

THE UNIVERSITY OF ART AND DESIGN CLUJ-NAPOCA  
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**Doctoral Thesis**

**THE DECONSTRUCTION OF INDUSTRIAL  
ARCHITECTURE.  
SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION THROUGH CULTURE.**

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## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

*Keywords: industrial spaces, painting, post-communism, urban development, functional conversion, deconstruction, degrading, ruin, nostalgia, history.*

The paper entitled "*The deconstruction of industrial architecture. Social reconstruction through culture*" represents an opportunity for research, enhancement, and interpretation of the infinite possibilities of the current transformation of art, architecture and social, the simplification of this diversity, which allowed me to engage in new directions, expand my expertise and discover new ways to perceive the language used in painting, and all of this while aiming to change the philosophy of social and individual life. The research paper is structured in four chapters addressing:

Chapter I – *Post-industrialization – social and cultural implications;*

Chapter II – *The urban revitalization through culture;*

Chapter III – *Expression and configuration of industrial spaces in painting;*

Chapter IV – *Analytical benchmarks and ways to configure images in one's personal creation.*

Building on the premise that there is an acute lack of cultural centers of art, we must start exploring the urban spaces in an attempt to find and define some areas that would allow the proliferation of culture among the people that are not in any way involved in this field (working-class neighborhoods, industrial areas). It goes without saying that landing some vacant sites in a city that is undergoing massive growth would be the best solution, but these kinds of buildings are located in areas that have been recently rezoned to fit the urban picture, more often on the outskirts of cities, which kind of makes them utopic projects, either used as subjects for architecture contests, or projects launched by universities. This is why I approached the architectural and urban space as a cache.

Architecture, the most comprehensive and explicit embodiment of science in art, leads to the creation of *landscapes* that organize urban life, giving it a certain feature. Each architectural object, regardless of its size and qualities, is part of public life; it becomes a benchmark of urban developments. They say great buildings leave behind magnificent ruins. The physical remains of abandoned factories, damaged or still functional but in an advanced state of decay, turn into unique objects, laden with history, difficult to place within a timeline, which don't actually belong neither to the past, as they still linger materialized in the form of ruins, nor to the present because their existence is not justified in the absence of production, ambiguously located in the current economic and cultural dynamics. These places are reminiscent of a distant past (sole representations of a bygone era defined by socialism), bringing forth the possibility of adaptive reuse of the industrial spaces through conversion, which may seem strange considering that they do not only symbolize exploitation and social control, but also the economic inefficiency of a bygone socialist system. This is an open subject and I tried to investigate the possibility of a different approach, the communist/post-communist deconstruction, and the ways in which a designer, whether artist or architect, can go beyond *the art of grievance*.

My professional interest in finding new ways to configure images in my personal works, the investigation of the relationship between art and architecture, finding answers with regards to current realities and understanding present art, have made me want to look back to the past or rather relatively recent history. What are the consequences of communism in contemporary art and industrial architecture? What type of aesthetic experiences can industrial art and architecture provide? What is the relationship between the two? How will the former working class be able to restore the factory to its former glory, and this time not by putting it to productive reuse, but by cultivating its spiritual value? How can architecture and art, by exploiting a reciprocity condition, transform *the factory* into an urban hub of cultural development, and this uninterested group of people into an engaged and determined audience? How can one depict their willingness and motivation to act? By willingly adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the goals that naturally arose in my research were: the evolution of industrial spaces in Romania, from their emergence during the communist regime to this day; the analysis of the deindustrialization processes, their impact on society and the city, and how the conversion

process could contribute to the redevelopment of urban/social spaces; investigate the process of functional redevelopment; case studies revealing national and international accomplishments in the field of cultural functional conversion; an overview and a new approach of the *art-architecture* relationship with special attention to industrial spaces; exploration of imagery in the rendering of industrial architecture in painting and personal approaches in my own work. Currently the issue is addressed only as focus of architectural studies, urban planning, or sociology; by exploring post-industrialization from a different angle, artistic vision can open up new avenues of perception and therefore new approaches to the functional conversion process. The architectural landmarks, cultural manifestations, and plastic works mentioned in this paper represent major benchmarks which served as a model and led to the creation of an interdisciplinary vision on the approached subject. The establishment of a method of study consistent with the need to know - including the mechanisms and consequences of the use of social, cultural and architectural spaces, is essential in the process of planning and designing in architecture.

## **Chapter I – Post-industrialization – social and cultural implications**

The theorization of the city and society is a necessary undertaking for understanding post-industrial changes, advanced capitalism and postmodernism. The legacy of the communist era is illustrated perhaps best by a simple visual analysis of the structure and state of urban industrial sites, which are a big part of the urban real estate inventory, alongside commercial buildings and standardized housing stock. The deindustrialization is both an economic and cultural phenomenon, at least to the extent that it stimulates artistic expressions, revamps of urban spaces and social practices. These industrial sites, empty lots or former production facilities - now vacant buildings - , that take up such a big part of the cities' real estate inventories, are regarded as important resources for future development. As the urban sprawl continues to push the boundaries of cities outward, these industrial facilities become part of the inner city, and even get to enjoy excellent locations, in close proximity to central business or entertainment districts. The Ursus Brewery in Cluj, and Libertatea Factory are good examples of this growing trend. Many industrial projects have been broken down and re-organized by hasty privatization procedures which caused the loss of the buildings' distinctive character.

This evolution triggers mixed feelings and reactions, as the urban picture is highly impacted by these conversions, actually adaptive re-use projects that involve the transformation of either vacant buildings or the outskirts of towns. I will be primarily focusing on the reaction brought about by these devastated sites, blighted properties, abandoned or partially destroyed. Industrial platforms are more often associated with devastation and isolation even when located in the heart of the city. On the other hand, they may be regarded as a symbol of the communion of urban centers with nature as, by being reduced to piles of rubble, these *buildings* allow vegetation to come through, and turn the space into greyfield land. A very good example of this phenomenon and the most famous abandoned industrial site in the movie history is “*the Zone*” in the film *Stalker* (1978), directed by Andrei Tarkovski

It is to the communist regime that we owe the industrialization, urbanization, secularization, widespread literacy, and the construction of gigantic infrastructure (useful or not), as well as one of the most significant interventions in the structure of society, mainly due to the rupture that it caused: the displacement of the peasant population and their relocation to industrial centers, and in some cases to newly created cities.

This phenomenon of displacement gave way to the birth of the proletariat, a new society under Marxist ideology, which was destined to become a non-class, contributing as Constantin Noica said to the “*transformation of a nation into population*” and last but not least, into a cohort of non-owners.

Currently, there is the image of the industrial worker fired from work, working the land with medieval tools or absorbed as a *useless material*, said Ioan Cosma, by alcoholism and the economic disorientation of the post-communist village, caught in a media reality.

Many of the pressures affecting the identity of the people and the sense of self are related to changes in the media after the fall of communism. Television is present everywhere and watching TV turns into the prevalent pastime for the working class in a world deprived of financial resources. During the communist regime, says Doina Petrescu, the need to be a part of a *community* was mandatory and for this reason, as a counter-reaction, the notion of *community* has been implicitly undermined and ripped of its meaning. The concept of “action” that art can inspire becomes referential. In these

circumstances, all knowledge must be based on “action” and come back to it, it being the fundamental criterion to motivate this social class, a group lacking potential. Therefore, the explanation of collective *visions* and artistic culture must be sought here.

## **Chapter II – Urban revitalization through culture**

In this chapter I have tried to provide answers to the issue of post-industrial cities in Romania, currently under redevelopment, by looking at successful examples of urban development, namely international functional conversions, when they were focused on culture or when they were illustrative of the way in which culture can contribute to urban revitalization. A key progression summarizes quite effectively this process: *Abandonment - Disintegration - Adaptation - Reuse - Culture - Remembrance - Society*.

A conversion is a process by which a series of buildings with pre-existing conditions, equipment, and networks can be put to productive use by bringing in new activities. When embarking on industrial conversion ventures or launching urban revitalization projects, the main concern is conservation and the focus turns to preserving as much of the existing structure as possible while allowing its cultural essence to linger and stand proof of an era long gone.

The revitalization of old industrial sites is refined by taking into account cultural factors, which will eventually foster the transformation of these facilities into hubs of innovation and urban experiment. In the current context, selecting an appropriate cultural function for industrial facilities in Cluj becomes an opportunity to support the local economy whose identity is closely linked to socio-cultural values; this kind of ventures will most probably result in long-lasting changes that will benefit the entire area.

Artists, architects and public should all take part in these activities, considering that performances and art have indeed the power to transform a place. These aspects can also contribute to the way in which a space, at the micro level, or a city, at the macro level, is perceived, either positively or negatively. However, artists should be guardians of the past with its significance and safeguard the imagination which could alter the future, as Roger Scruton pointed out: *the emotions inspired by serious art belong to imagination, not to fantasy*. Art is not directly capable of generating social change, but it can address social issues at a general level and can be a source of inspiration for social activists. Meanwhile,

it should also be clear that the modeling efforts that could alter the *realm of the possible* are not actually made in institutions, but they happen in everyday life, in *factories*, and they involve all those who wish to partake. The role of the artist, as cleverly noted by Nicolas Bourriaud, is, in a few words: *learning to inhabit the world in a better way*.

At the boundary between the two domains, *art - industrial architecture*, the parties involved experience a mutual transfer of information that needs a contemplative mediator. Here, the research addresses the culture of exhibition in unusual spaces and how it reflects the change of historical consciousness, of social life into post-industrialization. The attempt to corroborate the culture of the present by negotiating with history, by accepting the legacy of communism, and all of this without ignoring the social failure of the regime, has generated an enriched picture of the industrial space that's hosting art. The subject goes beyond the usual boundaries of architecture, becoming a matter of *culture and cultural communication*, as well as one of *history and sharp contact with history*.

### **Chapter III - Expression and configuration of industrial spaces in painting**

Since the beginning of the industrial revolution, artists, through painting and photography, have immortalized the scenes created by new technologies. Beyond mere documentation, these works have revealed attitudes towards the scene and the changes imposed by modernity, all of that with the social side in focus. The whole point of studying these artistic images is to examine the potential of the industrial landscape and how paintings can integrate or be integrated into a representation that reveals the systemic nature of these landscapes, rather than their simple viewing. The nostalgic nature of these landscapes generates attitudes and creates feelings, which, viewed from a post-communist perspective, affect the social. Post-communist artwork places the viewer in a completely different relationship with reality, emotion and intellect in the act of interpretation, involving, in these circumstances, its own system of law.

In this chapter I addressed new topics, such as the relationship between art and memory, the process of reconstruction related to the problem of transmitting the act of imagination and recollection with the help of various images. The return to the past is not

undertaken for history's sake, but for the relevance of some social events that have happened and could have ramifications today. Thus, the reconstructions do not become an acknowledgment of the past, but rather, present questions that take us back to those events in history that have been imprinted in the collective memory.

Additionally, this paper will analyze the issue of ruins, from a modern perspective rather than using a classical, romantic approach. Ruins invite to speculation and explanations, fragments inspire spatial redefining and socio - cultural transformations. In this chapter I also made references to the nostalgic art that is performed in order to commemorate the emotional, ideological conditions and visual expressions of the past, to preserve, in the collective memory, social and political facts that would otherwise be forgotten. Nostalgia is considered by some researchers a reaction to the present, to the rapid social and cultural changes that have taken place in recent decades. Roumen Avramov, a Bulgarian historian and economist, said that most of the time, the impulse driving to nostalgia is not just an emotion but rather a response to the current social discomfort, a metaphor of a growing sense of failure and decline of the last two decades.

#### **Chapter IV - Analytical benchmarks and ways to configure images in one's personal creation.**

Nicolas Bourriaud said that artwork has the ability to give meaning to human existence, and indicate possible paths in the middle of the chaos that represents the reality. So art, in light of the social becoming, unifies the real with the ideal, the tangible with the possible. There is an undeniable consistency between art and the historical perspective. It does not copy the reality but rather it reproduces it, it recreates it, it regenerates it in a sense, it reintegrates it into a universe of meaning and social values.

There is currently a rush to keep up with the West, but it must be linked to post-communism which is a reality of our times and which, as theorist Boris Buden wrote, *is not just a culture, but rather nothing more than culture*. When local art or culture is not backed up by an understanding and adaptation to the production of contemporary culture and we only wish *to keep up with the general trends*, the cultural intervention at a social

level may be impossible, inappropriate, and even completely ineffective. It is true, Gustave Flaubert had tackled a long time ago the issue of the multiple when wickedly declaring: *The better telescopes become, the more stars there will be*. Inevitably, a vision of a wider picture will provide a better solution to current problems, and the contemporary restructuring process of the post-communist society in the conditions of the dissolution of a communist past and its strong cultural impregnation, is not based on a critical processing of history, but rather biased on the presentation of a continuity of the national history, of myths, traditions and its cultural self-assessment.

This theoretical work can be understood as an in-depth look at the archeology of exploration of contemporary spaces and cultural practices. I am not trying to see the practical side materialized in the context of theory, as an object, but as an unpredictable multitude of circumstances, an archive, a box containing numerous possibilities that have happened and can yet happen, in the hidden and enclosed space of events that can occur when encountering the work of art. This approach investigates alternative histories, previously undocumented in the traditional sense, offering new perspectives on the issue. Also, just like a film director, I want to reconstruct architectural structures that I have visited, the same way that an immigrant would inventory the places he left behind, with all the emotions attached to it. The viewer is confronted with the challenge of giving meaning to his own existence, by analogy and a process similar to the creation of works. And each observer of these works of art can easily identify himself with strategies of self-staging, self-hiding, and simultaneously learn to consciously manipulate images on both sides of the situation: in the purpose of the work as a disembodied activity and in the industrial, real space.