

FROM ARCHITECTURAL ALLEGORY OF POWER AND PRIVILEGE TO DISSONANT LEGACY: THE 1960S GUEST HOUSES AND RESIDENCES OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE PCR THEN AND NOW/

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Abstract. As in most socialist republics, the residences and guesthouses of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (CC of PCR) were created by the party's internal administrations as unique architectural objects within the political representation circuit, benefiting from notable production during the years of modernist reconnection. Today, they embody a distinct chapter of the regime's architecture, challenging both the study of recent architectural history and their preservation, along with their place in the collective memory. The current contribution proposes a reevaluation of the CC of PCR's built legacy within the broader debate on dissonant heritage, considering the allegorical dimension arising from their past 'exogenous' nature. Questioning the factor of exogeneity, a radiography of the CC's residences and guesthouses' historical substance reveals a spectrum of nuances. On one hand, this can be interpreted through dichotomous values establishing a causal relationship between their architectural quality and the political context: as luxury objects, they diverge from ideological foundations and functionalist architecture, yet, as objects of representation, they stem from the core of political activity. Although designed at the margins of urban planning projects and outside state standards, they aligned somewhat with national architectural discourse during the relative liberalization of the 1960s.

On the other hand, the perspective of exogeneity provides a premise for expanding the discussion beyond the dissonant implications of socialist facture. The dissonance issue may be legible in the post-Revolution management of communist elites' heritage, varying between the Region and the Capital, whether through maintaining them in the protocol circuit, museification, or interventions enabled by their privatisation. However, their inherent secrecy, combined with architectural novelty and historical identity, supports a more allegorical understanding of this heritage, even within local communities.

Thus, these two attitudes will constitute the focus of the present study, which, by addressing the elusive aspects of socialist-era architecture, aims to add a new dimension to the research framework for reconciling with recent heritage.

Introduction. The issue of the architectural heritage of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (CC of the PCR) pertains to the relationship between politics and architecture in a specific context, described by Ana Maria Zahariade as "*occult architecture*". This term en-

compasses its atypical nature and its allegorical reinterpretation after 1990, despite its socialist facture. The historical perspective is framed by three features: the absence of a design brief, "*financial nonchalance*" in project investments, and exclusion from architectural publications [1]. Addressing these aspects highlights the need to refine interpretive frameworks, focusing on deconstructing the exogenous nature of CC objectives and identifying points of alignment emerging in the preceding decade.

The ambivalent status of luxury and representational objects highlights a correlation between socio-political hierarchy and the enclosed creative environment shaped by the Soviet model. Despite claims of equality and anti-imperialist rhetoric, party residences represented objects of privilege, reflecting the Leninist belief that "*state-provided housing was not a concern for leadership*" [2]. As the political apparatus consolidated under Stalin, "*special*" residences became creations of the CPSU's Department of Internal Affairs. Following this model, the PMR's Central Committee defined its housing stock largely through requisitions and nationalizations, establishing its Party Household Construction Sector in 1950. Socio-residential enclaves were created in neighborhoods once occupied by the bourgeoisie, such as Jianu and Dorobanți in Bucharest. Additionally, legal outlets were created in 1952 allowing excedentary residential space for dignitaries [3]. The special status was later introduced under the 1958 authorization of construction laws, placing the Political Bureau's projects directly under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, bypassing local councils [4].

On the other hand, the "*occult project*" of the 1960s preceded its convergence with state architecture during the Black Sea Coast's early systematization phase, coinciding with the revival of the modernist direction. Testing marginality within mass-tourism urban planning and resorts, villa commissions in Mangalia and Eforie Nord marked the beginning of long-term collaborations between the Party Household Administration and ISCAS architects in 1956. These collaborations facilitated the assimilation of Central Committee residential and guesthouse projects into the emerging architectural direction. Far from a purely domestic domain (guesthouse programmatic nuances will be detailed later), CC of PMR's project emerged amid a volatile architectural landscape, between housing standardization studies and unique designs.

These factors corroborate the 1960s closed creative phase under Dej and Ceaușescu. By 1965, distinctions emerged between the architectural heritage of the central apparatus—focused in Bucharest and along the Black Sea Coast—and regional counterparts. These historical aspects inform part of the allegorical framework for interpreting the relationship between architectural discourse and historical events.

The occult project of the "Center" between representativeness and duplicity. The creation of accommodation spaces became significant after the PMR Central Committee's political repositioning in 1958, following the Soviet troops' withdrawal from the RPR. This period marked a phase of cohesion for the political group and reinforced loyalty to Gheorghiu-Dej [5]. Beyond the PMR's 3rd Congress in 1960, which strengthened economic planning as a means of projecting the Party's commitment to national interests, Gheorghiu-Dej assumed a dual role

as leader of both the Party and the State in 1961. These events reinforced the national leadership in the early stages of a gradual break with the USSR, that described a new phase in foreign policy. Therefore, housing in the Capital, the power center, served a dual purpose: material reward emphasized by the end of the practice of living in a superior's house after 1957 [6], and representation through diplomatic activities in the tense external context. Between 1962-1964, Dej commissioned villas for Political Bureau members within Jianu quarter and proximity of the Capital, such as Snagov, exempt from urban planning resolutions. Following the Seaside episode, Cezar Lăzărescu became 'Dej's trusted man' [7], and, along with other ISCAS architects, was chosen to collaborate with the Household. Thus, the approaches reflect a continuation of the modernist experiment on a smaller scale in two ways: one derived from space-structure, synthesizing the coastal exercise into villas in secluded areas like the Floreasca Peninsula, and another with 'opaque approaches,' characterized by a more austere language and adaptable partitioning, primarily applied to villas on major streets (Kalinin intersection - Leonte Răutu, Primăverii 17 - Emil Bodnăraș, Primăverii 48-Ion Gheorghe-Maurer).

Despite their cyclical role within the party-state apparatus, the residential projects facilitated direct collaboration with future users, restoring the "fundamental quality" of individual design practice lost after the institutionalization of the profession. In contrast, the standardized state projects focused on sociological considerations aimed at social homogenization [8], further compounded by the rationalization of living spaces (under 7 sqm between 1962-1965) [9]. Significant financial resources were allocated to these projects, with materials sourced from beyond the Iron Curtain for the First Secretary's residences. Custom design solutions, such as a glass stair made by Saint Gobain for one of the Lac villas (1962, arch. Cezar Lăzărescu, arch. Anca Borgovan) [10], were employed. This trend reached its apex in projects like the P-50 villa (1964-1965, architects Aron Solari Grimberg, Robert Voll, engineers Luigi Corra, Mircea Solomon), designed for Nicolae Ceaușescu during the leadership transition. Breaking from the era's architectural style, classical elements were applied to a functionalist base design, distinguishing it from elite villas through its unprecedented costs, further enhanced by the level of detail.

After 1965, under the same premises of promoting political loyalty to new leadership and distancing from the old guard, Ceaușescu's secretariat maintained material rewards and control through proximity. The capital's enclave barrier was reinforced by restricting access to the later named Primăverii district, where new villas were built for the political elite on streets like Aviatorilor (arch. Constantin Rulea, Sebastian Moraru, late 1960s), Pictor Negulici, and Moliere [11]. Meanwhile, projects initiated outside the capital suggest a shift of interest toward expanding the space for political representation. Early plans for seashore resorts north of Mangalia, outlined in H.C.M. no. 1280 (1966), were launched under the dual management of the Ministry of Construction (ISCAS) and the Party's Household, leading to the first elite resort complex in Neptun. Previous examples of vacation villas had been purposed peripheral to resort plans, but the new complex aligned with Khrushchev's Soviet 'resort diplomacy' model in Crimea, later continued by Brezhnev [12]. Both in the capital and

on the coast, the modernist language of the villas was replaced by larger forms, employing brutalist approaches or softened by vernacular elements [13]. Cantilever beams, concrete gargoyles, wooden shutters and terrace details were notable. However, the first stage of Ceaușescu's "apparatus residences" coincided with a general liberalization phase, particularly after Decree 713 (July 21, 1967), which permitted private housing construction. In this context, regional DSAPCs tentatively explored regional expressions, especially in standard housing projects [14].

The emancipation of the guesthouse project in the Region. The quality of materials, spatial dimensions, and organization preserved the excesses characteristic of their purpose, even compared to contemporary examples outside the Eastern bloc (e.g., the FRG chancellor's villa in Bonn, arch. Sep Ruf, 1968). Adapted to the user's status, these features included filtered access, a hierarchy of living, work, and night areas, and expansive service zones. Overemphasis on layouts included private bathrooms, apartments, and integrated leisure spaces. This functional logic and expressivity qualified several residences of the old political guard, such as the Lac villas or the Kalinin villa, for conversion into guesthouses. This reallocation, later managed by the Representation Sector, extended to some villas conceived in the late 1960s [15].

This adaptability became evident in the early 1960s, as noted by Aron Solari Grimberg: "It was neither a dormitory nor a hotel but a construction with a basement, ground floor, and upper floor, featuring small apartments above and service rooms below. The building was intended for Communist Party activists or affiliated organizations, supporting the 'neo-bourgeois-landlord' administrative apparatus at the top" [16].

The creation of guesthouses became particularly prominent regionally, reflecting Ceaușescu's political strategy emphasizing "collective leadership." Before the PCR's 9th Congress in June 1965, this approach was bolstered by the General Secretary's visits to the major provincial cities. Following this episode, the Central Committee authorized, starting in 1966, Regional Households to commission guesthouse projects in the regional main cities. For the design CRs subcontracted DSAPCs. Projects for the Regional Councils (CR) provided architects with opportunities to explore personal architectural-plastic interpretations within the emerging framework of "national specificity." In this early phase, Nicolae Porumbescu's guest house in Suceava exemplifies these explorations, experimenting with wood, stone, and concrete within a distinctive formal vocabulary, reflecting the architect's engagement with the "stylistic matrix" of northern Romani through a brutalist lens. Yet Porumbescu critiqued the "garishness" of vulgar interpretations of national art [17]. Although detailing often served as a platform for individuality, certain projects, such as Liviu Niculiu's design for CR Bacău (1967), became grounds for assessing structural expressivity. The elevated volume housing day spaces and private apartments engaged a mix of V-shaped pillars and oversized concrete beams - a recognizable vocabulary in unique public projects - with massive wooden joists. Despite its experimental nature, the internal technical committee praised the design for its "originality in construction aesthetics, excellent functionality, and cost-effective engineering solutions" [18]. Despite the inconsistency of plastic experimentation with the new regionalist

orientation, the use of interior elements, such as integrated artworks and wood, remained constant, as seen in the Japanese garden and the atrium of the Timișoara guest house (1968, arch. Aurel Sârbu).

While often used by regional leadership, these guesthouses primarily served representational purposes. On a smaller scale than those in the capital, they played a significant informal role in historical events, whether international, such as Tito's 1969 visit to Timișoara, or internal, like Ceaușescu and the Political Bureau's use of the Suceava guest house.

Implications of inheritance. Although the socialist framework often directs discussions towards the regime's trauma and its heritage's value in a democratic context, several perspectives shift focus to the perception of these sites' occult dimensions post-1989. This perception often links the dilution of socialist characteristics through architectural insolite with a historical disconnection between the masses and the political apparatus. This is now overlaid by a fascination with the remnants of Romanian socialist effigies and the gravitas of historical events and is further nuanced by questions of compatibility, particularly evident in the management of these properties post-1990. Following the 1989 Revolution, the National Salvation Front transferred the properties of the CC of PCR to "state and Romanian people" ownership [19]. Government Decision (H.G.) no. 115/1990 divided guesthouses and villas into two categories: those retained by central state authorities or repurposed for diplomatic functions and those transferred to local administration [20].

Subsequent decisions, such as HG no. 567/1993 and HG no. 940/1996, placed residences formerly allocated to PMR/PCR Secretaries and the Political Bureau under the management of the Autonomous Administration of State Protocol Patrimony (RA-APPS), assigning them to high-ranking. Globally, official residences are an integral part of the political apparatus's convention, even when located in exclusive protocol zones, often maintaining a degree of public visibility. In contrast, those tied to the Central Committee apparatus remain largely conceptual in the public imagination, despite punctual public openings (villa Dante in 2012). This includes residences situated in the Floreasca or secluded areas like the vanished Scroviștea Palace site and Snagov. While these properties serve representational purposes during historically significant events (e.g. Emmanuel Macron's 2017 visit to Vila Lac 3), modernization intentions are ambiguously reported in the media. However, the current status guarantees the allocation of substantial resources for their upkeep. This is occasionally evident in minor external updates, such as fenestration, as observed in properties on Turgheniev Street.

However, interventions under RA-APPS often highlight controversies that transform the mythical character of urban enclaves into reflections of post-communist elites. A recent example is the 2024 modernization and repartitioning of Aviatorilor 86. Functional continuity occasionally favors architectural preservation, as seen in post-1990 embassy conversions, such as villas at Moliere 13 or the Kuwait ambassador's residence at Aviatorilor 100 (formerly allocated to Iosif Banc and János Fazekas). By contrast, minimal domestic features have been removed, like Emil Bodnăraș's former residence, now a diplomatic institute. Unlike other

villas in proximity designed in the same period displaying slight finishes' degradation, Aviatorilor 100's alterations include façade-mounted antennas and temporary structures, like guard booths, that disrupt its urban presence, despite villas typically integrating such facilities.

Appropriations and new significances. The inheritance of functions often supports marginality and mythologization through state security, while their alienation complicates the reception of this heritage in collective memory. On one hand, museification amplifies the allegorical weight linked to the former leadership in the capital, as a focal point of political avatars of modern Romanian statehood. The 2015 public opening of Ceaușescu's villa on Bulevardul Primăverii 50 can be seen as a formal rejection by the post-revolutionary state. One factor is the villa's historical status as an extension of the dictator's portrait, objectified through cultural activities on totalitarianism [21]. In other countries, similar occurrences took place outside capitals, like Stalin's villa in Abkhazia or Tito's Villa Brijuni, part of local cultural heritage. Beyond reevaluating the ideological burden or trauma, the villa remains a symbol of system duplicity in collective memory, "unmasked" after 1990, when some nomenclature members left and villas were opened to the public, yet perpetuating the myth of communist elite opulence.

At a regional level, the value of local heritage is questioned by stochasticity. Although HG no. 115/1990 placed guesthouses under local council administration (Annex 3), some were privatized. Among those preserved, some were integrated into the cultural circuit, becoming local landmarks, such as the Bacău guesthouse, a cultural center since 1990. Except for the degradation of wooden elements and stone cladding and some AC systems installed on façades, the building's aspect was preserved, and most interior features, from coffered ceilings to presidential apartment doors, remain original. The only significant intervention was converting the bowling alley into an art gallery, with the linoleum floor replaced by ceramic tiles. Privatization raises concerns about arbitrary interventions and destruction, such as the 2019 demolition of the Iași villa for a private investment project [22]. In many cases, commodification has led to properties being maintained within touristic circuit, like the Suceava villa, where both architectural features and interiors were preserved. This issue has been noted in recent positive governmental heritage management examples from former socialist states, like the 2016 restoration of the K-2 dacha in Saint Petersburg (arch. Alexander Zhuk, 1971), following a series of interventions [23]. The local value, however, is increasingly undermined, as seen in Timișoara, where a villa adjacent to the central park and C.D. Loga Street became a ruin after finishes were stripped in 2007 for a rehabilitation and extension project that was never executed.

Conclusions. Despite being framed within the unwritten, exogenous architecture of state projects, the CC of the PCR's villas and guesthouses represent a significant part of the historical architectural landscape. Their significance lies not only in their alignment with the polarized search for modernist directions and regionalist reorientation but also in the contrast and duality they establish within the political context, being products of a parallel environment to that of design institutes or even reflecting the specific considerations of the political function that led to their urban

marginality. What I refer to as an allegorical character is a cumulative history, partially unwritten, often carrying an oral quality that architecture aims to express. This emerges from my research process, which shifts what should be a study in architectural history into a multidimensional investigation, linking its origins to the political context and current conditions and ownership of this heritage.

Moreover, continuity demonstrates that most of this architecture is not meant to be trivialized, but rather maintains its symbolic value within the state's domain. This is further emphasized by the evolution of terminology and its significance, particularly reflected in the shift to the concept of "protocol residence". The term "protocol residence" was not used in Romania during the communist period. Instead, the PCR adopted the Soviet-derived phrase "special villas" (which later became "gosdacha" in the USSR). However, preservation in cases of commodification and privatization is not guaranteed, despite the acknowledgment of their local value. This issue places the CC heritage within a broader analysis of the regime's legacy and growing interest in the reevaluation of postwar architectural discourse.

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Figures.

- FIGURE 1 – Groundfloor plan of Lac 3 villa. Ileana Lăzărescu, Georgeta Gabrea, *Vise in piatra. In memoria prof. dr. arh. Cezar Lazarescu*, București: Capitel, 2003, p. 221.
- FIGURE 2 – Primăverii Palace – livingroom, 2022. Personal archive.
- FIGURE 3 – Villa on Moliere street, 2023. Personal archive.
- FIGURE 4 – Collage of details from the execution project, 1966. County Council of Suceava Archive.
- FIGURE 5 – Back courtyard arranged as an outdoor exhibition space at Bacău guesthouse, 2024. Personal archive.
- FIGURE 6 – Atrium of the guesthouse in Timișoara, 2023. Personal archive.

1.



1. garderobă;
2. hol;
3. cameră de zi;
4. sufragerie;
5. birou;
6. dormitor principal;
7. salon;
8. baie;
9. dressing;
10. dormitor+baie;
11. salon mic dejun;
12. birou;
13. hol acces;
14. hol primiri;
15. sufragerie,
16. bucatărie oficiu

2.



3.



4.



