

Recovering the Memory: Conversion within the Context

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Abstract

Industrialization, followed by deindustrialization, has written and rewritten vast territories, towns, and even human lives. The industrial heritage of cultural, architectural, or historic value has also a contemporary usage value, which makes it eligible for undergoing rehabilitation and conversion. In architecture, the conversion of a building could be understood as a change of its content (or function) without the change of its form. By understanding conversion as a path that goes beyond form and connects the initial function of the building with the newly given one, involves the idea that conversion it is not a complete removal of the former function (and memory), but as continual writing that overlaps the previously existing object. Thus, conversion is seen as some natural transformation process of a building, a stage within its evolution. Conversion is a process of change that calls for preservation and continuity; this change that should take into account the building memory, which has to be identified, protected and enhanced for the sake of present and future. Romania's industrial heritage finds itself in a critical condition; one important dysfunction of Romania's cities is the industrial spaces inserted as relics within the residential neighbourhoods. Some timid yet welcome actions of some private investors have been made into pilot conversion projects of industrial structures into cultural spaces. In Cluj-Napoca, not far from the city center, close to the industrial zone, the former “Brush Factory”, a building that contains both a real contemporary use and emotional value, has become a creation space for contemporary art. The industrial buildings are cultural, social, and economic assets that might be used today, and their integration within the cities' daily life by their reuse and adaptation to new functions contribute to the enhancement of the place and, last but not least, to the preservation of society's memory and identity.

Rezumat

Procesul industrializării, iar mai apoi dezindustrializarea, sunt fenomene ce au scris și rescris teritorii, orașe, vieți. Patrimoniul industrial cu valoare culturală, arhitecturală sau istorică, are de asemenea și o valoare de utilizare contemporană, fapt ce îl face să fie adecvat în vederea reabilitării și conversiei. În arhitectură, conversia unei clădiri poate fi înțeleasă ca o transformare, adică ca o schimbare a conținutului (sau a funcțiunii), fără schimbarea formei. Înțelegerea conversiei ca un traseu ce trece dincolo de formă și face legătură între funcțiunea inițială a clădirii și cea nou atribuită, implică ideea că procesul conversiei nu este o schimbare completă a vechii funcțiuni (și memorii), ci o scriere continuă ce se suprapune peste obiectul anterior existent. Așadar, conversia este înțeleasă ca un proces natural de transformare a clădirii, o etapă în cadrul evoluției sale. Conversia este un proces care implică păstrare și continuitate, și care ar trebui să țină cont de memoria clădirii, ce trebuie identificată, protejată și valorificată spre folosul prezentului și al viitorului. Patrimoniul industrial din România se află într-o situație critică; o

disfuncție importantă la nivelul orașelor din România este reprezentată de spațiile industriale dezafectate inserate în cartiere de locuit. Câteva acțiuni timide, dar totuși binevenite, ale unor investitori privați, se constituie în proiecte pilot de conversie a unor structuri industriale. La Cluj-Napoca, nu foarte departe de centrul orașului, în proximitatea zonei industriale, fosta „Fabrică de Pensule”, o clădire ce prezintă atât valoare de utilizare contemporană cât și afectivă, a devenit un spațiu de creație de artă contemporană. Clădirile industriale constituie un capital cultural, social și economic cu valoare de utilizare contemporană, iar reintegrarea lor în viața cotidiană a orașelor, prin reutilizarea și adaptarea lor la noi funcțiuni, contribuie la amplificarea caracterului locului, la păstrarea memoriei și identității unei societăți.

Keywords: industrial heritage, functional conversion, memory, preservation, continuity

The topic of this article is related to a subject which in the context of the contemporary architecture is taking shape becoming more and more clear: the conversion of an existing building. The popularity of this type of architectural intervention derives from a variety of reasons: the financial crisis, the ecological crisis, the crisis of (urban) space due to the densely built modern cities. But at the same time, there are other reasons that are generated not by a number of cases that were negatively imposed, but by a generally positive attitude of the public consciousness towards the built heritage.

The questions that I want to voice and to explore are: what does conversion mean? Is conversion involving only a change of the function and the adaptation of the building to the contemporary standards and needs? Is this its only meaning, or should it mean more than that? What are the implications (social, cultural, economic) that the industrial conversions sites might have at city level?

These are the questions that will organize and structure this study. In order to answer these questions, the theoretical work will be conducted through a parallel between the building/city and the literal-grammatical text, the act of building being seen as a (re)writing in the context. Starting from the urban tissue towards the architectural object, the study emphasizes that the part and the whole are context at the same time, the building's history being just as important as the context to which it belongs to.

*„We may live without her (architecture), and worship without her,
but we cannot remember without her.”
John Ruskin[1]*

The process of industrialization and then de-industrialization, are phenomena that have written and rewritten territories, cities, lives. The industrial period entailed an emphasis on the city, leading to the emergence of metropolises, the industrial conurbations of the industrial cities, designed to accommodate the industry and its related activities. The industrial zones were gradually incorporated into the growing cities, the industrial production being gradually moved to the outskirts of the new city limits, due to its incompatibility with the functions that arose in their immediate vicinity.

The industrial site situated in center of the town, in a more or less degraded state nowadays, occupies a special place among the classical forms of industrial ruin, the memory of the contemporary city being marked by the presence of the factories that grew with it. The industrial buildings are a reality of the human activity, a physical and temporal landmark that helps to raise the awareness of the past of a community or a society. Knowing and accepting the past plays an important role in understanding the present, contributing to the design of a realistic vision of the future.

The absence of activity within these deserted structures creates some urban gaps exposed to the passing of time and the danger of the (collective) oblivion. The value of the industrial buildings acquires an almost patrimonial valence, through all the collective memories, the stories of the people that inhabited them and through the rediscovery of the specific character of the place [2].

Amid the multiple crises affecting the world nowadays – the identity crisis, the economic crisis, the crisis of an excessive densification of cities and their overcrowding, the public space crisis, the ecological crisis – the development of cities has undergone major changes. The global economic crisis of the recent years, whose long-term impact is difficult to estimate, produced and still continues to produce globally significant changes in the architecture and urban planning domains. The experience of the recent decades shows that the cities [3] in the developed countries are redefined and adapted to the new requirements and the post-industrial activities, as a result of the globalization and of the increased mobility of individuals in search of more profitable jobs. The current issues related to the environment and society, generated, among others, by the strong real estate development, that until recently went at a very fast pace, require theorizing and investigating mechanisms that can contribute to a sustainable urban development.

The historical buildings play an important role in establishing some patterns of urban revitalization, representing some distinctive elements that add character and value to an area and help preserving its identity. Preserving the historical buildings means conserving the place memory, thus preserving the continuity and consistency of the architectural morphology and a certain spatial coherence of the site as a basis for future developments. Nowadays, the effects of globalization are being experienced also into architecture, the boundaries determined by cultural and geopolitical issues, which were essentially different before, being presently removed. The contemporary architecture is no longer born out of a particular place as the architecture of *place* (and time) being slowly indiscernible.

The existence in the contemporary world requires an awareness of the fact that without the past *accumulation* we would not be able to speak today of a modern time with its specific characteristics. In order to find his identity, the modern man cannot eliminate the temporal dimension out of his concerns, his existence being certified by referencing the past, the space and the time being a continuous accumulation of successive layers of evolution.

Text, context, conversion

The history of humanity in its various aspects, which includes also the urban history, is like a big *open book* which writes and rewrites permanently, the present (continuously build) being nothing less than an endless in-writing in the great (*urban*) *text*. Meanwhile, the city can be considered a living organism because of its constant movement and transformation. Most often the perception of the inhabitants concerning the city is not complete, but partial, fragmented, because the city is not only a simple, physically determined framework, but a composition resulted from a whole complex of tangible and intangible elements; all these elements are linked into a complex structure within a system of values and relations.

The linguistic *context* is considered a circumstance or a specific situation [4], the definition of the term becoming more complex when understood as a conjecture that (im)poses certain conditions due to the influence of the whole onto its parts, but also through the meaning that the parts provide to the whole they all belong to. So, the context is a whole defined but its component parts, each

constituent element of the whole representing the context; therefore, the whole and the parts are at the same time context.

Likewise, the *context* is defined as part of a text in which a word or phrase is located, its meaning and values being determined by its position within the text. At the same time, remaining in the field of linguistics, the term morphology is added to the mix in order to sustain the understanding of the context, *the morphology* being a part of the grammatical structure which consists of all the rules dealing with the changing of the form of the words in their various uses, or as the part of grammar that deals with the study of these rules [5].

In terms of architecture and urban planning, the *context* can be likened to the (*urban*) *syntax* [6], being outlined both as a structure specific to a certain city and as a relationship or connection that exists, following a specific set of rules, between different parts of the city. Any object or new item requires the incorporation into the context of the entire, by connecting it to the existing specific structure, so that after incorporation/assimilation, the item gets to be part of context, becoming in itself context.

The (historical) architectural context, through all its parts, is a reflection of the customs, traditions and culture of the place and the society that created it. The buildings that have lasted over time resemble the historical documents, which stand as testimonies of the past. The context is a link between past, present and future, and studying and understanding it plays an important role in finding an authentic identity, anchored into the temporal axis. Perceiving the built context, as a written text, as a body or as an archive of the memory and history, involves a deep understanding of the sense of the surrounding urban reality, because “things always tell different stories; about how they were made, about the historical circumstances in which they were made, and if they are true things, they also reveal the truth” [7].

In terms of terminology, *conversion* means a change in the nature of a thing, or a change in the essence of that thing. In linguistics, *conversion* is a process of word formation by changing a grammatical category into another, without changing its form, which is based on the functional change of a word by acquiring a new syntactic function. The conversion can be understood also as a *transformation*, a change through remodelling, a process that goes beyond the existing form and which develops on a certain path.

Therefore, the architectural conversion of a building can be understood as a transformation, as a change in the content (or function), without changing its shape, along a path that goes from something, the old function, to something else, namely the new function. Understanding the conversion as a journey that goes beyond form and that connects the original function of the building to the new allocated one, involves continuity. Consequently, the conversion means change but at the same time, means preservation, evolution and continuity.

The conversion process is directly influenced by the urban context in which the building being transformed integrates. The context is a specific structure of a city, a relationship or a connection that is established according to certain rules between different parts of a city. The study of the context, understood as urban syntax, implies the study of the buildings (functions) and of the rules of their connection and settlement in the urban tissue. Thus, the context is emerging as a conjecture that (im)poses certain conditions, because of the influence of the whole on all its parts, but also because of the meaning that the parts provide to the whole they belong to; any new construction requires an (re)integration in the context of the whole, by its connection to the existing specific structure.

The *becoming* process of the existing buildings or of the cities in constant (trans)formation, which are subject to a functional and spatial remodelling, resembles a *palimpsest* [8], on which there was a *first writing*, maybe also a *deletion* or an *addition*, and a *re-writing*. The conversions and the urban renewals resemble *writing over* an existing text, which provides the opportunity for an inventive and creative continuity by involving the previous layer into the creation of the new text, and by the renewal (of meaning) of the old text. Integrating into the new text a layer or a subtext, which up until a certain point has been hidden, involves revealing a wealth of spiritual and material treasures. Any building can be seen as a book (or a chapter in the urban book), as a support of a text or a composite of layers and meanings, whose reading resembles researching an archive which represents a resource for a possible intervention. Resembling the books that contain a story within a story, the rehabilitation and extension of an existing building is similar to adding a new chapter to an endless text.

Past, present, future: accumulation, preservation, reuse

The old buildings enclose into their walls a double value: an affective and a documentary one; they incorporate ideologies, feelings and the way of thinking of those who have shaped them, their structure reflecting the level of the civilization that created them. The preservation of these buildings is the manifestation of a psychological need for security and awareness of the *roots*. For some advocates of the preservation of the historical monuments, the conservation involves respect and reverence towards the monument, a fact that indicates a static attitude, devoid of the positive dynamics of the creation. However, the ideologies of some of the pioneers of the conservation of the built heritage, among them, in UK, John Ruskin (whose writings influenced the principles of conservation and restoration since the nineteenth century) and William Morris [9] who advocated in favour of the preservation of the old buildings that amounts to the sum of the successive interventions of the previous generations, carriers of human intervention.

Accepting the inevitable societal transformations that marked the course of history, implies the acceptance of the transformations undergone by the buildings, in order to comply with the social changes. Thus, imitating the past styles can be perceived rather as an insult towards the ancestors than a compliment, because every generation must build according to its own era's way and needs. Françoise Choay remarks in one of her books, "Allegory of the Heritage", that "the reuse is the most paradoxical and difficult form of the enhancement of the heritage: meaning the removal of a museum destiny for a specific building and re-inserting it into circuit of the current use" [10]. However, the functional recovery of a monument through its conversion, even with the purpose using it as a museum, insures not only the physical preservation of the building, but also the preservation of the memory, which was carried along. The reuse of built heritage is more than a romantic idea, becoming important because of the need to keep one specific building for its identity and documentary value.

In 1975, Serban Cantacuzino wrote in his book "New Uses for Old Buildings", that "because the structure of a building tends to withstand longer than its function, the buildings were always adapted to new uses, which allowed generation after generation to find the sense of continuity and stability in the environment" [11]. The buildings have always been subject to change throughout their lifetime, the edifices outliving the civilizations that built them, even if the political regimes, the religious or economic circumstances have changed. The Greek and Roman temples were turned into Christian churches, the English monasteries into rural holiday residences and the Russian palaces into museums. More recently, the nineteenth century plants and train stations are converted

into the cultural equipment or into residences for the simple reason that this type of intervention, the conversion, is cheaper and less complicated than building something from scratch. The reuse of the existing buildings is a matter of economics but at the same time, a common practice throughout history [12].

Referencing the historical context, with its optimal or less than optimal layers, is important when discussing about the (functional) content conversion. History is a continuous accumulation of *layers* on which the present is placed as a base, like a support, and through architecture the temporal co-presence of these layers becomes visible. Likewise, preserving an architectural space plays a specific role in the appropriation of a specific space, because any change to a familiar space, preserved in a certain way into the emotional memory, can be seen as a *disfigurement* [13]. Re-attaching value to the architectural patrimony means preserving the memory and the recovery of the historical-cultural identity by referring to the past.

In this context, the conversion of industrial buildings is considered a default component of the urban revitalization, due to the location of these sites in the central areas of the cities. Nowadays, in Romania, in most cases, the former industrial spaces (which have not yet been demolished) have the appearance of deserted shells, devoid of meaning and content. Understanding the rehabilitation and recycling of the existing built as an *engine/tool* in urban regeneration, this study follows the impact of the functional conversions on the social and cultural life of the city.

Industry, function, conversion

The decommissioned factories, whether or not classified on the list of historical monuments, are becoming nowadays cultural centers, museums, concert or exhibition spaces. The industrial heritage, with or without cultural, architectural or historical value, but often, with at least a contemporary use value, makes the edifice suitable to be subjected to the rehabilitation and conversion processes. On the other hand, the assemblies which become monuments and which are not allowed to enter under the refunctionalisation process, they are retained because of their educational value and transformed into museums of the (productive) activities that were once taking place inside them. The generous nature of the industrial spaces and the lack of strict divisions allow very creative refunctionalisation solutions.

The preservation and rehabilitation of the industrial heritage involves choices about the attitude towards old structures, and the relationship between the new and the old layer, or the way in which the previous layers can be transformed in such a way so that they can coexist within the same building. Some options may include demolition (if the preserved structure has no value or no interest - not even a structural one), museification or re-integration in the contemporary context through a structural, functional and aesthetic rehabilitation. On the other hand, the rehabilitation can become a controversial subject when the line between renovation, *façadisme*, and creative rehabilitation is not clearly distinguishable. The functional rehabilitation and conversion of an old building can be seen as a (positive) compromise between the historic preservation and the demolition. The reintegration into the active daily circuit is a balanced approach between the option of demolishing the building and the option of its museification – seen as a *freezing* of the building into a certain stage of its development (understanding the evolution as a process of adapting the building to the contemporary requirements). The space defined by an existing structure can be seen as a dynamic place of change and transformation, a scene for the informal game between past, present and the next stage of evolution which is yet to come [14].

The conversion is a transformation process involving preservation and continuity, any building can be *read* as a palimpsest, whose co-present (historical) layers help the understanding and appropriation of the realities of the (built) past. The co-presence requires a simultaneous existence, a now and then coexisting into one building, involving the presence in the same time and in the same intervention, of the significant hypostasis that building went through. The conversions and the urban revitalization resemble a *writing* over an existing text, which provides the opportunity for continuity by integrating in an inventively and creatively manner of the previously text layer into the new layer. By (re)integrating the preserved fragments of the previous layers, which are taken and inserted as *quotes* in the body of a text, the old meaning of the text is renewed.

From this perspective, not every project of transformation, rehabilitation or *up-grade* of the existing buildings, can be called a true conversion. The following two examples of converted industrial spaces, although both are housed in the same type of building – former industrial structures, present major differences regarding the attitude towards the existing layer.

In Madrid, the cultural center “Caixa Forum” (Fig. 1) opened in 2008 is located on a favourable site, in a central urban tissue with a historical value; the cultural center is located in front of the Prado Museum, near the Atocha train station and the Reina Sofia Museum. This new location of the arts in the Spanish capital was in the beginning part of some unspectacular urban spaces and structures, including the Station power plant and a gas station. The masonry structure of the former power plant, classified as a historic monument, is reminiscent of the early days of the industrial age in Madrid, while its adjacent gas station was a purely functional structure that was not blending in with the surrounding urban landscape. The architectural project of Herzog & de Meuron proposed the demolition of the gas station in order to create a small square, between Paseo del Prado and the new “Caixa Forum” within the former power station.

The brick shell of the plant is the only element that was preserved, part of the old industrial structure, the interior being entirely demolished. The removal of the base of the building provided an open space covered with the brick shell, which now creates the impression of floating above the street level. This protected space under the Caixa Forum, which provides shade to visitors who want to meet in open air, is at the same time the entrance of the cultural center, being connected to the small square in front of the Forum, both visually, as well as through the treatment of the pavement which is continued from the market to beneath the building.

The separation of the structure at the ground level created two distinct worlds: one below and one above the ground. The *underground* world, buried under the topographic landscape of the market, provides a space for a theatre/auditorium, technical rooms and parking spaces. The (new) multi-stage building above the ground level hosts, inside the preserved envelope, the entrance hall and the art galleries, while at the last two levels, which were added to the existing structure, it hosts a restaurant and the administrative offices. Thus, a contrast was created, in the interior space level, between the flexible nature of the exhibition galleries and the complexity of the last (added) level, with the administrative offices and the restaurant. The sculptural appearance of the silhouette of the forum, and especially the addition of the last two floors, was not intended to be just a formal-architectural whim, but an answer that reflects the character of the urban landscape of the rooftops pertaining to the nearby buildings.

This desire for integration into the wider context of the building falls somewhat in contrast with the fact that interior of the former power plant was entirely demolished, and thereby the immediate context of the spatial memory of the structure was deleted. In this case, one cannot speak of a conversion in the true sense of the word, as we have just a flat image, preserved into two

dimensions, the facades of the power plant, the historical three-dimensionality of the space being annihilated [15].

However, the exterior conveys the idea of overlapping historical layers which mark the evolution of the building. These distinctions are articulated on the facade by the preservation of the historical brick structure of the roof line, overlapped by a new layer, clad in etched metal panels, whose color engages in a dialogue with the existing façade in brick. The new part, is made up of two different parts: one consisting of solid metal plates and the other, at the top, also build out of the metal panels but which have micro perforations that allow the filtering of the sunlight into the indoors spaces.



Figure 1. Caixa Forum: the former power plant – before and after intervention

“Bâtiment des Forces Motrices” in Geneva is a good example of restoration and rehabilitation of an industrial space, which preserves at the same the memory of its first functions. Throughout history, the building has undergone two official inaugurations, first in 1886 as a plant, and the second in September 1997 as a concert hall.

The impressive building was built between 1883 and 1892 (Fig. 2) in the middle of the Rhone River, by Theodore Turretin, engineer and politician. In September 1882, the Grand Council of the Republic and Canton of Geneva subsidized the city of Geneva for the concession of the driving forces of the Rhone. Since then, Theodore Turretin was able to develop his project to build a plant that would operate in order to feed the fountains, the residences and the factories, providing them with water through a pump system.

The building plan is in an L shape, the longest wing parallel to the watercourse, while the arches at the base of the plant recalling the structure of the bridges. Inside, the two wings form a huge open space, devoid of any partition, the roof being supported by a metallic framing [16].

When the industry moves to the suburbs, the building of the driving forces of the Rhone River is abandoned during the 60s, being classified as an historical monument in 1988, when alternatives for a new cultural-functional vocation are being searched. In 1994, in order to restore the machine systems of the “Grand Theatre” building in the Place Neuve, the administration of the theatre begins to look for another space to receive the 1997-1998 theatrical season. After several discussions with the department responsible for managing the water plant, and through the generosity of a Genovese sponsor, a decision was made to build inside the former building of the driving forces, a new auditorium of 1000 seats adapted to the needs of the theatre. This new hall was supposed to host, for one year, all theatrical performances, and then to be used for various events, shows or classical music concerts (Fig. 3).

The basic principle of the intervention proposed by the architect Bernard Picenni was a simple one, aiming to create a reception space in the lower wing of the structure and the building of an auditorium in the large wing, using the *box in box* system. The auditorium, named the “Theodore Turretin Hall”, is entirely made out of wood, on grounds relating to the lightness of the structure and the acoustics of the hall. The Hall separates the building in two well-defined spaces, a public one with ticket office, foyer, dressing rooms, bar and a performance hall, and another one, private, with offices, backstage, dressing rooms and technical spaces.

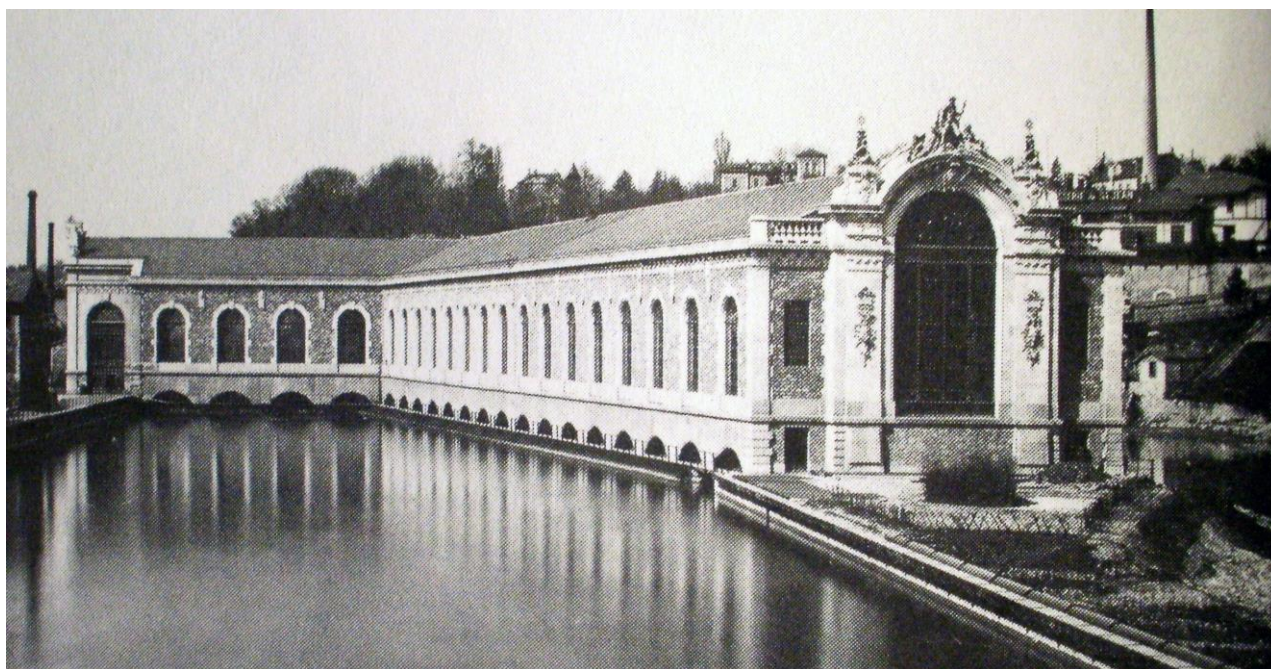


Figure 2. Bâtiment des Forces Motrices: image from the XIXth century

The public space of the lobby (Fig. 4), a polyvalent space, allows the organization of events and receptions, in the framework created by the original volume of the building, left empty in order to accommodate decorations, exhibitions and the public, depending on the scheduled events. However, two pumps were preserved in this place (being restored and painted in blue) as a testimony of the industrial history of the place. The place received thus a new identity and a new name, “BFM” (“Bâtiment des Forces Motrices”), but without erasing all traces of its previous identity and function. Under this three-letter the building of the driving forces receives today the public for

festive events and various cultural events, the most significant being the use as a concert hall for classical music [17].



Figure 3. Bâtiment des Forces Motrices nowadays

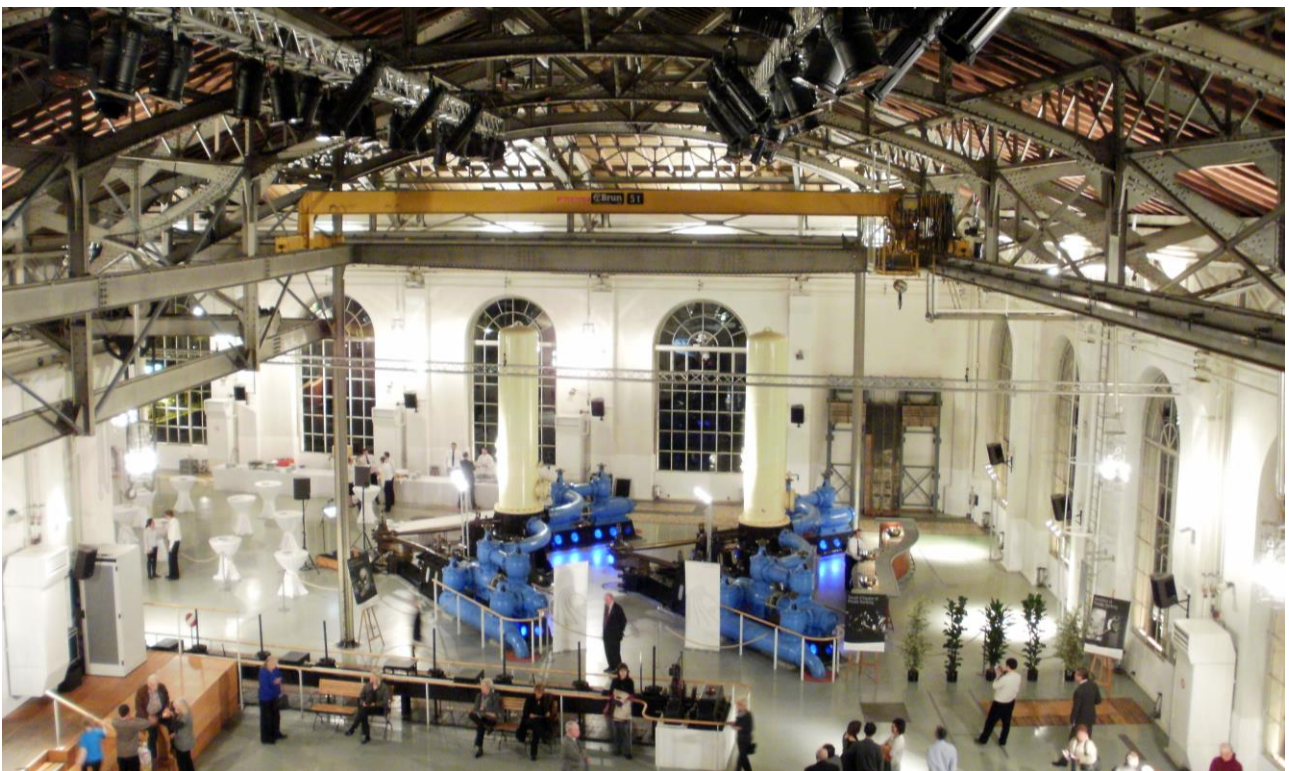


Figure 4. Bâtiment des Forces Motrices: the place memory

Recycling of the built environment and the recovery of the memory

Nowadays in Romania, following the extensive investments in constructions and the chaotic real estate development of the post-revolutionary market, most major cities are facing difficulties in

what the building stock is concerned. The problems generated by the new urban interventions, *complement* the major dysfunctions arising from the radical transformation processes undergone by the urban tissue in the period before the 1990s. The overlapping effects of these interventions and transformations have led to a built environment characterized by contrasts, located between the *brightness* of the contemporary architecture, the sadness of the communist-era neighbourhoods and the marginal (or marginalized) areas.

A significant dysfunction of the cities in Romania is represented by industrial spaces inserted into the residential areas, which took the form of architectural *relics*, one of reasons that generated this phenomenon being the discontinuation of the urban restructuring programs before 1990. Subsequently, decisions of a political and economic order and the orientation of the investors towards the areas with a high profitability rate caused the previous areas to decline, the industrial buildings and their adjacent infrastructure reaching a high level of degradation.

The postindustrial sites, the so-called *brown areas*, present a yet untapped cultural potential. In Romania, nationwide, there are a number of industrial sites with different distinctive characteristics and types, depending on the type of urban setting they belong to, the function they originally had or the period in which they were built. A characteristic of these industrial sites is often their uncertain status, due to their incorrect inventory on the list of built heritage, historical and cultural or, in some cases, precisely because they do not yet have the status of historical buildings.

Many of these sites that do not enjoy a clear status in terms of their historical value have been completely destroyed. In their place, assemblies of office or residences buildings have been built, which's architectural, urban quality and feasibility are, to say the least, questionable. The lack of legal and financial instruments and, often, the presence of local vexatious interests, resulting in today's industrial heritage impasse in Romania. The phenomenon of destruction of these patrimonial property components is explained, among other things, by the absence of a good and strong information or awareness, nationwide, about the built heritage in general and about the industrial heritage in particular.

One of the consequences of the *tabula rasa* ideology derives from the communist period, when the idea that what is old must disappear was promoted, the cities (together with their settlers) being rebuilt from scratch. This ideology includes among others also the deleting of the collective memory and identity by breaking any connection with the past. Unfortunately, this mentality still persists in the contemporary thinking, this time driven by other intentions, most often of an opportunistic or economic nature. Against this background, it is desirable to return to the built heritage, rescuing and reintegrating it into the functional and cultural circuit of the cities in view of the recovery and preservation of the historical values.

In our country, a small number of recovery operations of the industrial building stock applied consistently the principles for the protection and the functional reintegration of the industrial buildings into the contemporary urban tissue.

In Cluj-Napoca, not far from the city center, close to the industrial area, the former "Paintbrush Factory", a fascinating place specific to the postindustrial city, was converted in 2009 into a space for contemporary art creation. When artists from Cluj-Napoca, who were looking for a place to establish their headquarters, entered the factory, what opened before them was not only an area with potential for conversion, but also a very permissive place for the fantasies of the local artists and cultural producers.

The production of brushes has been permanently discontinued in 2005 after over 30 years of activity and what was left behind seemed to be a box with pieces from a fictional industrial age museum, otherwise very relevant to memory of the place. The *museum pieces* were created out of life stories, decommissioned equipment, safety posters, photos of the factory and of the surrounding area, brushes panels, worker's lockers rooms filled with yellowed posters. The conversion of the place into a contemporary cultural space took into account also the recovery of all these pieces and together with them, the place memory, the memory of a segment of the social history.

The global phenomenon that the conversion of the “Paintbrush Factory” is a part of, integrates the recovery movement of the industrial heritage, an approach of a historical value, seen both as a means of urban development and as a process of social valorisation of an abandoned place.

The project's purpose was not only the remodelling of the spaces as workshops, showrooms, theatres or dance halls, but also the *redesigning* of the collective memory of the social stakeholders who have (had) a connection with “The Paintbrush Factory”. To maintain the social meaning of the plant alive and relevant for the community, the project tried, throughout a process of deconstruction and reconstruction, the optimization of the dialogue among the various layers of time, which have left (and continue to leave) their mark in or on this site. “The Paintbrush Factory” in Cluj-Napoca is a test recovery and archiving of the past stories which revolve around the factory, the project providing the joy of a successful act of contemporary intervention, but still leaving room for continuation and improvement [18].



Figure 5. The Paintbrush Factory



Figure 6. The Paintbrush Factory: interior spaces

For an ethics of the (re)construction

To build within context involves a coexistence of the design philosophies, an attempt to unify the new with the old, the most powerful attributes and characteristics of the old building combined with those of the new building. The construction within context raises not only functional or technical problems, but it is also a matter relating to the history of the buildings, its site, its context, being it geographical, cultural, political or economic.

The theoretical journey of our study was born and conducted through the continuous parallel between building/city and the literal-grammatical text, the act of creation seen as a (re)writing in the con-text. Considering the urban tissue of the architectural object, the study emphasizes the fact that part and the whole are at the same time context, the history of the building being just as important as the context to which it belongs.

In this respect, the research argues in favour of an understanding of the conversion not as a full erase of the old function (and its memory), but as an ongoing writing, superimposed onto the existing one. The conversion is seen as a natural process of transformation of a building, a stage of an evolutionary process, the change arising from the new functional and social needs imposed by the contemporary urban context. The support of the theoretical study is made up of the examples of the built stock, of the creative reuse of the decommissioned industrial areas, which highlight the history of the place. The approach is an attempt to raise awareness of the importance of the cultural preservation and capitalization of the industrial architecture, seen as a repository of memories, experiences and life stories.

The parallels between the architectural-urbanistic context and the literary-grammatical context, leads to the understanding of the conversion as urban syntactic relationships. The conversion is a process of forming new words out of existing words without changing their forms, but by acquiring new syntactic functions, depending on the meaning of the sentence and its syntactic needs and functions. Likewise, in the urban areas, the buildings acquire new functions and new meanings in the activities (syntactically urban) context, depending on the functional needs of the area.

When it comes to conversion (and possibly the expansion) of an industrial building, the contemporary intervention should clearly indicate that it has a different style or comes from a different time period. The conversion should be addressed in view of the continuity, one of the most important principles of this type of intervention being the honesty of the material (spatial) expression of the building construction previous phases. Otherwise, both the new and the old architecture run the risk of being compromised and the final product becomes a mix-up. An anti-mixing approach does not mean that the new structure should not complement the existing one or

should not complement the rules and styles of the existing building or of those in the immediate vicinity of the site.

The conversion process should take into account the memory of the building, which needs to be identified, protected and harnessed for the benefit of the present and the future. The restoration and rehabilitation of the existing built stock requires the integration into the intervention principles the idea that the original structure should be strengthened in its original spatial and material context. Preserving the structural integrity and the respect of all types of industrial buildings should be one of the purposes of conversion, and by creating a dialogue between old and new, to generate a new volumetric composition.

The design of the new layer can include the preserving of the place memory and of the activities that defined the area of which the building was part of for many years, by preserving the signs which marked the original use of the space, but also by reusing these traces within the current activities. The industrial character of the site is preserved if the traces of its former identity and all functions are not deleted and the memory of its first function is preserved as testimony to the history of the place. The contemporary intervention can be highlighted without altering the architectural expression of the existing building, even when a stark contrast to the old structure is desired. Open and permeable from a social point of view, a building can tell the story of its architectural history, thus revealing the original character of the place; therefore, the physical integrity and the distinctive quality of the atmosphere of old industrial areas must be retained and highlighted.

Understanding the city as a book or a (con)text, the urban context, is a circumstance that (im)poses certain conditions because of the influence of the whole onto its parts. The context is formed in the minds of people out of memory images (tactile, auditory, visual, emotional) taking the shape of the memory of a place. From this point of view the appropriating of a space is done through the affective memory, the built space being interpreted and understood not only through the historical and the cultural context. The aesthetics of the place, the purpose of its use, the personal or passionate affection towards a place, plays an equally important role in its use in time and in the remembrance of that space. The significance of the place is apparent from the functional and emotional connection between the place and the observer, resulting in a meaning that the observer attaches to that place.

The memory of the place means the trace left by the time, or in time, by everything that happened in or on that place, the identity of a place being expressed through images, forms, environment, and in/through the people's memory the fundamental elements of that place are recognized. The research of these elements can lead to an architecture capable to be integrated into a certain place, and when the boundaries between building and place will be dissolved, the architecture will be able to transmit the simplicity and the naturalness of being in that place.

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- [3] London in Great Britain, Rotterdam in Netherlands, Paris and Noisiel in France, Namur and Hornu in Belgium, Essen in Germany, and so on.

[4] www.dexonline.ro.

[5] *Ibidem*.

[6] Syntax. The study of the rules whereby words or other elements of sentence structure are combined to form grammatical sentences.

www.thefreedictionary.com/syntax

1 a: the way in which linguistic elements (as words) are put together to form constituents (as phrases or clauses)

1 b: the part of grammar dealing with this

2 a: connected or orderly system: harmonious arrangement of parts or elements; the syntax of classical architecture

www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/syntax

[7] Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci. Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, Rizzoli, New York, 1979, p. 185.

[8] Palimpsest. A manuscript or piece of writing material on which later writing has been superimposed on effaced earlier writing

www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/palimpsest

[9] William Morris - founder of the British Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, guided in his actions by the writings of Ruskin.

[10] Françoise Choay, *Alegoria patrimoniului*, Simertia, Bucharest, 1998, p. 165.

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Fig. 1. Robert Klanten, Lukas Feireiss, *Build-on: Converted Architecture and Transformed Buildings*, Gestalten, Berlin, 2009, p. 94.

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Fig. 2. Marc A. Barblan, *Il était une fois l'industrie*, Collection Patrimoine Industriel de la Suisse, Geneve, 1984, p. 30.

Fig. 3. Personal archive.

Fig. 4. Personal archive.

Fig. 5. www.fabricadepensule.ro.

Fig. 6. Personal archive.

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