Hungarian Folk Traditions that Displaced Modernism:
Farmhouse Roofs, Chair Backs, and Grave
Markers as “Pure Sources”

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International architectural modernism has come under increasing attack because of its global
anonymity. In contemporary Hungary this has taken the form of a movement its proponents
call Organic, or Living Architecture. There were many influences on the development of the
movement, including the freedom inspired by American architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright
and Bruce Goff. But, in Russian-occupied Communist Hungary, the 1973 manifesto “Only
From Pure Sources” was perhaps most important in raising the issue of loss of architectural
heritage and the need for “creating harmony in new works, with the old, with the region, with
nature, with man, and with human settlement.” Farmhouse roofs, chair backs, and grave
markers were elements of traditional Hungarian folk culture that were closely studied by the
authors of this controversial manifesto. This article examines how the rediscovery of such
sources strongly influenced the invention of a native architectural alternative to modernism in
Hungary. Before the exit of the last Russian soldier from the country in 1991 this alternative
had already led to the construction of hundreds of new, tradition-based buildings.

As we approach the end of the second millennium, our recent past as well as our more
distant patrimony are coming under increasing scrutiny. In the professional practice of
architecture, the international industrial style known as the Modern Movement, or modernism,
is being attacked globally for its universality, its lack of local roots or meaning, and
thus its anonymity. In parallel, a critical review of alternative and less universal cultural
streams from earlier in the twentieth century is revealing other paths: directions that were
displaced, ideas that were blocked by the aesthetic and social preferences associated with economic industrialism. This article takes up one such instance of cultural rediscovery, that of the native peasant design traditions of Hungary which have served as one of the sources for that country's new Organic, or Living Architecture.

HUNGARY AND THE PéCS GROUP

Hungarians today call their country “Magyarország” after the Magyars, believed to be the most prominent equestrian tribe from the east who settled in the Carpathian basin during the ninth century. The Hungarian tribes, including the Magyars, were unrelated in origin or tongue to any other race in central Europe, but, under a Christian monarchy from 1001 to the twentieth century, they acted as a defensive bastion for Western Europe in the face of eastern invaders. For a thousand years Hungary, the land of the Hungarians, was a polyglot, ethnically tolerant territory, also occupied by smaller numbers of other peoples. Under the last Hapsburg emperor before World War I, the multicultural nature of the country was nowhere more evident in the large Hungarian bank notes which were lettered in eleven languages: Magyar, German, Czech, Slovak, Polish, Romanian, Ruthenian, Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian and Italian.

Unfortunately, reform efforts within Hungary before World War I failed to establish either a genuine political democracy or social equality during a period of increasing tension and anxiety. The enormous toll of suffering and loss from this war was then compounded by the political and social unraveling of 1918. When the Peace Treaty for Hungary was finally signed on June 4, 1920, the ceremony took place not in the grand Hall of Mirrors of the Palace of Versailles but in the modest Trianon. Among its outcomes for the country was the loss of two-thirds of its prewar territory and 59 percent of its population. As part of “the Balkan solution” for central and eastern Europe, more than five million Hungarians were divided among Czechoslovakia, Romania, and other surrounding countries. Particularly distressful to Hungarians was the loss of their most ancient settlements and 1.5 million of their prewar population in Transylvania to Romania. In general, prewar heterogeneous Hungary was dismembered after the war, leaving only those parts where Magyars were in the majority. For the first time, to be “Hungarian” became synonymous with “Magyar” (FIG.1).

Almost immediately, this ethnically simplified country was plunged into a financial and psychological depression, and it was not until the 1930s that modernization and growth began again. During the 1930s national romanticism faded in architecture. But architects still used native examples of village vernacular to fight the sterility of internationalism. The “Village Research Movement” increased the visual appreciation of rural village and folk culture at the same time it recognized the political, economic and hygienic backwardness of peasant life. Like the musical composers Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, architects of the time “looked not only for architectural forms, but also for intellectual values and cultural connections to use in their works.”

With World War II, the political and military mishaps of Hungary in a European War again ultimately proved disastrous and devastating. Physical destruction and lack of capital for rebuilding added to the political dilemma after the war. But by 1951 fear of the oppressive political dictatorship under Rákosi had quieted debate in all fields, including architecture. The direction of Hungarian architecture was spelled out in the September/October 1951 issue of Építész-Epítész (Designer/Architect): “Our cultural future will depend on how our writers and artists will relate to the socialist culture of the Soviet Union. How do we want to learn from it?” At the 1952 Congress of Hungarian Architects designers were told to “give up the imperialist, bourgeois architectural theories,” with their “cosmopolitan and antihuman” content, and to “learn from the exemplary architecture of the Soviet Union.” From a practical point of view, this ultimately meant a mobilization through the 1960s toward mass production of worker housing. An anonymous, industrialized system similar to that employed in many other European countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain quickly established minimum modern standards of accommodation and amenity. And the heavy-handed Russian prefabrication method of panel construction was imported, in spite of the existence of much more technically refined and architecturally interesting systems invented and demonstrated by Hungarian architects and engineers in the 1940s. The reaction, at first unvoiced, was nevertheless immediate and continuous: this soul-less panel construction was not architecture; but also, being Russian,
was clearly not Hungarian.

Frustration about the rigor of such socialization programs affected all aspects of life. In 1951 the targets of the Hungarian First Five Year Plan were increased by 60 percent. But the demands of these economic goals and the exploitation of the population to achieve them were compounded by politically totalitarian techniques and the suppression of religious and intellectual freedom. Eventually, the unrest that exploded as the October 1956 Hungarian Uprising was ruthlessly put down by the Russian army. "We are cut and fallen like wheat in a reaper," broadcast a student, vainly pleading for intervention from the West.

After 1956 the country seemed to represent a monstrous lie, a nightmare. Nevertheless, János Kádár, the Soviet-backed leader, very slowly and hesitantly, but by absolute necessity, led the country toward a more open society, however restricted. In hindsight, the 1956 Hungarian Uprising anticipated the dramatic collapse of the USSR’s monolithic grip on half of Europe and the political transformations of 1989. The departure of the last Russian soldier from Hungary on June 30, 1991 marked the end of a unique era, one that is surprisingly already remembered with a certain nostalgia.

During the years of Soviet domination, resistance to the facelessness of the Kádár version of Hungarian life demanded the preservation of human dignity and the enhancement of identity. It also required a creative vision of another kind of Hungary. For a handful of architectural students who had been in attendance at universities during and just after the 1956 Uprising, it was the very ruthlessness and anonymity of the emerging built environment that became the challenge. Thus a new architecture was invented in Communist Hungary in the darkest years of the cultural occupation, the 1960s and 1970s (FIG. 2).

During this period, fresh graduates were typically placed in large state design offices, it being these offices' prerogative, in the absence of private architectural practices, to grant recognition to young designers as registered architects. Thus, after they had received their degrees in 1968 from the only architectural program in the country, the Technical University at Budapest, Tibor Jankovics and István Kistelegdi joined Baranyaterv, the design office for Baranya County in Pécs. Jankovics and Kistelegdi were fortunate to be placed in a new studio explicitly set up to bring young blood and fresh ideas into the practice. Later, several of their classmates also joined what became known as the Young Studio. And when the need was expressed for a more unified approach to design, the group was further able to convince their superiors to hire their former university instructor György Csete to come to Pécs to head the Young Studio.

Within a large bureaucratic state organization, such moves represented a remarkable continuation of a belief in progress and renewal, at a time when change was unwanted and new ideas were considered dangerous. Indeed, the practice of a more adventurous modern architecture by the regional state design offices in Pécs continued throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, as evidenced by the many interesting local buildings.

Together with their projects, the most critical activity of the Young Studio in Pécs (now known as the Pécs Group) was their manifesto and exhibition “Only From Pure Sources.” The group’s pivotal public national debut in 1973 was presented in Budapest, the capital, with the help of Eva Molnár, an art historian. It took the form of a series of lectures and a graphic exhibition staged in the “Nest,” the old actors and artists club, Fészek, from the turn of the century. At this event, the group was introduced, via tape recording, by the architect Károly Kós, then 90 years old. They presented their work in three parts: February 20, “Our Folk Heritage and Architecture”; February

![FIGURE 2. Hungary and its neighbors, with the locations of major sites of organic architecture from 1973 to 1991.](image-url)
27, “Only from Pure Sources”; and March 6, “Our Future in Architecture.” The content was summarized in a document dated “19730301.” Authorship was equally credited to Gyorgy Csete, Ildiko Csete, Blazsek Gyongyver, Laszlo Deak, Tibor Jankovics, Istvan Kistelegdi, and Péter Oltai.

**ONLY FROM PURE SOURCES**

The Pécs Group’s exhibition and published manifesto raised the question of anonymity and lost identity in the built environment of Communist Hungary:

*Are we speaking our mother tongue in architecture? Are we creating harmony in our new works with the old, with the region, with nature, with man, and with human settlement? … Can one create an architectural synthesis of architectural experiments based on foreign principles and assumptions which are alien to native art? Is there a filter that can separate the useful from the many alien influences?*

The group identified two great heroes of Hungarian national culture: the architect Károly Kós (1883-1977), and the composer Bela Bartók (1881-1945). Both had emerged at the turn of the century as champions of folk culture, and both were associated with Transylvania. Bartók was born at Nagyszentmiklós, now Sinnicolau Mare, Romania. He first became aware of genuine peasant music at the age of 24, and from then on his career took the form of a dialogue between careful documentation of folk music and creative compositions inspired and often informed by these studies. As one of the world masters of musical composition at the time, he has also been honored for collecting and publishing definitive versions of Hungarian, Romanian and Slovak folk music.

In their manifesto, the Pécs Group quoted Bartók on the many ways folk music could be manifest in more elaborate contemporary and concert music. It then went on to quote the third and final verse from Bartók’s “Cantata Profana: The Nine Enchanted Stags,” finished in 1930. This work, based on a Romanian pagan legend, synthesized the composer’s love of the people, his nostalgia for village life, and his pantheism:

*Once there was a grand old dad.  
And he had nine beautiful sons.  
He did not teach them any trade,  
Only to walk the woods and hunt the beasts.  
And they hunted and hunted,  
until they became deer,  
there in the forest.  
Their antlers would not fit through the door posts.  
They could only run through the open valleys.*

The last line, which was also translated “Only from pure sources,” gave the title to the Pécs Group’s exhibition and manifesto. The manifesto asked: “How could our architectural heritage perish with its massive physical materiality, while our musical heritage thrives?” On its concluding page the group made the following proposals:

*In the beginning of this century, the folk art movement was not universally successful. Yet the writings and methods of Károly Kós in 1911 and Bela Bartók in 1912 are still ahead of us and still point out unfinished tasks. It is important that we assimilate every human and cultural value useful to us which is available from humanity. At the same time it is important that we get to know the treasure of our folk heritage, that we further develop it and retain it into posterity. In folk architecture the human environment, the region, mass, space, and creation are the instinctive and conscious work of centuries leading to general laws and results. The best examples of folk art manifest themselves in works of wise judgment, and in the optimum definition of needs, that inform the entire subject of creation. We must continually create harmony between man and nature and its creations; when we get acquainted with the new dimensions of space and time; when we live through ideological and societal changes; and when technology offers infinite choices. We search for the answers with our work and with our experiments. Anyone can find answers: Anyone who searches, anyone who works experimentally.*

Within the dilemma of erasure of memory in the built environment of the time, what lessons could be drawn from such a view? The group proposed starting with the ground, with the earth. And in the exhibition and its manifesto, they demonstrated the intimate evolution of architectural and material culture from the substance and spirit of native soil to progressive modern design. They envisioned this stream as at once up-to-date, using new technology and dealing with high-rise buildings, but also different from the prevalent international modernism.

**FARMHOUSE ROOFS**

As elsewhere, village life and rural traditional dwellings in Hungary represent the continuity of the most conservative cultural values. At the beginning of the twentieth century the
most conservative Hungarian architectural group, “The New Youth” or “The Young Ones,” under the influence of Ede Wigand Thoroczkay, sought a new national style that would synthesize the latest technology with traditional folk themes. Their most talented practitioner, Karoly Kós, wrote that “The basis for our constructive art is the Middle Ages and the basis for our national art is folk art.” After 1920, when Kós chose to live in his native Transylvania, now part of Romania, he continued to promote a form of idealism based on the traditional.

Thus his 1934 book on traditional Transylvanian culture, Erdely, which included 60 wood-block prints, opened with the image of a mid-nineteenth-century farmhouse (FIG.3). The image presented a local version of what was an almost ubiquitous European type.

In their manifesto “Only From Pure Sources” a half-century later, the Pécs Group used a short quote from Kós on the opening page.

I have learned everywhere that in every great nation the father’s work is continued by his descendants.
We see the same thing, North and South.
But when we come home, everything that is ours is undervalued.
Because our home is not yet ready, and because we don’t yet have ready culture and ready art, it is much easier to bring the ready-made from abroad.
First we should make that culture ourselves. We should with great effort gather the stones scattered from all over the country, to build in our own image.
For this task one must have both faith and fanaticism, for it requires a tremendous amount of work.

Traditional farmhouses, built of the earth and sheltered under great roofs, were viewed as the symbolic home of the Hungarian, and the root of his spiritual transformations. According to the Pécs Group’s manifesto:

COSMIC AXES in a house are tailored for man. The infinite horizontal and vertical axes of the freely expanding cosmos are controlled within the sheltering concept of house where man then can blossom into fulfillment.
THE EARTH: The ground grows into buildings. The houses, the haystacks, the hills, the mountains are a uniform and organic formation of nature. MAN is one with nature.
The formula of man’s house equals gradually rising up out of nature, and then returning back to be part of it.
The house has three components: the earth body of the building — the three-dimensional human zones; the emphasized cantilevers of the covered structure — the constructional zone; and the peaking roof silhouette — the sculptural conclusion.

Thus haystacks, outbuildings, barns, houses, churches, and wooden bell towers were all perceived as a family, not just of similar forms, but of common origins and currency (FIG.4). A comparison of the cross-sectional shape of the interior spaces of these earthen buildings revealed their inner unity.

In “THE REGION” the Pécs Group produced perhaps their most profound graphic (FIG.5). It suggested a view of the evolution of human occupation on Hungarian lands that could apply almost anywhere in the industrialized world at any time.
Through a sequence of profiles, it showed how the abrupt intrusion of large, gridded buildings within a humanized landscape, could be gradually softened and absorbed back within the land.

We can create the natural unity of the region in our buildings through the principal of organic deduction. The building follows the forms and silhouettes of the region, gradually stepping down to the zones of man. As the sculptural contours of buildings increase they approach natural forms, uniting with them, so that the region absorbs them.

As they described it, "The formula for the solution equals again the gradual evolution away from, and then the return to, natural forms."

Thus it is possible to see how their use of the term "organic" to define design intentions had nothing to do with stylistic appearance, and everything to do with interactive transitions between natural and the built environments through time (FIG.6).

In other parts of the manifesto they wrote:

HARMONY: The balance between nature and man is lost. Man has forgotten his organic constructive instincts. Now we are making repeated efforts to regain that lost harmony. A SETTLEMENT with its variation of scale should not be an obstacle for creating harmony. When a building grows in size, the shape of the roof loses its character, and becomes an alien and anti-human form. The silhouette, the form of the mass is a decisive factor. It is necessary that a building steps down to human scale in order to create transitions to a pliable and human zone.

Thus the formula for a building is the gradually rising form, and then the returning of the forms to their surroundings. This is the general principle of organic growth. For a BUILDING, for a house, variations of scale should not be an obstacle in creating a synthesis between the past and the present.

The sculptural possibilities of today's steel-reinforced construction in cities are similar to what mud or adobe did for the villages of the past.
The great sheltering roof, heavy and textured, is the single most dominant characteristic of the hundreds of buildings completed in the last two decades that have followed these ideas. The centering power of a pronounced roof has been demonstrated not just in houses, bars and restaurants, but in large buildings, such as civic centers.

One example illustrates how an anonymous modernist building with box-like forms and flat roofs could both functionally and physically be transformed according to the above principles so it could be intimately joined to its settlement. The project was the extension and remodeling of the secondary school of Fonyód, a town on the shores of Lake Balaton (FIG.7). The 1986 design, completed in 1989 by Ferenc Salamin and László Zsigmond, was a large job, entrusted to two young architects who had come through the voluntary, student-organized Visegrad Summer Workshops and a Makona apprenticeship with Imre Makovecz.

The existing flat-roofed International Style school building in Fonyód had become a detached focus within the town, located at the end of a broad street that led back from the lake and the railroad station (FIG.8). But the addition of a large meeting hall for public as well as school uses offered the opportunity to bring the building back into the community. The project also called for adding new space on the former flat roof, allowing the profile of the building to be changed. Other additions and modifications were called for that further allowed the sterile former factory for learning to be transformed into a humanized, character-filled building of hooded slate roofs, dormers, and gables. In the process, rigid socialist architecture was transformed to accommodate a new, softer social role (FIG.9).

The interior of the new meeting hall, which could hold 500 people, was especially dramatic (FIG.10). Here, a three-story white masonry side wall with arched openings was used to provide balcony overlooks and a pierced transition to the walls of the old school. The new side wall also provided structural support for a series of sloped columns that branched into timber struts supporting the exposed rafters and deck of the new roof. Along the other side and on the ends of the room, continuous windows were used to bring in daylight and relate the room to the space of the town. In plan, the hall is almost symmetrical, but in section, it is totally asymmetrical (FIG.11). Meanwhile, other additions tie back into the massing of the old school and open up the building to natural light and the community.

Although the form of the great sheltering roof, popularized by the Pécs Group's manifesto, had a domestic and thatched origin, its application to large community and commercial structures such as that of the secondary school at at Fonyód involved other materials. This allowed for a variety of effects. The light-colored slate shingles at Fonyód tend to reduce the bulk and weight of this building's roof. But the dark, rough boarding of the roof of the Community Center at Bak (1985-1988), designed by Imre Makovecz, adds to its weight and presence (FIG.12). Indeed, the walls of this building seem almost to disappear, as roof and walls become one under a great sculpted blanket of blackened planks (FIG.13).

GRAVE MARKERS

Of the other antecedents to a particularly Hungarian modern architecture proposed by the Pécs Group, the most delicate may have concerned the transformation of ancient spiritual signs and symbols for secular use. The burial memorials characteristic of Hungary include some with roots that may extend back centuries before the Hungarians were Christianized. In these archaic traditions, horizontal burial in the ground was often associated with trees — whether in...
groves, forests, or in a thicket — in the belief that living trees and bushes were the dwelling places of the soul. Today, for example, it is a well-known custom for a father or godfather to plant a fruit tree in the garden when a child is born. This alter ego of the newborn is watched carefully as a prediction of the fate of the child. Should the child die, the tree is used in the coffin or to make the grave post.

The best-known traditional grave marker in Hungary is the carved wooden grave post, known as fejfo, or “head board.” In Protestant areas, and especially in Transylvania, the term kopjafo came into wide usage to refer to a wooden or fa kopja: traditionally, the halberd or pike of a fallen soldier which was stuck into the ground to mark his grave. (Alternatively, the term gombosfa, or wooden knob, may have been used.) This custom, originated in the sixteenth century when Hungarian soldiers were fighting the Turks, was continued as a wooden grave sign during the Reformation by Protestants and Jews, who sought to distinguish their graves from those of Roman Catholics who used wooden crosses as markers. Today each village continues to have its own characteristic wooden markers, carved by craftsmen into shapes that maintain the meanings of a local community.

In the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the kopjafo traditions were discovered as authentic ancient motifs both by scholars and designers such as Károly Kós who were searching for a specific Hungarian style. Kós used kopjafo carvings decoratively on the porch posts of his own 1910 home, “Crow Castle,” near Sztana in Transylvania. In its 1973 mani-
grassy meadow at the southwestern corner of the industrial city of Miskolc, along a road that winds up through the mountains to Eger. In the design, the modest requirements for enclosed spaces were extended and exaggerated as the basis for large, warped and shingled asymmetrical roofs that screen the view of the immediate mountains and focus the visitor's attention on the gateway. The sloped wood roof planes seem to slice a space in the sky, an effect magnified by the extension of columns and rafters as carved wooden sabers, etched in the air (FIG.16).

The notched decorations in this design suggest the imagery of ancient wooden grave markers and the symbolic communities of spirits, which in Hungary were always associated in cemeteries with trees. The entrance to a National Forest thus could be treated as a sort of gateway to tens of thousands of spirits. Such a design showed how a utilitarian object such as a gate might partake of the concentrated formal expression of ageless belief, and of ethnic experiences that are uniquely and particularly Hungarian.

CHAIR BACKS

Chair backs comprised a third design source recognized in the 1973 manifesto "Only From Pure Sources." Hungarian country chairs had always followed the same four-legged structure, with a single individually designed and carved plank for a back. The infinite possible variations for these traditional carved chair backs inspired the Pécs Group to propose a means to relieve the anonymity of the standardized, precast, multistory housing blocks then being mass-produced around the country (FIG.17).

INFINITE VARIATIONS are imagined from a few basic elements. You carved your humanness in wood: order, beauty, and the principles of law; it is communal law and individual law, general and individual, many foldness and singularity that create harmony in your works. Can this concept perish?

THE NUMBER OF VARIATIONS IS 32,768. It can be evolved by interchanging eight elements. On 5- and 10-story panelized housing blocks you can dissolve the rigidity of boxy elevations, and the sterility of cross wall systems.*

This idea of interchangeable elements for panelized housing was implemented in the group's design for the housing blocks at Paks in 1975. Paks was a new town being built to house the country's first nuclear power plant. At the time of the manifesto,
the project for the housing blocks had been under study within the Pécs Group’s large collective architectural office, Baranyatev. Thus, even though the concept had been illustrated in the manifesto, the first blocks representing it did not appear until 1975 (FIG. 19).

After their construction, however, countrywide publication of images of the Paks Apartment Blocks, including unflattering photographs of their supergraphic motifs, escalated into a national debate on the relevance of new ways of thinking about and humanizing the built environment. The public controversy continued for months, primarily in periodicals, and became known as the “Tulip Wars.” The pivotal article in the offensive against the Pécs Group’s design was written in September by Prof. Mate Major (1904-1986) and was published on the front page of the weekly ÉS (literally, Asia), the popular name for Élet és Irodalom (Life and Literature).

By accident I happened to be in Paks and I saw something that was absolutely astonishing. A gray six-story box had blossomed with elevations of plant-like flat ornamentation painted white from top to bottom. The entrances were emphasized by cup- or shell-shaped elements. Why did it stun me? The young architects of Pécs are innovating. There is no question about it. In the process they have discovered decorative motifs from Hungarian folk art, the hand-crafted, and the hand-carved wood motifs found in peasant chairs. In other words they conceived the “tulip” as a metaphor on these surfaces with the intention of becoming a magic implement to regenerate our modern architecture, to make it better, and to make it more national.

We also had this kind of “tulip” period in the past. The great Ödön Lechner in the first decades of the Secession period developed designs using the teacher Joseph Huzska’s collections of Hungarian folk ideas together with “related” motifs from India — hoping to make a national architecture from this curious mixture for the Applied Arts Museum. For the Postal Savings Bank, he took Hungarian peasant motifs from the embroidered handkerchief that was part of the coronation regalia of popular Queen Elizabeth (in the apostolic ceremony of Emperor Francis Joseph I in 1867).

Between the two World Wars with the evolution of reactionary Hungarian architects this direction ultimately became fascist — proclaiming itself against Communism, [i.e., the folk movement is accused of being fascist because it is against Communism]. László Nagy, with his great reputation as a poet has become a hero and a patron of this movement. He encourages them to follow superficial, external and surface effects, instead of turning them to substance. Because of his patronage and support they now feel free to avoid that difficult discipline. They exercise their firm beliefs by following these cheap solutions. I am convinced that this primitive approach is not the way to rejuvenate our Hungarian national architecture.

Of course, it was not by accident that Major happened to be in Paks, and this was not his first article on the subject. Nor was his reference to Lechner’s use of an embroidered handkerchief correct, although embroidery continues to be a lively folk tradition. But as a senior academic in the architec-
ture department at the Technical University, it became his responsibility to maintain the old order, even though, as a proponent of the modern International Style, he had not always been so conservative.

An article on architectural criticism in Hungary by András Ferkai, published in 1989, summarized the sequence of events that had led to Major’s attack. It also explained why architects feared such criticism:

... in the early 1950s the establishment had been transformed. Faithfully following the Stalinist way, industries, the financial institutions and firms, were nationalized. The private practice of architecture ceased. But architects, gathered in huge offices established by the state, still did not want to accept the Stalinist style in architecture.

The political leadership decided to organize a so-called “discussion,” where they could force architects to be obedient. It was very strange that a Marxist professor of Architecture, a follower of functionalism, was accused of being the follower of a past style which would not fit with the new social ideas. After this “discussion,” architects were forced to accept the new style.

The same professor, in the middle of the 1970s, wrote, severely criticizing the organic experiments of the Pécs group; it was a little group of young architects in the southern part of Hungary. They tried to find a new path in architecture: a little bit organic starting from folk or vernacular traditions. This professor, with his criticism, managed to stop the experiment. From this, there devel-
oped a heated debate in the pages of different magazines. Eventually, sentence was passed on the experiment and the group was dissolved in an administrative way.

Thus it was that the Pécs Group was disbanded. In the years that followed, each was forced to find his own way within the profession. But their new thinking and action had spread new ideas within many offices in an already more sensitized country.

Heated exchanges of "tulip" articles eventually appeared in a variety of periodicals, including Magyar Építőműbízset (Hungarian Architecture). And today, architects, especially those who were young at the time, remember how they anxiously awaited the Saturday-morning arrival of Élet és Irodalom to follow the next episode. The dispute blossomed into perhaps the most major public debate about architecture in more than 30 years. Some consider it the birth of serious architectural criticism in Hungary. Others believe its shadow continues to cripple public dialogue about architecture in the country. But all agree the shared national epic had a major impact in that it shifted public awareness and the sense of professional responsibility about the quality of the built environment.

MODERNISM DISPLACED

Organic or Living Architecture emerged gradually in Hungary during the 1980s. Among its major sources was the manifesto "Only From Pure Sources" and the many parallel activities of the Pécs Group and other Hungarian designers, of whom Imre Makovecz is now the best known internationally. There may have been many other inspirations, of course. For instance, it is difficult to document how the concept of freedom and the relationship of building to the land, as demonstrated in the organic architecture of the U.S.A., may have played a role. Illustrations of the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and Bruce Goff could only be studied in Hungary at the time in private or restricted collections, since these materials were considered dangerous. Hungarians of this generation were also not encouraged to read English.

By the time of the dramatic political changes of 1991, this alternative architectural movement had come to be identified as almost a national style when the works of 38 architects representing Hungary were displayed at the Venice Bienale. Following this event, Makovecz was invited to design the Hungarian Pavilion at Expo '92 in Seville. This building has been universally admired as a fresh synthesis of many aspects of the organic movement, including folk traditions from the villages. It is again characterized by a great roof, here crowned by steeples (FIGS. 20, 21).

A generation since the publication of "Only From Pure Sources," hundreds of buildings identified as part of the Organic Architecture movement now owe their conception to ideas made visible in the largely forgotten manifesto. In Hungary, international modernism has already been displaced by an even more progressive architecture based on traditional rural folk roots.
REFERENCE NOTES


3. The city of Pécs, with its Roman foundations, is more than 2,000 years old. It is sited in a large protective limestone valley. A continuous south-facing slope defines the north edge of the valley and has always supported vineyards. The limestone has always been mined, so it offers both natural and manmade caves for storing wine. Pécs and its immediate area are often thought of as being the Mediterranean of Hungary, though neither its people nor their architecture have any relationship to Italy or Greece. Within Hungary, however, the comparison is made based on the areas softer climate and more open life-styles. Like a number of other Hungarian cities, Pécs developed a particular urban land use pattern. Yet, despite its many handsome and distinctive buildings, it never developed a distinctive style or school of design, except in medieval times. At that time the so-called Pécs Workshop developed a distinctive Romanesque stone work best seen today in underground parts of St. Peter's Cathedral.

4. The manifesto had two printings of 500 copies each. Since there were no page numbers, the author has provided pagination. Although the work is credited collectively, distinct differences were evident in the graphic and verbal styles of its sections, which are easily identifiable with the individual contributors to it. Although the graphics were well studied and quite distinct, the text was added without so much study, and therefore is rough both in the original and in translation.

5. The only major book by Károly Kósa was published in Hungarian in Kolozsvár, Romania, in 1934. It was published in replica (except in an English translation as Transylvania) in Budapest in 1989.

6. Since Hungarian culture was distinguished by a tradition of living in villages or towns, the isolated farmhouse was an exceptional prototype there. But the Hungarian village farmhouse followed the same format as the isolated farmhouse in other parts of Europe. In Hungary, villages were spaced every 5-6 kilometers, 2-3 kilometers being the limit of the distance a farmer could comfortably walk to work in the fields. Especially in small towns, Slavs, Germans, and Magyars might live together; and there would also be some mix of religions. Catholics, varieties of Protestants (including members of the Lutheran and Reform Church), as well as Jews, were all represented, although individual villages might be relatively homogeneous. Regardless of ethnic origins, language or religion, village residents considered themselves first to be Hungarian. A deliberate knowledge of several languages allowed the mixing of words for politeness, and tolerance of different belief systems that was understood from childhood.

7. Among published documents in English concerning burial and other belief systems are E. Kunt, Folk Art in Hungarian Cemeteries (Budapest: Corvina Kiado, 1983); and T. Dömötör, Hungarian Folk Beliefs (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981).

8. In Europe the ground floor is normally not counted as a story. Thus, while the original reads "5- and 10-story blocks," in the U.S. this would mean six and eleven stories.


All illustrations are by the author unless otherwise noted.