

(NON)INNOVATION: THE ENGINE OF INNOVATION IN INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE/

Alexandra Marinescu - *Doctoral School of Architecture, "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urban Planning, 18-20 Academiei st., 010014, Bucharest, Romania*

alexandra.marinescu1994@gmail.com

Abstract. The article proposes a study on the concept of (non)innovation during the Ceaușescu era, particularly in the period of maximal ostracism of any form of freedom – the 1980s. In a manner that can be described as cynical, innovation was coordinated by a resistance group that manifested covertly. This concealed breath of innovation of the time has gradually become the intangible cultural heritage of our society.

The journey into the (non)innovation of the architectural field in Romania during 1980's becomes like a negotiation with history: a decade where absurdity became normal. The mirror image between the following binary opposites: construction-acceptance and secrecy-dreaming shows how they were combined in the cultural society of the time. On one hand, the construction of the most important Ceaușescu-era buildings (construction), together with the ostracization of the creative flow (acceptance) become the description of the cultural heritage in which Romanian society finds itself. On the other hand, the article brings into discussion a surprising contribution of resistance that lived in the cultural suburbs (secrecy) and that, through subtle manifestations and architecture competitions, emulated its creative flow (dreaming). Therefore, this period gave birth to a complex diodic space of cohabitation of a hidden intangible cultural heritage – innovation, infiltrated into a rigorous cadence of the built heritage – (non)innovation.

It can be asserted that the 1980s saw the true apotheosis of cultural resistance, whose echo emanates even today. Having learned to express itself through an artistic lexicon organized in successive and dense layers with subtle hidden messages, the cultural landscape will, after the Tf moment (the 1989 revolution), acquire introspective dimensions for instance palimpsest idea, by explorations of individual or collective traumas. Ways in which party-guided (non)innovations became the engine for generating hidden innovation will be examined. By highlighting these cause-effect binomial links, an innovative direction for understanding intangible cultural heritage is opened.

Introduction. The present article brings together the azimuths of hidden cultural resistance in architecture from a relatively recent period in Romania's history, specifically the 1980s. The stagnation across all levels of society, dictated by the rigid and harsh principles of a totalitarian regime, such as the Ceaușescu era, could not remain without a counteroffensive in the cultural domain.

To outline a synoptic map of the anecdotal social and cultural context within which the research is situated, the article will briefly evoke the main

changes that emerged during this temporal bracket. The ninth decade, as recounted in historical writings, is characterized by a period of maximal constraint on all forms of freedom, be it expression, thought, or movement. These constraints resulted from a systematic prior policy of instilling totalitarian communist principles. These years were marked by a dialect imposed by the ideology of the time, as well as by the redundancies and absurdities of political discourse, which manifested destructively in society, particularly within the cultural sphere. During this period, absurdity crystallized into normalcy.

The year 1980 encapsulates a series of events that led to the onset of the systematic destruction of architectural and urban heritage – through the promulgation of the Investment Law, the official launch of Bucharest's new civic center, and the simulacrum contest for the Victory of Socialism Boulevard. Up to that point, writings could still be found that discussed the poetic and symbolic functions of architecture. However, with the paradigm shift, the polyvalence of architecture was abandoned, replaced by exhaustive emphasis on officially sanctioned motifs. The censorship of architectural lyricism reached its peak during the 1980s.

Within this grim scenario, hope found its natural course. The party-driven stagnation became the engine for generating hidden innovations. Driven by an inner desire for escape, architects found their paths to salvation in cultural outskirts. This manifested, on the one hand, through theoretical writings with a profoundly poetic character and, on the other hand, through architecture competitions – spaces for showcasing innovative ideas – supplemented by the works of groups of architects who created a dream that refused to conform.

Innovation through free theoretical writings on the poetic discourse of architecture. The complexity of architectural discourse is reinforced by the "Movement of Ideas" column, inaugurated by Professor Mircea Lupu in 1981 in the *Arhitectura* magazine. The magazine of the Union of Architects of the Socialist Republic of Romania was the only officially accepted publication within the profession. This section aimed to analyze, in the form of elliptical and cryptic texts, the creative flows within the global architectural sphere. The texts, imbued with a profound manifesto-like character, authored by figures such as Dorin Ștefan and Mihai Opriș, embraced expressions of postmodernist movements emerging in the West.

The complexity of contextualism is explored here from every conceivable angle: on the one hand, through principles of juxtaposition, and on the other, through historicism expressed either via radical eclecticism or, conversely, through archetypal forms. Each author developed these ideas through their unique lens, with the discourse framed around the concept of the hybrid, which in essence represents the theoretical core of postmodernism—pluralism.

To begin, we reference Dorin Ștefan's article "Archetypal Openings" [1] published in issue 6/182 of the magazine. Here, the theme of archetypes represents a quest to break free from the dictatorial template of the rigid modernist functionalism imposed by the regime. He invokes a series of myths to support the creative process of architecture as a "meta-histor-

ic architectural motif”: the cosmogonic myth and Romanian spiritual tradition inspired by Mircea Eliade’s writings, the myth of the spherical androgyne and the primordial egg, exemplified by Boullée’s cenotaph, the myth of the sky column or cosmic tree expressed in Schinkel’s hunting lodge in Anonin. Beyond the idyllic portrayal of myths, these explorations are attempts to uncover architectural depths and cultural relationships, developed along historicist lines.

Mihai Opreș, in his article titled “A Model for the Evolution of Architectural Style” [2] offered a description of the evolution of architectural styles based on the writings of art historian Heinrich Wölfflin and Robert Venturi. He also proposed a definition of architecture derived from the Vitruvian qualities – firmitas, utilitas, and venustas – placing them on an equal qualitative level. Postmodern architecture was viewed strictly through the post-classical lens of modernism, as its natural progression.

The series of eight articles titled Contextualism, written by Dorin Ștefan, addresses the theme of context from various perspectives: from principles of juxtaposition to historicism expressed either through radical eclecticism or archetypal forms. In the article Contextualism II [3], postmodern architecture is seen merely as a label identifying a mannerism directed toward the meta-historic category. In other words, it recognizes that the past is an undeniable given, which cannot be eradicated and must, therefore, be revisited with deliberate intent, free of naivety. In the article Contextualism III, context is analyzed in terms of form, which supersedes any intervention strategy in situ. The relationship between the new form and the existing one must be established in such a way as to achieve harmony within the integrative unity.

Innovation through free theoretical writings on the architecture competitions. Another manifesto article, highly relevant for the study of creative flows, is the one dedicated to the competition for the Youth House [4]. In his description of the proposal published in Arhitectura magazine, Dorin Ștefan defined the fundamental aesthetic of architectural creation as the thought process itself, the unspoken space, the project per se, which governs the act of construction within the architectural matrix. Additionally, he aligned with American postmodernist principles by adopting the visions of Charles Jencks, Aldo Rossi, and Robert Venturi regarding the use of archetypal structures to enrich architectural discourse.

“Through the efforts so far, aiming at the integration of the archetype, we seek to reintroduce the connotative dimension and open functionalism towards an architecture of depth, in the hope of restoring the unity of architectural discourse. The attempt is to achieve, through the logic of contradiction and ambiguity, supported by high-tech quality, the contrapuntal harmony of the conjunctio oppositorum, blending scientific and poetic approaches for the benefit of architectural space.” [5]

The solution proposed spaces organized around an atrium and a spatial sequence of porticos as foundational elements, composed under technological principles, giving legitimacy to architectural exuberance through the precision of mathematics. By abstracting the concepts of the Unit of Measure (U_m) and the Unit of Ideas (U_i) into mathematical formulas, the author proposed a morphology of determining factors for the project, start-

ing from the archetype. Thus, the outcome was contextually anchored by interpolating with space and time, paradoxically evoking the resemblance between a prototypical project and one that vehemently opposed it.

$$O.A. = /U_m U_i/ [6] (1)$$

where:

O.A. – architectural object

U_i – Unit of Measure

U_i – Unit of Ideas

The process of design at to moment is:

$$O.A._{(to)} = U_i \beta, \Delta, t \sum U_m(\alpha, x, y, z) (2)$$

where:

β – socio-cultural nature

Δ – contextual determinants

t – time

α – archetypal support

x,y,z – spatial coordinates

The solution brings together key elements – porticos, an inner courtyard, basilical sections, and a cascading section for the accommodation area – organized around the program of a youth cultural center, a program specific to the social and political context of the time. As an attempt to manifest opposition to postmodernism, the proposal represents a return to an archetypal historicism, stripped of any postmodernist artifice.

The theoretical discourse – following a logic of contradiction and ambiguity, supported by high-tech quality – functions as a subtle underpinning of the project. However, while it explores the polyvalence characteristic of postmodernism, the approach retains a rational spirit inspired by modernism, oriented toward the pursuit of scientific legitimacy. FIGURE 1.

Innovation through architectural competitions as a form of free expression. The second avenue where architects found their much-desired freedom of expression was through participation in architectural competitions – projects that were free from constraints and envisioned ideas in profound opposition to the reflection of the society of their time.

Architectural competitions approached theoretical discourse through a different medium – drawing – exploring the metaphorical dimensions of architecture. In other words, a competition project recalibrates its utopian idea during its early stages, presenting it as a critique of a given theme, beyond the realm of construction.

Of notable importance during the period studied were the architectural

competitions organized by the Japanese magazine *Japan Architect*, to which many Romanian architects enthusiastically aspired. In the 1981 Central Glass International Architectural Design Competition – a prestigious contest still held today – a team of Romanian architects comprising Alexandru Colpacci, Ioan Andreeescu, Vlad Gaivoronschi, Adrian Ionașiu, and Claudiu Panaitescu won second prize. Their proposal, titled *Meditation as a Journey into the Labyrinth*, explored the theme of individual destiny: a traveler’s journey, driven by the desire for self-transcendence. The labyrinth metaphor here symbolizes life and the illusion of individual centrality, with scenes representing stages of existence—from youth to death—unfolding in different zones of the labyrinth. The work employed a graphic and compositional style akin to a comic strip, with frames arranged clockwise in a circular format. Each frame illustrated a stage of knowledge, as articulated in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. These frames referenced compositions from renowned paintings, such as Velázquez’s *Las Meninas*, all revolving around the central labyrinth as a symbolic metaphor, with Venice as an example of a city-labyrinth. Architecture assumed a secondary role in this project, serving as a medium to solidify the concept of destiny. FIGURE 2.

Another competition of note was launched in 1979 by Jean Nouvel for the repositioning of Victor Baltard’s *Les Halles* in Paris. Organized by the magazine *Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, the competition saw the participation of several groups of Romanian architects. The proposals were characterized, on one hand, by a critical regionalism based on structuralist exercises involving macrostructures and, on the other hand, by postmodernist influences – ranging from the cult of megastructures to the revitalization of architectural drawing as both purpose and representation. Romanian architects Viorel Simion, Dorin Ștefan, and Dinu Patriciu participated in this competition through Romconsult – a consultancy organization established in 1973 to facilitate international consultancy projects and promote Romanian construction exports. Their project aimed to revitalize architectural drawing as both a purpose and a representational tool, inspired by the urban theories of Leon and Rob Krier, with a theoretical foundation rooted in drawings akin to Giovanni Battista Nolli’s maps. FIGURE 3.

Another award-winning project in a competition organized by *Architectural Design (AD)* magazine was the London Docklands Museum, designed in 1986 by Dan Bolomey and Matei Lykiardopol [7]. The proposed architecture embraced a high-tech style, characterized by slender metallic elements supported by cables and glass enclosures. This form of contextualism drew inspiration from the technological aesthetics of utilitarian port structures, particularly the complex mechanisms designed for lifting and moving heavy loads, such as cranes. The proposal was presented in a playful and sketch-like manner, incorporating a zeppelin displaying the museum’s name from above and various signage elements. The graphic representations also included docked sailing ships juxtaposed with the project, suggesting a conceptual borrowing for the architectural solution. The atmosphere and visual quality of the representations evoked unbuilt projects such as Cedric Price’s *Fun Palace* (1961), which later influenced the iconic design of the Centre Pompidou in Paris (1977). FIGURE 4.

At the World Forum of Young Architects – Interarch ‘87 in Sofia, the project

At the Same Time, in the Same Place by Florin Biciușcă received third prize in the competition-exhibition. The project, focused on the theme *The New Concept of Urban Unit*, was a study of cities and housing in the post-industrial era. It proposed the development of single-family housing capable of accommodating between one and nine users through a modular system of spatial organization, arranged on no more than two levels. The volumetric and spatial configuration of the modules reflected influences from vernacular architecture, characterized by organic and asymmetric development based on successive additions. The exterior composition integrated various gabled roof typologies, adapted to the size of families. Complementing the interior spaces, the project introduced intermediate elements, such as porticos that combined covered areas on the ground floor with loggias on the upper level. Although founded on principles of modularity and seriality, the project aimed to confer each module a distinct identity and architectural recognizability.

The same theme of modularity extended to urban planning. The key concept of the proposed assemblies was functional mixing, offered as an alternative to the functional zoning of cities characteristic of the Industrial Revolution. The project took inspiration from medieval cities, where most human activities occurred in a single space—the home. On a regular grid, the project proposed spaces necessary for human existence, including workspaces, residences, parking, and circulation, coexisting within the same organized modular framework [8]. FIGURE 5.

Conclusion. In the 1980s, a hidden dynamism reached its peak, leaving an impact that continues to resonate today. The dichotomy between dictatorship and cultural resistance gave rise to a complex cultural landscape, where artistic expression was layered with hidden meanings and subtle messages. This fusion of creativity and opposition manifested in various forms, from cryptic writings to metaphorical architectural projects. As a response to the oppressive regime, these expressions wove together an artistic lexicon structured in successive layers, containing profound introspective dimensions. After the 1989 revolution, these dynamics took on a new perspective, embodying a palimpsest of cultural evolution that continues to shape Romania’s artistic narrative.

The examples cited above are not exhaustive; they represent only a small fraction of the synoptic map of architects’ attempts to escape the constraints of the Ceaușescu regime. These sparks within the gray monotony gave birth to new depths in architectural discourse. In other words, the (non)innovation directed by the party became the driving force behind hidden innovations. By shedding light on these binary cause-effect connections, we open a novel perspective for understanding the intangible cultural heritage.

References.

1. D. Ștefan, “Deschideri arhetipale”, in *Arhitectura*, no. 6, edited by C. Jugurică et al. (*Arhitectura*, Bucharest, 1982), pp. 79–90.
2. M. Opriș, “Un model de evoluție a stilului arhitectural”, in *Arhitectura*, no. 3, edited by C. Jugurică et al. (*Arhitectura*, Bucharest, 1983), pp. 76.
3. D. Ștefan, “Contextualism II”, in *Arhitectura*, no. 3, edited by C. Jugurică et al. (*Arhitectura*, Bucharest, 1985), pp. 71.
4. “Concurs pentru Casa de Cultură a Tineretului”, *Architectural Competition*, in

Arhitectura, no. 6 (1981), pp. 65-76.

5. "Concurs pentru Casa de Cultură a Tineretului", Architectural Competition, in Arhitectura, no. 6 (1981), pp. 69.

6. D. Ștefan, My modernism (Autodenuț) (Pleiada, Bucharest, 2016), ISBN: 606-748-107-5, pp. 85.

7. "Proiect românesc premiat la concursul internațional Muzeul Docurilor din Londra", Architectural Competition, in Arhitectura, no. 2 (1987), pp. 63-69.

8. F. Biciușcă, "Participări încununate cu succes la confruntări internaționale. Posibilități, egale și depline, de afirmare a tinerelor talente", in Arhitectura, no. 2, edited by C. Jugurică et al. (Arhitectura, Bucharest, 1987), pp. 70-71.

Figures.

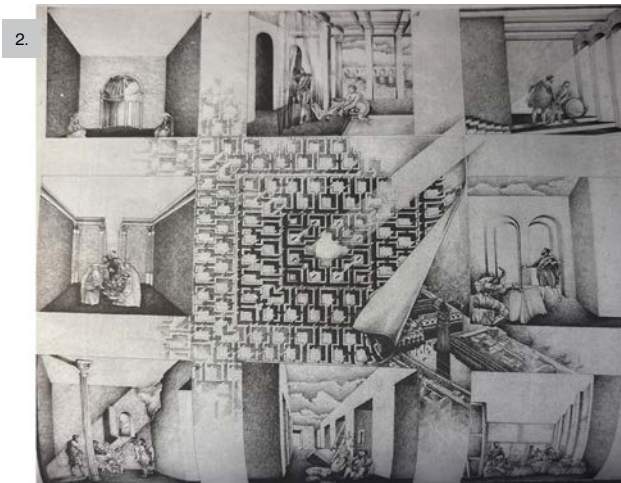
FIGURE 1 – Standardized community center project. Axonometry, facade, section.

FIGURE 2 – Central Glass competition poster, pencil drawing, 1981.

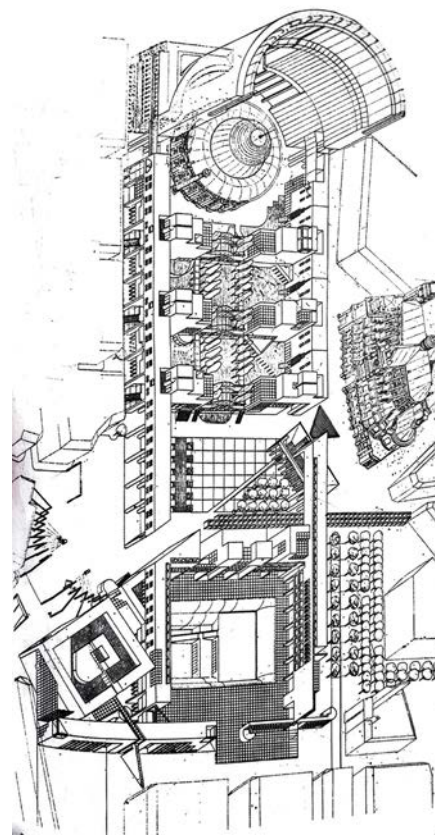
FIGURE 3 – The layout of the Paris Halls. Romconsult. Axonometric drawing.

FIGURE 4 – Museum of the Docklands in London, competition organized by Architectural Review magazine 1986, axonometric drawing.

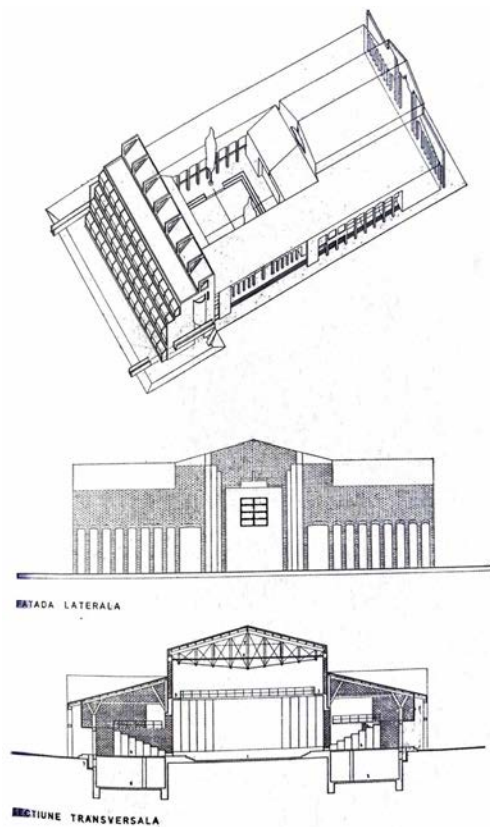
FIGURE 5 – Evolutionary housing, Florin Biciușcă, Interach' 85 competition. (axonometries, perspectives and module variants).



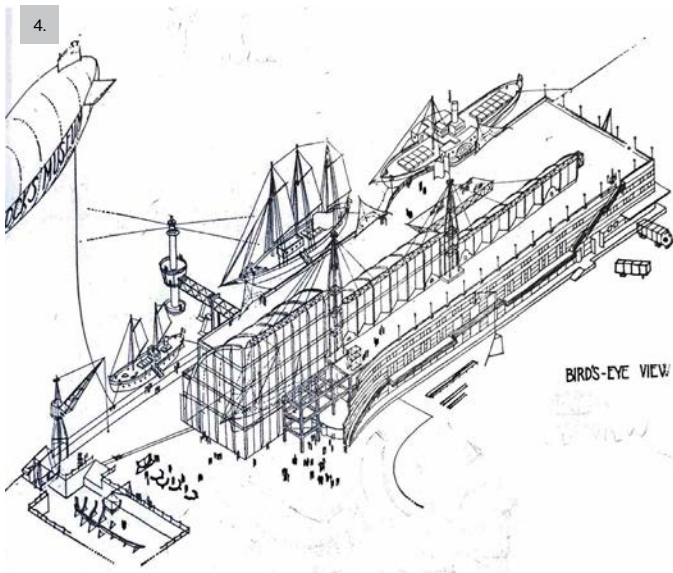
3.



1.



4.



5.

