998:8), thus being inscribed into the everyday understanding of legitimate and necessary behavior and interaction in the space of the street; this is further made obvious by the fact that even the minimal informal dimension of interactions between drivers—what is usually referred to as traffic or driver's etiquette—simply comes to supplement the formally defined interactional structure of the traffic code.

The legal framework of the traffic code is inherently spatial. In the last analysis, it constitutes a juridification of the social relations that are usually associated with the idea of public space. The traffic code is a re-encoding of the social contract that regulates relationships in public space, relationships which thus become formalized, calculable, highly predictable and, in the end, abstract. The traffic code not only regulates spatial practices but at the same time constitutes them: the space of traffic itself is produced, in its perceived, lived, and conceived dimensions, in accordance with the legally defined arrangements of the traffic code. First, the space of the street is not only a container for traffic, but it is physically altered to function as such—markings, signals, lights, etc. are material inscriptions of the traffic code into space. Likewise, cars themselves are designed in order to facilitate delinguistified interaction based primarily on visual signals, this further adding to the technicization of traffic space. Indeed, in the case of traffic, it is not just abstract legal principles, but also space itself that functions as a medium for coordination. Second, the lived dimension of space is reduced to the abstract requirements of coordination, with claims on space being settled via the pre-established interactional structure of the traffic code. This

[29] The paradox in this case, as noted by Habermas, is that law itself becomes a source of legitimation. While my claim on the institutionalization of the traffic code in the lifeworld is obviously valid from an empirical point of view, it would still require an analysis of the exact details of this process; this, however, does not belong here (see also Habermas 1989).

renders the space of traffic abstract in its immediately lived dimension; the juridification of social relationships produces the space of traffic as a lived abstraction where social relations are reduced to the coordination of multiple abstract subjects individually engaged in purposive-rational action. Lastly, the traffic code endows space with legibility, with a clearly defined framework fit for the immediate and practical interpretation of the meaning of space itself (the street), spatial practices (driving), and the reality of traffic as such. By virtue of its technicization, the space of traffic gains an almost unique "virtue of readability" (Lefebvre 1991:143) whereby it is conceived in accordance with the principles of abstract legal representations. Traffic space thus not only becomes a non-place (Augé 1995)—by virtue of it being experienced as for and in transit, a space of isolation and collective solitude, the space of seamless movement, "dead" space—but it is also subjectively represented and expected to function as such; the alignment of the perceived, lived, and conceived dimensions of space with the abstract space required by the systemic imperative of circulation fuses individual expectations and schemas of interpretation with the systemic requirements of the coordination of action consequences.

The Solipsism of Congestion

If being in traffic becomes part of the taken for granted routines of everyday life, the immediate experience of congested traffic concerns precisely the collapse of this habitual framework, in both its lived and conceived dimensions. Congestion (re-)problematizes the space of the street, and it does so in a very peculiar way and through very peculiar mechanisms; the challenge is to understand the nature of this experience and the politics therein. Again, in order to do this, we have to go back to the problem of coordination and interaction.

What is immediately apparent is that congestion is synonymous with an extreme scarcity of space which ultimately leads to failure in achieving seamless circulation, on both

collective (i.e., systemic) and individual levels. If congestion is usually associated with long times spent waiting in traffic, the Bucharest experience of being in congested traffic is somewhat different, in the sense that it is this and much more. Congestion in Bucharest does not concern only the static aspect of waiting in traffic, but rather has to do with a very dynamic process by way of which meaning is re-inscribed into the space of traffic. What is obvious from the start is that this comes as a consequence of the fact that congested traffic strains the legal arrangements of the traffic code and it does this in more than one way. On the one hand, the legal and spatial arrangements required for coordination fail on an objective level: from the acute lack of parking spaces, to the failure of the system of traffic lights in fragmenting flows between intersections, this is more than obvious for Bucharest drivers, pedestrians, and officials alike. On the other hand, from a subjective point of view, the collapse of individual mobility projects leads to a delegitimation of the traffic code and, consequently, to individuals acting outside the legally prescribed rules of behavior (whether or not this is subjectively perceived as just bending the rules or simply breaking them is beside the point here).[30] This further creates coordination problems on an objective level: since individual coordination acts are to a great extent dependent on the functioning of the entire network of interactions *and* vice-versa, individual acts of traffic "indiscipline" create problems on a collective level as well (e.g., it only takes one or two wrongly parked cars to restrict vision in an intersection or block a lane on a street, each of these two situations leading to the breakdown of the relationship between the respective signals which stands at the basis of mediation between individuals). The flurry of new regulation, the continuous enforcement and increasing density of the traffic code over the past years came as a response on the side of the state, when faced with the fact that the traffic system of signals has become

[30] Average rush-hour speeds typically drop below 20 km/h in the central and northern areas of Bucharest; interestingly enough, in the southern parts of the city, it drops to 10 km/h. The average speed for public transportation is, on aggregate, two times lower than the average speed for automobiles (see Bucharest Municipality 2007).

not only strained, but also inefficient and questioned in practice.[31] Intersubjectively, however, this widely-spread non-compliance leads to a (re-)problematization of, first, the issue of coordination between competing claims on space and, second, space itself.

The problem with linking up different and competing claims on space is now posed anew, as even the minutest deviations from legal prescriptions can displace the issue of coordination from the level of the relationship between the traffic signals to the level of the relationship between individual road users. The return to concrete spatial strategies of action which replace the abstract obedience to the system of signals leads to the introduction of ambiguity in coordination acts between individual drivers, and a loss of predictability quickly ensues from this. This ambiguity comes from the fact that, in order for coordination to succeed, ego has to adjust to alter's actions which do not signify in the same way as the on/off logic of the signal; these adjustments, furthermore, come in response to actions that do not meet the expectations of a functioning traffic code and thus pose legitimation problems, first, for alter's actions (which can be perceived as illegitimate) and, second, for the traffic code itself. Since in such a context the pre-established definitions of the traffic code are made ambiguous, the micro-situations in which coordination is required are in need of redefinition; this, however, cannot come from the system of signals itself, and consensus regarding specific definitions has to be reached by other means. In most cases, the spontaneous reactions of drivers when they are faced with such ambiguous interactions consist of either interrogative ("what?", "why?") or imperative ("do that!", "don't do that!") utterances that are addressed to the respective alter; these point not only toward a required understanding of what alter is doing and why she is doing it, but also toward a tendency to communicate ego's own definition of what is and should be happening. Since the ambiguity of situations is determined by competing claims on space which are no longer regulated by the imposition of

[31] See, for example, Primăria Municipiului Bucureşti (2007b; n.d.) , Bucharest Municipality (2007) and *Ziarul Financiar* (2008).

abstract criteria of judgment, the individual idiosyncrasies which stand at the basis of these claims—interests, needs, emotions, and so on—need to be harmonized as action orientations. The problem of coordination is, therefore, displaced into the lifeworld of participants, and communicative action has to supplement, if not replace, coordination via the systemic media of the traffic code. The definitions of traffic situations thus have to be interpreted and negotiated by way of communicative action in order to accommodate competing claims on space whose validity can no longer be subsumed under the abstract logic of the system of signals.

These communicative challenges, however, are impinged upon by the very spatial arrangements which circumscribe them; the material characteristics of the space of traffic—what can in this case be seen as the spatial organization of communication—introduce distortions into the communicative process and ultimately lead to the failure of communicative attempts. Even the most basic characteristics of the space of traffic are made in accordance with the requirements for individuals acting instrumentally rather than communicatively: if the tail-to-tail succession of individual vehicles, for example, severely limits the possible forms of communication, it is the body of the car that contributes most to the blocking of communication via bodily or linguistic mechanisms.[32] What the car does is fragment space into atoms in which individuals are isolated from each other, not being able to communicate other than by a very limited array of visual signals. Even if the signaling equipment on a car can be used to ensure minimal forms of meaning-exchange, and even if drivers sometimes use their own body in attempting to make themselves understood, these are rather exceptions which are circumscribed to specific situations (e.g., good visibility, lack of complexity) and thus simply extend the logic of the system of traffic signals rather than constituting an alternative to it. The fragmentation of traffic space introduces physical

[32] See also Thrift (2005:47).

barriers into the organization of communication and thus crucially shapes the experience of congestion in a direction which precludes the reaching of consensus by way of mutual understanding.

Significantly, these communicative disturbances induced by the constraints of traffic space itself take the form of what Habermas (2001) called "communicative pathologies"; this happens as a consequence of the fact that the conflictual situations which arise in congested traffic are not resolved on the basis of consensual action.[33] Since the spatial arrangement of traffic does not allow for individuals to exchange meaning, this leads to the production of misunderstandings not only regarding, for example, a person's intentions in acting in a certain way, but also her reasons for pursuing one course of action, instead of another—reasons which may concern the pursuing of purely instrumental purposes, but also other subjectively lived factors such as physical or emotional states which become very important, considering that congested traffic poses increased demands on the physical and psychical capacities of individuals. Even in situations in which alter can make her claim on space intelligible to ego—something which is already dependent on ego's level of experience with driving, her capacity to anticipate the possible outcomes of interactions—assessing the validity of this claim (i.e., the reasons behind it) is something which cannot so easily be achieved considering the spatially distorted organization of communication. Nevertheless, conflictual traffic situations are not devoid of meaning for either ego or alter; rather on the contrary: even though a common definition of a situation is not produced, meaning still emerges even in the context of a minimal exchange of differing interpretations. Meaning is produced in isolation and is split off from communicative action as ego attributes not only specific spatial claims to alter, but also tends to unilaterally formulate interpretations concerning alter's intentions, reasons, capacities etc. When faced with such conflictual situations, the spontaneous

[33] Habermas (1987:134) also refers to these as situations of "disturbed mutual understanding."

reactions of all the people I drove with—and, as I was to find out later, my reactions were very similar—were concerned not only with the necessary adjustment in speed or trajectory but also genuine attempts at interpreting and defining these situations. Since these interpretive practices automatically involve the attribution of specific reasons and intentions to the respective alters and, along with this, the moral evaluation of their actions and, further, because each individual has very limited ways of making these reasons and intentions known to others, these spontaneous interpretive attempts are more often than not based on "a virtually inextricable mix of mismatched expectations and phantasy [sic]" (Laing, Phillipson, and Lee, quoted in Habermas 2001:157) related to alter as a subject in her relationship not only with ego but also with the legitimate norms of action that pertain to traffic. The paradox is that even though the traffic code fails on the level of practice, it still functions as a normative framework for evaluating others' behavior. This leads to ego engaging in unilateral speculative judgments not only concerning the legitimacy of alter's actions, but also concerning alter's reasons. What appears, for example, from ego's perspective to be an illegitimate, aggressive or irresponsible act may be in fact the result of an objective constraint imposed on alter's course of action (e.g. trying to avoid a dangerous situation which may not appear as such to ego), just as well as it can be determined by alter's fear in acting otherwise. These misunderstandings—which easily lapse into moral judgments—transform the others with which individuals interact in traffic into what Lefebvre ([1961] 2008:215-6) called "otherness": from being an accessible and knowable other, *the* other driver becomes—by virtue of her spatial isolation—inaccessible and unknowable, her actions being (mis)interpreted as threatening, cynical, incapable, frustrating and so on. In sum, the immediate experience of being in the Bucharest traffic is inherently solipsistic and alienating, with spatially isolated monads engaged in stillborn attempts at mutual understanding which eventually pass into judgments that do not follow the accommodation of mutual interests and

claims on space.[34]

In most cases, however, traffic presupposes a much more complex interactional structure comprised of multiple actors that act and need to be coordinated simultaneously. This spatio-temporal simultaneity, coupled with the need of finding quick solutions and with the fact that possible failures in coordination may not only be costly but also dangerous, further exacerbates the communicative disturbances outlined above. Ultimately, the experience of congested traffic can only be characterized as one of collective solitude in which each person's capacity to map the situation on a collective level is given by her limited field of vision and capacity to anticipate and speculate. From this vantage point, congestion represents a bundle of failed coordination acts which are synonymous with failed attempts at engaging in mutual understanding; the upshot is that, since new legitimating norms of action cannot emerge in such a context, the institutional framework of the traffic code still stands as the only benchmark for legitimation. As a consequence of this, the lived experience of congestion is not only associated with a perceived lack of control over one's own mobility plans, or with the negative consequences of communicative disturbances (frustration, fear, and also aggression, cynicism, etc.), but also with a perceived image of lawlessness and norm-free interaction. The peculiarity of the lived space of congestion, therefore, is that it apparently remains devoid of political *content* despite the possibility of it constituting what Lefebvre called a lived "moment" of critique, i.e. a lived critique of everyday life which may come about as a consequence of a temporary collapse of the everyday.[35] This latter possibility is precluded by the fact that the problem of congested space is displaced into conflictual interactions at the level of everyday life that cannot be resolved by way of mutual

[34] As Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 2005:358) noted, solipsism is inherently rooted in the lived experience of everyday interaction. What congestion does, then, is to exacerbate this reality; indeed, on a collective level, congestion presents itself as "the absurdity of a multiple solipsism" (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2005:359).

[35] "For Lefebvre, 'moments' are those instances of intense experience in everyday life that provide an immanent critique of the everyday: they are moments of vivid sensation of disgust, of shock, of delight and so on, which although fleeting, provide a promise of the possibility of a different daily life, while at the same time puncturing the continuum of the present" (Highmore 2002:115-6).

understanding; the subsequently perceived generalized illegitimacy of others' actions therefore becomes part and parcel of the lived experience of congestion. The political *value* of this lived experience, however, lies in the fact that it congeals into representations of space. The widespread sense that social relations in traffic are unpredictable—something which, as argued so far, is inherent to the space of congestion itself—leads to traffic space being conceived as lawless and chaotic; as I will show next, this entails that space is transformed from being a barrier to capital accumulation into a subjectively-perceived obstacle to be overcome.

4. Hegemonic Space

The relationship between lived space and conceived space is a dialectical one and, even though spatial practices are directly lived before they are conceptualized and represented, representations feed back into the lived dimension of space in the sense that they inform and shape that experience.[36] The first question we have to answer concerns the relationship between the lived experience of traffic congestion analyzed in the previous chapter and the representations of the space of congestion to which this experience speaks. Second, we have to ask what the political function of these representations is. Indeed, it is much easier to trace out the political content and value of conceived space and, from this vantage point, understand the politics of the lived space of congestion and its relationship with the congested space of political economy. It is obvious from the start that representations of space are infused with power relations, not only by virtue of their presence in the public sphere, but also because of their fusing together of both knowledge and ideology of space (see Lefebvre 1991:44-5). It is to these aspects we must turn next.

[36] See Lefebvre (1991:34) and Madsen (2001).

The State of Nature

Apart from disrupting everyday routines, congestion also renders the space of traffic illegible; it not only destabilizes individuals' mobility projects, but also changes the ways in which people think of the space of the street and, to a certain extent, of public space in general. As the space of failed interactions, the space of congestion made its way into the lifeworld of Bucharest residents, and traffic congestion engendered its own "myths and meanings" (Moran 2005:ch.3) which congealed into more structured representations of space. As a consequence of the fact that congestion became a very important theme for most people in Bucharest, the local traffic mythology is immense, and an exhaustive account would go beyond the purpose of this paper. In what follows, I want to focus on a theme that quickly came to dominate all readings of congestion: chaos.

From the standpoint of individual actors, there are an infinite number of different narratives dealing with the experience of congestion, on the one hand, and its practical implications, on the other. Indeed, the multiplicity of itineraries invites just as many strategies and cognitive mappings of congested traffic as there are people and trajectories. However, while individuals narrate specific events which they witnessed or situations they were involved in, as well as relating these to particular spaces (intersections, parking lots, good and bad routes etc.), what is very peculiar about individual narratives of congestion lies precisely in their commonality: the backdrop of all traffic stories is always the amorphous problem of "traffic" as such. More often than not, conversations on Bucharest traffic lapse into discussions, characterizations and judgments of traffic in general, thus going beyond the problem of concrete situations and individual itineraries. Ultimately a reified form, "traffic"—which, in Bucharest, rarely has any other meaning than "congested traffic"—is taken to be a thing in itself for which each specific situation stands as a confirmation of its presence and characteristics, just as in practice it is in itself something that each individual

must either avoid or deal with. It is starting with this discursive abstraction that the space of congestion is made legible. Even if the "private" consciousness of individuals is inflected by the particularities of the lived experience of congested traffic, it is the way private consciousness relates to the "public" consciousness of congested space which is important for understanding the politics of congested traffic.[37] From this point of view, congested traffic becomes a metonym for society at large, an expression of a crisis of social relations in public space; traffic no longer concerns only the instrumental purposes of mobility, but is rather made to represent the city as a whole and the relationships therein.

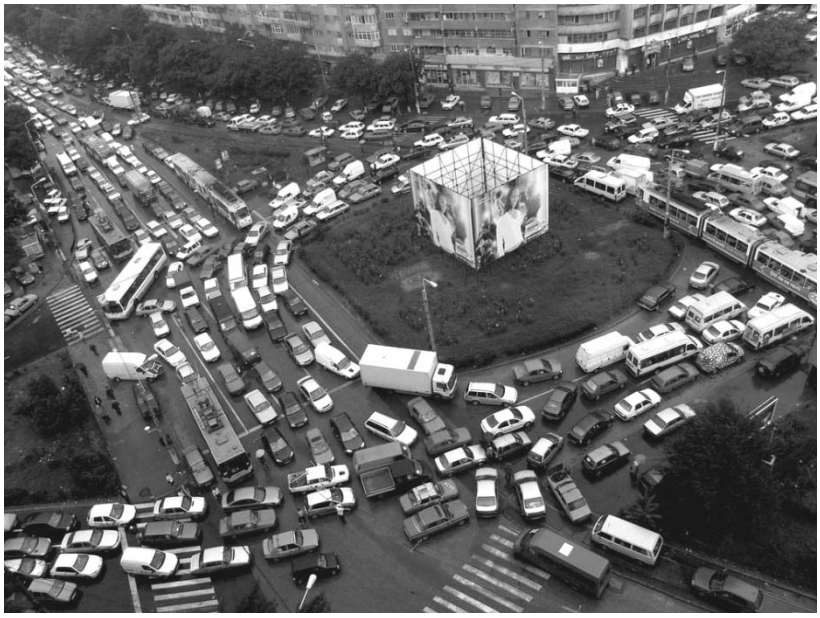


Figure 6: Chaos
Author: Stefan Cosma.

The most effective means of endowing the Bucharest traffic space with legibility is definitely through visual representations.[38] Usually adopting the bird's eye perspective, these

[37] Lefebvre ([1958] 1991:195) distinguishes between private and public consciousness: "The individual's 'private' consciousness is complemented by a 'public' consciousness; they interact and support one another. The 'private' consciousness refers across to the 'public' consciousness and vice versa; the one is meaningless without the other. The one is as real— and as unreal— as the other. For the 'private' individual, the public consciousness contains the most basic social elements that individualism can adapt to; and at the same time it is laden with deceptive words, mystifying ideas and images. In the 'public' consciousness the 'private' consciousness finds justifications, ready-made explanations, compensations. Individual life oscillates between the one and the other." Further, he positions "public" consciousness at the intersection between everyday life and political life (see Lefebvre [1958] 1991:92).

[38] While the popularity of photographs and audiovisual material representing traffic space is obvious in the mass-media, these types of representations are also widely used in accompanying personal accounts on blogs or internet forums.

"public images" (Lynch 1960:7) of traffic break from the closed confines of the car in order to underscore the collective dimension of traffic congestion at a different scale.[39] As essential elements of the imaginary of congestion, such images tend to speak for themselves, insofar as they render congestion into a visual spectacle of irrationality, with "chaos" being the immediately appropriate idiom to characterize the space of congestion.[40] It is this idea of chaos that first renders the space of congestion transparent in spite of the opaqueness with which congestion presents itself from the grassroots level of the individual driver; paradoxically, as we have already seen in the previous chapter, this is only possible precisely by virtue of this opaqueness. This transparency with which the space of congestion is endowed pays tribute to a totalizing discourse which transforms the immediate fact of traffic into an abstract concept (de Certeau 1988:94) pointing to the obviousness of congested traffic as a space of generalized disorder.

It is with a similar image that Alexandru Solomon (2008) starts his documentary on congested traffic in Bucharest. The difference is that, in *Apocalypse on Wheels*, Solomon turns the image on its head in order to give traffic space another reading; he sees traffic as "a greater metaphor of a [sic] contemporary Romanian society" and suggests that the traffic predicament in Bucharest points to the fact that "this world has completely turned upside-down" (Kuc 2009). The film starts with the theme of chaos, and then moves successively to six other themes: pain, consumption, lawlessness, insolence, trauma, and powerlessness. Solomon depicts traffic space as an urban no-man's-land, a chaotic space devoid of respect for other people, in which unfettered aggressiveness and competition replace the rule of law. Bucharest traffic thus appears to be paradoxical from two points of view: on the one hand, individual competition between drivers leads to collectively irrational outcomes—congestion

[39] For Lynch (1960:7), public images are "common mental pictures carried by a large number of a city's inhabitants" which usually convey strong meanings and emotions.
[40] In Bucharest, when it comes to speaking of congestion, "chaos" is on everyone's lips; examples in the mass-media also abound (e.g. *HotNews.ro* 2008).

itself; on the other hand, unfettered competition leads to individually experienced traumatic situations—from the apparently more benign psychological and emotional tensions associated with driving in Bucharest, to the most severe cases which involve loss of life, Solomon shows how individual suffering is isolated from the overarching reality of traffic space which, nevertheless, produces it. The film formulates a critique of the space of congestion in that it endows the reality of congestion with powerful moral undertones: the increasing number of cars is traced back to rampant consumerism, while being in traffic

Figure 7: The world upside-down.
**Source*: Solomon (2008).

means that one has to face endemic incivility as the rule of the strongest prevails; these are all seen as characteristic for a dehumanized and dehumanizing space of congestion. In the last analysis, as Solomon portrays it, this generalized war of all against all is the result of "values being turned upside-down" (Kuc 2009). The film conveys the impression of anonymous guilt, as each individual contributes to, and yet escapes direct responsibility for, the vicissitudes of congested traffic. This is accompanied by a double understanding of powerlessness: first, the state—personified by a traffic policeman—is presented as either ending up as a helpless

spectator faced with an incomprehensible reality it is unable to control, or as an inherently corrupt structure—the legal system itself—which is part and parcel of the chaotic state of social relations reflected by the space of congestion; second, the general feeling of powerlessness is further strengthened by the fact that the critique of the space of congestion takes the form of a critique of everyday life itself, which emphasizes the essentially dystopic state in which individuals act toward each other. The spectator is left in awe at the sight of an apparently uncontrollable reality of traffic, as the space of congestion becomes not only a space in which each individual fends for herself, but also a space in which she is compelled to do so.

Apocalypse on Wheels is far from being an isolated account of the space of congestion. On the contrary: from newspaper editorials to daily televised accounts, the Bucharest media is filled with representations of the space of congestion which deplore the daily plight of being in traffic and further explore congestion as a symptom of a more general state of urban decay (e.g. Cautis 2009; Crisbăşan 2006; Dutu 2009; Ghinea 2010).[41] What Solomon's film does is to distill what is in fact a generalized and much more diffuse discourse related to traffic space which—since it is transformed into a discourse on relationships in public space in general—easily lapses into a form of moral panic that engulfs not only media representations but also personal narratives and casual everyday conversations. This Hobbesian imaginary of congestion directly relates to the lived experience of congested traffic: it is the core idea of generalized disrespect toward the law, coupled with the unpredictability of social interactions, that is reflected in these representations of the space of congestion as a prime locus of irrationality and anomie. There is indeed a dialectical relationship between the lived and conceived dimensions of the space of congestion as, on the one hand, representations of chaotic space render the lived space of

[41] These are just very few examples of a virtually infinite array of texts.

congestion legible, while, on the other, lived experience feeds into and buttresses these representations of space. It is the split communicative framework of congested traffic, and its associated solipsistic experience that render these representations of chaos and anomie not only appropriate, but obvious, and it is the immediately experienced normative status of interactions that makes space appear as lacking in social solidarity.

The political value of these representations is threefold. First, while they obviously constitute a critique of the space of congestion, this does not go beyond a critique of everyday social interactions in relationship to a putative normative framework which no longer stands in practice. Since these representations portray it as being inherently anomic, the space of congestion points toward a crisis of everyday life which no longer has to do with systemic determinations and ends up circumscribing even problems related to the social reproduction of labor-power—the loss of time itself is causally associated with the loss of social solidarity. The sense of anomie more often than not supplants these issues and reformulates the problem of congested space as a problem in and of the space of congestion—the problem of congestion is thus displaced almost entirely into the lifeworld of actors as the systemic determinations of congestion are effaced.[42] Second, since they are simultaneously a critique of the state's weakness and lack of authority, these representations posit the state as the only entity which holds the necessary power to intervene; the enforcement of the law appears as the only way to harness the juggernaut of congested traffic and its anarchic structure of interaction. Finally, these representations constitute a depiction of traffic on the level of "global space" (Lefebvre 1991:228): the problem of traffic seems to be at the same time everywhere and nowhere, since "traffic" in fact relates to the city as a whole.[43] The power of

[42] For a theoretical account of how systemic problems are displaced into the lifeworld, see Habermas (1992).
[43] The concept of "global space" has quite a loose understanding throughout Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1991); nevertheless it is clear that it encompasses the notion of scale (or, in Lefebvre's language, that of level) in the sense that it refers to space as a whole, the space which circumscribes and connects multiple instances of the levels of the urban and the everyday. What I have here in mind however, is the connection Lefebvre draws between global space and the signification process whereby it appears as pertaining to "what is public" ("Where

this narrative comes precisely from its capacity to resonate with individual experiences and to offer an abstract interpretive framework for concrete situations; this means that "private" meanings are fused with the "public" meaning of the space of congestion where they immediately find justification. As I will show next, these political undertones of the conceived space of congestion ultimately feed back into the systemic logic of the production of space.

Creative Destruction

By the middle of the decade, the issue of traffic congestion was already a constant presence in the Bucharest public sphere, even though, as we have seen above, its representations took a fetishized form. The discourse of catastrophe which surrounded congested traffic made its way into the field of electoral politics as traffic became an important issue on politicians' agendas in struggles over seats in the local government. If this was already happening at the time of the 2004 elections, traffic became the primary point of interest in the 2008 electoral campaign and, apart from minor differences, all candidates agreed on the necessity to intervene in order to solve the problem (Agenţia de Monitorizare a Presei 2008a; 2008b; Candidaţii la Primăria Capitalei s-au Confruntat la Realitatea TV" 2008). Their solutions were in themselves extremely similar: traffic management was to provide a short-term solution, while improvements in the public transit system and infrastructure networks were to constitute mid- and long-term solutions (see Bucharest Municipality 2007). The key tenet of these political discourses was that infrastructure needed to be overhauled in order for the city's traffic problem to be solved. Needless to say this claim went unchallenged as it was grafted not only on top of the existing generalized belief in the requirement of state intervention, but also on top of the taken-for-granted representations of the space of

global space contrives to signify, thanks to those who inhabit it, and for them, it does so, even in the 'private' realm, only to the extent that those inhabitants accept, or have imposed upon them, what is 'public' (Lefebvre 1991:228); see also p. 387).

congestion which rendered the problem of traffic transparent and obvious. Subsequently, most investments concentrated in the development of road infrastructure and, for the past three years, the city has seen some major projects being undertaken in this direction, with more to follow in the years to come. All of these projects have a particular characteristic: on the one hand, their legitimation comes from the public consciousness of traffic being a problem for the city as a whole—i.e. being perceived as a problem of public interest; on the other hand, their effects are highly skewed in that they reaffirm and buttress uneven geographical development in the specific form it took under the dominant logic of exchange-value (see chapter 2). In the last analysis the political process of creative destruction in Bucharest relates to this dialectic between the discourse on global space—traffic congestion as a problem pertaining to the public interest—and the content of actual interventions in space—the spatial selectivity of investments. In other words, it is not only the political economy of congested space that is effaced and taken for granted, but the same happens to the class cleavage which underpins the production of urban space. It is here that the hegemonic quality of the space of congestion becomes apparent, as its representations function in order to conceal and legitimize the violent and uneven character of creative destruction.

Consider, first, the public transit system. The "General Master Plan for Urban Transportation" (Bucharest Municipality 2007) positions the development of public transport among the priorities in alleviating the problem of congestion and sets specific goals for investments in both the metro and surface transportation networks. As we have already seen in chapter 2, however, the surface transportation service is crippled not only because of congestion, but also because it is underfinanced and, despite the recommendations of the Master Plan, the local government has not taken any significant measures in order to turn the

situation around.[44] However, things seem to be a bit different when it comes to the metro network: a 300 million-dollar project aimed at extending the metro network toward the north, all the way to the Henri Coandă international airport, is scheduled to begin later this year (see Bărbulescu 2010; Primăria Municipiului Bucureşti 2007a). While this project is supposedly aimed at alleviating congestion and solving "the public transportation problem in the northern area" (Primăria Municipiului Bucureşti 2007a), it is in fact meant to provide the required infrastructure for the further concentration of capital investments and suburban development along the city's center-north axis (see Bucharest Municipality 2007:43); moreover, it is also supposed to make the Bucharest-Ilfov region more competitive on an European and global level, even though this actually means that the northern part of the city is to be transformed into an economic enclave for global-city functions.[45] This project has been prioritized over other expansions of the metro network toward the densely populated neighborhoods in the western and north-eastern parts of the city, while there have been no discussions of expanding metro coverage in the fifth district, which is already underserviced when it comes to public transportation.[46]

Investments in road infrastructure have likewise concentrated in the northern part of the city; a series of underpasses and overpasses have been built in the north, with other projects—such as the widening of roads—also being underway (see, for example, Etves 2010; Grigore 2009; Primăria Sector 2 2010a; 2010b). But these are rather minor in

[44] Rather on the contrary: if the beginning of 2010 was marked by discussions of possible subsidy cuts which would further undermine the service (Teognoste 2010), dedicated bus lanes are still virtually non-existent in Bucharest, despite policy recommendations for their immediate implementation (see Bucharest Municipality 2007:361-2). Coupled with massive investments in road infrastructure—which, of course, are made for, and encourage car usage—this points to the fact that specific investments are prioritized over others; the underlying class cleavage in this case is obvious, since car ownership is highly skewed in accordance with income distribution (see Bucharest Municipality 2007: 145-6; 258-9). This issue, however, requires more attention than it can be given here, since the consumption of individual automobiles is a highly complex phenomenon.

[45] Since the new metro link is also meant to provide a quick connection between the airport and the main railway station, it represents a local version of what Graham and Marvin (2001:367-9) have called "'glocal' infrastructure networks" which are tailored in accordance with the requirements of global interconnectivity, regardless of local problems and needs.

[46] According to a recent survey (ICCV 2009), inhabitants of the fourth and fifth district were mostly dissatisfied with the quality of the public surface transportation system, as opposed to the inhabitants of the other districts.

comparison to the two major road infrastructure projects currently being undertaken in Bucharest: the Basarab overpass and what is supposed to become the new Uranus Boulevard. Both these projects involve not only the fostering of uneven development, but also the destruction of previously existing spatial arrangements in order to set new infrastructures into place. Similarly, both exemplify the pitting of the "public interest" and the burden of traffic congestion—which, on a discursive level, relates to global space—against the "private interests"—which concern the particular spaces on top of which these projects are to be put into place.

Started in 2007, the construction of the Basarab overpass is currently the biggest investment project undertaken by the Bucharest Municipality. It directly connects the north of the city with its western part and consists of an almost two kilometer long overpass which includes two bridges, with a total cost of approximately 178 million euros (Consiliul General al Municipiului Bucureşti 2005) (for images of the project, see figures 8 and 9 in the appendix).[47] Throughout the last decade it has often been referred to as the number one priority in terms of urban infrastructure development as state officials have

Map 6: The Basarab (left) and Uranus (right) projects.

[47] Only in 2009 the project was allocated approximately 9% of the Municipality's budget (Primăria Municipiului Bucureşti 2009).

repeatedly insisted that the fate of traffic depends to a very great extent on the successful implementation of this project; the argument is that the overpass would close the central ring road and would thus provide a bypass alternative to the heavily congested central area. The project required extensive demolitions as the overpass was planned to be built on top of an area of dilapidated, lower-class housing and protests followed not only on the side of tenants that were to be displaced, but also on the side of inhabitants of nearby areas who would be directly affected by the construction of the overpass (see *Evenimentul Zilei* 2009; Mediafax 2009c; *Realitatea TV* 2009). In 2008, expropriations and demolitions were stopped, as the Municipality lost a trial filed on the behalf of local inhabitants; this did not last for long, however, as in 2009 new legal arrangements gave preeminence to the local government in continuing with the expropriations.[48] The impact these protests had in the public sphere was little to none at all, as representatives of the central and local government continued to claim that the overpass was an absolute must and that public interest was more important than the interests of private individuals opposing the project. The legal outcome simply formalized what was an already settled issue in the public sphere.[49]

The Basarab project follows the logic of capital concentration in the northern and western parts of the city and provides the necessary spatial requirements for its expanded reproduction. The project itself, however, is more than just a simple infrastructure overhauling targeted at alleviating congestion; for that matter, the overpass is going to prove most useful in connecting the north with the west, and the extent to which it will serve the southern part of the city is as of yet unclear, since the existence of the southern section of the inner ring road is somewhat fictitious. It is also meant to be used as an instrument in opening up land for redevelopment, not only in the "dead industrial area" surrounding it (*HotNews.ro*

[48] This depended on the intervention of the central government (see Lupoaie 2009; *Mediafax* 2009a; 2009b).
[49] Interestingly enough, the NGO leading the protest against the Basarab project did not tackle the problem of traffic congestion head on, but rather preferred to focus on more specific legal and environmental issues, as well as the viability of the project and the existence of possible alternatives (see Terra Mileniul III n.d.).

2005), but also in the central and western areas that it will serve, areas which are presently very attractive for real estate capital (Lupoaie 2008).[50] In part, this was only possible because of the problem of congestion being used as a legitimating counterweight not only to localized protest movements, but also to any significant public discussion on the spatial selectivity of state investments.

A similar project has been underway since the spring of 2010: the widening of the Buzeşti and Berzei streets is part of a broader development of what is to become the new Uranus Boulevard. Located in the heart of the city, it is designed to connect Victoriei Square—which is considered to be the core of Bucharest's central business district—with the area surrounding the Palace of the Parliament, thus establishing a parallel route to the city's main central boulevard. The similarities with the Basarab project are manifold. First, the scale of the Uranus project—the new boulevard is supposed to have two or three lanes in each direction, while the Buzeşti and Berzei streets have only one (Consiliul General al Municipiului Bucureşti 2009; Curteanu 2010)—entails the demolition of many dilapidated lower-class dwellings, and the displacement of the previous tenants (see figures 10 and 11 in the appendix). Second, just like the Basarab overpass, this project has also been claimed as a necessary solution for alleviating traffic congestion, with no voices contesting this claim.[51] Third, it will also exacerbate uneven development by providing infrastructural requirements for further capital concentration in the northern and central parts of the city. Finally, it is also used as an instrument for raising land prices and fostering redevelopment in its immediate proximity and also for opening up large plots of land situated in prime locations toward its

[50] In 2005, the mayor prophesized that the area surrounding the Basarab overpass would become "extremely interesting from the point of view of real estate" (*HotNews.ro* 2005); he specifically mentioned that one of the main goals of the project was to encourage urban redevelopment in the area. This prophecy is on its way of being fulfilled, as over the past years the area has been targeted by both commercial and residential real estate interests.

[51] Just like in the case of the Basarab project, there have been voices arguing for the necessity to preserve the historical heritage of the areas targeted for demolition (e.g. Giurescu 2006); these, however, did not touch upon the problem of congestion itself and, consequently, were of no effect.

southern end (see Comisia Tehnică de Urbanism a Capitalei 2009).

The new metro line, the Basarab overpass and the new Uranus Boulevard are part of the state's long term plans to overhaul Bucharest's transport infrastructure and are posited as priority solutions for alleviating traffic congestion and contributing to the city's overall development (see Bucharest Municipality 2007). A closer look at these three projects, however, reveals an underlying general trend: there is a very particular selectivity to spatial interventions as infrastructure networks are laid down primarily in order to support capital investment and foster uneven development at the urban scale. While the northern metro line will provide a quick airport connection and will lead to further concentration of global-city functions along the center-north axis, the Basarab and Uranus projects not only provide transport connections between the northern, western, and central parts of the city, but also serve as tools for urban redevelopment, coupled with rising land prices and gentrification. What these projects have in common pertains not only to their specifically spatial class content, but also to the functioning of their underlying political mechanism; representations of the space of congestion serve a legitimating function as all these projects are claimed to be not only absolutely necessary but also to pertain to the public interest.[52] In Bucharest, the politics of creative destruction—of tearing down previously established spatial arrangements and replacing them with new ones that are appropriate to capital accumulation—thus imply a dialectic between the discourse of a global space of congestion and investments in particular concrete locations. This relates back to the lived experience of congested traffic and the displacement of the issue of traffic congestion from being a systemic problem to appearing as a crisis of everyday life; as I have tried to argue throughout this analysis, this dialectic

[52] While major investments in transportation infrastructure have as of yet concentrated in the central and northern areas, projects meant to serve other parts of the city have also been planned—one example is the new metro line which is supposed to serve the sixth district in the west. Nevertheless, priority has been given to the former projects, and it is unclear whether the latter are ever to be anything more than just plans on the drawing board. Still, the fifth district is more or less inexistent in the Municipality's plans for investments, and minimal investments are planned for the fourth district (Bucharest Municipality 2007).

between system and lifeworld can be rethought as a relationship between the congested space and the space of congestion, with concrete political processes mediating the process of space production. A more general point made here is that it is only by looking into lifeworld processes that we can understand the specificities of the production of space, the case of Bucharest showing how the two dimensions of traffic congestion—its political-economic determinations on the one hand, and its implications for everyday life, on the other—are interrelated and mediated by specific political processes and representations which dominate the public sphere. The selective interventions in space which epitomize not only creative destruction but also the state's role in fostering uneven development at the urban scale thus found their specific legitimating backdrop in concrete lifeworld processes, space therefore finding itself at the intersection between the political command of the state (directly) and capital (indirectly) and the likewise political demand for alleviating a perceived crisis of everyday life.

Conclusion: System, Lifeworld and the Production of Space

Traffic congestion pertains simultaneously to both system and lifeworld, and the production of its space reflects this duality. Not only does this research reveal the complexities of congestion as an object of analysis, but it also shows how the production of congested traffic space can inform us as to the underlying systemic transformations of capitalist urbanization and their reflection into the lifeworld. Traffic congestion in Bucharest is not only situated at the intersection of broader dynamics of the production of spatial configurations under changing regimes of capital accumulation, but also takes its toll on everyday life, and it is only by considering these latter changes that we could fully grasp the scope of what I have previously referred to as the politics of traffic congestion. As I have argued, first, the systemic determinations of traffic congestion in Bucharest needed to be traced out historically, from this standpoint congestion appearing as a symptom of a shifting dynamic between the

requirements of capital accumulation and its spatial underpinning. This was made possible by grasping the changed structure of flows and the individualization of spatial practices as core elements in the political-economic transformation of the city. In terms of lived experience, congestion disrupts the juridified coordination structure of traffic which renders circulation space into a non-place, a lived abstraction. The breakdown of this action framework introduces the practical requirement for communicative action, on the one hand, and the re-emergence of concrete meanings and re-interpretations of space, on the other. Since the material characteristics of traffic space preclude the accommodation of competing claims on space by way of mutual understanding, the experience of congestion is primarily characterized by a split communicative framework which determines the space of congestion to be lived as a space of norm-free, failed interactions. This pointed to the fact that the systemic problem of congested space is displaced into the lifeworld, and explained why and how congestion appears as the symptom of an endemic loss of solidarity and generalized lawlessness, of the anomic state in which society finds itself. Indeed, the emergence and consolidation of a Hobbesian imaginary of the space of congestion which quickly came to dominate other representations of Bucharest traffic space simply constitutes the congealment of this experience. The political nature of these representations of space became obvious once they made their way into the public sphere and functioned as the legitimating underpinnings for spatial intervention on the side of the state. The argument comes full circle, as the space of congestion itself is revealed to be political, and congested space becomes an obstacle to be overcome not only on a systemic level, but also at the level of subjective perceptions and representations. Creative destruction and the legitimizing of an inherently uneven process of space-production are, therefore, mediated by the levels of everyday life and the structuring of representations of space. What this analysis further reveals, then, is that the politics of congested traffic space lie at the intersection of the systemic dynamic of space production and

the lifeworld aspects of the lived and the conceived.

Even though I have argued that we can open up the space of congestion for critical scholarship, this clearly needs to be placed within a broader understanding of what transportation, traffic and urban mobilities in general are about. This research, therefore, is merely a starting point, and should be, first, placed within the emerging scholarship concerned with the production of infrastructures (Graham and Marvin 2001) and the critique of everyday traffic space (Moran 2005). Second, the critical framework used here allows me to position traffic congestion as an important part of what Harvey (1985a; 1985b) called the urbanization of capital and the formation of distinctively urbanized forms of consciousness and experience. It is in exploring this latter dimension that this research has reached its limits: while the explicit focus on the category of space provides a linchpin in understanding the multiple dimensions and implications of traffic congestion, this necessarily comes with the downplaying of significant issues which have barely been touched upon in this thesis. It is not only issues concerning the state and class relations that have largely been left undiscussed, but also those related to individualism, the family, and consumption that will have to further be addressed in order to paint a fuller picture of congested traffic and the meanings and politics therein.[53] Furthermore, comparative research will also be needed, as the extent to which the results presented here depend on Bucharest's geographical and historical idiosyncrasies is yet to be established; there is no doubt, for example, that the city's compact form and high population density invite different interpretations than the ones dealing with the suburbanized and sprawling landscapes which characterize cities in the US. Lastly, while this analysis of Bucharest traffic space illustrates the importance of accounting for the space in between places of living and places of work, further research will have to inquire into the

[53] A specific reference to Harvey's (1985a) five loci of consciousness formation is made here. While Harvey's theory is tailored for a double focus on the processes of consciousness formation in the work place and in the living place, extending his framework in order to cover the space of traffic could raise new questions in need of answering.

comprehensive character of lived experience and consciousness formation as totalities. In other words, questions concerning the relationships between spaces of living, spaces of work, and spaces of traffic and congestion will have to be addressed. All of these are required in order to account for congestion as a specific characteristic of capitalist urbanization, and also to broaden our understanding of the city by going beyond the workplace/living place dualism. A comprehensive understanding of traffic and traffic congestion is bound to reveal not only the importance of previously unexplored aspects of the urban condition, but also highlight shifts and transformations in the broader process of space production, in both its systemic and lifeworld dimensions. What has been sketched here, then, is simply a point of departure.

Appendix

		Number of enterprises by size and economic sector					Number of employees						
Economic sector	**Size of enterprise**	**1998**	**2008**	**2008 as % of 1998**	**% of total 1998**	**% of total 2008**	**1998**	**2008**	**2008 as % of 1998**	**% of total 1998**	**% of total 2008**	**average 1998**	**average 2008**
total	**TOTAL**	64,377	129,940	201.8	100	100	889,053	1,048,844	118	100	100	13.8	8.1
	0 to 9	58,038	116,052	200	90.2	89.3	210,740	250,540	118.9	23.7	23.9	3.6	2.2
	10 to 49	4,610	10,835	235	7.2	8.3	126,361	229,591	181.7	14.2	21.9	27.4	21.2
	50 to 249	1,218	2,467	202.5	1.9	1.9	153,761	250,436	162.9	17.3	23.9	126.2	101.5
	>=250	511	586	114.7	0.8	0.5	398,191	318,277	79.9	44.8	30.3	779.2	543.1
	<250	63,866	129,354	202.5	99.2	99.5	490,862	730,567	148.8	55.2	69.7	7.7	5.6
manufacturing	**TOTAL**	5,894	11,553	196	100	100	283,546	178,457	62.9	100	100	48.1	15.4
	0 to 9	4,247	8,960	211	72.1	77.6	15,853	22,832	144	5.6	12.8	3.7	2.5
	10 to 49	1,029	1,842	179	17.5	15.9	27,605	40,889	148.1	9.7	22.9	26.8	22.2
	50 to 249	369	608	164.8	6.3	5.3	48,461	60,305	124.4	17.1	33.8	131.3	99.2
	>=250	249	143	57.4	4.2	1.2	191,627	54,431	28.4	67.6	30.5	769.6	380.6
	<250	5,645	11,410	202.1	95.8	98.8	91,919	124,026	134.9	32.4	69.5	16.3	10.9
transport	**TOTAL**	2,694	7,481	277.7	100	100	60,058	70,201	116.9	100	100	22.3	9.4
	0 to 9	2,367	6,662	281.5	87.9	89.1	6,713	12,491	186.1	11.2	17.8	2.8	1.9
	10 to 49	222	609	274.3	8.2	8.1	5,435	10,649	195.9	9	15.2	24.5	17.5
	50 to 249	71	152	214.1	2.6	2	7,512	12,559	167.2	12.5	17.9	105.8	82.6
	>=250	34	58	170.6	1.3	0.8	40,398	34,502	85.4	67.3	49.1	1188.2	594.9
	<250	2,660	7,423	279.1	98.7	99.2	19,660	35,699	181.6	32.7	50.9	7.4	4.8

Table 2: The structure and size of enterprises, Bucharest-Ilfov region.
**Source:* NIS data; author's calculations.

Figure 8: The Basarab project.
**Source:* Forumul portalului metrouusor.com (2009).

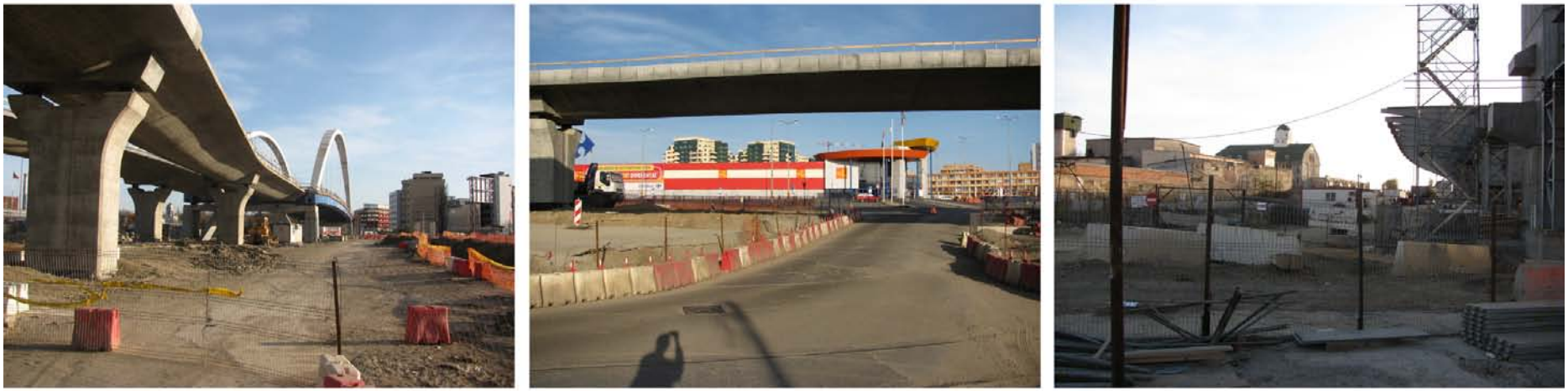


Figure 9: The Basarab overpass construction site.
Note: New commercial and residential developments are visible in the second photograph, while the third shows the area that had to be demolished.
Author: Ştefan Guga, April 2010.

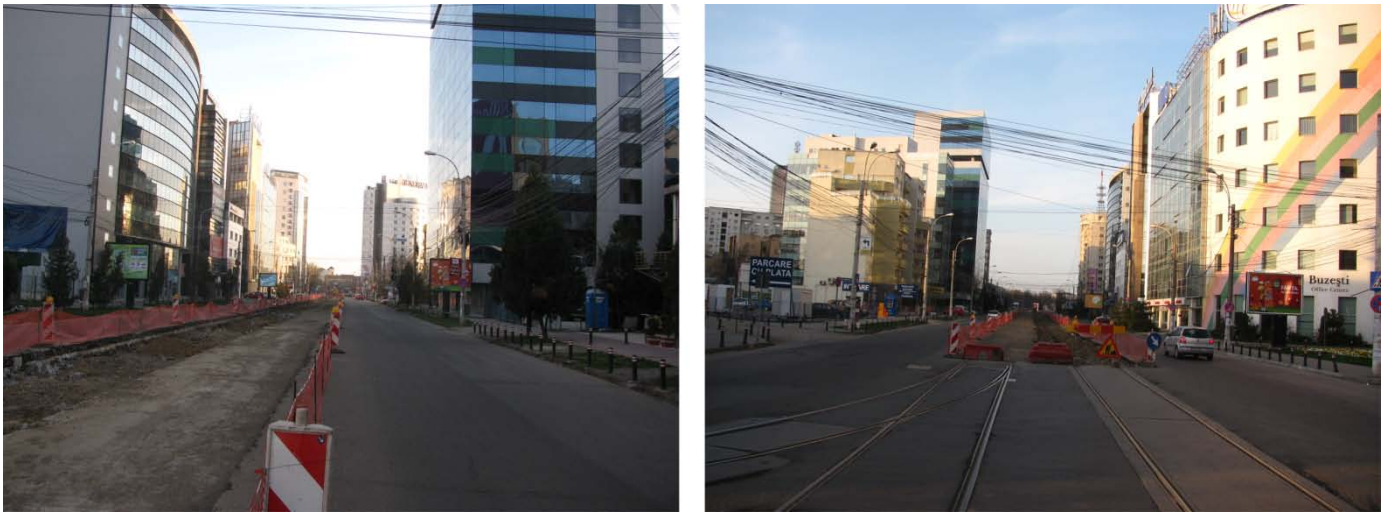


Figure 10: The Uranus Boulevard construction site.
Note: High-end office buildings around Victoriei Square—the core of Bucharest's CBD—can be seen in both photographs.
Author: Ştefan Guga, April 2010.

Figure 11: The Uranus Boulevard construction site.
Note: This is one of the areas that are scheduled for demolition; an office high-rise can be seen in the background.
Author: Ştefan Guga, April 2010.

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