

Studio Sergison
Spring Semester 2013

Low-rise, high-density 4



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Bucharest street drawing

This semester represents the fourth instalment of our ongoing investigations into the manner in which low-rise, high-density housing solutions can support the multifarious needs to densify the European city. In this instance the Romanian capital Bucharest has been chosen for our study.

In previous semesters we considered the theme of low-rise high-density in the centre of London, in a number of 'representative' situations in Zurich and in the southern Italian city of Naples. In all cases the demands placed upon projects differed greatly. What they have in common is the need to react accurately and with sensitivity to the inherited conditions in the places we are looking at. The architectural solutions offered attempt to understand a place and to provide answers to real needs, rather than act in a purely academic and self-referential manner. This is a core component of the position this studio holds and explains why we devote so much to the study of place. In part, this manifests itself in the on-going survey work undertaken.

Bucharest is a city unlike any that we have studied before. It is an eastern European city with a complex and partly tragic history. It is not, however, without urban and architectural interest, although its rich and varied built fabric has been vulnerable to neglect, financial opportunism and a general sense of ambivalence towards buildings that would be deemed as a valuable part of the national heritage elsewhere in Europe.

Our work this semester will be large in scale, a truly urban investigation, where the knowledge of the rich and particular urban context of the site chosen will inform our ability to develop strategies for a large area that was cleared by the intervention of the previous regime.

As in the past, experts and authorities on the issues we will be looking at this semester will support our research and work.



Previous investigations do not adequately equip us for the study we are going to undertake this semester, as we will be looking at a city that is rather different from those we have already considered.

Bucharest is the capital of Romania and was initially developed as a summer residence for Romanian rulers. Unlike many significant European cities, it was never constrained by walls or defensive structures, and this left it exposed to numerous assaults from Turkish invaders.

The urban fabric of the centre of Bucharest is not generally very dense. In fact, contrary to what is the case in many European cities, the greatest density is encountered around its perimeter, in suburban areas, while elsewhere the built fabric tends to be less dense. This would allow Bucharest to densify the city centre relatively easily, although the question that needs to be asked is how this can be achieved in a reasonable, appropriate manner.

In Bucharest's urban fabric we encounter many late nineteenth century examples of the ambition to produce a national architecture that draws upon regional styles and motifs. Alongside this are more international or universal models, firstly examples of Beaux Art buildings, which remind us of the early twentieth century ambition to build Bucharest in the image of Paris. In the 1920s and 1930s the city embraced the egalitarian logic of international modernism, and there are many fine examples of buildings from this period. In the post-war period the Communist programme of large-scale peripheral urbanisation was designed to encourage the agricultural population to settle in the city.

While not very well executed, many of the buildings from this period were architecturally well intended. Hindsight reveals the chasm between the ambition of this building programme and its realisation. Much of the building work undertaken after the Second World War was badly built, with poor levels of insulation.

The actions of the Communist regime in the centre of the city can only be described as a cynical and, frankly, obscene act of urban vandalism. The razing to the ground of whole neighbourhoods and the consequent displacement of entire ethnic communities clearly pursued a social and political agenda. At certain historical moments authoritarian regimes have deemed it necessary to represent their power through an architecture of incontestable grandeur that would ensure its endurance through time. The palace and the surrounding urban plan of the centre of Bucharest is nothing other than an extreme example of this strategy. But this urban ambition was not entirely realised, and the site chosen for our work this semester takes a

Aerial view of Bucharest



large area of land that was destroyed and has remained mostly empty since the 1980s.

We see the primary purpose of the work to be undertaken this semester as an act of urban repair, albeit one where the consequences of the past - feelings of loss, absence and nostalgia - need to be carefully considered.

Your principal task will be to prepare a strategy plan for the selected area. Throughout the semester, priority will be given to the spatial and atmospheric character of your proposals and these will be developed and tested through models and three-dimensional investigations.

Working on the legacy of an act of urban vandalism, your work should attempt to make careful and well considered proposals for reorganising a fractured urban condition. This could be seen as a service to the city of Bucharest and an attempt, in some small way, to mitigate the damage it suffered in the past.



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1
Strada Vasile Lascar

2
Area around Strada M. Berthelot

3
Area around Strada Popa Tatu

4
Calea Victoriei

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Area around Strada Popa Tatu

6
Splaiul Independentei



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Bucharest is located in the Wallachian plain, or *Campia Romana*, which lies between the Carpathian mountains to the north, the Danube delta to the west and south and the Black Sea to the east.

Fertile soil and an abundant supply of water made this area a favourable place for settlement although it also suffers frequent seismic activity. The first settlements in the area date back to 100,000 BC, but unlike many European cities that have Greek or Roman foundations, Bucharest emerged relatively recently as a city of any importance despite its proximity to the historically established Asian and Western European trading routes. It is not until the fifteenth century that any significant urban structure can be traced due to the unstable geopolitical situation.

Before Bucharest became established as a settlement there were many culturally significant developments in the region, including the development of Romanian as a language. Around 1800 BC the Getae and the Thracians settled in the Carpathian-Danube region. Later, during the time of the Roman Empire, cities were founded in the western Romanian plain and Transylvania, and Bucharest was probably a military encampment. In the third century AD, the Goths, Huns and Slavs settled in the southern part of the Danube. During the fourth century, the region was converted to Christianity. The Romanian language developed between the seventh and ninth century from a crude form of Latin mixed with Gatae-Dacian and Slavic elements.

The time between the ninth and thirteenth century was a period of great political instability. Numerous forces from the east including the Pechenegs, the Cumans and the Tatars controlled Wallachia. In the 14th century the principality of Wallachia was unified under Basarab 1 (1310-1352) and the *Tera Romanesca* (Romanian country) was founded.

It is during this period that reference is made to Bucharest as *Castrum Bucuresti*, a royal residence on the Dambovitza River at the junction of important trading routes. It was around this residence that Bucharest grew and became a prosperous market town. It attracted many skilled craftsmen, as well as noblemen from other parts of the Principality. As the town was not constrained by significant fortifications, it was able to grow in an organic manner, with many smaller, village-like quarters emerging around small churches.

In 1659 the Ottoman Empire forced the Romanian Prince to take up permanent residence in Bucharest and in 1668 the Romanian Orthodox Church established its central seat here. These two events were very significant for the

p11
Bucharest street network evolution plans by Matei Bogoescu

1
1800, Ottoman Bucharest: agglomeration of *mahale* (quarters with houses grouped around churches), linked by spontaneous, unplanned streets.

2
1900, the 'Paris of the East': system of boulevards introducing hierarchy in the city centre and spontaneous growth of the periphery

3
1925, Modernism: expansion of the city

4
1965, Communism: large housing estates at the periphery

5
1985, Ceausescu's transformation of the city: the Communist monumental axis

6
2005, Bucharest today: developments in the consolidated city and the new motorway infrastructure



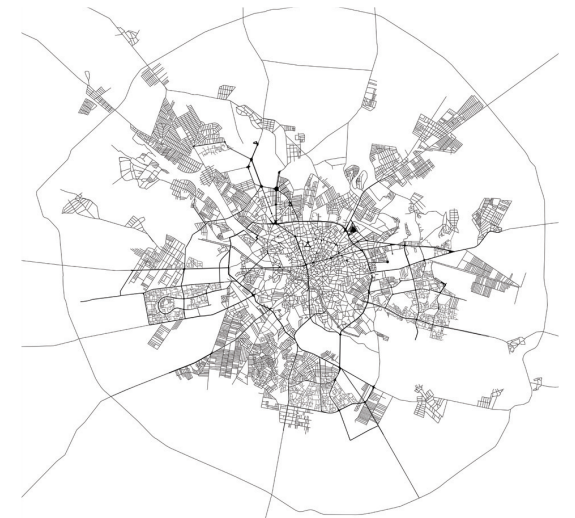
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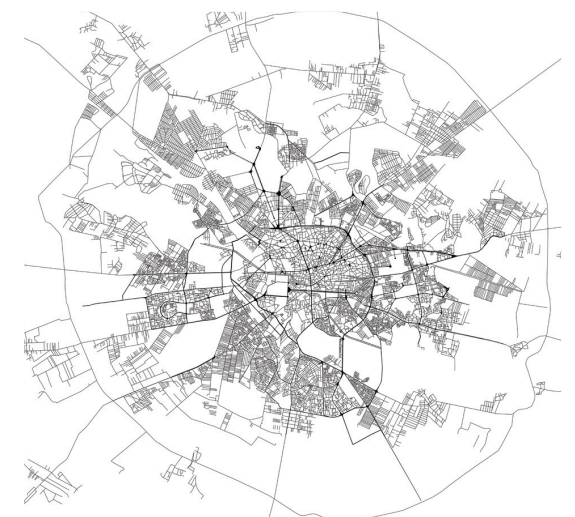
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emergence of Bucharest as a city. The political and commercial ties with the Ottoman Empire during the period grew in importance and greatly influenced buildings, dress and social etiquette.

In 1714 the Wallachian Prince was replaced by the Phanariotes, aristocrats of Greek origin from the Phanar quarter of Istanbul. Under their influence, infrastructure was greatly improved, bridges were built and the first water pipework was laid. Bucharest's status as a commercial, administrative and cultural capital was further consolidated. The urban structure of the city remained loose. The quarters, called *mahale* from the Arabic *mahalla*, meaning to settle, were dominated by small one-storey high timber structures. Visitors to the city at this time found it 'oriental' in appearance, dominated by a large number of markets and religious structures.

By the end of the eighteenth century the population of Bucharest had grown to 50,000 living in approximately 6,000 houses. Manufacturing and trading companies were established, churches were renewed and stone and brick began to replace timber as building materials.

With the end of the Phanariotes regime in 1821 the Turkish influence waned. Conflict between Russia and Turkey as well as Austria and Turkey led to the establishing of consulates in Bucharest by many European countries. Under the influence of Russia, the infrastructure was further improved and streetlights were introduced. The population grew to 70,000 although war, earthquakes, fire and severe famine impeded the development of the city. In spite of this, the European influence on the city became stronger with the laying out of parks and boulevards. Many older quarters, however, retained their character centred around a church.

In the nineteenth century industrialisation and political change led to a reorganisation of the city. The proclamation of Prince Carol I as king of Romania and the downfall of the Ottoman Empire represented significant developments nationally, and led Bucharest to follow the example of Western European cities. After an extensive fire in 1847, the inner part of the city was modernised, with taller buildings being erected and density increased. The commercial centre of the city was surrounded by quarters for workers and following the French example, the *mahale* became known as *cartiers*. Large boulevards were constructed, following the Hausmannian model of Paris. During this time, a railway system was established and industrial production replaced more traditional manufacturing workshops.

By 1860 the population of Bucharest was 122,000 and the city was undergoing significant change. The construction of a number of important institutional buildings was undertaken, including the University, the National Bank and the Palace of Justice. The city began to acquire many of the characteristics it has today.

After the First World War, Transylvania, Bukovina and Bessarabia united with the Romanian kingdom and significantly increased the land area of the country. As the capital of Greater Romania, Bucharest grew in importance and gained the reputation of being the 'Paris of the East'. The two main axes Piata Victoriei and Piata St Gheorghe, following the design of Boulevard Henri Martin in Paris, were considered to be amongst the most modern in Europe.

Up until the Second World War the city continued to prosper. Many notable examples of buildings in the International Style were built including private houses and apartment blocks. Among others boulevard Magheru-Balcescu was constructed. By 1939 the population had risen to 870,000 and the city covered a land area of 7,800 hectares.

A powerful earthquake in 1940 and bomb damage during the Second World War caused significant damage. During the Communist era, large-scale reconstruction work was undertaken. This can be divided between the 'Soviet period' - the time following the end of the Second World War until 1965 - and the regime of Ceausescu from 1965 until 1989. The first phase was characterised by the nationalisation of private property and the collectivisation of agricultural production, following the Soviet example. During this time a large number of people were rehoused in satellite cities around Bucharest and large industrial complexes developed. The borders of the city were expanded. By 1948 the population of the city had grown to 1.6 million and its land area had tripled from 7,800 to 21,700 hectares.

The spatial expansion of the city lasted until the 1970s. The city centre remained more or less intact, although very much neglected. An earthquake in 1977 had a devastating impact on Bucharest and the surrounding area. The destruction it caused to the city centre was taken by Ceausescu as an opportunity to undertake radical transformation. A colossal political-administrative centre, comprising monumental boulevards, buildings and the oversized 'People's House', today the Palace of the Parliament, replaced what was left of the traditional quarters.

This grand urban renovation plan has had a traumatic impact on the centre of the city. Since the 1990, due to limited financial means, only the most urgent tasks have been undertaken. Ceausescu's comprehensive urban vision remains incomplete.

More recently private investment has led to much development, although little of it has any architectural or urban quality. In the absence of a comprehensive and legally enforced planning policy, many recent buildings have been erected with little regard for the quality and character of the wider context. In this respect the future of Bucharest is an uncertain one, despite the boulevards of the nineteenth century, pre-war Modernist buildings and post-war Communist buildings that give the city its unique appearance.



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1 Ottoman Bucharest: historical engraving

2 Boulevard Magheru around 1940

3 Calea Victoriei around 1930

4 Satellite towns, June 1984

5 The site set up for the displacement of Mihai Voda Church, January 1986

6 The boulevard leading to the 'People's House', July 1987

Project

The first component of the work to be undertaken this semester requires you to develop a strategy plan. This can be understood as a typological and massing study. The principal tool to assist you in this exercise will be a 1:500 model. This will be made collectively and encompass a wider area than the site in which your work is situated.

We ask you to begin by exploring numerous solutions that would ensure that the site you are studying could be developed to a reasonably high density. Each option you propose should be recorded photographically and then critically appraised and tested in terms of the density it yields. These proposals should then be further developed, refined or discarded.

This work should be understood as part of an iterative process that will begin to develop an idea for the project you will be working on throughout the semester. You should use the study trip to Bucharest as an opportunity to verify your project.

A seminar will be offered to introduce this piece of work.

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Project site area





In this studio we hold the position that invention is a necessary ambition in architecture, but it rarely emerges through a spontaneous intuitive impulse. Typically, an architect can only make a truly unique proposal after many years of study and reflection. It is even debatable whether true originality is achievable.

To aid your understanding of the task you are attending to this semester, we would like you to undertake a survey of a building or buildings in Bucharest, and of the area immediately adjacent to the site in which your work is situated. We believe that by exploring in greater depth the qualities that can be encountered in this neighbourhood, useful information can be gleaned that can potentially inform your work later.

Your work should consider the plan organisation of a block. You should be able to describe it clearly and analytically, employing diagrams where necessary. You should, however, concentrate on understanding the quality and arrangement of the facade, and this should result in a measured survey of an existing series of elevation. This will require you to look very carefully at buildings, making sketches and taking photographs as a way of recording the conditions they exist in. We would also ask you to make a precise photographic portrait that conveys the atmosphere of the buildings and the manner in which they are situated in the city. You might also make a photographic portrait of an internal space and record the relationship the building's interior has with the city outside.

A seminar will be offered to introduce this piece of work.

North-east Bucharest,
detail image by Stefan Tuchila



Third exercise: Atmosphere/Image

The next piece of work will require you to produce two images. The graphic technique to be employed is not prescribed, although you should be able to explain why you feel your chosen technique is appropriate.

These images should represent the atmosphere and presence of your building. One of the images should represent the exterior of the building and its relationship with the existing urban tissue. The other image should describe the interior of a block and represent its relationship to neighbouring buildings either as found fragments or to buildings you propose.

A seminar will be offered to introduce this piece of work.



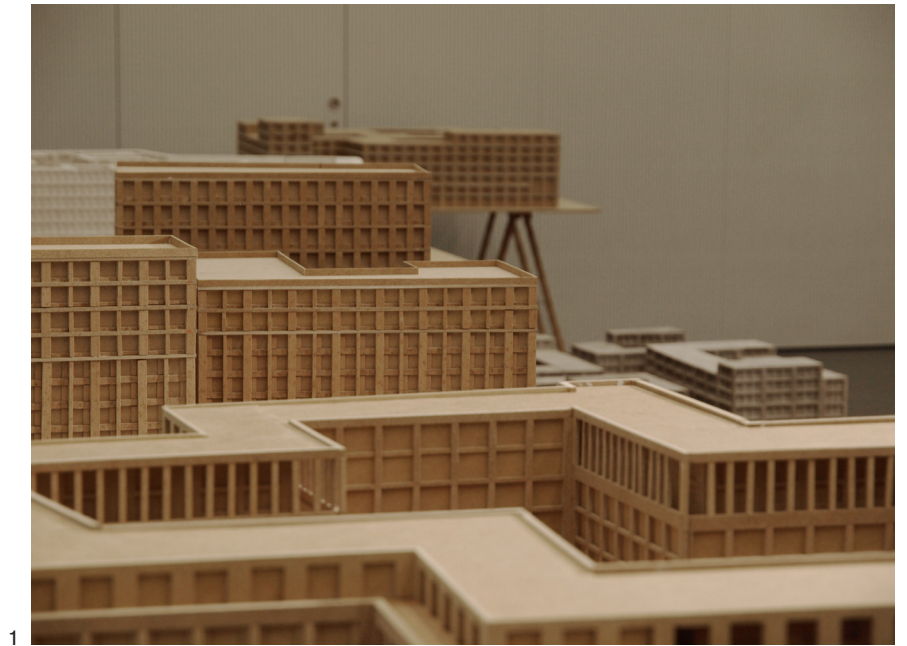
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Perspectives by Dionisio Mora,
used as a design tool during the
semester

Fourth exercise: Building concept

The results of your research should now be re-appraised and drawn upon to make the next instalment of this semester's work. We would now like you to develop a more precise concept for a building, or series of buildings, on the site you have chosen. The principal tool we ask you to employ is a 1:200 study or sketch model which should include an appropriate amount of context. This is really the beginning of the key piece of work for this semester. We are interested in the qualities contained in the buildings you design and the way they express themselves through the organisation of the facades.

The emphasis of your work should be to appraise critically and refine earlier studies. While producing a model will be the main focus, we expect that your project should be developed with study plans, elevations, sections and sketches. It is important that the density of your project is also measured.

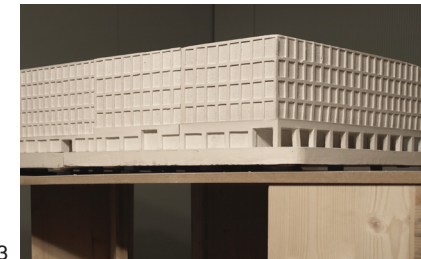
At this stage in the semester, your work will be subject to an intermediate review.



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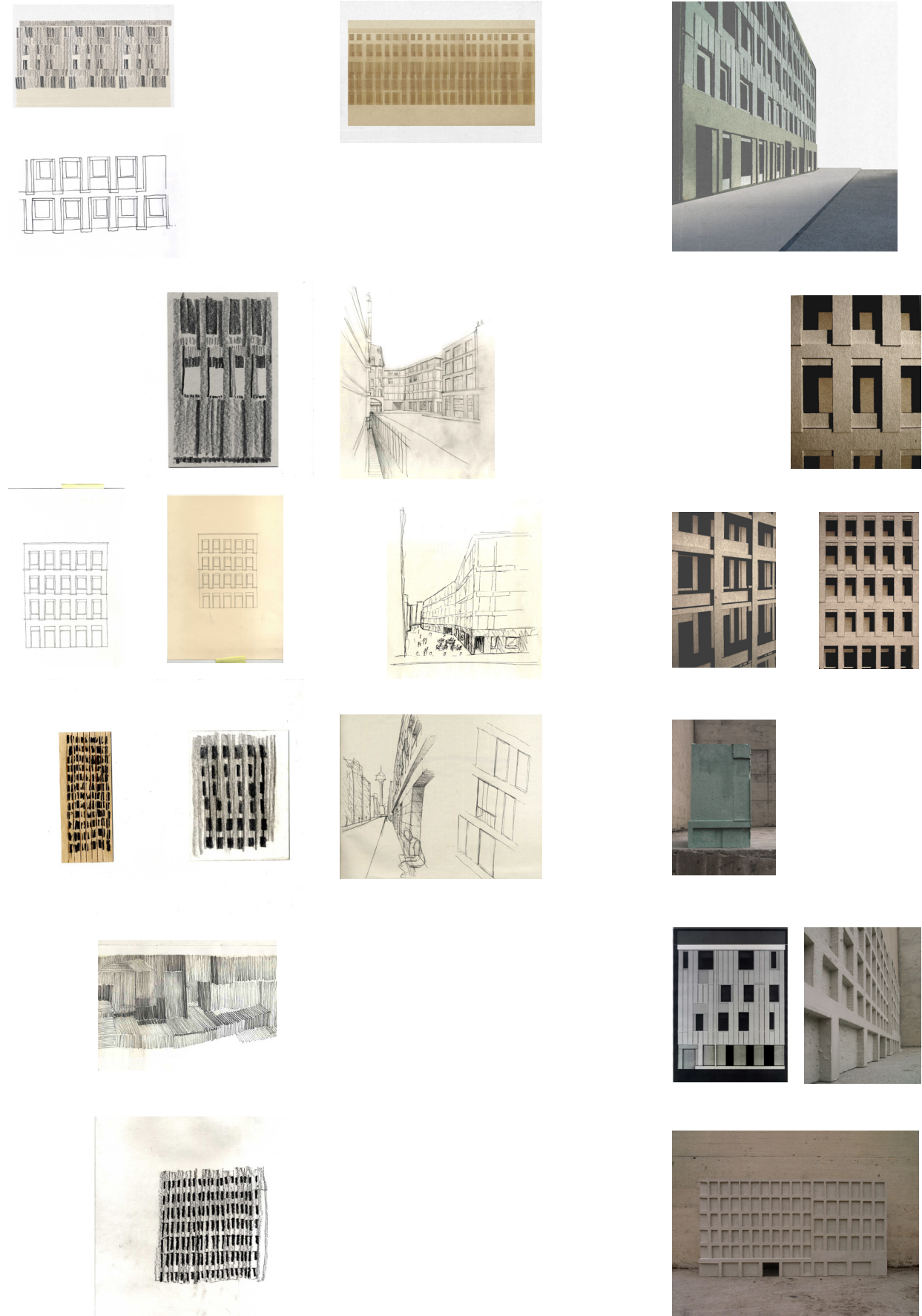
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Models produced in the studio

Fifth exercise: Facade concept

At this stage you should already have developed a rudimentary understanding of your project in plan and section. We now ask you to develop and test your ideas for building facades within the structure of the strategy plan you have developed. The facades of your buildings should be drawn at 1:200 as unwrapped elevations and as three-dimensional models.

This work will require you to have a clear concept of the image of your building. What materials is the building made from? What is your attitude to the arrangement of window openings? How does the building meet the ground and how is the top of the building resolved? There are numerous additional issues you should be considering about your idea for the facade. A typical section and partial elevation drawn at a scale of 1:50 should be produced to answer these questions.

A seminar will be given to assist your understanding of this exercise.



Development of a facade concept, sketches and models by Matthew Bailey and Vitor Pessoa

Date	Event	Details	Assignments
21 February	Studio introduction		
22 February	Studio briefing	Jonathan Sergison (JS) presents studio and spring semester Introduction to the sites and to the site model	Allocation of sites Book tickets for Bucharest Start 1:500 site model
28 February 1 March	Review	Lecture by Corinne Weber (CW) on Bucharest Lecture by JS on Surveying a Building Study trip briefing	1:500 site model First ideas for a strategy plan
7-10 March	Study trip to Bucharest	Please see separate programme for detailed information	
14-15 March	Review	Presentation of survey studies Introduction by SM and CW on Perspectives	Strategy plan 1:500 model studies
21-22 March	Tutorials	Revision of survey studies and review of Perspectives Lecture by JS on the idea of a strategy plan	Perspectives 1:500 model studies
28-29 March	Tutorials	Revision of strategy plan Seminar with Irina Davidovici	1:200 model studies
4-5 April	Easter holidays		
11-12 April	Intermediate review	Project reviews with guest critic	Ideas for a strategy plan 1:500 model 1:200 model studies Perspectives
18-19 April	Tutorials	Lecture by JS on Facades	1: 500 model 1: 200 model studies plan and elevation ideas

Date	Event	Details	Assignments
25-26 April	Review	Review of elevations/sections	1:200 model 1:200 elevations/sections 1:200 ground floor/landscape plans
2-3 May	Review	Review of 1:50 construction section	1:50 construction section
10 May	Review	Review of final drawings	1:200 plans 1:200 elevations/sections 1:50 construction section perspectives
16-17 May	Tutorials	Submission of final drawings and model discussions	Start final model scale to be agreed
23-24 May	Tutorials		Final model Prepare pdf presentation
28-29 May	Final review	Invited critics	1:500 model 1:200 model Final model (scale to be agreed) 1:200 ground floor/landsc.plans 1:200 elevations and sections 1:50 construction section Perspectives Pdf presentation

Reading list

L'Architettura della città

Aldo Rossi, Marsilio, Padova 1966

Das Haus und die Stadt / The House and the City

Diener & Diener, Städtebauliche Arbeiten/Urban Studies
Roger Diener, Martin Steinmann, Birkhäuser, 1995

Dichte / Density

Archithese, Niggli Verlag, 2011

Forme forte

Martin Steinmann, Birkhäuser, 2003

The seduction of place: the city in the 21st century

Joseph Rykwert, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2004

Papers 2

Jonathan Sergison and Stephen Bates, London, 2000

Collected Essays in Architectural Criticism

Alan Colquhoun, Black Dog Pub Ltd, 2009

Die Stadt im 20. Jahrhundert. Visionen, Entwürfe, Gebautes

Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, Wagenbach Verlag, Berlin, 2010

References

Bucarest dal villaggio alla metropoli. Identità urbana e nuove tendenze

Giuseppe Cinà, Edizioni Unicopli Milano, 2005

Bucarest, une ville entre orient et occident

Dana Harhoiu, Bucuresti Simetria L'Union des architectes de Roumanie
Arcub, 1997

Bucharest 2025, a new paradigm

Matei Bogoescu, Master Thesis, TU Delft, Faculty of Architecture, 2010

Bukarest - die Entwicklung des Stadtraums : von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart

Joachim Vossen, Reimer Berlin, 2004

Transparent city - on limits and dwelling in Bucharest

Stefan Ghenciulescu, Editura Universitara 'Ion Mincu', 2008

Romanian Modernism: The Architecture of Bucharest, 1920-1940

Machedon, Luminita, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, The MIT Press, 1999

Modernism in Bucharest (1925-1945)

Ana Gabriela Castello Branco dos Santos, Architekturmuseum der Technische Universität München, 2001

Surprise witness: uncensored photos from the Communist years

Andrei Pandeale, Compania, 2008

Zeppelin - a city scrutinized from atop

N° 108, Oct 2012

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