

PROBLEMATIC ASPECTS IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF ROMANIAN ARCHITECTURE

PROBLÉMOVÉ ASPEKTY HISTORIOGRAFIE RUMUNSKÉJ ARCHITEKTÚRY

Historici architektúry nezvyknú hovoriť o tom, ako a prečo píšu o svojich príbehoch a o ich pozadí. Toto tvrdenie platí najmä pre kultúry podobné mojej, kde je táto disciplína pomerne mladá a bola vystavená mnohým rušivým tlakom uväzňujúcim ju v protirečivostiach a obmedzeniach jej pôvodu.

Katalyzátorom pre mňa bolo nedávne kolokvium *Current Issues of Central and East European Architectural Historiography* (Súčasný problémy historiografie architektúry v strednej a východnej Európe), ktoré sa uskutočnilo v Bratislave v januári 2013. Prinútilo ma, aby som sa zamyslela nad našou historiografiou architektúry, a to aspoň z dvoch dôvodov. Na jednej strane, podobne ako mnohí iní, domnievam sa, že kontext strednej a východnej Európy je niečo viac než len administratívna geografia susedstva, odlišná od západnej Európy. Z viacerých perspektív a v mnohých paralelných rovinách prechádzali krajiny v tejto oblasti porovnateľným vývojom „križovatky kultúr“, mali podobný étos, podliehali rovnakým vplyvom a analogickým ohraničeniam. Môžeme predpokladať existenciu spoločnej kultúrnej dimenzie v pozadí toho, čo obmedzuje a žiarlivo voláme „národné“ cesty architektonického vývoja. Táto dimenzia ich spája svojráznym spôsobom. Alternatívou je, že naše výskumy zostanú uzavreté v ľubovôli politických hraníc a každý z nás bude osamote lamentovať nad „provinčnosťou“ – spoločná dimenzia teda zostane skrytá a nedostatočne preskúmaná. Na druhej strane, v súčasnom Rumunsku vznik novej generácie historikov naozaj predstavuje bod obratu v našej historiografii. Domnievam sa, že informovanie o týchto nových prístupoch môže povzbudiť historikov v strednej a východnej Európe, aby spolupracovali so zahraničnými kolegami. Mohlo by to prispieť k formovaniu porovnávacieho výskumu prostredia, zameraného na kultúrny potenciál spomenutej oblasti, ktorý by bol hodnotený prostredníctvom príhodných metodologických nástrojov.

Tento článok teda predstavuje selektívny prehľad rumunskej historiografie architektúry tak, že uvádza *pièces de résistance* (referenčné knihy), napísané architektmi. V nádeji podnietiť

spoločnú reflexiu sa venuje určitým problematickým záležitostiam, pričom sa sústreďuje predovšetkým na „sebacentrismus“. Príčiny v pozadí tejto pretrvávajúcej črty sa hľadajú predovšetkým v dvoch smeroch, ktoré sa objavujú v historiografii architektúry: ideológia postupne uskutočňovaných projektov modernizácie (vrátane konštrukcie národnej identity) a nasledujúce procesy transformácie dobového usporiadania. Boli reprezentované v minulosti, prítomnosti a budú aj v budúcnosti prostredníctvom jemného vyjadrovania, označeného Kosseleckom, Pomianom a Hartogom ako „režimy historicity“. Tieto dva smery sú skôr pracovnými hypotézami pre širšiu kritickú štúdiu, ktorá by mala byť napísaná v budúcnosti; tento článok je len jej náčrtom. Veľmi schematický prehľad našej historiografie architektúry možno zosumariovať nasledujúco:

V prvej polovici 20. storočia prvé systematické záznamy so sprievodnými metodickými ilustráciami sa zaoberali tým, čo teraz nazývame pred-moderným vývojom. Boli podporované silným étosom (a chimérami) výbušnej modernizácie konca 19. storočia, čo okrem iného znamenalo, že „režim historicity“ sa nachádzal v statickom vzťahu s minulosťou zdedenej štruktúry („la longue durée“). „Zakladajúce architektonické príbehy“ internalizovali špecifiká, protirečivosti a výkyvy tohto procesu. Dominovali ho „národné“ imperatívy (hľadanie potvrdenia pôvodnosti a lokálnej pravosti) a túžba po europeizácii (demonštrácia príslušnosti k západnej kultúre) – tieto faktory pôsobili súbežne, hoci protirečivo. Pri skúmaní a odhaľovaní fascinujúcej architektonickej pestrosti (ktorá nezodpovedala západným vzorcom štylistického vývoja) historici sa snažili obísť túto háklivú situáciu prostredníctvom neutrálnych opisov, sústreďenia sa na „objekty a „štýly“ či na estetické záležitosti (ktoré mali dôležitú úlohu v rumunskej kultúre). Pri interpretácii architektúry sa bádatelia opatrne vyhýbali kritickým teoretickým perspektívam. Okrem zriedkavých výnimiek dejiny prvej generácie historikov boli opismi vlastnej architektúry uzavretej v tesných národných hraniciach. Odkazy na susedné kultúrne oblasti väčšinou chýbali; niektoré z nich

"Europa regina", Sebastian Munster, 1570

"Europa regina", Sebastian Munster, 1570



Source Zdroj: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Europe_as_a_queen_map.JPG#filelinks (accessed 9th Jun 2013)

boli odmietnuté kvôli kontaminácii osmanskou minulosťou (Balkán); ďalšie sa prevažne vnímali neutrálne (časť oblasti *Mitteleuropa*); a ďalšie vzbudzovali strach (Sovietsky zväz).

Tieto črty vytvorili historiografické dedičstvo, ktoré prešlo do naratívov v nasledujúcom období. V retrospektíve môžeme byť akokoľvek kritickí, ale tieto príbehy boli decentne prispôsobené k prevládajúcim súdobým prístupom v dejinách umenia. Problém bol v tom, že historici nemali čas uvedomiť si svoje limity a prekročiť ich, ani nemali slobodu potrebnú pre vývoj kritických prístupov. Spolu s novým spôsobom prežívania minulosti komunizmus (najmä lokálna forma národného komunizmu) zaviedol množstvo prísnych ideologických opatrení, ktoré posilňovali tieto limity (niekedy paradoxným spôsobom).

Zrodené po druhej svetovej vojne dejiny modernej architektúry, mladšie a krehkejšie, boli mimoriadne poznačené komunistickou ideológiou a tým ešte zvýrazňovali problematické dedičstvo. Komunizmus nahnevane vyhlasoval svoju unikátnosť v procese modernizácie a budovania minulosti, a teda radikálne sa rozišiel s moderným vývojom. Prejavilo sa to v dvoch odlišných dejepisných príbehoch: zakázaný a ostro kritizovaný medzivojnový modernizmus a glorifikovaný komunistický vývoj. Obidva boli odsúdené na svoj vlastný druh izolácie.

Po páde komunizmu sa táto umelá chronologická geometria odrazila v novej nekorektnej reprezentácii, vytvorenej na pozadí ďalšej nahnevanej neurotickej interpretácie minulých období (hľadanie ideálnej minulosti – zodpovedajúcej neistej prítomnosti – a vyžadovanej nejasnou budúcnosťou). Po roku 1989 sa následne znova energicky vynorilo medzivojnové obdobie, ktorého reprezentácie diktátorský systém bez milosti potláčal. Stalo sa „pravým“ ideálom modernej architektúry – minulosťou, ktorá by pomohla znovunastoliť stratenú kontinuitu. Zároveň sa historici nevyhýbali kedysi oslavovanej komunistickej fáze so všetkými ohavnosťami režimu; preto vnímanie nedávnej minulosti bolo znova falzifikované. Spôsobilo nesprávnu a nerozumnú deštrukciu stavieb, a tak znova narušilo historickú kontinuitu.

Nové historické prístupy sa najmä počas poslednej dekády pokúšali znovunastoliť

rovnováhu a prekročiť historiografické obmedzenia, bez ohľadu na to, aké príčiny ich spôsobili. V istom zmysle žijeme v „posttraumatickej intelektuálnej úzkosti“. Príspevok uvádza vybrané príklady tohto historiografického „uzdravenia“ (najmä spomenuté dvojjazyčné práce). Nové interpretácie pred-modernej architektúry, ktoré sa zamerali na lokálny vývoj v širšej kultúrnej oblasti (Balkán, stredná Európa) prekročili geografické hranice ako prvé, spolu s novými úvahami o lokálnej modernizácii a jej špecifických významoch. Sprevádzal ich vznik série kritických prístupov k medzivojnovému modernizmu. Napokon chápanie komunistickej minulosti a jej architektúry je ešte problematickejšie: množstvo románových príbehov sa snaží osvetliť a rozlúštiť zaujaté a nespofahlivé záznamy; historici sa tiež pokúšajú odpovedať na stále otvorené otázky ohľadom toho, ako písať dejiny epochy, ktorá bola v takej veľkej miere poznačená ideológiou.

Ale mnohé z týchto otázok, najmä vo vzťahu k dvom posledným obdobiam, nemôžu byť zodpovedané a horizont je stále ďaleko. Kladieme si správne otázky? Z mnohých dôvodov sme stále uväznení v „národných“ hraniciach, v interpretáciách a v súčasných aspiráciách; ešte stále prekračujeme hranice len na to, aby sme sa porovnali s modelom „centra“.

Hlavnou myšlienkou príspevku je, že naše dejiny umenia (ja sa vyjadrujem najmä k našej historiografii) sú stále sporné, lebo ich témy nie sú dostatočne problematizované z hľadiska *porovnávaní a prekročení národných hraníc* v rámci spoločného kultúrneho pozadia, ktoré sme zdieľali a stále zdieľame. Pre prekonanie našej relatívnej vzájomnej ignorancie, pre vývoj vhodnejšieho kritického aparátu, pre hodnotenie našej rozdielnosti – skratka, pre napísanie našich dejín architektúry komplexnejším spôsobom – je podstatné prepojenie našich projektov a odštarovanie spoločných projektov.

Môže to znamenať hľadanie iného typu dejín architektúry: už nie histórie niekoľkých provinčných architektur, ale histórie zdieľanej „marginálnej kultúry“, odlišnej od „centrálnej“ kultúrnej konštrukcie. Môže to byť odpoveď na často kladenú otázku: čo my môžeme ponúknuť kultúre centra?

“All [of these countries] seem to be governed by the same principle of the identity crisis, of the conflictive absorption of contradictory cultural waves, of a provincial model, low-keyed, but haunted by failure and lack of perspective. All seem to struggle between the majoritarian indifference and the elite’s schizophrenia, all seem to have something in common, but none of them knows the others, as if they were under a common curse: resonating with distant and disdainful centres instead of relating to ignored brothers.”

Sorin Alexandrescu, *Identitate în ruptură*^{1/1}

Architectural historians do not speak very often about how and why they write, about their narratives and the reasons behind them. This statement is especially valid for cultures like mine, where the discipline is quite young and has been exposed to frequent disturbing pressures that have left it confined within its own original contradictions and limitations.

The recent colloquium *Current Issues of Central and East European Architectural Historiography*, held in Bratislava^{1/2} incited me to reflect upon our architectural historiography for at least two reasons. On the one hand, I am not the only one to believe that the CEE context is more than an administrative geography of vicinity, distinct from Western Europe. In many respects and in parallel moments, countries in this area had comparable evolutions “at the crossroad of cultures”, sharing a similar ethos, obeying analogous influences and common constraints. We can assume the existence of a common cultural dimension that underlies and joins in a peculiar manner what we restrictively and jealously call each of our “national” architectural developments. Or, as long as our researches remain enclosed within the arbitrariness of political borders, each of us separately lamenting our “provincialism”, this dimension will stay hidden and insufficiently explored. On the other hand, in Romania today, the emergence of a new generation of historians certainly marks a turning point in our historiography. I could assume that announcing these new approaches might stimulate cross-border collaborations, thus contributing to the construction of a comparative research milieu interested in gauging with proper methodological tools the cultural potential of this area.

That is why I decided to skim through the Romanian experience, offering some snapshots meant to call into question certain problematic aspects of our historiographic tradition, along with some of the recent attempts to overcome them.

A very brief chronological outline could be sketched as follows: after a gestation period that started in the middle of the 19th century, our architectural historiography was born in the first decades of the 20th century, initially included in the discipline of art history and subsequently produced by architects; only the old heritage (up to the 18th century) was recorded till the 2nd WW; the 19th and 20th century developments (up to the 1980s) were accounted after the 2nd WW (the latter exclusively by architects); the study of all architectural periods was resumed after 1989, mostly by architects, though the interest of young art historians, historians and anthropologists in architecture is increasing.

As there is a consensus (maybe a prejudice?) concerning the ascendancy of architects’ authorship in architectural historiography, this paper is mainly concerned with their works. This is an opportunity revisit briefly our professional culture from the perspective of historiography, seen as a partial representation of the way this culture matured responding to specific temporal experiences and ideological contexts.

BETWEEN NATION AND THE “EUROPEAN TEMPTATION”

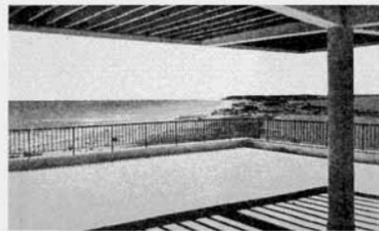
The seeds of what would become systematic historical pursuits in architecture were sown in the middle of the 19th century, when enthusiastic erudite amateurs, none of them architects, aimed at identifying and surveying everything that might have constituted the essence of traditional architecture and art, a necessity publicly claimed by the intellectual elite^{1/3}. This concern, which would hurriedly develop into a discipline, was only one side of the eruptive process of modernisation that involved the entire society, putting its signature on all its cultural products.

The process was governed by a fresh ideology, in which the “idea of modernisation” – seen as the will to fill a historical gap and to synchronise the new state with Europe – was a force far stronger

Universitatea de Arhitectură și Urbanism "Ion Mincu"

Problematika frontului la apă

Aspecte ale evoluției litoralului românesc
în perioada comunistă



teză de doctorat
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București 2012

than any objective social or material motivations ⁴⁴. It was a sort of "European temptation", constructed by the emerging progressive elite, pragmatically but also idealistically oriented towards a future symbolised by Western civilisation. It triggered a particular form of acculturation, and set in motion new economic, social and cultural mechanisms that would collide with the old order enclosed in the natural givens of existence, with the lasting structures of the Byzantine, Orthodox and medieval traditions. One might say that the local universe was reinventing itself on a new model, trying to dislocate the *Longue Durée*. This provoked an anxious frame of mind, a specific "state of modernity" that would underlie Romanian modern culture as a fundamental, although contradictory, dimension.

The static old world, recurrently identical to itself, opened up to new horizons of spatial and temporal perception: distances became shorter, rhythms beat faster, time was measured. A new apprehension of time infiltrated the day-by-day life; along with it, a new way to relate to the past was set in place. The society entered what Francois Hartog has termed "a modern regime of historicity" ⁴⁵. The tradition of *historia magistra vitae*, in which the models for the present were sought in the past, was replaced by a teleological history, drawing from the past elements to support a present whose sense resided in the future it was preparing. The *telos* ushered in, the *Nation*, was serving both the aspiration for independence and the European ambition. Politically achieved within 60 years ⁴⁶, this highly symbolic cultural construct was laid over the traditional sociality severely tormented by the modern complexity ⁴⁷. The ensuing national consciousness, the new form of solidarity, was built using history. While settling its scientific bases as a new discipline, history assumed broader societal goals and took on the responsibility of action.

The ideological space of the modern identity construction, within which history evolved, was thus driven by two terms: the *Nation* and the "European temptation". They concurred in building a meaningful topology with two "centres": the local territory, whose genuineness was to be stressed, and the mesmerising Occident, whose attraction was daringly put by Sorin Alexandrescu in

terms of a *hierarchy of power* historically settled ⁴⁸. Apparently wide, the bipolar geography thus shaped was very restrictive; there was no room there for the neighbouring cultural layout. On the one hand, the national impetus was keen to define its identity in contrast to the adjacent "otherness"; on the other hand, the aspiration to be associated with Western civilisation (to "become European") meant to bypass the areas in-between.

Though enjoying its relative methodological autonomy (borrowed in general terms from Western architectural and art historiography), and also a certain neutrality in interpretation (pertaining to the specific objectivity of the "built documents"), architectural history was not immune to the inconsistencies and fluctuations of the two ideological terms brought into play. Historiography had to cope with them, and the narratives of the main three "founding fathers" of the discipline (Nicolae Ghica-Budești, Gheorghe Balș, Grigore Ionescu ⁴⁹), are imbued with contradictions. Here are some suggestions.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the architect-historian was facing a built heritage that had to be understood, systematised, and publicly introduced. This "working material" was the most visible witness of the past cultural tradition; it was also an uncomfortable, disturbing witness. On the one side, there was the old heritage, already uncovered through more or less systematic inventory campaigns, the so-called "antiquities" in the language of that time. This heritage had to speak about *national* genuineness, about a unity that was difficult to assess in the context of three historically separated regions, subjected to different cultural influences. On the other side, there were the recent massive architectural Western imports that the "project of modernisation" had activated: almost concomitant and random models and forms (from the Renaissance to the 19th century) were amalgamated with frivolous freedom, in the absence of the rigors of a classical tradition. This development, resonant with the Western "centre" – thus suitable for the "idea of modernisation" – was too new to sustain the "authentic specificity" required by the identity construction. In both cases, the architectural display was rather forbidding historians' attempts to geometrize it in Western terms, the first category especially from



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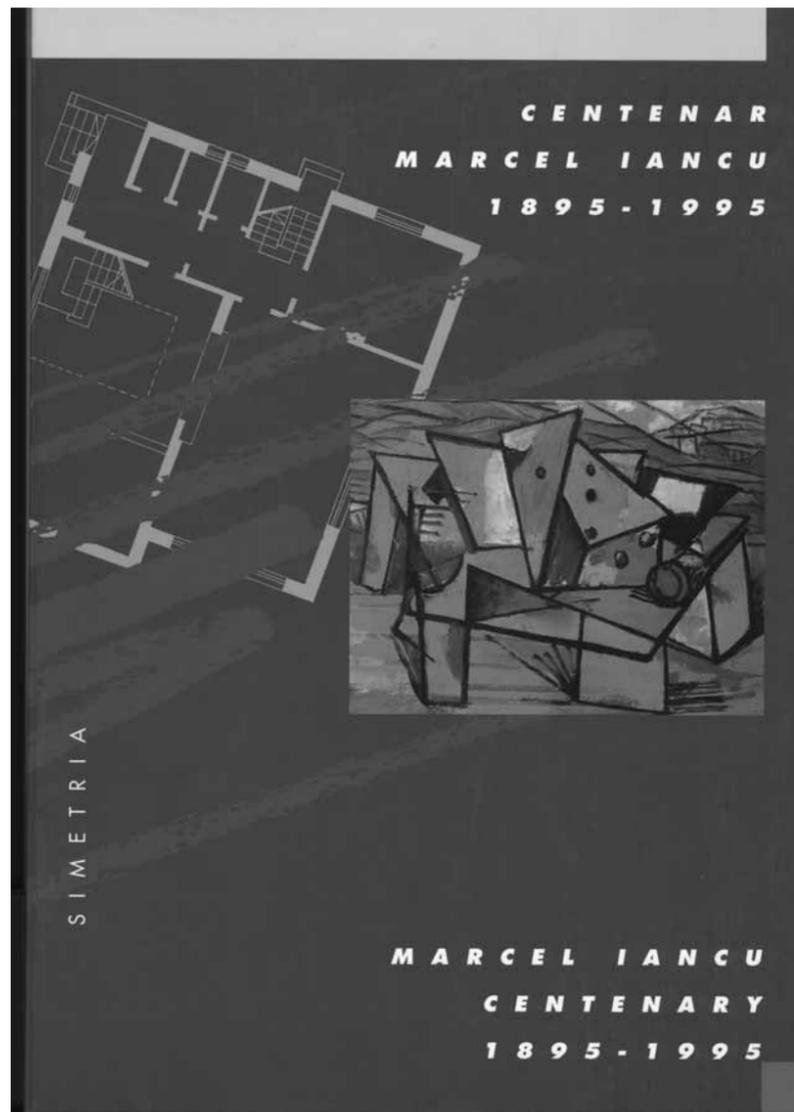
ARHITECTURA
ÎN PROIECTUL COMUNIST.
ROMÂNIA 1944-1989

ARCHITECTURE
IN THE COMMUNIST PROJECT.
ROMANIA 1944-1989

Ana Maria Zahariade

the stylistic point of view; the second from a chronological perspective.

The natural way to solve the contradiction in the spirit of national legitimacy was the recourse to a "time zero", an originary moment found in the rural vernacular that was so largely present in the space of a predominantly agrarian culture frozen in a medieval temporality. Gr. Ionescu tried this demonstration, in his 1937 history ¹⁰⁰. However, the



genuineness of the "Volk constructive spirit" was mainly recognised in the Old Kingdom, in spite of the political endeavour to include Transylvania culturally in the *national* tradition.

Similarly problematic was the nexus between the "time zero" of the vernacular, the variety of the old past, and the "past present" of the Western assimilations. Continuity was an unavoidable asset to the national, waiting to be confirmed through architecture as well, and was reflected in the desperate historiographical attempt to insert the old heritage into Western stylistic patterns – an impossible attempt, with pitiful results¹¹¹. Still, the matter of continuity would constitute the sense of the most meaningful theoretical debate in Romanian modern culture: the relation between tradition and modernisation, never resolved and still present.

Hence, the position on the Western "centre" turned out to be less stable in the cultural scaffolding than the pursuit of original, *national* genuineness. Though Western Europe remained, even subjacently, "the" term of reference, the local architectural culture (including historiography) changed many times its stance, from idealisation (especially at the beginning of modernisation, and after 1989), to opposition and even rejection, following the various ideological shifts (deliberated or imposed).

Regardless of which direction the architectural historiography leaned within its bipolar geography, the neighbouring cultural areas were largely absent: some were rejected as contaminated with the Ottoman past (the Balkans); others were mostly indifferent (part of *Mitteleuropa*); others were feared (the Soviet Union). Despite the national identity of Greater Romania that was at stake, even Transylvania was ambiguously perceived as a foreign body. Its architecture was not present at all in Gr. Ionescu's 1937 history; it was included for the first time in a history of feudal art only in 1959¹¹².

The only outstanding exception to this exclusivist model was the historian Gheorghe Balș, the first and only observer to have placed the local architecture in the context of its nearby influences, settling thus a research method¹¹³. Yet, to search over the borders did not enter the logic of the "national", and his approach was not followed¹¹⁴.

Finally, in this *teleological* writing of the past, *Nation* proved to be stronger than the "European temptation". The introverted, auto-centric approach remained the most obstinate dimension of Romanian historiography. Furthered by the

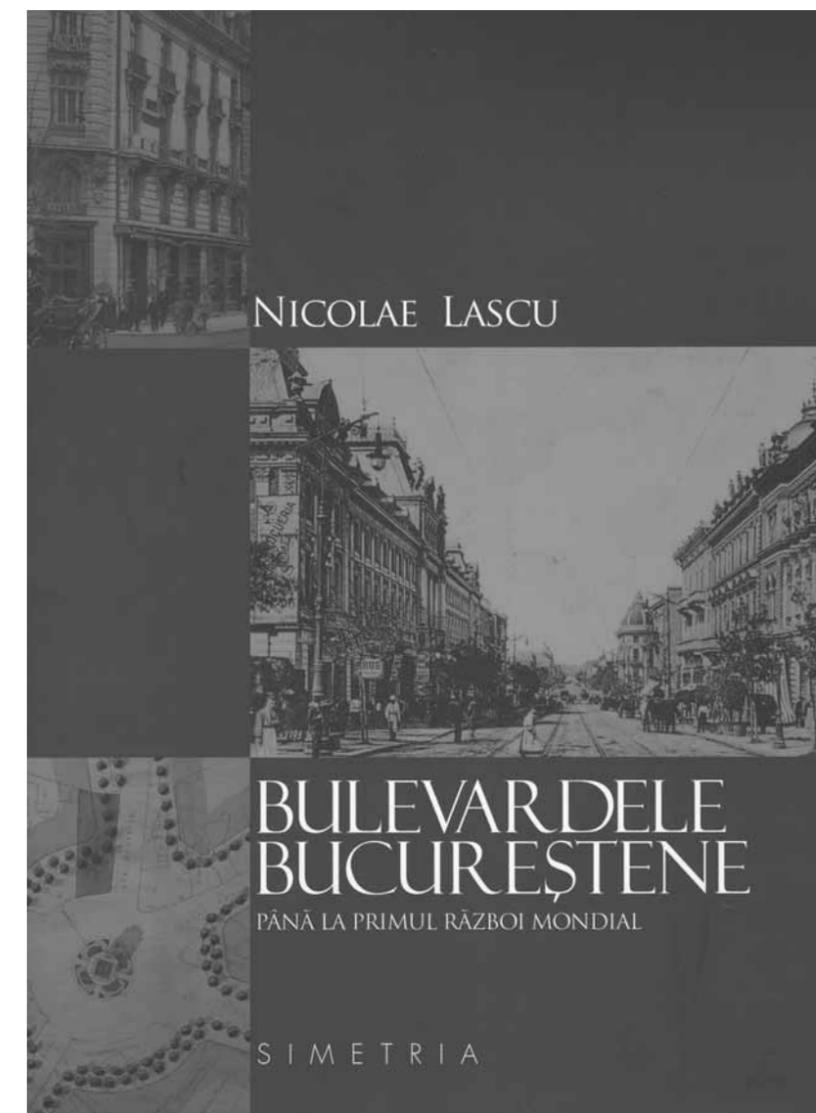
various politically triggered nationalisms, it recurrently surfaced, and resurfaces even today, biasing the historical interpretation¹¹⁵. Neither the adherence to modernism, which was almost concomitant in the whole region, nor the existence of the CIAM East sections, invited the historians to look attentively over the frontiers. Moreover, the entry into the USSR's orbit together with the other seven CEE countries should have favoured a cultural cross-border dialogue; paradoxically, this deepened the self-centrism. (it is true that neither the COMECON nor the Warsaw Pact were cultural associations)

ARCHITECTURAL CULTURE AND THE LACK OF TIME

In fact, architectural historiography was only a part of the larger framework of the architectural culture that was being built simultaneously. One might say that, in Romania, they both were already born modern, emerging onto totally virgin soil, with no precedents. The Romanian architect himself was equally young (educated abroad, mainly at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, he replaced the anonymous master-mason in the same second half of the 19th century); and so were architectural education (the School was founded in 1892), the architectural associations (the Society of Architects in 1891), the spaces of critical exercises (the journal *Arhitectura* in 1906), along with the structures responsible for the evidence and protection of the historical heritage (the Commission for Historical Monuments in 1892).

It could even be said that the relative originality of this construction, if anything, resides precisely in the absence of tradition, and in the inevitable hurry to cultivate this virgin soil. The same handful of young architects, part of the progressive intellectual elite, were in a hurry to impose the profession, to catalogue, systematise, make known and protect the architectural heritage, to write, to teach, and to design the new architectural environment. The architect-historian was one of them. Those were "heroic times", and the achievements are undeniable, not only in the area of architectural historiography, but regarding the whole professional establishment. But they left little time for critical reflection.

According to Sorin Alexandrescu, the theoretical elaboration seems to be negligible or condemned to banality in the "peripheral cultures", while it



always played a decisive role in the culture of “the centre”^{16/}. I cannot recognise the full worth of this idea with regard to other CEE architectural

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LOCUIREA ÎNTRU PROIECT ȘI DECIZIE POLITICĂ

ROMÂNIA 1954-1966

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cultures, since I am aware of certain truly original discursive approaches (an interesting matter to be studied comparatively). This appreciation is certainly pertinent for the Romanian case, where the lack of the classical tradition as a stable term of reference and comparison, and the installing of the whole architectural establishment on the bases of 19th century eclectic culture^{17/} certainly contributed to a theoretical fragility.

The theoretical debate, however negligible, was mainly focused on aesthetic matters, related to the meanings of the architectural acculturation in process. Taken out of their original time and space, the Western stylistic imports were stripped of their original meanings; transported in the present, all were locally endowed with a modernising dimension, as bearers of “Occidentalisation”, of “European identity”. The importance of styles (the concept of style being a central topic in the philosophy of culture) thus exceeded the form in itself; no matter how perfect or flawed the achievement, the new meaning was there.

Hence, the vivid debate of the “national style” vs. “alien Western imports”, which largely occupied the theoretical space, transferred the bipolar topology of the identitary construction into the aesthetic field. The discourse tended to assume essayistic forms, and sharpened between the two World Wars when confronted with the Modern Movement’s ideas and forms. As styles were supposed to play a crucial role, endowed with all worthy meanings, they obliterated the other dimensions of the modern architectural spirit. Even the most intellectual and original group, associated with the journal *Simetria*^{18/}, made no substantial exception: the past and the present were used to recuperate a balance meant to foster future *specific* (meaning national) *aesthetics*. Thus, the ideological core of the theoretical deliberation remained almost exclusively confined within the limits of architectural aesthetics, suspended in a sort of timelessness of forms.

This approach certainly played an important role in the descriptive insistence in historiography, a feature that was transmitted to the histories of the next generation. Stylistic affiliation remained the main criterion of systematisation, although it was not really suited to the understanding of the local architectural development.

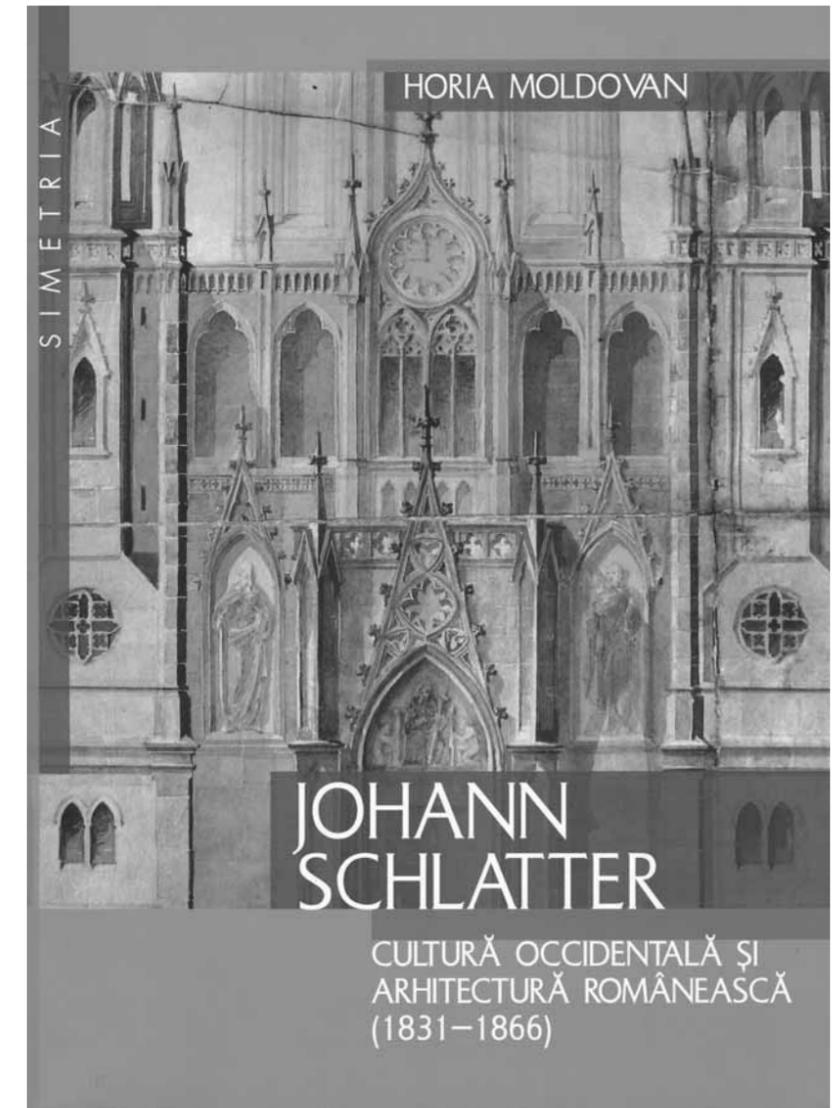
The methodological debates already present in the West^{19/}, between art and architectural historians searching for more suitable criteria to characterise architecture, did not echo in our theoretical space.

Meanwhile, born in the close proximity of the policies of modernisation, urban theory firmly matured under the pressure of urban development, growing from its earlier forms of urban regulations into remarkably articulated theoretical and historical writings. In fact, we can find here a critical modern theory, where the past was programmatically seen from a pragmatic perspective, and the local development was analysed and acknowledged in relation to a larger European context^{20/}. These theoretical achievements did not inform the architectural historiography, which remained concerned with objects and their aesthetics. Besides, the city did not enter the historiographic concern till the 2nd WW.

After the 2nd WW, the urban theory gradually surrendered to the domination of the Communist ideology; as did architectural theory. With rare and encrypted exceptions, during that period we can hardly speak about theory and even less of criticism. Hence, the failure to confer a critical or a self-reflective dimension to the historical discourse, while the prevailing inclination towards aesthetic matters justified the formal, descriptive approaches.

COMMUNIST BIASES

Though experienced as a cataclysm, the Communist regime did not radically change the sense of the articulation between past, present and future. It only changed the *telos* of the future, through which the past had to foster the present. If the *Nation* or the Occident had been largely accepted collective goals, the *Communist Golden Future* and its ingredients imposed another perspective of interpreting the past. New “centres” were imposed to historian’s imaginary topology: the Soviet Union took the place of Western Europe (at least for an important while) and the *Proletariat* replaced the *Nation* (although the *Nation* was surreptitiously brought to the fore by the Romanian form of *national communism*). History was, as a consequence, politically controlled. And control extended to the historian too, who was compelled



to observe the past through a lens different from the previous one that had generally been considered objective. Divergences were not admitted,



but condemned. If they existed, they had to be encoded. The writing of history became a more difficult endeavour; its reading was too.

Most strongly affected was the history of the modern period (including the 19th century), since up to the 2nd WW, only the systematisation of the pre-modern heritage was achieved; Gr. Ionescu ended his 1937 book with the 18th century. As the new instance of modernisation bore the standard of a resentful “new”, it forced the separation of the contemporary architectural development from its pre-war precedents. If the 19th century development could be presented as ambiguously

annexed to the old past, modern architecture was split into two distinct narratives.

The first, the interwar period, became, to say the least, a highly unfashionable issue. Communist rhetoric regularly compared the new achievements with the 1930s, and the comparison had to be favourable to the new development; consequently pre-war modernism was cautiously avoided. Gr. Ionescu daringly introduced modernism in his second history from 1965^[21], since he also was a remarkable modernist architect. He reiterated this part in 1982, in his last and most overarching history^[22], followed by the contemporary development. Cautiously avoiding any evaluation that would have involved ideological or political interpretations, he even suggested a connection between the two periods since they fell under the same heading, *The Contemporary Epoch. Searching for the new*. His neutral presentation thoroughly organised through building types, continued the descriptive pre-war historiographic feature, which proved to be useful. A year earlier, Gh. Curinschi-Vorona's history^[23] was an example of a purely Stalinist approach to the same period, using the whole panoply of Stalinist rhetoric.

The second, the Communist development, was meant to be close to the ideal. Its historiography was not very lengthy: it was decently glorified by Gr. Ionescu in 1969^[24] and treated more neutrally in his 1982 final history, and encomiastically recorded by Curinschi-Vorona in 1981.

A NEW REGIME OF HISTORICITY OR A POST-TRAUMATIC CONVALESCENCE?

According to Francois Hartog, the year 1989 is the conventional limit of a new “regime of historicity”, under the sign of “presentness”, a hypertrophied present immediately historicised^[25]. It is too early to appreciate whether this is valid in our case, or what we are undergoing is only convalescence. What might be said is that after 1989, the relation among past, present and future became neurotic and overzealous, floundering between the society's desire to recover a past stability and the architects' urge towards a rapid bridging of the new gap that Communism has dug between Romanian culture and the Occident. The Western “centre” became dominant, shadowing all the immediate vicinity; remains of the old ethos

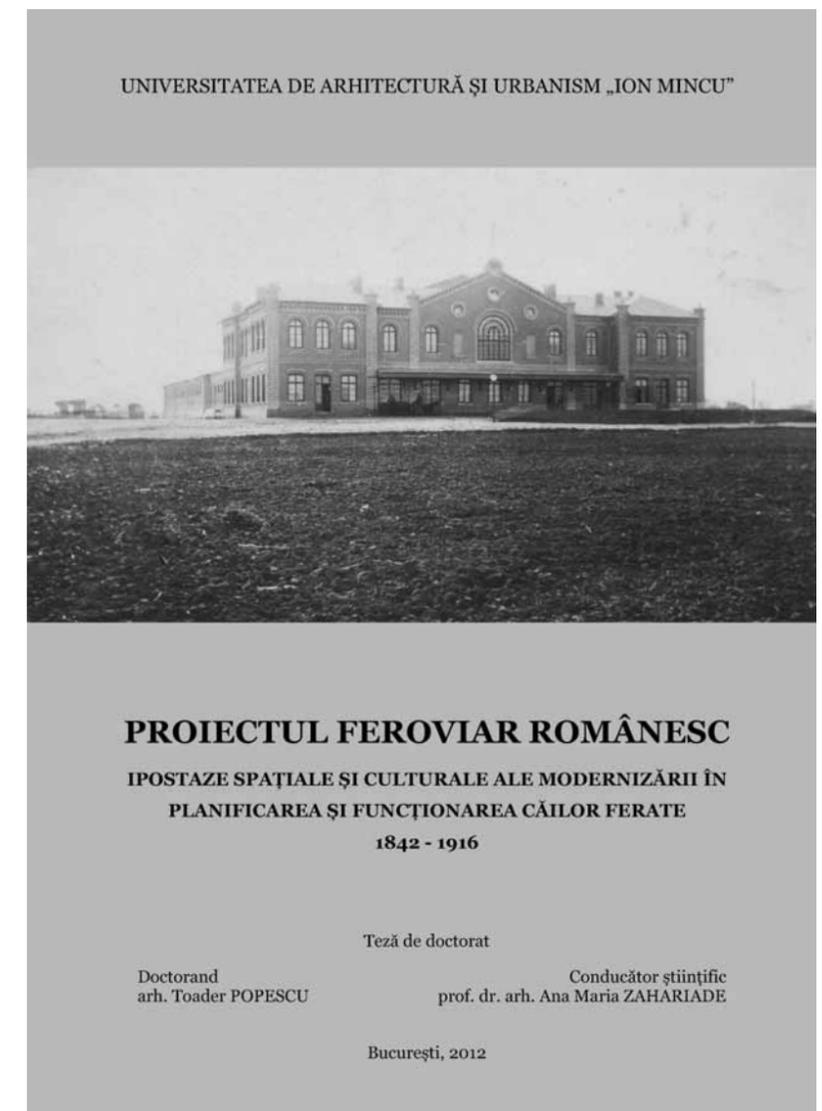
appeared re-energized in various forms. This shift triggered new and uncritical temporal discriminations, followed by critical reflections.

For instance, the previously prohibited interwar modernism resurfaced, vigorously idealised. Highly overrated, it underwent a transfiguration, up to considering it *unique* in the CEE context. A simple visit in the neighbouring countries would have re-settled the balance^[26]. Along with exhibitions and international colloquia revealing an increasing volume of novel information, number of studies and publications tried to reframe a more objective view and to overstep the inherited interpretative limits: Nicolae, Lascu, Zahariade, Ana Maria, Bocăneț, Anca: *Horia Creangă Centenary 1892 – 1992*, București, Simetria, 1992, 219 p.; Machedon, Luminita, Scoffham, Ernie: *Romanian modernism*, 1999, MIT Press, 407 p.; Popescu, Carmen: *Le style national roumain. Construire une Nation à travers l'Architecture 1881–1945*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes & Simetria, 2004, 370 p., and *The space of Romanian modernity*, Fundatia Arhitect Design, 2011, 183p.; Criticos, Mihaela: *Art Deco or Well-tempered Modernism*, Simetria, 2011, 275 p.^[27]. In spite of these efforts, Romanian modernism is not yet present in the collective volumes concerning Central and Eastern architecture. The necessary cross-border perspective still waits to be implemented.

Architectural historian's geography enlarges gradually. The Western “centre” is revisited by many of these books, this time from critical or analytical perspectives. But more interesting are the recent studies that resume Balș's contextual approach. The investigation of the local development within the neighbouring areas of influence is noticeable in the academic teaching and in recent volumes of various spans, which are highly meaningful in this regard: (Gheorghiu, Teodor Octavian: *Fortified towns. Urban Defense in Medieval Central and East Europe*, Bucharest, Simetria, 2000, 213 p.; Brătuleanu, Anca: *Portraits of Romanian Princes in Foreign Collections*, Bucharest, ICR, 2010, 80 p.; Moldovan, Horia: *Architecture in Wallachia, 1831 – 1866. Johann Schlatter's Activity*, UAUIM doctoral thesis, 2008).

The study field of historiography widened too, recuperating the city and the urban theory, in Romania and over the borders: Lascu, Nicolae:

Urban Regulations and development, Bucharest 1831 – 1952 (UAUIM doctoral thesis, 1997) and Bucharest boulevards till the 1st WW, București,



PROIECTUL FERROVIAR ROMÂNESC

IPOSTAZE SPAȚIALE ȘI CULTURALE ALE MODERNIZĂRII ÎN
PLANIFICAREA ȘI FUNCȚIONAREA CĂILOR FERATE

1842 - 1916

Teză de doctorat

Doctorand
arh. Toader POPESCU

Conducător științific
prof. dr. arh. Ana Maria ZAHARIADE

București, 2012

Simetria 2012; Popescu, Toader, *The Romanian railway project. Spatial and cultural faces of modernity within the planning and functioning of the railway system. 1842 – 1916* (UAUIM doctoral thesis, 2012); Sebestyen, Monica: *The Public Monument and The Public Space. Bucharest 1831*

– 1948 (UAUIM doctoral thesis, 2012); and from 2008, the bilingual quarterly magazine *Urbanismul* (new series), București, RUR, (editor in chief Maria Mănescu).

However, the history of the recent past had the most interesting dynamics. Immediately after 1989, the architecture of the Communist period was not only shunned, but also blamed; it was indiscriminately charged with all the crimes of the regime, which prejudiced the understanding and attracted unreasonable denunciations. The first historical approaches focused passionately on the exoticism of the *House of the People* or the dictator's psychological abyss. They were followed by more objective readings in the light of the universal dimensions of totalitarianism (Ioan, Augustin: *Modern Architecture and the Totalitarian Project. The Romanian Case*, Bucharest, ICR, 2009, 198 p.). Not denying the validity of this interpretation, but adding nuance and enrichment to the understanding of the local architectural development during Communism, this approach has been surpassed in the last years through serious archive explorations. Today, the number of such inquiries is growing. The history of architecture under Communism turned out to be extremely provocative especially for the young generations, yet interspersed with many difficulties: from biased and unreliable records and destroyed archives, to questions on how to write the history of an epoch ideologically suspect to such an extent.

The matter is problematic and still open. In 1968, Manfredo Tafuri wrote that the architectural historian has to be “part and parcel of the profession of political theorist”^{128/}. I have not understood how true his dictum was until I started my own research. In a context where the whole system of architecture was ideologically administrated, where theory was replaced by political dogma, we have to look for the space of professional freedom, for that amoebic space infiltrating the framework of political constrains. It could be conceived as a particular form of complicity between the profession and the establishment that the historian has to decipher. It seems impossible to establish a meaningful chronology of the period in any other way than gauging the depths of this entangled and dramatic relationship, its

dynamics and its specific outcomes. This problem seems to be a key issue in writing the history of that period. In this respect, new books and several remarkable doctoral dissertations succeeded in bringing to the fore decisive political and architectural documents, most of them publicly presented for the first time, casting new light over the specific background of this problematic development: Zahariade, Ana Maria: *Architecture in the Communist Project. Romania 1944 – 1989*, Bucharest, Simetria, 2010, 144 p.; Tulbure, Irina, *Architecture and Urbanism in Romania between 1944 – 1960. Constraint and experiment* (2011, UAUIM); Miruna Stroe, *Miruna, Housing between Design and Political Decision. Romania 1954 – 1966* (2012, UAUIM); Băncescu, Irina, *Waterfront Problematic Issues. Aspects of the Evolution of the Romanian Seaside during the Communist Period* (2012, UAUIM); Răută, Alexandru, *Negotiating the Civic Center. Architects and Politicians in 20th Century Romania* (2012, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven); Simiraș, Mihnea *Recovering neighborhood in the districts of collective dwellings in Bucharest. Human activities, social relationships and space* (2012, UAUIM).

As a result, what was a descriptive discourse became a reflective narrative, a political history of architecture. Generally, the new turn in our historiography aims at interrogating processes not forms, at proposing new interpretative perspectives, and at covering a larger geography. It is still a fragmentary mosaic of insights, waiting to be completed and construed in a larger context; its geography is still narrow.

How much richer the interpretation of this new material would be in the comparative context I mentioned at the beginning! Paul Valéry once said that history “is the most dangerous invention that the alchemy of intellect has ever elaborated”^{129/}; it is certainly true, but I do believe that history could be a federative instrument, too. I still preserve the strong impression left by the recent AzW events, the congress and the exhibition on *Soviet modernism*^{130/}; they have both shown how many unforeseen directions could be explored when historians meet in front of a larger picture.

My point is that our architectural history is still problematic because its issues are insufficiently problematised, *comparatively* and *transnationally*. Since, to a certain extent we shared a common past and background, networking and starting common projects become essential for surpassing our ignorance of each other, for developing a more appropriate critical apparatus, for gauging our distinctiveness and our commonness. If history is “a particular form of the human search for sense”^{131/}, our discourse can no longer be only about several “provincial” architectural cultures; it should be about a shared “culture of margins”, about a cultural construction different from the cultural construction “in the centre”^{132/}. It must be about a more encompassing interpretative perspective, which trespasses the narrowness of the national borders.

It might be an answer to the question asked in the colloquium in Bratislava: What can we offer to the culture of the centre?

NOTES POZNÁMKY

- 1 Published in *Secolul 20*, 10 – 12, 1999 – 2000, București.
- 2 Architectural Historians Colloquium: Current Issues of Central and Eastern European Architectural Historiography, Bratislava, January, 31-February, 1.
- 3 ODOBESCU, Alexandru: Viitorul artelor în România, conference at the Cercul românilor. Paris, 1851, March 17. Republished In SĂSĂRMAN, Gheorghe – LASCU,

Nicolae – DEAC, Alexandrina: Gândirea estetică în arhitectura românească, antologie alcătuită de București. Meridiane 1983, 210 p.

4 Eugen Lovinescu's interpretative hypothesis of Romanian modern civilisation was launched in 1924, based on Gabriel Tarde's sociological theory of imitation. See LOVINESCU, Eugen: *Istoria civilizației românești moderne*. București, Minerva 1997, 378 p.

5 In the author's words, a regime of historicity is “an academic formulation of the experience of time, which, in its turn, models the ways we say and live our own

time. ... [it] opens and circumscribes a space of thinking. ... It rhythms the writing of time..." See HARTOG, François: Temps et histoire. «Comment écrire l'histoire de France?» In: *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*. 50e année, 6, 1995. pp. 1219 – 1236; accessed 10 March 2013; URL: http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/ahess_0395-2649_1995_num_50_6_279428. See also Karin, Tilmans, Frank van Vree, Jay M. Winter: *Performing the past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe*, Amsterdam University Press, 2010, 368 p.

⁶ Present Romania is the result of two political unifications: the 1859 union of Moldavia and Wallachia that created the "Old Kingdom" (United Principalities, from 1859 to 1881, and the Kingdom of Romania, after 1881), and the 1918 union with Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina ("Greater Romania").

⁷ BOIA, Lucian: *Două secole de mitologie națională*. București, Humanitas 1999, 136 p.

⁸ ALEXANDRESCU, Sorin, *Identitate în ruptură, Mentalități românești postbelice*. Bucharest, Ed. Univers 2000, 320 p.

⁹ GHICA-BUDEȘTI, Nicolae (1869 – 1943): *Evoluția arhitecturii în Muntenia și Oltenia*. București, BCMI XX, XXI-II, XXV, XXIX, 1927, 1930, 1932, 1936; BALȘ, Gheorghe (1868 – 1934): *Histoire de l'art Roumain ancien (XIV – XIX)*. Paris, E de Brocard 1922 (with N. Iorga); *Bisericile lui Ștefan cel Mare* (summary in French). In BCMI, XVIII, 1925, fasc. 43 – 46, 331 p. and 1926, 330 p.; *Bisericile și mănăstirile moldovenești din veacul al XVI-lea*, Bucharest, in BCMI, XXI, fasc. 55 – 58. 1928, 397 p.; IONESCU, Grigore: *Istoria arhitecturii Românești din cele mai vechi timpuri până la 1900, 1937, Cartea Românească*, 498 p. For Ionescu's post-war books see infra.

¹⁰ IONESCU, Grigore, op. cit.

¹¹ TAFRALI, O.: *Istoria artelor. Iași, s. n., 1922*, (vol. I – II) 419 + 592 p., where the author summons all his science to make the architectural evolution in Wallachia and Moldavia fit the Western stylistic epochs.

¹² Virgil Vătășianu, *Istoria artei feudale în Țările Române*, I, Bucharest, Ed. Academiei, 1959, 1020 p. Before, only some minor Transylvanian authors wrote, starting

with the beginning of the 20th century, on the wooden churches that were considered Romanian-Orthodox architectural works.

¹³ See BRĂTULEANU, Anca: *Quelques notes sur la modernité de la recherche architecturale de George Balș*. In *Series Byzantina X*, Warsaw, Neriton, under printing (by courtesy of the author).

¹⁴ An exception was Sebestyen, Gh. & Victor: *Arhitectura Renașterii în Transilvania*, Bucharest, Ed. Academiei RSR, 1963, 252 p.

¹⁵ JOJA, Constantin: *Actualitatea tradiției arhitecturale Românești*, Bucharest. Ed. Tehnică, 1984, or Silvia Păun's post-1989 chimeric writings are such examples.

¹⁶ SORIN, Alexandrescu, op. cit.

¹⁷ Especially important was the Ecole des Beaux Arts eclecticism and its underlying philosophy, since the majority of architects studied in Paris.

¹⁸ The *Simetria: Caiete de arta și critică* magazine, founded and directed by G. M. Cantacuzino, published between 1939 – 1946.

¹⁹ See DEVILLARD, Valérie – JANNIERE, Héléne: *Critique architecturale*. In *Encyclopédia Universalis* [en ligne], consulté le 20 mai 2013. URL : <http://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/critique-architecturale/>

²⁰ E. g., Sfințescu, Cincinat (1887 – 1955): *Urbanistica generala: evolutia, igiena, economia si circulatia, estetica, legislatia*. Bucovina, I. E. Toroutiu 1933, 803 p.

²¹ IONESCU, Grigore: *Istoria arhitecturii în România*; 2nd volume: *De la sfârșitul veacului al XVI-lea pînă la începutul celui de al cincilea deceniu al veacului al XX-lea*. București, Ed. Academiei RPR 1965, 543 p. (the 1st volume was published in 1962)

²² IONESCU, Grigore: *Arhitectura pe teritoriul Romaniei de-a lungul veacurilor*. București, Ed. Academiei RSR 1982, 712 p.

²³ CURINSCHI-VOROVA, Gheorghe: *Istoria arhitecturii în România*, București, Ed. Tehnică, 1981, 390 p.

consulted in the UAUIM Library and in the Carol I Central Academic Library of Bucharest (BCU).

²⁸ TAFURI, Manfredo: *Teorie e storia dell'architettura*, Bari, Laterza, 1968

²⁹ Quoted in LEVY-DUMOULIN, Olivier: *Histoire (Histoire et historiens)*, *Encyclopédia Universalis* [en ligne]; accessed 10 March 2013; URL: <http://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/histoire-histoire-et-historiens/>

³⁰ 19th Vienna Architecture Congress, 24. – 25. 11. 2012, *Soviet Modernism. 1955 – 1991. Unknown Stories*.

³¹ LEVY-DUMOULIN, Olivier, op. cit.

³² ALEXANDRESCU, Sorin, op. cit.

²⁴ IONESCU, Grigore (collaborators: DERER, Peter – THEODORESCU, Dinu): *Arhitectura in Romania perioada anilor 1944 – 1969*. Ed. București, Academiei RSR 1969, 196 p.

²⁵ HARTOG, Francois, op. cit.

²⁶ I had this rewarding experience in 1998, due to an individual Getty research-grant: Hypothesis regarding the specific features of interwar Romanian modern architecture compared to the adoption of modern movement ideas in other CEE countries.

²⁷ In order to stress their significance for the new historiographic orientation, the titles of the recent works are included in the text. When the volumes cited are bilingual or have English summaries, the titles are in English. All the doctoral theses have English abstracts. They can be