

**CASA,  
CA TRUP PUBLIC**  
*O introducere în  
arhitectura interioară  
a sufletului (oriental)  
rrom în exil*

**THE HOUSE AS  
PUBLIC BODY**  
*An introduction to the  
interior architecture of the  
exiled (oriental) Roma soul*

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In its oriental origins, the Roma cultural system was based on a religious identity of Manichaeism and Gnostic origins (the eponym is the Christian heresy of the Greek term "Atsinganoi", the "untouchable, impure") that resulted from the syncretism of the Abrahamic religions with the Occult religions of the Ancient Middle East. For the "Athinganoi", life in this world meant atonement for a sin, the chance to return to the absolute not being this world but "shatryia", a celestial world beyond Good and Evil.

The radical theory according to which these different perspectives are expressed in terms of "individual-not-of-this-world" (Roma) vs. "individual-of-this-world" (non-Roma), reflecting two different opposing ideologies of salvation, individualist/independent (of secular Indian origin) and holistic (Christian European origin), could represent a way of understanding those things that have remained oriental in Roma culture, even where history has fashioned for them a western, European destiny.

At the dawn of the European Renaissance, the forced migration towards Europe as a result of the collapse of the Oriental Crusader states and the rise of Islam, implied a comprehensive social deconstructing and adaptation to the strategies inherent to a "people without a state". *Notre Dame de Paris*, a modern operetta based on the novel of the same name by Victor Hugo, which 10 years ago re-launched "neo-Bohemianism" in the West, posits the idea - rightly, in my opinion - that Esmeralda and her companions were asylum seekers (the story takes place in 1492 around the famous Cathedral in Paris). This is also confirmed by the safe-conduct granted in 1416 by Sigismund, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, which granted Roma the freedom to travel across Europe. In this period Europe was under pressure from Islam, and the grounds given by Roma on "requesting asylum" were therefore religious. Colossal groups of Roma began travelling, especially on the pilgrimage routes to Compostella and Rome, which was probably for reasons of safety, as Christian charity and tolerance were assured for pilgrims. But these routes became over-crowded, and from the documents and art of the day we know that the economic pressures placed on "local budgets" by bands of paupers, "abnormals" (Foucault) and mendicant monks lead to crisis. "Subsidies" were cut, pilgrimage routes abolished. Leonardo da Vinci painted the monstrous face of the Gypsy Captain Scaramuccia (who later became Scaramouche, the cowardly swordsman from *Commedia dell'Arte*, a young Don Quixote), Giorgione, ominously, painted *Tempesta* (showing a naked woman in a field, breast-feeding her child under the gaze of her soldier-husband), a sign that relations between the majority population and the "asylum seekers" had progressed, between moments of ecstasy and fear, towards confrontation. There were hundreds of expulsions, under threat of death, excommunications, manhunts organised by the local communities. There is still no well-documented history of these times, but even so, it seems obvious that what we see today must have its roots in this past. The Roma "dukes", "voivodes" and "kings" of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries were to reappear five centuries later as "bandits", "witches" and "beggars". "Life without a state" led to the creation of survival strategies that were different from those developed by a stable culture and the anomisation of Roma organisational culture, adapting it to the type of influence required for survival. A glance at imagology and the imagery of European art yields the same ubiquitous and quixotic image of the "nomad population", the "singing people",

the same stereotype in its mediaeval and modern forms, in a perpetual coming and going through European sub-history: begging, singing, telling fortunes, pilfering, doing various subsistence work in a conserved, segregated underworld. Viewed as a "nomadic culture", the romantic expression of a redemptive, boundless freedom, the marginal Roma way of life, internalised in its cultural foundations, is in fact a paradigm for the interpretation of a transcendental schism, oscillating between self-hate and exaggerated ego, between one's own physical form (that seen from the outside, demonised, "hated") and one's own body (that felt on the inside).

Man (in this case, Roma), as a creature of fate, is defined by his behavioural dimension and his ability to cope with vulnerability. This is why a failure to adapt has created a wide range of "Roma cultures", whose "unity" is the product of a continual adaptive striving for existence/survival. Regardless of whether we call this alienation, existential absurdity, anxiety, estrangement, suffering, etc. or "disgenics", deviance, aggression, fear, etc., these are the contrary and restructured perspectives and mentalities of human fragility and defragilisation, a handicap, a social disease. In the pragmatics of fragility, the Roma are beings trapped in a perpetual temptation to compensate for their psychological deficit, which is interpreted as inferiority or weakness, through an excess of techniques of survival and influencing. This fact leads to over-compensation (false conscience, excessive self-esteem, abnormal/psychotic lifestyles), whereby the individual/group wastes away in the permanent readjusting of its own personality. The reasons behind this personality deficit have much to do with the repeated failure to embrace normality: the existential plan collapses and the individual falls back into his previous condition of the incongruent self, a magnified identity crisis, as a reaction to failure. Escaping reality and entering the irrational, as a niche of visibility and sublimation, is harnessed through particularism, "exoticism" (*sangreardiente*, as sexual "power"; "musical people", as a mediator of ecstasy; "witchcraft"/magic, as strategy of defence and intimidation), etc.

In terms of hermeneutics, in European culture, the binomial "body-soul" has survived, under the influence of Christianity, as the basic rule of an axiological and ontological hierarchy of the master-slave type, between the genuine, spiritualised being liberated from the yoke of passion and its "non-domesticated" counterpart, which remained at the level of corporality and affect. Roma culture, whose ethnogenesis occurred outside European rationalism (or, at most, in its underworld), has continued to exhibit the psychological wounds of the soul, as an intersubjective dynamic of interiority vs. exteriority in which the body is "intimate", accessible only to the self, while the physical form remains "public", outside, accessible by the Other. Recovering the "intimacies" of the self (self-esteem), as a body, would be possible, however, by "negotiating" one's own otherness, the "public" body with the Other as a premise for recovery from the shipwreck of human dignity. Until this becomes possible, opulence, be it in form of houses like giant gingerbread palaces (pagodas) or the egocentric economics of the gift, as a resource of prestige, will, for traditional communities, be essentially the same as what bovarism is to modernised communities: an illusory victory over Evil.

Source: *Kastello. Palaces Of The Roma in Romania*; Published by Igloo Media, June 2008, [www.igloo.ro](http://www.igloo.ro)