

Lost or endangered musical edifices in Iași

CARMEN CHELARU

University of Arts “George Enescu” Iași
ROMANIA*

Abstract: The same as Prague or Florence, the city of Iași is a place blessed by the *Muses* for anyone who is fond of culture. Perhaps nowhere in Romania does such a consistency of history, culture and fame exist as here! Our study is not a result of nostalgia, but an alarm to those who should keep available places, things and monuments involved in the Romanian arts, culture and genius. Almost each street or building in Salzburg tells us about Amadeus. Iași includes all sort of memories about famous names, Romanian or European, which unfortunately disappear one by one. On the occasion of the single Romanian Music Festival (18th edition, Iași 2014), we decided to display information and warnings regarding some musical edifices in Iași which do not exist anymore or are about to disappear. Among others, Ghica House, edifices on *Lăpușneanu* Street, Sadoveanu estate and further more. *Culture* does not only mean being a spectator, an onlooker, an outsider; *culture* means education, knowledge, morals, law and so on. As inhabitants of Iași city we must do infinitely more to build a cultural city: socially, economically, with a civic attitude!

Keywords: Iași, *Lăpușneanu*, George Enescu, Conservatory, Philharmonic, Burada, Notre Dame de Sion

1. Introduction. European Capital of Culture?!

Iași – European Capital of Culture! The virtual space as well as the real one, managed by local administrators, gave the impression that the title had already been gained. Public opinion – passive enough and fraught with presumption – took for granted this mainland recognition of Iași as the Romanian Capital of Culture, ‘Romanian Florence’, ‘City of the Seven Hills’ etc. I was therefore curious – afterwards, it’s true! – to look for more information regarding the mechanism of granting this title and, if possible, the reasons for *not receiving* it by my/our town. Here are some ideas I found:

The competition criteria were as following: “contribution to long-term strategy, European dimension, cultural and artistic contents, ability to produce results and management” (Stan, 2015). The Jury consists of ten experts designated by the European Union institutions: The Parliament, the Council, the Commission and the Communities.

The title is not awarded for the present cultural heritage and dynamic cultural offer of a city; that may underlie the submission of the application, but cannot itself constitute candidacy.

* carmen.chelaru@gmail.com; www.docs.com/carmen-chelaru

In April 2013, the newspaper *Evenimentul regional al Moldovei* published an interview with Mr. Hugo De Greef, manager of ‘Bruges – European Capital of Culture 2002’:

“Reporter: How important is infrastructure (roads, airports, cultural institutions) to win the ECC competition?”

Hugo De Greef: “Infrastructure is really important. But more important is cultural infrastructure. Roads, airports could count, but they are not crucial to winning the title. Instead, the cultural background generates a long term result, allowing for a large audience. It certainly depends on local circumstances. There are cities where a new museum counts, for other cities a new theatre is important and so forth.” (*Evenimentul regional al Moldovei*, 20 April 2013)

Last year (2015) the entries were submitted and, as few locals expected, Iași lost. *Why?* The easiest answer is a conspiracy theory against Iași and its citizens! Leaving aside self-pity and frustration, I enclose here some brief ideas from the Panel’s report at the Pre-Selection Stage:

“The cross-border project is potentially a positive element towards the European dimension criterion but the panel felt that the other strands of the programme were less developed with international partners or inter-cultural dialogue. The programme failed to sustain how it intends to become the eastern interface of western culture. It lacked notably a clear artistic vision to question and develop this crossroads position of a city with multiple influences. (...) The bid book recognized that the city was less open to contemporary art, innovation and the avant-garde.” (*Selection of the European Capital of Culture*, 2016, p. 18)

The panel felt that key areas were dealt with only in a cursory manner rather than in depth. Examples included the traumatic memory of the ‘Pogrom of Iasi’ in 1941 and a project with the Roma; “this was an area where the programme could have been significantly increased to meet the inter-cultural dialogue component of the artistic vision criterion.” (*Selection of the European Capital of Culture*, 2016, p. 19)

I enclosed the above references – painful for the people of Iași – in order to sustain my position towards the local carelessness as far as significant historical monuments are concerned.

2. Ghica House, one of the earliest locations of the Iași Conservatory

I wonder how many people – older or younger, in the past or nowadays – have been passing on *Gavriil Musicescu* Street, by the old and damaged building that barely stands, as if defying the new constructions around? How many of them wonder: ‘Why has this building been forgotten? Why hasn’t it been demolished already like so many other historical monuments of Iași? Who used to be and above all who is going to be its owner?’

The board on the wall, almost wiped off, does not provide much clarification either: “In this building, the Conservatory of Music and Drama

existed between 1860-1940. Great musicians activated here, founding the Romanian modern music. May 1978.”



Photo 1. Ghica House, *Gavril Musicescu* Street.
Photo: Gh. Chelaru (8 Sept. 2014)



Photo 2. The Board on the building

Actually, for some time, this board was covered by a banner saying ‘To let!’

I include here a short story of this building, hoping that maybe, some day, its fortune will change. The information comes from historians such as Alexandru Aurescu, Ion Mitican, Constantin Ostap, Aurica Ichim, George Pascu and so on.

Late 18th century: boyar Costache Ghica builds the house on *Banu* Street; around 1820 a second floor was added. In 1870, the Iași Conservatory hired most of the house. The contract was signed by Elena Costache Ghica (owner of the house) and Constantin Gros, head of the Conservatory (Aurescu, 1906, p. 107). The contract was renewed in 1872, until 1884, when the Conservatory would be housed in other buildings, on 7-9 *Lăpușneanu* Street near the church.

By consequence, the year 1860 mentioned on the historical board of the building does not correspond to reality. A detailed research of this matter has been undertaken by historian Aurica Ichim, from the Iași ‘Reunification’ Museum (Muzeul Unirii), in her study ‘A Lot of Expenses for the Restauration of *Ghica* House’ (Ichim, 2009, pp. 101-106). Meanwhile, Digi 24 TV Channel and historian Sorin Iftimi shot a documentary film under the title ‘History transformed into ruins. Ghica House, built in 1820, hosted the Iași Conservatory’ (DIGI Web Cam Live). Unfortunately, the movie hosted by two highly frequented social networkers, received a single reply!

From 1917 to 1918 (World War I), the French Embassy was settled here. After 1990, the building became more and more damaged. In 2005 the Iași Mayor returned it to the inheritors, Alexandru and Barbara Panco, descendants of the Ghica family. Afterwards the owners sold the house to a Romanian-Belgian company, which hanged the poster ‘To let’ and forgot about the place!

Should we add more comments? *Yes*, we should! Ghica House is part of national heritage. Legally, historical buildings cannot be demolished, more than that, genuine architecture has to be preserved. At present, the building appears as a skeleton, windows broken, fallen plaster, door locked. Neither the Iași City Hall nor the owners are interested in the fate of this place. In Western Europe, under these circumstances, owners are fined or even expropriated...!

3. Musical Edifices on *Lăpușneanu* Street

Lăpușneanu Street is a symbol for the citizens of Iași, together with the National Theatre, ‘Trei Ierarhi’ Church and the Palace of Culture. Prince Alexandru Lăpușneanu ruled Moldavia in the middle of the 16th century¹, and changed the capital city from Suceava to Iași. After World War II many buildings were demolished or damaged here. Since 2014 this street has been renovated and little-by-little it seems to regain a better face.

What is the musical part of *Lăpușneanu* Street? Unfortunately, all the buildings related to music have been destroyed, but if someone would like to transform this street into an interactive historical site, these buildings should be mentioned somehow.

Walking from the top – Eminescu Plaza down to the Union Plaza (Piața Unirii), on the right, instead of the Telephone Company Headquarters, there were some exquisite shops between the wars; among them, the **Conservatory Storehouse** of brothers Josef and Michail Blaiska.

¹ Prince Lăpușneanu ruled Moldova between September 1552 and 18 November 1561, and then from October 1564 to 5 May 1568.
(https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandru_L%C4%83pu%C8%99neanu, accessed on 8.09.2015)



Photo 3. *Lăpușneanu* Street, nowadays

One could see here great concert pianos, double-basses, cellos, and all sort of brass instruments, also gramophones, long play discs, scores. The building was knocked down after the 1977 earthquake.



Photo 4. The old 'Hôtel d'Europe', transformed after the war in a confectioner's, then demolished

On the same side there was **Europe Hotel** ('Hôtel d'Europe'), where famous soprano Hariclea Darclée² lived during her concert tours in Iași.

² Hariclea Darclée, 1860-1939, one of the world's most famous opera singers during her three-decade-long career. She performed the role of *Tosca*, at the world premiere in 1900 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hariclea_Darcl%C3%A9e, access on 19.12.2015).

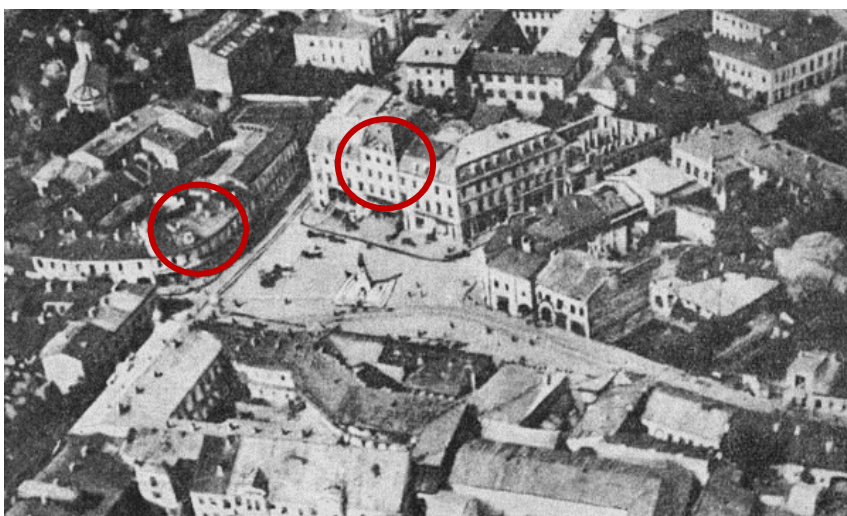


Photo 5. Union Plaza (Piața Unirii) of Iași, middle 20th century.
The circles mark *România/Schiller* Hotel (left) and *Traian* Hotel (right).

The great soprano had been invited to perform in the main ball room of **Roznovanu Palace** (now the Iași City Hall). There, the hosting noble family organized charity concerts, theatre performances and balls. Darclée lived also at **Romania** (also Schiller) **Hotel**, now disappeared, nearby Traian Hotel. Behind Romania Hotel, Scarlat Pastia, Mayor of Iași between 1877-1879, built a public place named **Pastia Hall**. After the great fire of 1888, when the National Theatre of Copou burned down, Pastia Hall became the main public space in Iași for all sort of performances – theatre, opera, concert, film.



Photo 6. *Trianon* Cinema in 1950

Coming back to *Lăpușneanu* Street, on the place of **Corso Garden**, in the 1940s another old building hosted the Conservatory of Music and Drama.

Here, on 8 July 1942, a group of intellectuals from Iași founded the ‘Moldova’ Philharmonic.

On the left-hand side, next to the Reunification Museum there was the **Trianon** (nowadays **Republica**) **Cinema** and the **Weinstein Music Store** with electric pianos and pipe organs (photo 6).

European historical cities like Budapest, Prague, Vienna, Paris, have adopted a beautiful habit – street music well done by professional musicians and sustained by the town community.



Photo 7. Jazz Band on Charles Bridge, Prague

Why shouldn't *Lăpușneanu* Street be the same?

4. National Theatre of Copou

The so called National Theatre of Copou was a historical building, property of prince Mihail Sturza, who agreed to host theatre performances. It was turned into a public theatre in December 1846, until February 1888, when a fire destroyed it entirely. The main building of the ‘Alexandru Ioan Cuza’ University (inaugurated in 1897) was erected in its place.



Photo 8. The National Theatre of Copou

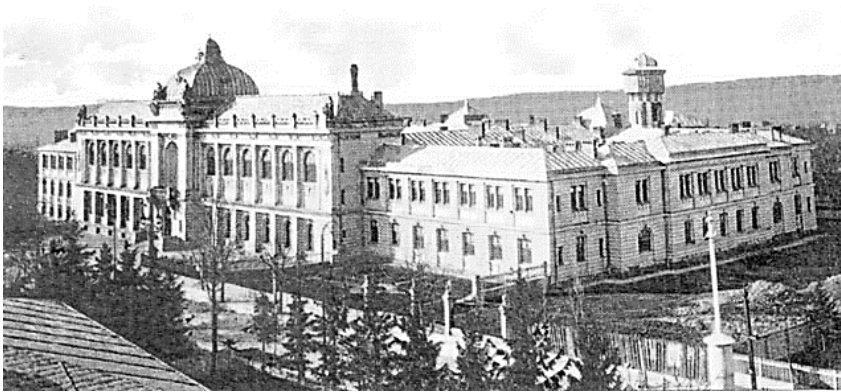


Photo 9. 'Alexandru Ioan Cuza' University main building, in 1928

At the end of January 1847, Franz Liszt and his friend Guido de Karácsony arrived in Iași after three concerts in Bucharest. They lived as guests in the house of Alecu Baș – nowadays the main building of the University of Arts. Here Liszt met the most important Moldavian personalities of the day, among them Gheorghe Asachi³ and Costache Negri⁴. In Iași, Liszt performed three concerts, the first (18 January) in the Baș mansion and the next two – on 21 and 24 January – in the National Theatre of Copou.

5. The Tower House in Copou



Photo 10. Backhouse (left) and fronthouse (right)

³ Gheorghe Asachi / Asaki, 1788-1869, Romanian prose writer, poet, painter, historian, dramatist and translator. An Enlightenment-educated polymath and polyglot, he was one of the most influential people of his generation. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gheorghe_Asachi, access on 24.03.2016)

⁴ Costache Negri, 1812-1876, Romanian writer, politician and revolutionary. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Costache_Negri, access on 24.03.2016)

The so called ‘Sadoveanu’ Mansion, situated up Copou hill not far from downtown, in a residential neighbourhood, was built by Mihail Kogălniceanu⁵ in 1842. Then, it was sold to Jacob von Neuschotz, baron and banker of Iași⁶. Here, Maria Cantacuzino – future wife of George Enescu (they married in 1937) – lived during WW 1, 1917-1918. The musician who had a close relationship with her, often spent time here. Actually, he lived in the small house of a doctor friend⁷, nearby the National Theatre and the Notre Dame Institute.



Photo 11. *Vovidenie* Street. Here, musician George Enescu lived from 1917 to 1918 (photo Mihai Cantea)

6. Musical Street *Cuza Vodă* and its Neighbourhoods

The story of the *Cuza Vodă-Brătianu-Stroescu* Streets begins in the first years of the 19th century. The main edifice – **Balș Mansion**⁸ – was raised around 1815 (Suceveanu, 2009). Afterwards, it was sold to catholic order ‘Notre Dame de Sion’⁹, for the educational French Institute ‘Sacré Coeur’¹⁰, founded in Iași at the beginning of 19th century.

⁵ Mihail Kogălniceanu, 1817-1891, Romanian liberal statesman, lawyer, historian and publicist; he became Prime Minister of Romania on October 11, 1863, after the 1859 union of the Danubian Principalities under the Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza, and later served as Foreign Minister under Carol I. He was several times Interior Minister under Cuza and Carol. A polymath, Kogălniceanu was one of the most influential Romanian intellectuals of his generation. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mihail_Kog%C4%83lniceanu, access on 24.03.2015)

⁶ Jacob von Neuschotz, 1819-1888, important personality of Iași in the second half of 19th century. Great philanthropist, he founded several schools and orphanages (Oprea, 2014, p. 13).

⁷ The house on *Vovidenie* Street was bombed during WW II.

⁸ Balș family – Balșa or Baloș, Bălăuș or Boloș – came from Montenegro.

⁹ “Notre-Dame de Sion, couramment abrégé en NDS, est une congrégation religieuse catholique romaine fondée en 1843 par Théodore et Alphonse Ratisbonne. Plusieurs communautés ainsi que de nombreux établissements scolaires portent actuellement le nom de « Notre-Dame de Sion » dans le monde. C'est la congrégation dont était issue sœur Emmanuelle.” (https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congr%C3%A9gation_de_Notre-Dame_de_Sion, access on 14.11.2015)

¹⁰ “La Société du Sacré-Cœur de Jésus (Societas Sacratissimi Cordis Jesu) a été fondée en 1800 par Madeleine-Sophie Barat (1779, Joigny dans l’Yonne - 1865) pour l’éducation des jeunes

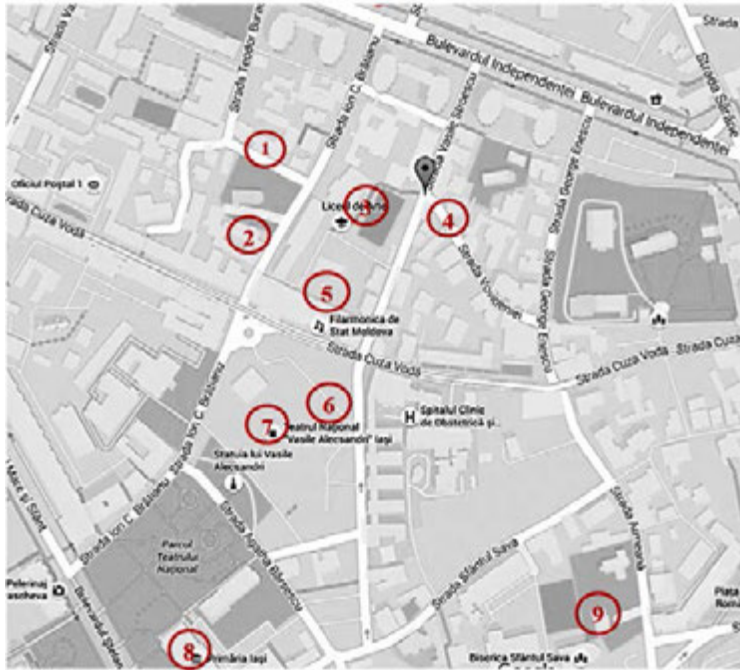


Photo 12. *Cuza Vodă* Street and the Neighbourhoods:

- 1) Burada House; 2) The house of *St. John* Churchyard, where conductor Emanuel Elenescu spent his childhood; 3) The High school of Arts; 4) *Vovidenie* Street; 5) The former Philharmonic building near Balș House; 6) The National Theatre Power Plant; 7) National Theatre and Opera House; 8) Roznovanu Palace (now City Hall);
- 9) The Armenian Athenaeum near the old Armenian Church



Photo 13. Balș Mansion – ‘Notre Dame’ Catholic Institute, Iași, end of 19th century

filles. Ses membres sont aujourd’hui appelés Sœurs du Sacré-Cœur. Elles étaient célèbres autrefois sous le nom de Dames du Sacré-Cœur. Leur spiritualité est ignacienne. Elles signent R.S.C.J. (Religiosa Sanctissimi Cordis Jesus).” (https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soci%C3%A9t%C3%A9_du_Sacr%C3%A9-C%C5%93ur_de_J%C3%A9sus, access on 14.11.2015).

In a guide of Iași city (published approx. in 1933), the history of the Notre Dame Institute is described as follows (*Cel mai nou ghid al Iașului/The Newest Iași Guidebook*, 1933, pp. 99-102):

“In the first half of 19th century, apart from a few elementary schools financed by the state, some private educational institutes were settled in Iași. Children of rich families learned German, French, music and some practical disciplines here. In 1866, through the involvement of the Catholic Bishop, Monsignor Saladari, a private institute for girls was settled in the Balș Mansion. At the beginning, the teachers were French nuns, under the leadership of *Mère Marie Théodorine* (Amélie Randon).”

Then, a few Romanian teachers joined the nuns, but French remained the learning language in the school. From 1900 to 1910, the French Institute added a large building as an extension to Balș Mansion, designed by the Italian architect J. Vignaly, where a Catholic Chapel was built.

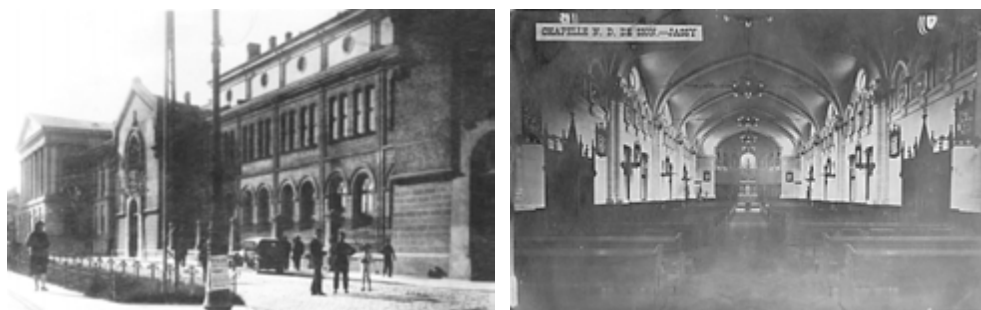


Photo 14. Institute ‘Notre Dame’ of Iași, (left) external view; (right) the chapel inside



Photo 15. ‘Notre Dame’ Institute backyard



Photo 18. Iași Philharmonic Concert Hall between 1957–2013

Across *Cuza Vodă* Street, from 1894 to 1896 the **National Theatre** was built by Viennese architects Ferdinand Fellner (1847-1916) and Hermann Helmer (1849-1919). In the same edifice the Opera House was founded in 1956. Fellner and Helmer are also the authors of famous similar theatres in Europe, like those in Vienna, Prague, Odessa or Zürich. On 1 December 1896, the National Theatre of Iași was inaugurated by Mayor Nicolae Gane, being considered the oldest and the best public theatre in Romania.



Photo 19. National Theatre of Iași

Inaugurated in the same period as the theatre, the Power Plant – in the National Theatre backyard – marked the beginning of public lightning in Iași. During WW I, George Enescu and his orchestra organised the rehearsals here.



Photo 20. The Power Plant by the National Theatre (left).

The board on the building: ‘The old power plant, built from 1834 to 1896, the first centre for public lightning in Iași (1 December 1896). Writer Mihail Sadoveanu lived here as director of the National Theatre. George Enescu’s Symphonic Orchestra also performed rehearsals here. The first concert took place on 13 December 1917.’

Nearby *Cuza Vodă* Street is **Burada House** (photo 21). Here lived Theodor T. Burada – Romanian folklorist, ethnographer and musicologist, member of the Romanian Academy (elected in 1878, the first musician to achieve this position). Burada played violin, studying at the Iași Conservatory (1855-1860) and the Paris Conservatory (1861-65). He travelled widely in Eastern Europe on concert tours and took the opportunity to collect folkloric material in his travels, especially from Romanian communities. He was the editor of *Dicționar muzical* (c. 1862-75), the earliest Romanian dictionary of music (Cosma Viorel).

Almost at each step around the old city of Iași there are places with historical and cultural significance altogether turning the town into an open air museum. It could become European Capital of Culture if its history gained consistency, if it became vivid by modern resources, being enclosed in a European context.



Photo 21. Burada House and the board on the wall: ‘In this house there lived Theodor T. Burada (1839-1923), a personality who crucially contributed to the assertion of Romanian music, professor at the Iași Conservatory, violinist and composer, historian of the Moldavian Theatre, ethnologist and ethnographer, member of *Junimea* Society and, since 1887, first musician member of the Romanian Academy.’

Let’s try to imagine somebody who has never heard about Iași, who does not know where the town is. How could we first draw their attention? Through virtual information – not only historical and cultural, but especially practical, in two or three languages: roads, accommodation, meals, transportation – all permanently updated. How and where could we offer this information? At the main entrances of the city, like the airport, stations, PR offices, through maps, QR codes, posters, etc.

How do we coherently organise the multitude of cultural interests into tracks, categories, groups? How do we make them available, approachable to visitors? Do these cultural objectives provide comfort? How do we solve the problem of aggressive begging, which becomes more aggressive during religious celebrations? How about the filthy back yards and dark alleys? Initiatives such as the vintage tram, with or without music, one or more routes with carriages have they ever lasted? What about a well promoted summer concert season, without cancellations or postponement? I wonder how many professional musicians from Iași did or do play in restaurants in *San Marco* Square of Venice? Why shouldn’t they do the same in Iași? In the old city districts – Sărărie, Tătărași, Copou – there are many buildings of genuine Moldavian architecture – why shouldn’t they be included in a visiting tour?

Culture is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1974). Unfortunately, the real meaning of the term eludes us. Besides, we give up easily! Everything which happens to be out of our narrow space of life bares no interest to us!

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