CONTINUITY AND FRACTURE,
OR MEMORIES ABOUT A STRONG DISCONTINUITY

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It seems that polemics, the Avant-garde and the revolutions have generated the great ruptures in the history of civilization and in the aesthetic culture, along with big leaps in the world's evolution. They have awakened the critical reason, which on its turn has supported the brave ideas and the new mentalities. In arts, they have favoured the originality and adequacy. It is a true fact that the inevitable fractures in the continuity of the existence have bothered the sweet laziness of the popular spirit, but the spirituality has enriched. As Gianni Vatimo said, the aggressive thinking has disturbed the "pensiero debole", i.e. the "weak thought" which is always comfortably settled in the cultural inertia.

Talking about the "progressive weakening ontology" of postmodernism compared to modern times, Vatimo continued a Nietzsche-Heideggerian demonstration. While favoured by the present crisis of Hegelian dialectic and a decay of the strong metaphysics, the decline of differentiated thinking is accompanied by a "weakening of the being", he noted. In other words, great thinking has become more and more defensive when facing the challenges coming from the fundamental research; it increasingly indulges in daily contextuality and transience and dissolves itself in the networks of a society that turned to be a simple body of communication. This means a simple and trivial way to Jürgen Habermas' "undistorted communication", which is spontaneous and uncontaminated by abstract judgement. We therefore live in a society of generalized weak thinking, which is both good and bad. It may be more tolerant, more permissive, thus mitigating the other fracture, the one between elites and masses. But it is also a sign of failure, showing that man gave up the common old culture of the big thoughts.

The great historical ruptures of the old strong times have therefore led the humanity towards either disaster or progress, most often to beneficial leaps accompanied by injustice. However, they have refreshed the sensitive world with either the help of a papal bull or a guillotine. Things happened more peacefully in the art world before the time of avant-garde when Mondrian, for instance, said in his advocacy for abstraction: "I think the destructive element is far too neglected in art!" Now, we, the ones weakened by postmodernity, are yearning for the welfare of continuity in the most condemnable and shameful fashion; we indulge in the spirit's drowsiness, witnessing the hijacking of astral moments into déjà-vu clichés.
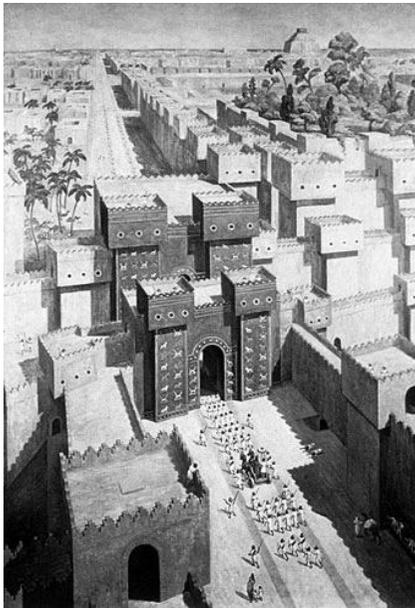
One thing is clear: continuity is comfortable, rupture is thrilling. The question remains: should our art and architecture be comfortable for the sake of the masses or thrilling according to our ambitions? The popular aversion against revolutionary theories and the avant-gardist thinking is understandable, but on the other hand, abdicating from their values is hard for the survivors of the great thinking.

I don't have a clear-cut answer, but I see people who want to see continuity where architects agree there were ruptures. For instance, in an article published in "Dilema veche", an anthropologist (Vintilă Mihăilescu) has stated his approval towards a doctoral thesis on the history of architecture, when he read that the author asserted that Ceausescu's type of urban project had not been invented by

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communists, but it could be traced back until the ancient times. That is true, only the reiteration of the hegemonic moments here and there in the history does not mean either the continuity of totalitarianism in history, or the monumentalist city planning in the life of the European cities. The mankind has not evolved continuously according to the urban principles of the Mesopotamian kings, but it was also an agora built by those ancient Greeks who invented democracy. Eventually, there were countless other moments of urban democratic and progressive thinking between the creation of the Procession Way of Babylon, Speer's axis for "World's Capital Germany", Le Corbusier's segregationist and functionalist-monumental vision of the Modern City, and Ceausescu's "Victory of Socialism" Boulevard. The European medieval city organization is an example of an organic and cohesive community atmosphere. As for the communist civic centre in Bucharest, the reiteration of an old hegemonic urban vision at the end of the second millennium AD meant a fracture in the evolution of the city, while the breaking of thousands of human destinies meant a fracture in the evolution of the Romanian society.

Image 1. The Processional Way in Babylon, built 615 BC them, binds the royal palace to the temple site and passed through the Gate of Goddess Ishtar.
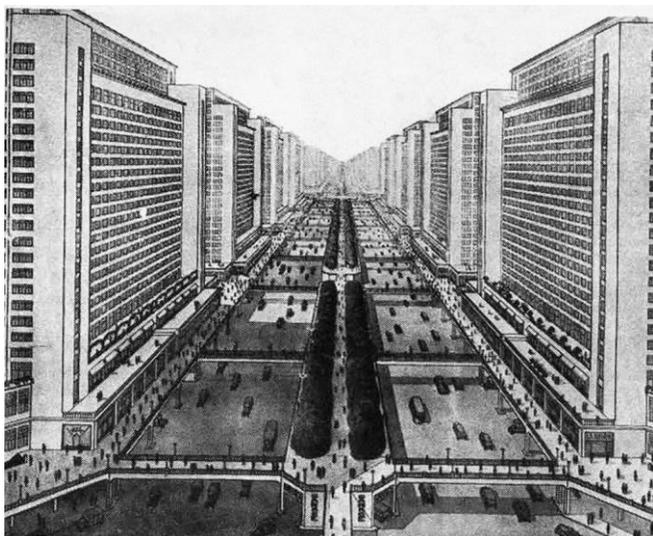
Image 2. "Avenue of Glory" ("Prachtallee"), a monumental axis within Albert Speer's reconstruction project for Berlin, during the Third Reich; an idea designed in 1942. The project was called "capital of the world, Germania". "As world capital Berlin will only be comparable with Ancient Egypt, Babylon, and Rome! What is London, what is Paris compared to that!" commented Hitler.

Image 3. A famous replica from the 1980's: Boulevard "Victory of Socialism" in Bucharest.

Rupture or continuity? A monumental type of urban vision that was specific for the first state organizations in history and their reappearance in the twentieth century.

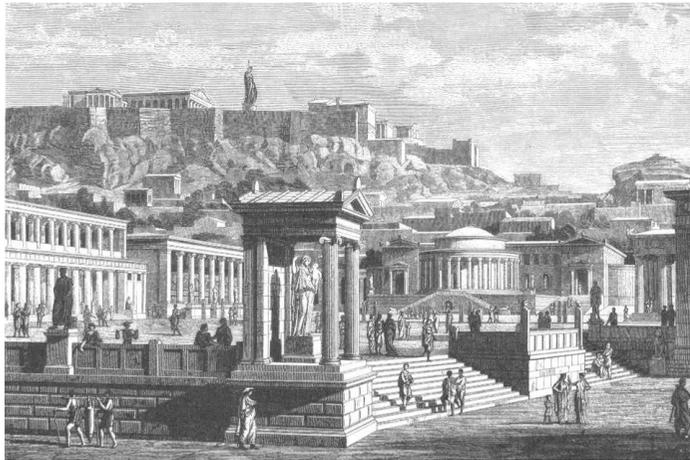Image 4. „La ville radieuse", Le Corbusier's project of 1922.

Image 5. Sheik Zaied Road in Dubai.

Image 6. „Victoria Socialismului" ones more, viewed from Ceauşescu's balcony.

The author was obviously looking at things from another social-human perspective when saying that none of the last three tragic moments in Romanian history – neither the war, nor communism, nor

the '89 revolution - managed to break the Romanian society into three. Maybe not, but it is true only when we are looking at the big scale of history and society. Perhaps, our own existence as Romanian does not indeed consist of two lives, one during communism and one during capitalism. Perhaps fascism, nationalism and the extreme leftism have failed to derail either anthropological structures or the evolutionist flow. Maybe most political turning points have not succeeded to change the social and individual destiny of mankind as much as they would have liked. Then it makes sense to me when Vintilă Mihăilescu says that "*society and the people who compose it spend their time in ways far too subtle and profound than those suggested by our temporary classifications and frontiers.*" I am not sure whether *subtle* or *profound* are the right adjectives, but *stable* and *pragmatic* would certainly be.

Image 7. A reconstruction of Agora of Athens.

Image 8. A fragment of Raphael's painting "The School of Athens"; Plato and Aristotle are in the foreground.

Image 9. Civic space in Venice around 1730-35, a painting by Canaletto.

Image 10. A street in Edinburgh during the Victorian era, painting by Louise Rayner.

The democratic vision.

Image 11. Along the Avenue de la Grande Armée, in Paris-Défense („the Mitterand axis")

Image 12. On the steps at la Grande Arche.

A combination between the two visions.

When looking at history, politics and society in this manner, things maybe do happen in the same way when it comes to architecture and urban planning. Ideological points of no return and classifications are made by "strong thinkers" whom the decent people usually have no an idea about. While great upheavals were going on in Renaissance, Neoclassical or Romantic arts, decent humanity kept on practising its common art in a touching – or is it annoying? – the millennial continuity. It was only in the twentieth century that Modernism managed to produce a crevasse between a "strong" Modern art and an audience that was too "weak" to assimilate it. But this is another discussion.

The turning points have always been caused by the restless peoples, who have permanently tried to change the trajectory of history or art because they did not have the time to stand on the side and watch them unfold so slowly. As a rule, it was the vain ones who, imbued with revolutionary gusto, hindered the progress of the world with their perpetual new beginnings. On the other hand, the geniuses are those who managed to derive beneficial renewals. It all depended on the value of the individuals and the position of the constellations. What is certain is that the road from the revolutionary innovation to the changes within social conscience is winding and tricky. It has firstly to cross the crevasse between the innovators and the public, and then to deviate that flow of popular inertia. But what would happen if society spontaneously absorbed all extravagances arising from our pathetic search for originality? Wow! And this is would be a topic for a later discussion.

The artistic avant-garde has caused the rupture from society out of sincere love for society. The modernists asserted that the millennium-long evolution had led to individualism in art, a most damaging

social effect. Therefore, they have struggled to mend the rupture between the individual and the universal, until they gave abstract art to the people. That one was now reduced to some sort of "universals" – for everyone to understand. Well, "they struck at Tib and down fell Tom" the people would have said, had it been aware of what was happening. Only that he didn't understand, didn't even try to understand, and didn't accept it, either. The art world alone went its own way.

Than Heidegger, a moderator between people and its benefactors rehabilitated the individual. Speaking about architecture, the creators who were overwhelmed by Heidegger's authority immediately became individualists again, and started to bestow new noble distinctions upon one other, such as *existentialist* or *phenomenologist*; it was in the line of *count* or *baron*. If some architects in the north of Europe, let's say the Netherlands, were keeping in touch with the people, they would be called *structuralist* by the French people; that was some sort of a *Lord*.

Although post-structuralism dealt with all sorts of reweaving of torn tissues, nobody has drafted a "popular aesthetic theory" of architecture in order to redo the link between the big creation and the people. The critique keeps on issuing theories, resorting to philosophical terms and ideas, probably aiming the production of a more beautiful and ethical architecture. When ordinary architects have finally translated those strong theories, a new leap tends to derive out of this tension. In the meantime, society keeps on happily building its balusters. And this happens, in spite of our indignation, the architects, historians, sociologists, philosophers of culture or anthropologists. In other words, the society goes about its continuities, and we go about our *polemics*, *avant-gardism* and *revolutions*.

 A couple of years ago, thinkers like Manuel de Landa, *the co-rupter*, used to propose new leaps on the roads opened by the digital revolution. There were, indeed, much more exciting than the continuity of mediocrity in the creation of the community, an obsolete theme, as well as a lost cause. But society involved itself from the beginning and things went meanwhile out of control.

We could also meditate, à propos, on a theme such as rupture vs. continuity between generations. We should not forget, for example, that Manuel de Landa is Gilles Deleuze's successor and his challenger as well. But we are going to do it in the autumn. Until then, we shall have spent our holiday amidst nature or well-preserved historical centres. That is, in the world of sweet laziness of spirit and individualistic passions, where mawkish, outmoded leitmotifs such as *partir c'est mourir un peu* still hold their ground. *Partir* means a sort of *rompre*.

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