

PROGRESSIVE, FORWARD-LOOKING AND ADVANCED Hungarian architecture and modernity 1956 – 1962

PROGRESÍVNA, NAPREDUJÚCA A POKROKOVÁ maďarská architektúra a modernita v rokoch 1956 – 1962

Zoltán Farkasdy: Apartment house,
Úri utca, Budapest, 1958
Zoltán Farkasdy: Bytový dom,
Úri utca, Budapešť, 1958



Photo Foto: Mariann Simon

Moderná architektúra sa v Maďarsku objavila v druhej polovici päťdesiatych rokov 20. storočia politici potvrdili známu kultúrnu požiadavku socialistického realizmu, že práca má byť „socialistická obsahom a národná svojou formou“. Architekti museli definovať svoj vzťah k modernej architektúre v rámci tohto vyjadrenia prichádzajúceho zvonku. Táto esej je venovaná súdobým debatám na tému znovuzískanej modernej architektúry na politickej, odbornej a verejnej úrovni. Cieľom je odpovedať na nasledujúce otázky: Ako maďarskí teoretici a praktizujúci architekti reagovali na túto situáciu? Je možné definovať a oddeliť rozličné trendy v rámci ich prístupov? A ak áno, ako sa môžu tieto prístupy spojiť so súbežnými medzinárodnými alebo predošlými národnými trendmi?

V decembri 1954 Nikita Sergejevič Chruščov, prvý tajomník Komunistickej strany Sovietskeho zväzu, vyhlásil potrebu zmeny v architektúre. Vo svojom prejave označil modernú technológiu za motor v pozadí budúceho vývoja. Zdôrazňoval dôležitosť technológie ako nástroja industrializácie, prefabrikácie a štandardizácie, a tvrdil, že je nevyhnutná pre splnenie stupňujúcich sa požiadaviek vo výstavbe. Inými slovami, technológia bola dôležitá ako prostriedok kvantitatívneho vývoja. Spomenuté faktory boli súčasťou modernity, ale moderná architektúra sa nikdy neobmedzovala na racionálne uvažovanie; keď maďarskí architekti vítali tento štýlistický obrat v politických zámeroch, oceňovali predovšetkým odstránenie predtým vyžadovaného historicizmu. Bezprostredná (akademická) reakcia bola zameraná na interpretáciu návratu modernej architektúry v rámci princípov dialektického a historického materializmu. Cieľom bolo oddeliť ju od západnej modernej architektúry a súčasne zdôvodniť miesto architektúry v skupine umeleckých disciplín.

Čas pre oficiálne riadenie nastal len po neúspešnom povstaní v roku 1956. Len v roku 1958 politická moc obrátila pozornosť na kultúrne otázky. Maďarská socialistická robotnícka strana stanovila hlavné princípy pre kultúrnu politiku, podľa ktorých podstatnou prekážkou v kultúrnym a ideologickom vývoji bol nacionalizmus,

s ktorým sa malo bojovať prostredníctvom národnej kultúry vychádzajúcej zo socializmu. Zásady jasne hovorili, že „populárny, národný a humanistický charakter“ kultúry musí vychádzať z kultúry pracujúcej triedy, ktorá hrala rozhodujúcu úlohu v boji proti kapitalizmu. Článok neopisoval vlastnosti kultúry pracujúcej triedy, ale technologický vývoj označil za determinujúci komponent budúcnosti socialistickej kultúry. Smernica na záver jasne definovala „socialistický obsah“ novej kultúry, ale neurčila štandardy, ktorým mala zodpovedať „národná forma“.

Politici poverili touto úlohou oficiálne (ideologicky kontrolované) umelecké spoločnosti, ktoré museli zverejniť svoju interpretáciu novej dohody. Prezident Asociácie maďarských architektov publikoval konečnú verziu smernice tejto organizácie v roku 1959. Dokonca aj názov článku – *Súčasný problémy socialistickej architektúry* – odkazoval na nadradenosť socializmu. Podľa autora forma zodpovedá predovšetkým materiálom, konštrukcii, technológii a funkcii modernej architektúry, čo vysvetľuje, prečo socialistická architektúra sa ešte stále neodlišuje od kapitalistickej architektúry, s výnimkou lokálnych daností. Hlavnou myšlienkou článku je, že národná forma sa má organicky odvíjať od socialistického obsahu. Inými slovami, národný charakter architektúry znamená, že je zasadená do socialistickej spoločnosti.

Hoci oficiálni predstavitelia odboru sa horlivo snažili prispôsobiť novej situácii, definovať novú socialistickú architektúru, ktorá sa niekedy stále nazývala socialistickorealisticou, nebolo jednoduché. Vedúci úradník ministerstva stavebníctva vysvetlil stránickej smernice pre kultúrnu politiku nasledujúcim spôsobom: „Forma nedávno postavených budov svedčí o tom, že maďarskí architekti začínajú rozumieť novej, progresívnej, napredujúcej a pokrokovej maďarskej architektúre.“ Oficiálni predstavitelia často používali najmä termín „pokroková“, aby sa vyhli neželanému slovu „moderná“. Na rozdiel od teoretikov a funkcionárov, pre väčšinu praktizujúcich architektov bolo jedno, či sa nová architektúra bude volať „socialistická“, „pokroková“, alebo „supermoderná“: tešili sa z toho, že unikli štandardom používania

historických foriem a tradičných stavebných materiálov, a vítali znovuzískaný pragmatický modernizmus, racionalitu a prísľub používania nových technických riešení.

Pre väčšinu maďarských architektov znamenala táto situácia túžbu po materiáloch, detailoch a formách podobných tým, ktoré sa využívali na Západe, ale takisto podnietila špecifický prístup k modernej architektúre. Súbežne s historickými a umelecko-historickými debatami o nacionalizme na prelome rokov 1960 a 1961 vo vedúcom architektonickom časopise *Magyar Építőművészet* (Maďarská architektúra) boli publikované články, ktoré sa zaoberali tradíciami maďarskej architektúry. Autor klúčovej state začal tvrdením, že súčasná maďarská architektúra sa svojou kvalitou nemôže porovnávať s francúzskou, talianskou, škandinávskou a americkou architektúrou. Autor upozornil na dôležitosť tradície vo všeobecnosti, ale so špeciálnym dôrazom na štýl Art Nouveau zo začiatku storočia a roľnícku architektúru, ktorých prístupy a formálne bohatstvo bolo hodné nasledovania. Nasledujúce články súhlasili v tom, že nemôžeme ignorovať naše tradície, ale rôznili sa pri odpovedi na otázku, či ich máme hľadať, alebo vybrať určité obdobie či štýl, ktorý budeme nasledovať. Všetci praktizujúci architekti zdieľali nádej znovuzískania umeleckej slobody a jeden historik architektúry vyjadril presvedčenie väčšiny: nech architekti tvoria a potom budú inštinktívne reflektovať tradíciu. Ale keď sa tí, ktorí sa zúčastnili na debate, snažili opísať atmosféru maďarskej architektúry, všetci spomínali vlastnosti roľníckej architektúry.

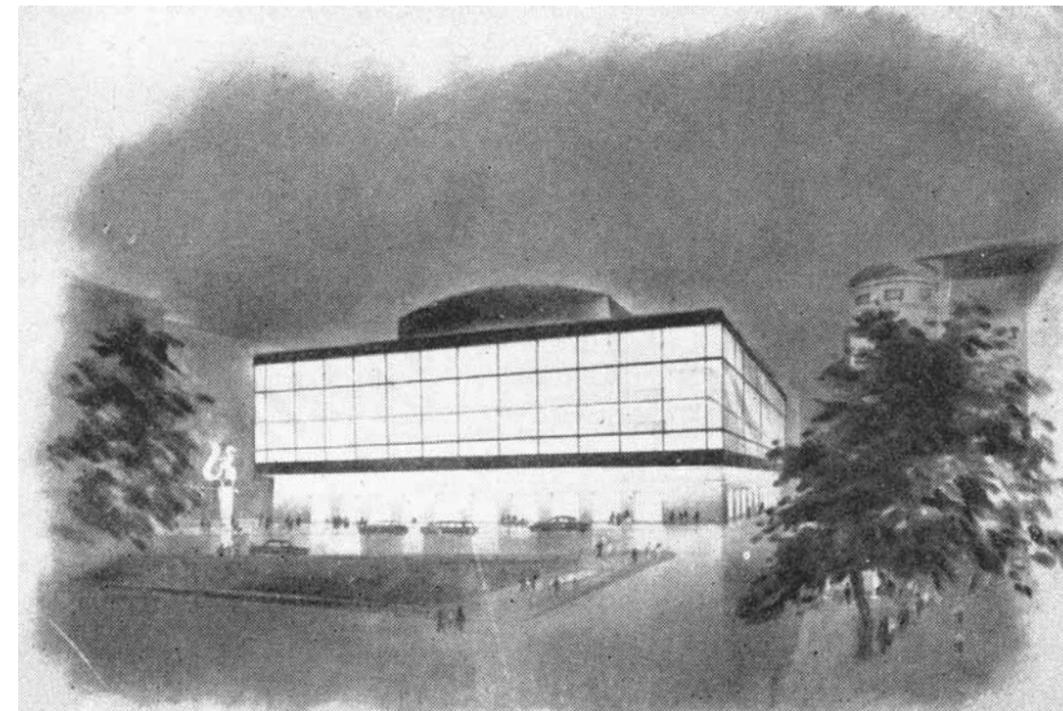
Okrem dvoch spomenutých prístupov k modernej architektúre – orientovaných na technológiu a národné tradície – musíme uviesť aj tretí. Vznik „skromného“ alebo „situovaného“ modernizmu v maďarskej architektúre (tieto pomenovania vznikli neskôr) musí sa pripísať zahraničným

In the immediate post-war years, modern architecture characterized the Hungarian scene: key positions of architectural practice and state construction administration were occupied by advocates of modern architecture of whom several were also active participants of the Modern movement. This trend was soon interrupted with a short but highly forceful period (ca 1950 – 1955)

vplyvom, ktoré nepôsobili prostredníctvom teórie, ale prostredníctvom príkladov, hoci poznatky o nich pochádzali len z obrazov. No vnímanie diel Le Corbusiera, Louisa Kahna, Arneho Jacobsena a Alvara Aalta či novej architektúry v Taliansku samo osebe nevysvetľovalo vznik tohto trendu. Príčinou skromnosti tejto tretej skupiny budov bolo to, že väčšinou boli vyplňovanými stavbami. Tento fakt obmedzil, ak nevylúčil používanie prefabrikovaných prvkov, zatiaľ čo architekti dávali pozor na to, aby tieto budovy boli v harmónii so susednými budovami.

Maďarská architektúra tohto obdobia bola zasadená do socialistického politického a ekonomického pozadia a držala krok s jeho hlavnou silou, modernizáciou. Tento socialistický (komunistický) spôsob modernizácie sa sústreďoval na extenzívnu industrializáciu. Hoci politická a odborná interpretácia vzťahu medzi architektúrou a technológiou sa vo viacerých aspektoch rôznila, industrializovaná architektúra sa stala motorom v pozadí „racionálneho obrazu rozvoja“. Politici zdôrazňovali masovú produkciu, prefabrikáciu a štandardizáciu, kým architekti boli fascinovaní možnosťami nových technologických riešení a inovácií. Väčšina architektov uznávala, že architektonická modernita znamená používanie progresívnej, napredujúcej a pokrokovej technológie, hoci ešte museli počkať na to, aby socialistická ekonomika dobehla a predbehla Západ. Existovala len jedna menšia skupina, ktorá – s prihliadnutím na zahraničné príklady modernej alebo regionálnej modernej architektúry – zachovala citlivosť predchádzajúceho socialistickorealistickeho obdobia a vo svojich projektoch na chvíľu vytvorila druh modernizmu viazaného na miesto. Tento trend partikulárnej maďarskej modernej architektúry počas spomenutého obdobia chýbal v palete architektonických praktík a objavil sa len v niektorých publikáciách.

of the style known as Socialist Realism, a state-required traditionalism which ruled the entire field of culture. By the second part of the 1950s, modern architecture had returned, yet the new situation was radically different from the previous one, even though there had been no radical changes concerning the professional actors. The well-known cultural demand of Socialist Realism, namely that



Source Zdroj: *Magyar Építőművészet* 1 – 3, 1958

the work should be 'socialist in content and national in form' was still a political necessity, and the architects had to define their relationship to modern architecture within this standardised phraseology. Between 1956 and 1962, in a period of temporary political uncertainty and gestures of détente, controlled discussions were accepted, sometimes even fostered^{1/}. This essay is concerned with contemporary debates on the topic of regained modern architecture on a political, professional and public level. Questions to be addressed are the following: How did Hungarian theorists and practicing architects react to the situation? Is it possible to define and separate different trends within these approaches? And if so, how can these approaches be connected to parallel international or to earlier national trends?

Nikolai Sergejevich Khrushchev, the first secretary of the Soviet Communist Party announced

the need for a change in architecture in December 1954. In his speech, he referred to modern technology as a driving force for the future development. He accused architects that they had "disengaged from the advanced economic and technical terms of development, and under the pretext of fighting against constructivism had fallen into the other extreme of formalism: they became captivated by individual and artistic exaggerations, using architectural shapes, 'unusual decorations' (and unusual built volumes) which made the dwellings similar to churches or museums."^{2/} He called architects to draw the conclusion that "artistic aspects should have a closer contact with advanced technology", with the economic and technical aspects of architecture. Khrushchev stressed the importance of technology as a means of industrialization, prefabrication and standardization, as a condition to satisfy the growing building demands, in other words as means of quantitative

Károly Weichinger – Károly Jurcsik – Csaba Virág – János Bonta:

1. Prize-winning design for a concert hall in the Budapest city centre, 1957

Károly Weichinger – Károly Jurcsik – Csaba Virág – János Bonta: Vítězný návrh koncertní sály v centru Budapešti, 1957

development. The above factors were parts of modernity but modern architecture never restricted itself so completely to rational considerations. Hence, when Hungarian architects celebrated this stylistic turn in the political will, they most strongly appreciated the elimination of required historicism.

Despite the clear political message, the situation remained unsettled in the following years. Journals continued publishing aesthetically historicist buildings – it needed some time to build modern ones – but the new plans were already modern; meanwhile, leading theoreticians tried to explain, if even for themselves, the sudden and radical change in political expectations. It was easy to abandon historical forms and details for the adaptation of advanced techniques, but it was more difficult to legitimate the position of industrialized architecture within the world of the arts. Ironically, Máté Major, the leading architecture theoretician, found the solution for this conundrum, in his presentation of Khrushchev's speech, in a Stalin quotation. "Comrade Stalin used the following classical and clear metaphor in the linguistic debate: '... building materials of the construction are not equal with the construction, although without them the construction cannot be completed'. According to its meaning and essence, this statement applies also to the building construction.

Consequently there is no building without material and construction – which constitute the economic and technical aspects – but the material and the construction themselves do not make the building^{13/}. In Major's conclusion, the dialectics of the economic-technical and artistic aspects of architecture should not be forgotten but instead preserved. He even adds – as a fundamental lesson of Khrushchev's speech – that in the permanent struggle between the two aspects of architecture the artistic side has a more important role. Another university professor, János Bonta, discovered in his theoretical explanation that the artistic aspect lay within the national form, though he radically reinterpreted the latter term. Denying any direct reusing of traditional forms or details, he regarded the effects of natural environment and also the town as a result of a continuous development, yet finally named social structure as the primary source of national form. "Therefore, when we approach the problem of national form in our architecture we have to start from people's living conditions and demands – from the socialist life as the content of architecture – and not from any anticipated or borrowed formal ideas."^{14/} However, the author also rejected any rigid techno-centrism – which for him characterized only capitalist architecture, and resulted in an anti-historical, cosmopolitan architecture^{15/}. The immediate (academic) reactions attempted to interpret the return of modern architecture within the Marxist principles of dialectical and historical materialism, to separate it from western modern architecture and at the same time to justify architecture's place within the group of arts.

The moment for an official future guidance arrived only after the failed uprising of 1956. Political power – which needed about a year and a half to stabilize its position – turned its attention to cultural questions only in 1958^{16/}. The guiding principles for the cultural policy of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party were published in July of the same year, with its primary declaration that the main obstacle of the cultural and ideological development is nationalism, which must be opposed with a national culture based on socialism. "The newly born culture is socialist in its content and national in its form. It preserves and comprises all those progressive cultural treasures which have been collected

Ferenc Callmeyer:
Wine bar, Badacsony, 1957
Ferenc Callmeyer:
Vínny bar, Badacsony, 1957



Source Zdroj: IPARTERV archive No 2738

through the development of hundreds of years in national works and in values adopted from other nations. Using the best results and inspired by the socialist ideal, it achieves the synthesis of popular, national and humanistic character on a higher level."^{17/} The label had been kept, but the intention had become different. Nationalism was contrasted with socialist patriotism, which entailed the priority of socialist internationalism above national integrity. Moreover, the thesis made it no less clear that the 'popular, national and humanistic character' of the culture should be based neither on the peasants' folk culture nor on the petty bourgeois urban culture, but on the culture of the working class, which played the leading role in the fight against capitalism. The paper offered no description of the features of working-class culture, but referred to technological development as a defining component of the future of socialist culture. "The great scientific and technical transformations of our age demand an even faster development on the general cultural and technological level. This new requirement shall be enforced across the different fields of culture, and shall be counted upon when we define the tasks in detail."^{18/} To conclude, the guideline clearly defined the 'socialist content' of the new culture, but it set down no standards on what appearance the 'national form' should take.

Politics delegated this task to the official (ideologically controlled) associations of art, which felt obliged to publish their interpretation of the new consensus. The meeting of the architectural associations of socialist countries to be held in November 1958 in Prague offered itself as an excellent opportunity for the Association of Hungarian Architects to prepare its thesis^{19/}. The proposed paper discussed by the association's management touched upon the following questions: "What should architecture be in countries building socialism, or in countries where socialism has already been built? 2. How should this architecture relate to the architecture of the capitalist West and how to its own, national (feudal, capitalist) past, that is to architectural history?"^{110/} Although the wording itself – which stressed the 'national' as something connected to former, rejected social and political systems like feudalism and capitalism – expressed a distance, some participants felt it important to have such a relationship. The opinion



Source Zdroj: Szendrői et al: Magyar építészet 1945 – 1970. Budapest, Corvina p. 109

Ferenc Callmeyer:
Restaurant and confectionery,
Badacsony, 1961

Ferenc Callmeyer:
Reštaurácia a cukráreň,
Badacsony, 1961

that the "Hungarian character necessarily should be present in architectural work" was left unchallenged, but the view that a national architecture should exist, based on home milieu, landscape, climate and nature, was shared by others. Some contributors did not even exclude the use of traditions, if in a sensitive way. This new definition of socialist architecture "doesn't mean that the architecture should ignore its traditions. But beyond the finding that the respect for tradition should never be at the expense of modernisation, according to the socialist architecture we shouldn't follow but experience traditions and with this impulse we have to begin the new tasks with new means" – János Böhönyey, a member of the management stated^{111/}. In contrast to the original questions, the national aspects of architecture seemed not to be a particularly compelling issue of the discussion: in fact, the participants were much more interested in the organizational changes in the construction industry and in the role of creative designers on the system.

Máté Major, the president of the architectural association, published the final theses in an academic journal^{112/}. Even the title of the article – 'Current Problems of Socialist Architecture' – referred to the primacy of socialism. Form follows

first of all materials, construction, technology and function in modern architecture – the author states – which explains why socialist architecture has not differed yet from capitalist architecture except the local conditions. *“Developing socialist content, in other words the socialist way of life, thought and message, will help us to reach the stage of the national form – the difference in people, society and ideology that separates our architectural forms from the capitalist West – over its locality, and the socialist architecture the new, special, historically matured, higher step of the universal architecture will be formed.”*¹³¹ As with the paper as a whole, the message of the quotation is that the national form should grow out of socialist content organically. In other words, the two concepts cannot be separated: national character of our architecture means that it is embedded in the socialist society. The difference should be the inevitable development, following the Marxist ideology and terminology, from the different superstructure.

A decrease in the importance of national (and traditional) aspects of architecture can be detected during the year 1959. The Party returned to the question of national traditions in the middle of the year, but when setting forth what it termed as ‘progressive traditions’, it became clear that primacy was assigned to the traditions of the industrial working class and the labour movement, which was difficult to apply in architecture¹⁴. The ‘national form’ of the new socialist architecture was pushed towards ‘socialist form’ which also implied that it should differ from the parallel modern architecture of the capitalist West. When architects and journalists mentioned the new trend in architecture, they never used the attribute ‘modern’ but instead ‘socialist’. As capitalism had contaminated the expression ‘modern architecture’, consequently the copying of modern architectural forms would lead to formalism as another extremity after traditionalism – as Máté Major warned. *“Some architects – as a reaction against traditionalism – have shifted towards the uncritical admiration of architecture, methods and works of the capitalist West, and this copying threatens the spread of a new formalism.”*¹⁵ It was hardly easy to define the new socialist – sometimes still named as socialist-realist – architecture, though the official representatives of the profession were eager

to adapt themselves to the new situation. Not only Máté Major integrated the change in his Marxist theory of architecture but – as a newspaper reported – a senior official from the Ministry of Building Affairs explained for the members of the association the future tasks of architecture based on the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party’s guidelines for cultural policy. According to the reporter, the official outlined the most representative attributes of the new socialist architecture in his speech. *“The form of recently constructed buildings suggests that Hungarian architects show an emerging understanding of new, progressive, forward-looking and advanced Hungarian architecture.”*¹⁶ In particular, the term ‘advanced’ was commonly used to avoid the undesirable word ‘modern’, appearing as an attribute in several combinations – advanced furniture, advanced architecture, advanced building technology – but it was increasingly linked to the use of technology. The Third Conference of the Association of Hungarian Architects in November 1959 (the first such event after the uprising of 1956) attracted great political and public attention¹⁷. The newspapers repeatedly reported about the event, but the texts already suggested that the advanced architecture means advanced technology, to which ‘advanced’ art should be added somehow. *“A remarkable speech was presented in the debate, mentioning that the decade-long theoretical battles addressing architectural forms, whether they were cosmopolitan or national, traditional or modern, had been slightly modified by now, as they were based on an undeveloped, mainly craft-based building industry. ... We can solve contemporary architectural problems only with the help of the latest modern technology. Prefabrication and new constructions are forcing the architect to take into consideration the characteristics and demands of new technology when defining his/her ideological objectives.”* – reported a journalist¹⁸.

By 1960, it became evident that the regained ‘advanced architecture’ is nothing more than advanced technology without any artistic aspect. The Party’s decree on the tasks of the construction industry came out in June 1960, announcing clear requirements for the increase of the industry’s capacity by using prefabricated building elements, by mechanization and by the application of standard design¹⁹. It is not surprising that



István Bérczes
– Béla Szittyá: Post office
and tourist information
point, Tihany, 1962

István Bérczes
– Béla Szittyá: Pošta
a turistické informačné
centrum, Tihany, 1962

Source Zdroj: IPARTERV archive No 6051

when the leading figures of the profession had to choose from the palette of modern architecture they preferred the functionalist approach of Walter Gropius, which seemed to be most in tune with industrialization. *“Our architecture, which is striving towards prefabrication, should rely on rationalism, logical consistency and realism as a necessity. In this respect we agree with the functionalism of Walter Gropius, who connected functionalism with the social tasks of architecture and with the standardization of mass housing.”* – declared Lajos Skoda, the secretary general of the association in his unpublished theses for the IV Conference²⁰. However this reference was left out from his delivered speech, while another paragraph was included, in which he accused the architects who

disdained to understand political requirements. *“‘Connection with nature’ or merging the building with the surrounding environment – used as a catchword – it means for some architects that they have to design for each place a different building, which is against the principles of standardization and industrialization.”*²¹ Mentioning Walter Gropius was undesirable at the 1961 conference, but the difference between the capitalist modern architecture and the new socialist architecture was expressed in another way, too. *“Architecture should be thoroughly reconsidered, and revolutionized with the basic belief in the power of socialist world. If capitalism has its modern architecture, then we have to create architecture under socialism with a super-modern method, in the purest sense of the word.”* – so stated one enthusiastic



Béla Borvendég:
Mortuary, Szeged, 1960

Béla Borvendég:
Márnica, Szeged, 1960

contribution ^[22]. Against the theoreticians and the official representatives of the profession, for the majority of practicing architects it was a matter of indifference if the new architecture was called 'socialist', 'advanced' or 'super-modern': they enjoyed their escape from the constraints of using historical forms and traditional building materials, and celebrated the regaining of pragmatic modernism, rationality and the promise of using new technical solutions. Soon the term 'modern' lost its unpleasant connotation and little by little reappeared in the architectural vocabulary, first in the reports on tall (7 – 8-storey) buildings.

For most of the Hungarian architect, the above situation meant a longing for similar materials, components, forms etc. to those applied in the West, but it also awakened a special approach to modern architecture. Raising the old-new issue of

Hungarian character in architecture was part of a wider cultural discussion in the country. Parallel to the historical and the art-historical debate on nationalism, at the turn of 1960 and 1961 some articles were published dealing with the traditions of Hungarian architecture in the leading architectural journal *Magyar Építőművészet* (Hungarian Architecture). The moment was sufficiently far from the traditionalism of the 1950s and fit well into the officially supported discussions on 'progressive tradition'. The author of the keynote paper was Imre Kathy, a university professor, who started with the statement that contemporary Hungarian architecture could not be compared with the quality of French, Italian, Scandinavian or American architecture. The reason he saw in that the referred foreign examples followed modern principles and

Source Zdroj: Magyar Építőművészet 6, 1961

preserved their connection to their roots both. On the contrary, Hungarian architecture had lost contact with tradition. The author called attention to the importance of tradition in general, but with a special emphasis on the turn of the century Art Nouveau and peasant architecture as worthy of emulation for their approach and formal richness. "We see that the basics of modern architectural principles were set out already in the turn-of-the-century works. These principles – truth to materials, sincerity, utility, functionality, national character – have not changed since then. ... Some foreign impacts (Finnish) played a role in the turn of the century architectural efforts, but our traditions – especially folk architecture – formed their basis." ^[23] The replying articles all shared the opinion that we shouldn't ignore our traditions, but they differed concerning the question if we have to look for them or to choose a certain period or style to follow. In the hope of regaining artistic freedom, one shared by the practicing architects, László Császár, an architectural historian, expressed the approach of the majority: let architects create and they will reflect on tradition instinctively. "In this way, the elaboration of a particular Hungarian architecture relying on traditions is more of an intuitive than a rational work. The creator's architectural and aesthetic requirements as an immense necessity will force it to come into being." ^[24]

However when the contributors of the debate tried to describe the atmosphere of Hungarian architecture they all included the features of peasant architecture. Identifying Hungarian architecture with peasant or folk architecture was not a new invention: it had roots in creating the nation in the early 19th century. But there were another reason which made peasant tradition relevant: folk architecture was the only tradition acceptable for modern architecture, because of the rationality represented in its structures and use of materials. After the painful interlude of traditionalism in the mid-fifties, Hungarian architects were reluctant to look for traditional sources, even in folk architecture. Consequently, the theoretical proposal – at least within our period – found no followers in practice, even while the myth of folk architecture remained present in the theory. It was not an exception that if the reviewers felt any reference to traditional architecture in a newly created

modern building they celebrated it – even if the architect had no intention of recalling the shape of a rural building. To cite only one example: in 1961 the reviewer evaluated a recently completed mortuary as follows. "It is a synthesis of what the latest modern architecture offers, using conscious and unconscious symbols and the values of most ancient folk architecture. ... It refers to both the smoke-houses of the Great Hungarian Plain and to Le Corbusier's chapel in Ronchamps." ^[25] The architect offered no protest against this interpretation, but when many years later he was asked about the building in an interview he referred to simple practical considerations, while also making clear his admiration for Le Corbusier ^[26].

Beside the aforementioned two approaches to modern architecture – oriented towards technology or national traditions – it is necessary to list a third one. This trend differed from the others in that it lacked a direct theoretical background. Though the relationship between modern architecture and the built and natural environment, or the human character of modern architecture, was on the agenda of international architectural discussions, especially in the late 1940s and early 1950s, there is hardly any writing with similar contents or references to these discussions in

Béla Borvendég:
Mortuary, Szeged, 1960

Béla Borvendég:
Márnica, Szeged, 1960



Source Zdroj: Magyar Építőművészet 6, 1961

Zoltán Gulyás: Apartment house, Fehérvári út, Budapest, 1958

Zoltán Gulyás: Bytový dom, Fehérvári út, Budapešť, 1958



Source Zdroj: Szendrői et al: Magyar építészet 1945 – 1970. Budapest, Corvina p. 48

the Hungarian documents. The only exception is a comment at the 1961 Congress of Association of Hungarian Architects, in which János Bonta referred to Sigfried Giedion's concept of 'new regionalism'. He mentioned this approach as an acceptable example for adapting to the local conditions, to meet the given place, landscape, nation and circumstances, but not as a model to follow, after all Sigfried Giedion was a western theoretician. "Our architecture is provincial, but not in the good sense of reflecting on the relatively limited conditions of a given landscape, people and situation – that we shouldn't call provincialism, but in Sigfried Giedion's words, new regionalism. Our architecture is provincial in its immaturity that it wants to look more than what it is."¹²⁷ As it happens, from 1960 onwards János Bonta was the editor of the architectural journal *Magyar Építőművészet*, which published a number of current international buildings during the investigated period. Consequently the presence of a 'modest' or 'situated modernism' in Hungarian architecture – the labels were created later – should be attributed to an international impact, which acted not through theory but by the knowing of the examples even if only from images. However the reception of Le Corbusier, Louis Kahn, Arne Jacobsen and Alvar Aalto, or the

Zoltán Farkasdy: Apartment house, Úri utca, Budapest, 1958

Zoltán Farkasdy: Bytový dom, Úri utca, Budapešť, 1958

recent architecture of Italy, cannot in itself explain the emergence of the trend. An account for the relatively sparse number of this third group of buildings is that they were mostly infill developments, which restricted if not excluded the use of prefabricated elements, even though the architects took seriously their task of ensuring harmony with the neighbouring buildings.

In these buildings, the facades were plastered, coloured, using lane mouldings, composed proportions and rhythm of openings, or they had brick cladding or other classical materials. To sum it up, the best examples had the common features of using traditional materials on the facade, monolithic reinforced concrete structural frame and a human scale in terms of their mass and proportion. Their additional characteristics were the sophisticated details, due to the invested design hours – at this time, the senior generation of master-builders was still active, and because of the temporary decrease in investments, state design offices were not overloaded with commissions. Nonetheless, this sensitive approach to modernism weakened over time. And, as it presumed thorough and slow work in both design and construction, it consequently was not sufficiently effective in terms of quantity, which soon became the primary aspect for the building industry. Furthermore the architects themselves became fascinated by new shapes and solutions offered by technology, which expressed development and optimism.

Hilde Heynen's definition of modernisation in his book on architecture and modernity – that "the term modernization is used to describe the process of social development, the main features



Photo Foto: Mariann Simon



Source Zdroj: Owned by the author

of which are technological advances and industrialization, urbanization and population explosions, the rise of bureaucracy and increasing powerful national states, an enormous expansion of mass communication systems, democratization, and an expanding (capitalist) world market" – refers to the capitalist world, so it can only partially be applied to the Kádár era, and not only because of the lack of democracy¹²⁸. Hungarian architecture of this period was embedded in its socialist political and economic background and kept pace with its main aim, modernisation, and this socialist (communist) way of modernization concentrated on extensive industrialization. "Rapid industrialization was one of the most important strategic goals of Communist regimes (and seemed at first to be the most easily achievable) but critical analysts have also singled out the dependence on obsolete industrial models as one of the most conspicuous causes of decline and crisis" – states J. P. Arnason, a major authority on this theme¹²⁹. This imperial modernisation was embedded in the ideological projection of past developmental patterns and characterized by

overstretched and self-defeating ambitions. Modernity – as a project of modernization – in Hungary (like in any other socialist country) was evidenced mainly through its objective aspects, i.e. the social and economic processes, the programmatic side. The subjective aspect, the process of personal liberation, was limited by an ideology that excluded reflexivity as a means of correction.

Industrialized architecture became the engine of this 'streamlined image of development'¹³⁰, though the political and the professional interpretation of the relationship between architecture and technology differed in many respects. Politics stressed mass production, prefabrication and standardization, while the architects were fascinated by the possibilities of recent technological solutions and innovations. After 1962, the Kádár-regime changed its politics: the so-called 'Hungarian is-



Source Zdroj: Szendrői et al: Magyar építészet 1945 – 1970. Budapest, Corvina p. 121

János Bonta: Apartment house, Tóth Árpád sétány, Budapest, 1963

György János: Bytový dom, Tóth Árpád promenade, Budapešť, 1963

János Bonta: Hotel Karacs, Salgótarján, 1964

György János: Hotel Karacs, Salgótarján, 1964

sue' of 1956 was removed from the United Nations Organization's agenda in December 1962, and in March 1963 Kádár announced a general amnesty for the prisoners sentenced after 1956. Ironically, this political consolidation resulted in a narrowing of the margins for architects. In parallel with the requirements defining an increasing quantity of standardized buildings, the space devoted to architecture in newspaper reports decreased; the master school of the architectural association, a key place for reflection, was closed in 1960 and by 1963 architectural criticism disappeared from the architectural journal, *Magyar Építőművészet*, too.

In the wake of the conflicts of the interpretations of modernity, the architectural profession arrived at its own compromise with political power. *"The confidence and the belief that we can catch up ourselves resulted in a strong consensus between the profession, society and the political trend. In*

the spirit of modernism, architecture compromised with the power." – remembered György Janáky, a contemporary in the 1980s^{31/}. The majority of architects accepted that architectural modernity means using new, progressive, forward-looking and advanced technology, though they still had to wait until the socialist economy could catch up and pass the West. Only a smaller group of architects – with the knowledge of foreign examples of modest or regional modern architecture – preserved the sensitivity of the former socialist-realist period and created a kind of situated or even place-bound modernism in their projects, for a while. The trend of a particular Hungarian modern architecture was missing from the palette of the architectural practice in the early Kádár era and appeared only in a few theoretical writings. Over time both approaches returned, but that is another story.

ecture. Part II.] *Magyar Építőművészet*, 5, 1956, p. 163. According to the author's remark, the essay was first presented in November 1955 at a university conference.

⁵ BONTA, János: A nemzeti forma problémája az építészetben I. rész. [Problem of national form in architecture. Part I.] *Magyar Építőművészet*, 4, 1956, pp. 125 – 127.

⁶ Az MSZMP művelődési politikájának irányelvei. 1958. július 25. [Hungarian Socialist Workers Party's guidelines for cultural policy, 25. July 1958] In: A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai 1956 – 1962. [Hungarian Socialist Workers Party's decrees and documents 1956 – 1962] Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó 1964, pp. 231 – 260.

⁷ Ibid, p. 245.

⁸ Ibid, p. 246.

⁹ The meeting was postponed to January 1959.

¹⁰ MAJOR, Máté's introduction. Board Meeting Minutes of the Association of Hungarian Architects, 21. October 1958, p. 2. BUTE Archive

¹¹ BÖHÖNYEY, János's comment. Ibid, p. 16.

NOTES POZNÁMKY

¹ Historians now agree that this first period of the sixties in Hungary was characterized by the rebuilding of the political system after the 1956 revolution, including the bloody revenge against political opponents and the parallel making of a deal with society at large, which gave up its right of rebellion in exchange for a relative prosperity. RAINER, M. János: A magyar „hatvanas évek”. (Politika)történeti közelítések. [The Sixties in Hungary – historical and political approaches] In: RAINER, M. János: Bevezetés a Kádárizmusba. [Introduction into Kádárism] Budapest, 1956-os Intézet – L'Harmattan 2011, pp. 149 – 184.

² Khrushchev's speech is quoted in MAJOR, Máté: A moszkvai építészeti kongresszus után. [After the Moscow Architecture Congress] *Szabad Művészet*, 3, 1955, p. 137.

³ MAJOR, Máté: A moszkvai építészeti kongresszus tanulságai. [Lessons of the Moscow Architecture Congress] *Műszaki Élet*, 4, 1955, p. 4.

⁴ BONTA, János: A nemzeti forma problémája az építészetben II. rész. [Problems of national form in archi-

¹² Máté Major (1904 – 1986) was a leading figure throughout the socialist period. As an academician, a university professor and the president of the Association of Hungarian Architects (besides his many other positions) he represented the official architectural theory in Hungary.

¹³ MAJOR, Máté: A szocialista építőművészet aktuális problémái [Current problems of socialist architecture] *Építés- és közlekedéstudományi közlemények*, 3 – 4, 1959, p. 294.

¹⁴ A burzsoá nacionalizmusról és a szocialista hazafiságról. [On bourgeois nationalism and socialist patriotism] In: A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai 1956 – 1962. pp. 328 – 352.

¹⁵ Milyen legyen a szocialista építőművészet? Beszélgetés Major Máté Kossuth-díjas építőművésszel. [How to construct socialist architecture? Conversation with Máté Major, Kossuth Prize awarded architect] *Magyar Nemzet* 14. December 1958. p. 7.

¹⁶ Állítsuk az építőművészetet a szocializmus szolgálatába. [Set architecture in the service of socialism] *Magyar Nemzet*, 9. May 1959, p. 3.

¹⁷ The III Conference of the Association of Hungarian Architects was held between 27 – 28. October 1959. Unfortunately the board meeting minutes between 29. September and 8. December 1959 are missing from the BUTE archive.

¹⁸ TAMÁS, István: Szocialista építészet. [Socialist architecture] *Magyar Nemzet*, 1. November 1959, p. 7.

¹⁹ Az MSZMP Központi Bizottságának határozata a vegyipar fejlesztéséről, az építőipar feladatairól és az ipar telepítés helyzetéről. 1960. június 29. [Decree of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party's Central Committee on the development of chemical industry, on the tasks of building industry and on the state of industry location, 29. June 1960] In: A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai 1956 – 1962. pp. 427 – 438.

²⁰ Theses of the secretary general's report for the IV Conference of the Association of Hungarian Architects, 25. October 1961, p. 12. BUTE Archive.

²¹ SKODA, Lajos: Építészetünk helyzete. [State of our architecture] IV. Conference and Anniversary Assembly of the Association of Hungarian Architects, 21 – 23. November, 1961, *MÉSZ*, Budapest, n. d., p. 43.

²² FERENCZY, Károly's opposition. IV. Conference and Anniversary Assembly of the Association of Hungarian Architects, 21 – 23. November, 1961, *MÉSZ*, Budapest, n. d., p. 132.

²³ KATHY, Imre: Korszerűség, szecesszió, hagyomány. [Modernity, Secession, tradition] *Magyar Építőművészet*, 3, 1961, p. 37.

²⁴ CSÁSZÁR, László: Építészeti hagyományok és nemzetköziség. [Architectural traditions and internationalism] *Magyar Építőművészet*, 5, 1962, p. 52.

²⁵ SÜDI, Ernő: Szeged, ravatalozó a Belvárosi temetőben. [Szeged, mortuary in the Belvárosi Cemetery] *Magyar Építőművészet*, 6, 1961, p. 27.

²⁶ SIMON, Mariann: Az életben jelen kell lenni. Simon Mariann beszélgetése Borvendég Bélával. [You must be present in your life. Mariann Simon talks to Béla Borvendég] In: Béla Borvendég: *Architectura quo vadis*, Terc, Budapest 2005, pp. 296 – 306.

²⁷ BONTA, János's opposition. IV. Congress and Anniversary Assembly of the Association of Hungarian Architects, 21 – 23. November, 196. Budapest, *MÉSZ* n. d, p. 144.

²⁸ HEYNEN, Hilde: *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique*. The MIT Press 1999, p. 11.

²⁹ ARNASON, Johann P.: *Communism and Modernity*. In: Shmuel N. Eisenstadt ed.: *Multiple Modernities*. New Brunswick, New Jersey, Transaction Publishers 2002, p. 66.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 67.

³¹ JANÁKY, György: Kísérlet egy korszak bejárására. [Attempts mapping an era] *Magyar Építőművészet* 3, 1988, p. 3.