

**A DENIED CONTINUITY:  
the Shift of 'Heritage' as Ideology  
in Romanian Socialist Architecture**

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The imposed establishment of the Socialist regime in Romania brought along a series of changes in architectural thinking, which was to be moulded according to Soviet doctrine. One of the major changes concerned the understanding of the notion of 'heritage' and its role in shaping architecture for the New Socialist man. With its slogan – 'socialist in content, national in form' – proclaimed by the Father of peoples himself, Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin, the era of Socialist Realism exploited the notion of 'heritage'. This article explores the use of heritage in Romanian Socialist architecture, stressing its ideological dimension of it. Chronologically, it focuses on the 'cursed decade' – the 1950s – which offers a double advantage for the study: as a primary shift from 'bourgeois' architecture, and also as a period of powerful rhetoric. It also opens a parallel with another seminal moment for the use of 'heritage': the creation, starting with the end of the 1960s, of 'Lyrical Nationalist' architecture, which was to become the trademark of Ceausescu's era.

At the end of the Second World War, the Romanian architectural scene was divided between two major tendencies: on the one hand, 'National Style', an architectural expression created in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and developed throughout the first half of the next century, proposing a continuity with tradition by interpreting local heritage in a modern language; on the other hand, Modernist architecture, which was imported in the 1920s and gained the rapid recognition during the 1930s. From different perspectives, both

were seen as emblems of modern Romania. Affirmed a few years later after the proclamation of the Romanian Kingdom, in 1881, 'National Style' embodied its very essence, shaping its nationalist aspirations throughout its evolution. For the new generation after the First World War, at least for a part of it, Modernism was synonymous with the new dynamics of society, with its capacity for progress and integration of international values.

Thus, in 1945, when peace was reinstated, each of the two tendencies had good hopes of becoming the leading architectural current in the country. However, none of them was to gain this role, since in 1951, when the First Five-Year Plan was launched, Socialist Realism was officially proclaimed as the architectural image of the Romanian Popular Republic. Overtly opposed to Modernism, denounced as formalist and anti-humanist – the perfect mirror of 'corrupted capitalism' – Socialist Realism rejected also the 'National Style'.

While its attitude towards Modernism appeared as the logical reflection of its dialectics, the denial of the values of the 'National Style' was incongruous, since the source of inspiration of both 'National Style' and Socialist Realism was the heritage of local tradition. Instead of a natural continuity, developed as an interpretation in a socialist key of the vocabulary used by 'National Style', Socialist Realism chose to demarcate itself from the architecture of 'old' (read 'capitalist') Romania. The reason was simple: as a former official architecture, 'National Style' was inseparable from what was considered the reactionary doctrine of Romanian bourgeois society.

The creation of a Romanian socialist architecture was accompanied by a clear ideologisation of the concept of local tradition. The different uses of this concept – during the 1950s and starting with the end of the 1960s – served to shape new images for the identity of the nation. In spite of obvious similarities with the interpretation of tradition given by 'National Style', these new images emerged as a denied continuity.

### **Building the Socialist State: Reinventing tradition**

The denial of continuity that accompanied the instalment of Socialist Realism engendered a reinvention of the past. Not only of the recent past, totally rejected and thus rewritten in order to justify the dialectics of the new doctrine, but also of the distant past, which constituted a potential reservoir for shaping the identity of Socialist art.

If right after the war there was a certain 'ideological confusion', as it was described later in the 1950s<sup>1</sup>, starting with 1950-51 (when the Soviet model was scrupulously applied in all fields) Romanian architecture was clearly oriented towards the new standards of Socialist Realism. With the help of the Party and also of personalities of the Soviet architecture, architectural projects were changed during their elaboration, in order to fit into the demands: 'socialist in content and national in form'. The most outstanding example of this ideological shift, which thus became a manifesto of the new architecture, was *Casa Scînteii* (*The House of Sparkle*).

In its early phase (1948), the project concerned only the building of a printing house for the necessities of the Party (newspaper, propaganda brochures, etc.)<sup>2</sup>. The 'cultural revolution' declared one year later, in 1949, turned it into a Palace of Culture and Arts. Not only did project become very complex (offices for the Party commissions for art and culture, a printing house and a colony for the printers with all the infrastructure), it also became a highly symbolic one, since it mixed in a single architectural programme the institutionalised culture and care for the working-class. No wonder this was to be an exemplary project closely controlled by the Party and Soviet specialists. Indeed, the first versions of the project, which displayed a modernist vocabulary, were vigorously criticised due to their 'Americanised disproportions' of a 'match-box'-like edifice. The adopted solution was overtly inspired by the model of 'high buildings' that rose during those years in Moscow, under the direct guidance of Stalin.

It is not my intention to discuss here the obligatory shift from a modernist vision to a socialist realist one and to trace its aetiology. Instead, it is the teleology that I want to analyse.

Invited to give his advice about the project, the president of the Academy of Architecture of the USSR, the architect Mordvinov, explained that 'the difference between Soviet architecture and Western architecture is represented by the content of ideas. Soviet architecture as art expresses the grand ideas and sentiments of the Soviet man and the Soviet regime. There is no grandeur of ideas and sentiments in

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<sup>1</sup> N. Badescu, *Un deceniu de importante transformari in arhitectura RPR*, "Arhitectura RPR", 1954, No. 6-7, pp. 1-12.

<sup>2</sup> See for the history of the project H. Maicu, *Despre proiectarea Casei Scînteii*, "Arhitectura RPR", 1951, No. 1, pp. 3-13.

the dominating classes of America and Western Europe<sup>3</sup>. There were two possible ways to express this 'content of ideas': there was the abstract one, founded on the emotional charge related to the architectural composition, such as 'optimistic', 'gay', 'luminous', etc., adjectives usually connected in the language of the time with the new socialist architecture; but there was, too, a narrative manner generated by the force of the architectural detail. Narrative meant above all readable for the masses: a narrative architecture was supposed to be accessible to the masses due to all the enclosed references. Local heritage, familiar thus easily readable, was a perfect ideological instrument. More than that, local heritage represented an efficient instrument for fighting the capitalist temptation. The other Soviet representative invited to judge the project of Casa Scînteii, the architect Simonov, vice-minister of Urban Buildings, explained to his Romanian colleagues the virtues of this powerful ideological instrument: 'Why copy from the Westerners? Seek in the art of your people and you will find things that will charm you'<sup>4</sup>.

The lesson of Soviet Socialist Realist architecture seemed to be entirely assimilated, as Horia Maicu, head architect of the project, confidently declared: 'guided by our Party, which has a profound love for the treasure of our folk art, and following the example of Soviet architecture, we had attentively studied the works of folk art and found innumerable examples and elements that we tried to interpret in connection with the new socialist content to be displayed by the architectural expression of Casa Scînteii'<sup>5</sup>.

But the architectural discourse did not reflect the political one. If Maicu had invoked folk art, he used instead the feudal high art vocabulary; more than that, his main source of inspiration was religious architecture, Wallachian as well as Moldavian. The elaborated porch on the main façade of the building combines references to both former Romanian principalities: the vaults are reminiscent of the gothic influence, particularly present in Moldavian art, while the vegetal decoration is almost a quotation of the Wallachian vernacular of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, inspired by Ottoman models. Such quotations are frequent: several door-frames, as well as the frame of the principle entrance, are copied after famous Moldavian churches.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

If not pure folk art – popular art in Romanian, from *popor*, people – the examples of local heritage employed at Casa Scînteii were nevertheless ‘popular’ not only because considered as the apex of Romanian art, but also because created by ‘folk masons’, as was affirmed in the publications of the time<sup>6</sup>. Thus the heresy of the architectural programme was absolved due to the healthy origin of its maker, a metaphor reinforced by the decoration of Casa Scînteii, where ornaments typically employed in religious architecture were rhetorically mixed with socialist symbols. As in numerous aristocratic residencies and churches of 18<sup>th</sup> century Wallachia, a sumptuous vegetal decorative belt surrounds the edifice: an almost perfect pastiche, if not for the five-pointed stars adorning it. Another example of deviated quotation is the circle medallions, covered by a fine twining, carved in stone and copied after those of Cozia church (1387-88), but decorated with the hammer and sickle.

#### **Building with words: the power of rhetoric**

The elements of traditional heritage used by Horia Maicu at Casa Scînteii had already been used by the ‘National Style’, which began its career with a historicist interpretation of local tradition. However, no continuity between ‘National Style’ and the new socialist architecture was claimed: if they shared a common vocabulary, they did it for different reasons. Both used history as a source of inspiration, but since Socialist Realism defined itself on its ideological difference, it could not admit to sharing the same history as a ‘bourgeois’ architecture.

Thus, even the history of the ‘National Style’ was revisited. Celebrating a hundred years from Ion Mincu’s birth, founder of the ‘National Style’, the magazine “The Architecture of the Romanian Popular Republic” presented the architect as an illuminate forerunner. Trained at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, once back home Mincu assimilated the lesson of the local tradition, while remaining faithful to the architectural scheme taught at the *École*. But the mentioned article transformed his approach according to the pattern of Socialist Realism architecture: thus, anticipating the sources of inspiration of communist architects Mincu would have praised the folk and classical. Besides, his model would have been the advanced Russian architecture, as claimed

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<sup>6</sup> ‘The originality and the quality of the buildings – churches, residencies, palaces – raised by folk masons’ as affirmed Nicolae Bădescu, op. cit., p. 112.

the author of the article, quoting Mincu himself: 'I am convinced – would have said the architect – that the love and the hard work of our artists will quickly make known Romanian architecture, as the efforts worthy of admiration of our neighbours made known Russian architecture'<sup>7</sup>. While Mincu was presented as a 'patriot architect', due to his love of the Romanian people and his opposition to bourgeois principles (as the past was reinvented through a dialectical perspective), 'National Style' in general (and in particular its 1920s-1930s phase) was considered a deceitful invention in the service of capitalist society. Deceitful, because its form (national, thus popular) did not correspond to its content (entirely bourgeois).

Since the 'National Style' was very successful until 1945 (and even after this date), it was necessary to dismiss its doctrine and to associate the use of local heritage uniquely with Socialist Realist architecture. With some exceptions (such as Ion Mincu, mentioned above), the production of 'National Style' was purposely ignored if not vehemently criticised, especially the works of the interwar years, influenced by the principles of Modernism. These works were labelled as 'formalist', one of the heaviest accusations brought to 'capitalist' architecture and the architects who perpetuated the approach were condemned for their 'formalism' and 'archaism'. The 'sinners', in almost all cases, were the practitioners that had already developed this direction before 1945.

One of the most eloquent examples was that of Henriette Delavrancea-Gibory, a brilliant adept of the modernised 'National Style'. As an employee of the newly founded Institute for Design and Constructions, she was charged with the project of a sanatorium/night asylum for single workers in Hunedoara, a city of heavy industry. The project had a special ideological charge, on the one hand due to its programme (inspired by Soviet practice) and on the other hand due to the image of Hunedoara, an important industrial centre for the socialist economy. The first solutions proposed by Delavrancea-Gibory reflected her architectural approach during the 1930s and her attachment to the values of regionalism: she had studied the vernacular architecture of the region and interpreted it in her composition of the sanatorium. The proposals were severely criticised by her colleagues: the sanatorium appeared as 'a place for [spiritual]

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<sup>7</sup> G. Kurinschi, *Ion Mincu, arhitect patriot. La 100 de ani de la nasterea lui I. Mincu*, "Arhitectura RPR", 1952, No. 12, pp. 26-34.

withdrawal, a monastery, an echo of the past and not a building which would express a new creation'<sup>8</sup>. The architect replied with subtle irony to the critics, declaring she was, undoubtedly, too much inspired by the overwhelming example of the Huniad Castle (a 15<sup>th</sup> century fortress dominating the city), as well as by the religious and the peasant architecture of the region: 'considering that all [these architectures] were connected, the architect was dominated... by an archaic attitude', declared Delavrancea-Gibory in the typical language of the autocritical discourse.

Her disguised testimony concerning the difficulties she had<sup>9</sup>, as a former defender of the 'National Style', to achieve a Socialist Realist expression was symptomatic for the shift of the concept of heritage, and particularly for the power of the Verb. The final project displayed minimal changes, masked by an Italianate approach, which allowed the architect to develop a convincing rhetoric: 'the façades, though strongly connected and articulated to each other, have different functions and express a different idea... To the South, ... a quiet and restful atmosphere. To the North, ... fantasy and joy. To the West, the façade is sumptuous, expressing ... the wonderful achievements of our people...'. 'These various forms, stated Delavrancea-Gibory, do not represent a mere aim, but a means of expression of the social content of the building, expressing the thankfulness and the dignity of the life it will shelter'. The discourse reveals the duality into which architects were forced to act; this is a subtle manipulation of the rhetoric of Socialist Realism, where words cover with a veil of illusion the architectural object: 'Derived from the truth of the life, which they were expected to reflect, the forms were so vividly resented from the beginning of the creative process and so sincerely expressed in the final volumes, that if we compare the first expression of the building, with its archaic aspect, with the [last version] we realise that ... the general volumes are still the same but they express now a completely different thing'. Otherwise said, the magic of the socialist content.

The distance between the rhetoric of the discourse and the rhetoric of the architectural product explains the difficulty of assimilation of Socialist Realism doctrine, both in theory and in practice, especially in terms of interpretation of

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<sup>8</sup> H. Delavrancea, *Sanatoriul de noapte din Hunedoara*, "Arhitectura RPR", 1952, No. 8, pp. 3-11.

<sup>9</sup> 'With much difficulty, explained Delavrancea-Gibory, and after many trials, the new composition was achieved...' Ibidem.

the local heritage. For the former modernists the simple idea of using tradition was a heresy, while the former adepts of 'National Style' had long ago abandoned the historicist approach for a more refined interpretation of tradition.

The same inadvertence between theory and practice was reflected in the demand of using 'the most valuable, the most connected to the folk production...' <sup>10</sup> ornaments from the local heritage. The demand, a manner of stressing the rupture between 'National Style' and Socialist Realism, led to a strange hybridisation of local decorative motives (chosen from the most prestigious feudal examples, as a guarantee of their artistic quality) with classical elements. Hence, it was a formal translation of the doctrine of Socialist Realism: to be popular and classical at the same time. A complicated problem for the Romanian architects: 'due to a poor architectural production of Romanian classicism... and particularly to the ignorance of the few existent examples, the task of Romanian architects is more difficult than that of USSR architects or from the other popular democracies...' <sup>11</sup>. Again, the past was reinvented, the new edifices displaying an ambiguous image of what could have been interpreted as a pretended Romanian Renaissance, as in the case of the 'Nicolae Balcescu' Open-air Theatre (Paul Emil Miclescu, Bucharest, 1954) or 'The Brotherhood between People' cinema (Nicolae Porumbescu, Bucharest, 1953). Raised in the quarter Bucurestii Noi – New Bucharest – both edifices demonstrate a perfect assimilation of the Soviet lesson: the architects particularised the formal classicist scheme (here a symbol of the cultural dimension of the programmes) with several elements, precisely quoted from the most reputable Romanian monuments of the past. Monumental pediments, columns with exuberant capitals: classicism was reinvented for the leisure of the working class. Not only was architectural history written again, but History in general was revisited.

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<sup>10</sup> P. Macovei, *Proiectele studentilor de la facultatea de arhitectura*, "Arhitectura RPR", 1952, No. 1-2, pp. 46-52.

<sup>11</sup> G. Petrascu, *Cîteva probleme de compozitie si plastica in legatura cu proiectarea de locuinte cu putine caturi*, "Arhitectura RPR", 1954, No. 6-7, pp. 43-51.



**A new shift: socialist architecture becomes functional while remaining expressive**

The uneasiness between theory and practice was to disappear with the new direction adopted by the Building Congress of the USSR in 1954, which condemned the 'formalist distortions of the Soviet architecture and its carelessness towards the function', seen as 'the remains of an idealistic aesthetic in architecture'<sup>12</sup>. The first echoes of the doctrinal shift resonated promptly in Romania. More than that, there was a certain effervescence preceding the shift, induced via political channels. A few months before the Soviet Building Congress, the Second Plenary Session of the Union of Architects, held in Bucharest, had already condemned the heavy historicism of Socialist Realism<sup>13</sup>. After being employed as a key mechanism of the Socialist Realism vocabulary, historicism was now accused for all the failures of the new architecture: it was held responsible for the high cost of the buildings, for slowing the process of construction and, above all, for obliterating the function of architecture. 'The main features of architecture are the spatial conception of the volumes, the predilection for certain ratios and proportions, for certain rhythms and cadences, for certain planimetric schemes...'<sup>14</sup>, affirmed one of the speakers at the plenary session.

The changes announced by the Building Congress represented a real revolution for Socialist architecture. According to the congress, the very definition of Socialist Realism was to be reinterpreted: 'realism' stood now for efficiency and new techniques and 'socialism' for 'progress' in general, a progress willing to absorb (and interpret on an ideological basis) the latest discoveries of the capitalist world. The notion of 'national' did not disappear, but changed its doctrinal charge: its aesthetic dimension was replaced by a conceptual one. That showed both a loss of ideological impact and a certain uneasiness to define, in the new context, what was concretely meant by 'national'. Hence, the importance of creating a new plastic expression of the architecture, as it was strengthened at the Second Congress of the Romanian Communist Party in 1956<sup>15</sup>: 'what we need to know now is not what kind of architecture we should

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<sup>12</sup> V. Tasaiov, *Pentru o justa intelegere a arhitecturii*, "Arhitectura RPR", 1955, No. 7, pp. 36-38.

<sup>13</sup> See the articles concerning the manifestation in "Arhitectura RPR", 1954, No. 6-7.

<sup>14</sup> G. Petrascu, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-51

<sup>15</sup> By that time, the official name was The Romanian Working Party. At the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, it was decided to turn back to the designation of Romanian Communist Party.

copy, but how to make a new and original architecture, an architecture that will serve the new man and correspond to the advanced technique of the socialist era, but also an architecture of our people'<sup>16</sup>.

The expressiveness of the new architecture was to be obtained by 'the simplicity of the forms, the good proportions of the buildings... and of their setting in the site, the good use of the vegetation...'<sup>17</sup>. This indefinite approach opened the way to a 'new regionalism' – as Siegfried Giedion designated the similar phenomenon developed in the 1950s in the Western World<sup>18</sup>. History was repeating itself, but in an accelerated rhythm: the historicist attitude gave way to a regionalist approach (or better, to a localist one, favouring the site) as had happened before in the evolution of the 'National Style'.

Several examples of the Romanian architecture designed after 1955 restored the dialogue with the production of the 'National Style' in the 1930s. The approach that was criticised in the previous years for its 'archaism' and for its 'formalist' attitude, was now cultivated. Curiously enough, there was not only a resemblance but also a continuity of intentions and expression between this approach and the modernised version of 'National Style' in the 1930s. Nevertheless, this continuity was not allegedly recognised and that for two different reasons. On the one hand, 'National Style' was already seen as a closed chapter, especially for younger architects who had not practised it before; if it was to claim a resemblance with another architectural experience, Romanian architects would have opted for the 'new regionalism' developed in the Western countries, since the dialogue was not only allowed but also encouraged to a certain extent. Besides, on the Western side, there was no recognition of the former nationalist and regionalist approaches, either. The pioneers of Modernism have always dismissed these currents, and their followers did not accept them either. 'New regionalism' was seen as an emanation of Modernist architecture in its attempt to adapt itself to the site. On the other hand, tradition no longer represented an ideological matter for Romanian architects: strongly interpreted and simplified in order to fit with the dynamics of the composition,

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<sup>16</sup> *Sarcini noi si marete*, "Arhitectura RPR", 1956, No. 2, pp. 2-4.

<sup>17</sup> P. A b r o s i m o v, *O importanta etapa in dezvoltarea arhitecturii sovietice*, "Arhitectura RPR", 1958, No. 7, pp. 23-25.

<sup>18</sup> See S. G i e d i o n, *New Regionalism*, in: *Architecture you and me*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Ma) 1958, pp. 138-151.

the use of several elements of the local heritage was a mere consequence of the integration of the architectural object in its site. By this approach, Romanian architects joined again the preoccupation of their Western colleagues (who actually functioned as undeclared models). The touch of local vernacular appeared, thus, as the appropriate solution for an architecture concerned with the adaptability of materials and high functionality. In other, an architecture able to express an organic link between its forms and its function<sup>19</sup>.

According to the same logic, terms changed: 'plastic' replaced 'aesthetic' – thus: no more 'the aesthetic of the composition', but 'the plastics of the composition' – while the former ideologically charged epithets (like 'optimist', 'gay', etc.) were tacitly replaced by the notion of 'expressiveness'. The whole perspective of the creative act changed: the image of the architectural object was no longer the consequence of an imposed doctrine, but the mere expression of its function and form.

Nevertheless, written discourse remained seminal for the understanding of the architectural work. The hotel designed by Dinu Hariton for the International University Games, held in January 1951 in Romania, represents an interesting example of shifting the ideological charge of the discourse. Due to economic and time constraints, the architect used wood massively for the building: in the mountainous setting of the edifice, this local material contributed also to its appropriateness to the landscape. But this regionalist expression of the edifice was almost eluded in the article published in "Arhitectura RPR", a month after its inauguration; a very brief commentary noted that 'the principal schemes of the building took in account local architecture in its principal schemes, while the local techniques of construction guided the designing of the details'<sup>20</sup>. Six years later, when the project was published again, not only the name of its setting had changed – from Poiana Stalin to Poiana Brasov<sup>21</sup> – but also the discourse of the architect, who insisted on the expressiveness of the hotel: 'the plastic treatment of the facades derived from the local tradition, both in terms of materials... and in terms of expression of the forms... the building was inspired

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<sup>19</sup> P. Abrosimov, op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> *Complexul sportiv de la Poiana Stalin*, "Arhitectura RPR", 1951, No. 2, pp. 1-9.

<sup>21</sup> Poiana Brasov – literally Brasov Glade – is a winter resort in the neighbourhood of the city of Brasov. In the first years of 1950s, when the city was baptised after Stalin, the name of the resort changed too.

by the peasant house, by its verve and sensibility... In spite of the variety of the volumes and the force of expression of the materials, the facades maintain their unity due to the simplicity and the sobriety of the composition: all these engender the picturesque requested by the landscape, without altering the solidity of the construction'<sup>22</sup>. A rich discourse insisting on the debt towards local tradition and, particularly, on its interpretation into a new expressiveness.

### **The path to Socialist Nationalism**

However, if the new sensibility for the site was an undeniable compound of the Romanian architecture of the late 1950s, the dominant tendency was represented by the Modernist principles, which corresponded to the needs of a rapid and efficient construction. By the mid 1960s, the industrialised Modernism became the new trademark of progressive socialism, generating a homogenisation of the urban built landscape. In reaction to this worrying uniformity, but also preparing a shift in the national politics, a new interest for the use of tradition emerged.

The architectural discourse was powerfully stimulated by the political sphere. At the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress in 1965, the Communist Party encouraged architects to create a 'local touch', first translated in terms of 'specificity of the place'<sup>23</sup>, a syntagma that became the rule for measuring the quality of the new architecture, as shown in the titles of several architectural texts published after the congress: 'The new architectural ensembles should respect the natural site', 'How to choose an appropriate place for the buildings', 'Each city has its own specific profile'<sup>24</sup>, etc. This attitude could be seen as a reaction against the consequences of Socialist urbanism and mass construction; architects deplored the uniformity of the new quarters and city centres, pleading for the respect of the specific features of the site. Criticising the intervention of the team of architects responsible for the reconstruction of Piatra-Neamt, Horia Maicu (the indoctrinated designer of Casa Scînteii), remarked: 'How beautifully fit and wind into the site the old roads, that people of the old burg created without the help of any urban planners, but only trusting their common sense and their intuition, two notions that

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<sup>22</sup> D. Hariton, *Hotel la Poiana Stalin*, "Arhitectura RPR", 1957, No. 3, pp. 3-10.

<sup>23</sup> See H. Maicu, *Ansamblurile noi trebuie sa respecte cadrul natural*, "Arhitectura", 1966, No. 1, pp. 4-7.

<sup>24</sup> Articles published in the magazine "Arhitectura" ["The Architecture"] 1966, No. 1.

did not serve to present-day architects... If [the architects] had looked closer to what was done by those non-specialists who created the town throughout the centuries, they could have inspired themselves – without copying – from the manner they have conceived the outlines of those roads, in accordance with the natural relief, in accordance with the landscape'<sup>25</sup>.

Though connected with the ultimate experiences of Western architecture, the syntagma 'specificity of the place' was too vague to express the idea of the 'local touch' indicated by the Party. Thus, the Plenary Session of the Union of Romanian Architects held in February 1967 was dedicated to 'The current problems of contemporary Romanian architectural aesthetics'<sup>26</sup>.

There was no unanimous opinion among the representatives of the architects on how these problems were to be solved. Some of the voices considered that 'specificity' could not go together with the demands of contemporary architecture; but most of the speakers agreed on the necessity to create a specifically Romanian architecture. It was the great return of tradition onto the architectural scene, a return that was reminiscent of the passionate debates around modernity and specificity in the 1930s. By that time, the defenders of 'National Style' concluded that architecture could be both modern and Romanian, which was also the conclusion of the debates at the Plenary Session in 1967. However, not only were the interwar debates on the subject completely ignored in 1967, but 'National Style' was explicitly condemned for being demagogical and obsolete<sup>27</sup>.

The new defenders of the tradition belonged, most of them, to a new generation. For them, 'National Style' was part of history – a page that had already been turned after the Second World War. It is obvious – from the debates around the meaning of the notion of 'specificity' – that in 1967 all the discourse built around specificity by the creators of the 'National Style' was either ignored or deliberately misinterpreted. Both cases were the result of a censure of history. More than that, if 'National Style' was denied, if not ignored, it happened also due to the influence of the historiography in Western contemporary architecture. Romanian architects felt – finally – connected again with the 'outer' world

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<sup>25</sup> H. Maicu, *Ansamblurile noi trebuie...*, op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> "Arhitectura" 1967, No. 3 published extensively the debates.

<sup>27</sup> N. Porumbescu, M. Vaida-Porumbescu, *Specificul in arhitectura*, "Arhitectura", 1967, No. 2, pp. 12-17.

and it was important for them to keep this connection. This process was not new; it had begun in the last years of the 1950s, engendered by the progressive approach between Eastern and Western worlds. The Fifth Congress of the International Union of Architects, held in Moscow in 1958, largely contributed to the opening of socialist architecture towards Western experiences. And the interest for local specificity figured among these experiences.

Cautioned by a similar tendency in Soviet architecture, the debates around the possible specificity of Romanian architecture were actually largely inspired by the latest production in Western architecture, particularly by Le Corbusier's Chandigarh and the new Japanese architecture. The future main figure of the Romanian architectural nationalism, Nicolae Porumbescu, indicated, in his discourse at the Plenary Session in 1967, both these examples as models to follow.

What was to be the new Romanian architecture? According to Porumbescu, due to the political orientation of the country and to the evolution of modern architecture, 'lyrical nationalism' was the appropriate answer. Combining socialist content, progressive techniques and the famous 'local touch', this architecture was to be, at the same time, a reply to tired Western Modernism. All the participants in the Plenary Session agreed that folklore was to re-invigorate the new Romanian architecture. As Porumbescu put it, 'tradition is the vehicle that carries in its womb [sic!] the seed of innovation...'<sup>28</sup>. Folklore made the difference between Western architecture, haunted by the spectre of sterility, and socialist architecture, which found its vigour in it: 'In the nations with an old culture, the process of assimilation of folk architecture ended a long time ago, and had passed through refined transformations; but, due to too long and wearing repetitions, it became sterilised. The Western crisis is due to this very need of renewal, which cannot find a source anymore'<sup>29</sup>.

Considering that socialist Romania was in a period of transition, passing from craftsmanship towards high industrialisation, Porumbescu believed that tradition and innovation should interact in order to create a particular expression. Referring to the continuity between old and new expressions in architectural techniques – especially to the influence of wooden structures on stone structures – he suggested that a new alliance could be created between vernacular and

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<sup>28</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem.

Modernism, by the contamination of concrete structures by wooden folk motives. The architect considered that Romanian vernacular had all the necessary qualities required by modern architecture: rational, with a strong lyrical dimension, anti-dogmatic, modest, noble and opposed to academic formulas.

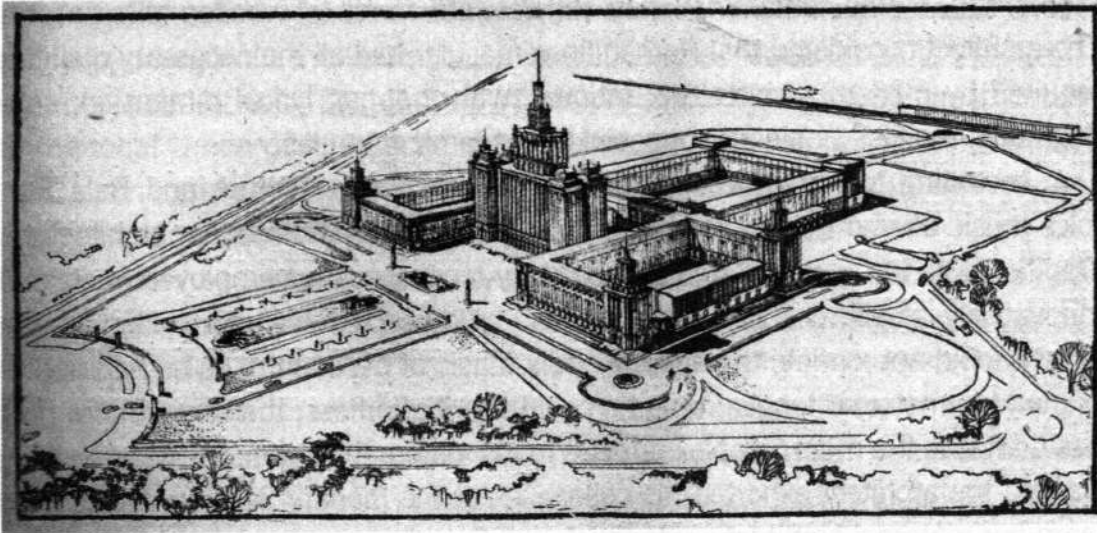
According to Porumbescu, Constantin Brancusi's sculpture and Bela Bartok's music offered the key to re-interpreting vernacular into modern architecture. Tradition was to be assimilated as a primary language, thus employed freely and innovatively, as affirmed Bartok, quoted by Porumbescu in his intervention: '... the artist should appropriate the authentic folk music of his country as he had appropriated his maternal tongue, thus he could use it effortless, the same that a poet can compose the most complex phrases in his maternal tongue...'<sup>30</sup>. Paraphrasing Bartok, the architect exhorted his colleagues at the Plenary Session: 'We should learn our maternal architectural tongue'.

Strongly encouraged by the Communist Party, the tendency debated at the Plenary Session of the Union of Romanian Architects in 1967 developed in the framework of the Nationalist Socialism which characterised Ceausescu's long 'reign'. An emblem of both the modernity and the specificity of Romania, the new architectural aesthetics, closely guided by the party, was transformed into a powerful nationalist instrument. Heritage became an obsessive motive of the new discourse, more present and more exploited than in the 'historic' phase of Romanian nationalism. But this is another history that needs its own narration.

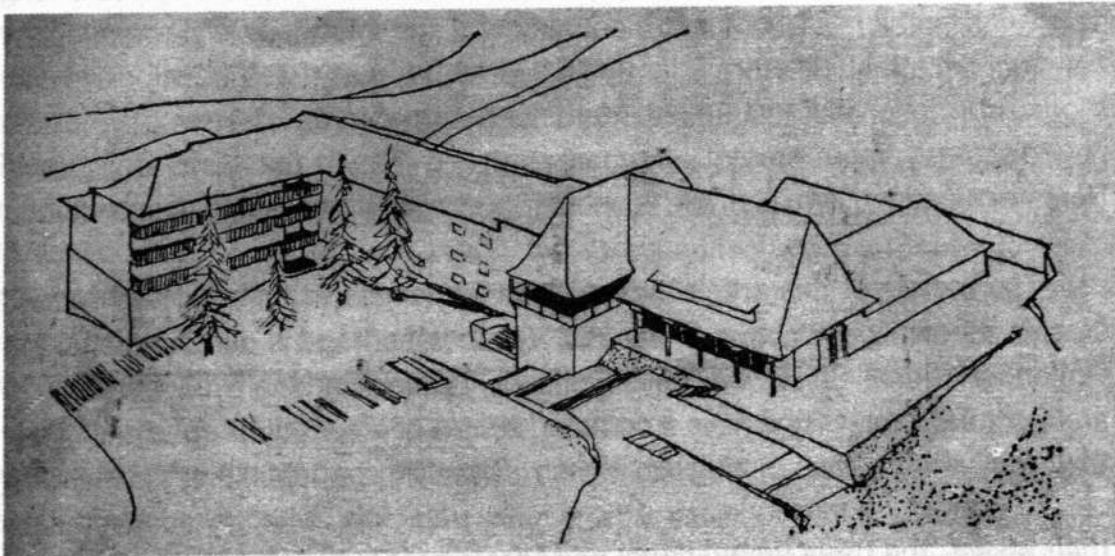
The morale of this article is that History changes with Time. Each period creates its own perspective of the History; thus heritage is continuously reinvented. 'National Style', Socialist Realism, 'Lyrical Nationalism': these three architectural expressions have a common source of inspiration – Tradition. Only their motivation differs, acting like a prism. That is to say, deviating the meaning of its subject, imposing each time a new trajectory. Though connected by their object, the three architectural episodes presented here remained – finally – solitary experiences. Like all identical experiences, always pretending to invent the world.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibidem.



Horia Maicu, Casa Scînteii (Bucharest) – general view  
("Arhitectura RPR", 1951/1)

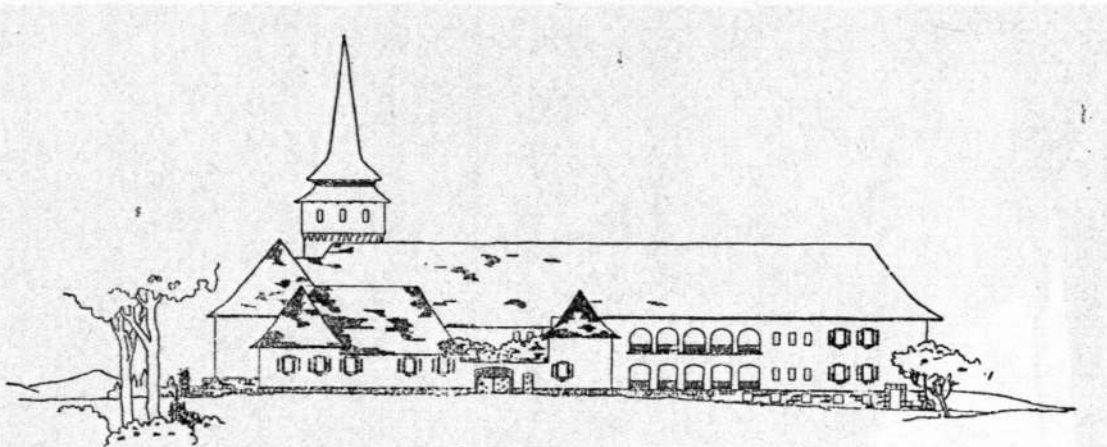


Dinu Hariton – general view of the hotel in Poiana Brasov  
("Arhitectura RPR", 1951/2)

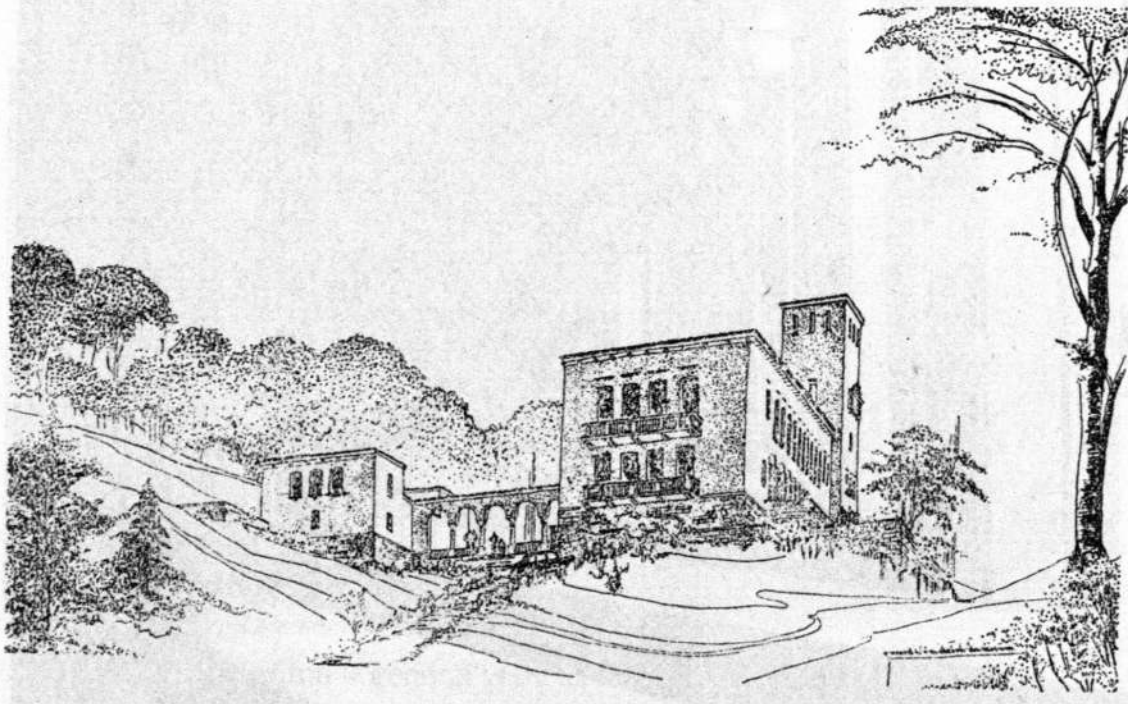




Horia Maicu, Casa Scînteii (Bucharest) – detail,  
the porch on the main facade



Henriette Delavrancea – first proposal for the sanatorium in Hunedoara  
("Arhitectura RPR", 1952/8)



Henriette Delavrancea – final proposal for the sanatorium in  
Hunedoara("Arhitectura RPR", 1952/8)



Nicolae Porumbescu – cinema „Brotherhood between people” (Bucharest)

Odrzucona ciągłość:  
zmiana „dziedzictwa” jako ideologia  
w rumuńskiej architekturze socjalistycznej

W 1951 r. Horia Maicu, główny architekt projektu Casa Scînteii (Dom Iskry), uważanego za symbol socjalistycznej kultury w Rumunii, opublikował w periodyku „Arhitectura” artykuł poświęcony powstawaniu tego przedsięwzięcia. Pierwsze projekty Casa Scînteii (1948-1949) zostały odrzucone przez członków partii komunistycznej, postępujących zgodnie z radą radzieckich specjalistów, którzy ogłosili podejście modernistyczne „zamerykanizowanymi dysproporcjami” budynku „na kształt pudełka od zapalek”. Przyjęte rozwiązanie było bezpośrednio zainspirowane modelem „wielkich budowli” w Moskwie, jako przeciwnym imperialistycznej architekturze. Odrzucający modernistyczną architekturę jako formalistyczną, funkcjonalistyczną i kosmopolityczną, artykuł opublikowany w „Arhitectura” był jednym z pierwszych kładących podwaliny pod socrealizm w rumuńskiej architekturze. Aż do końca dekady prąd ten dominował w budowlanym krajobrazie, wspomagany przez silną ideologiczną podbudowę intensywnie promowaną w „Arhitectura”.

Socrealizm zarzucono po cichu pod koniec lat 50. W centrum uwagi znalazło się szybkie i skuteczne konstruowanie, rumuńscy architekci wrócili zatem do zasad modernizmu, które stały się nowym znakiem firmowym postępowego socjalizmu. Niemniej w 1967 roku, idąc za nową linią polityczną partii komunistycznej, na dorocznym spotkaniu Związku Architektów Rumuńskich na nowo rozważono problematykę nowej estetyki rumuńskiej architektury współczesnej. W konkluzji stwierdzono, że „jest możliwe [zbudowanie] współczesnej architektury o rumuńskiej specyfice”. Nie tylko było to możliwe, ale i silnie zalecane przez władze polityczne. Otworzyło to drogę „współczesnej” architekturze, przekładającej na język betonu symboliczne motywy tradycyjnego dziedzictwa. Nazywana także „lirycznym nacjonalizmem”, według określenia jednego z jej najbardziej zagorzałych adeptów, Nicolae Porumbescu, tendencja ta rozwinęła się w ramach nacjonalistycznego socjalizmu, który cechował długie „panowanie” Ceausescu.

Artykuł prezentuje rolę tradycyjnego dziedzictwa w położeniu ideologicznych podwalin pod rumuńską architekturę socjalistyczną. Aby podkreślić znaczenie ideologii w zadekretowaniu tożsamości narodu, skupię się na dwojakiego rodzaju odrzuceniu ciągłości. Z jednej strony, będzie to odrzucenie rumuńskiego stylu narodowego, reprezentującego główny nurt w rumuńskiej architekturze współczesnej. Stworzony pod

koniec XIX wieku i rozwinięty w pierwszej połowie następnego stulecia proponował ciągłość tradycji przez przełożenie lokalnego dziedzictwa na współczesny język. Socrealizm i „liryczny nacjonalizm”, mimo że również odwołujące się do tradycyjnego dziedzictwa, odrzucały jakiegokolwiek podobieństwo wobec wcześniejszego stylu narodowego. Z drugiej strony, nowa nacjonalistyczna ekspresja, zrodzona pod koniec lat 60. XX wieku, zdecydowanie odrzucała jakąkolwiek możliwość kontynuacji socrealistycznego sposobu wykorzystywania tradycyjnego dziedzictwa dla zbudowania współczesnej tożsamości.