

Reading Urban Strata: Semiotics of Post-communist Spaces - Participants

Isaac Marrero Guillamón teaches anthropology at the University of Barcelona. He was previously senior lecturer in anthropology at Goldsmiths, University of London, where he convened the MA in Visual Anthropology. His research has focused on spatial conflicts and controversies where questions of heritage, displacement and “progress” are at stake, and where new forms of expertise, activist formations and conditions of possibility are enacted. He has conducted ethnographic research on the transformation of ex-industrial neighbourhoods in Barcelona (Poblenou) and London (Hackney Wick). More recently, his work has approached the relationship between indigeneity, modern art and development in Tindaya, Fuerteventura (Canary Islands). Across these projects, he has experimented with a range of visual, multimodal and collaborative research devices including film, photography, public events, textual objects and exhibitions.

Cristina Albu is an Associate Professor of Art History and Art History Graduate Advisor at the University of Missouri, Kansas, USA. Her research addresses how contemporary art enables us to question what and how we perceive. It focuses on artists' uses of new media such as video and biofeedback technology to enhance attention and highlight the fluidity of selfhood and interpersonal exchanges. This is a relatively new area of study which builds on intersections between art, science, and technology. She is the author of *Mirror Affect: Seeing Self, Observing Others in Contemporary Art* (Minnesota University Press, 2016); co-editor (with Dawna Schuld) of a volume of essays titled *Perception and Agency in Shared Spaces of Contemporary Art* (Routledge, 2018); and author of articles published in prestigious journals such as: *Afterimage*, *Artnodes*, and *Athanos*. Albu is currently working on a book manuscript titled *Body-Mind Signals: Affect, Intimacy, and Communication in Biofeedback Art*.

Ioana Marinescu is an architect and visual artist working with large-scale photographs in public spaces, with projections and live actions. She holds a practice-led PhD from The Slade School of Fine Art, University College London, which focused on the 1980s demolitions in her hometown Bucharest. Her research brings archival imagery to life in urban contexts and through the body. Marinescu has delivered numerous lectures and workshops on her doctoral work and taught at the Universities of Greenwich and Kingston. Recent exhibitions: Beaconsfield Gallery and The Architectural Association, London; National Museum for Contemporary Art and Space for Contemporary Art, Bucharest; Cazarma U, Timișoara; Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna; Helsinki Contemporary; The Swiss Architecture Museum, Basel.

David Littlefield is a senior lecturer in the School of Architecture + Cities at the University of Westminster, London UK, where he leads the MA Interior Architecture programme. His teaching spans cultural context, narrative thinking, and design studio. David's research centres on themes such as authenticity, heritage, representation, regeneration, and notions of place. Over the years, he has written for or contributed to numerous publications on architecture, design, and urban environments, and his work has been exhibited at Bristol's RWA, Arnolfini, and the Architecture Centre. In addition to his academic and research pursuits, David co-organised the conference Transgression in 2013 and curated the major exhibition Unseen Hands: 100 Years of Structural Engineering at London's V&A in 2008. He is a Fellow of the RSA and serves as a Director-Trustee of the Interior Educators network, where he also co-edits the journal IE:Studio.

George Themistokleous' critical spatial research investigates the role of the body within media assemblages in contested territories, particularly borderland spaces. Using custom-made devices and interactive performative installations, he explores blurred hybrids of electronic and actual selves to challenge identity constructs and circuits of power. His work re-activates latent, de-automatized bodily states as affective modes that challenge normative, codified behaviors, working towards social collective modes of self-determination. George's customized devices, participatory multimedia installations, and writings have been presented and exhibited internationally. He currently teaches design-studio and theory at Norwich University of the Arts and is the founder of Para-sight (www.para-sight.net).

Aleks Catina emigrated from Romania with his parents and sister in 1983. He studied architecture and architectural theory at London Metropolitan University and the Royal College of Art. Aleks is currently a Senior Lecturer in Architecture at the School of Architecture, Computing and Engineering (ACE) at the University of East London, where he leads teaching across both the design studio and history and theory modules. His doctoral thesis at Birkbeck, University of London, is entitled On Masks and Monuments: Themes of Provincialised Irony in Contemporary Art and Architecture. He is also the author of The Pillars of Uncertainty: A Jeu d'Esprit on the Monument (Cours de Poétique, London, 2025, forthcoming).

Eliza Demian Pătrașcu is an artist-researcher working across experimental film and sonic practices, spatial theory, and performative methods. Her work is grounded in the speculative exploration of physical, virtual, and imaginary spaces, with a focus on issues related to visibility, vulnerability, and access. She holds a BA in Fine Art and an MA in Visual Anthropology from Goldsmiths, University of London, and is currently pursuing a PhD at the Centre of Excellence in Image Studies (CESI), University of Bucharest, where she is conducting research on the social life and disruptive potential of urban emptiness.

Irina-Anca Bobei (b. 1996) is a fourth-year PhD student at the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest, “Space, Image, Text, Territory” Doctoral School (SD-SITT/CESI), the Department of Cultural Studies. She’s currently writing a dissertation on visual culture and weeds, plants in the city, plants in speculative fiction and ruderal imaginaries. Previously, Irina-Anca Bobei attended a Master’s course in the same department in visual cultural studies and finished with a thesis about the visual construction of the Anthropocene and the representation of non-human migration in the visual arts. Other research interests include non-human mobility theories, landscape theory, and ecohorror narratives. She is part of the SPECULA group, an artistic and editorial collective based in Bucharest.

Vanessa Gravenor is an artist and researcher based in Berlin. She works on the topics of entangled traumas, the aftermaths and aftereffects of war/military operations often through moving image. In her works and texts, she keeps an eye towards vulnerability, the psyche, and processes of recovery as they play out on the image/imaginary. Select publication include “Serious Dreaming: Virtual Violence and Its Dreamed Double” *Third Text*, Vol. 34 (2020), No. 6; “Against the Double Negative,” *Rosa Mercedes* (2023) No. 5. From 2021–2024, she was an Artistic Research Assistant at HFBK-Hamburg for Prof. Dr. Hanne Loreck, where she co conceptualized and edited the experimental publication project *Archives of the Body – The Body in Archiving*. She is completing her theory-practice doctorate under Loreck and Prof. Omer Fast.

Maria Balabaş is a romanian radio producer, sound artist and researcher. As a sound artist she is interested in the poetics of field recordings and archive materials. She is also a practitioner and organizer of soundwalks. In her PhD research she explores ways of listening to a traumatic historical past.

Adelina Ştefan is a researcher at the University of Ostrava (Czech Republic) and a UniGR fellow at CURE at University of Saarland. She is the author of “Vacationing in Dictatorships: International Tourism in Socialist Romania and Franco’s Spain,” recently published with Cornell University Press. She holds a PhD in History from the University of Pittsburgh.

Anton Polsky (b.1982), aka MAKE, is one of the pioneers of the street art movement, a DIY urbanist, socially engaged artist, researcher, activist, and game designer. He was a co-founder of Partizaning, a DIY urbanist collective and media platform; Delai Sam(a), a festival and platform that united urban activists from post-socialist territories to share the experience of reinvention

of collective actions to rediscover and revitalize public spaces of privatized post-socialist cities from the grass-roots level; and MediaImpact political art festival and platform. Since the late 1990s, he's been creating socially engaged art on the streets to research societies and reshape urban environments. Until 2022, he lived in Moscow, traveling and making projects in other cities — St. Petersburg, Krasnodar, Sao Paolo, Berlin, Bishkek, Amsterdam, Helsinki, and Tallinn. Since 2023, he has lived in Berlin, where he is conducting research for his PhD at Humboldt University on street art in post-socialist cities, including Berlin.

Balázs Gáspár (b. 1989) is a Budapest-based journalist, guide. In 2014, he graduated from Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest, with a degree in Hungarian Language and Literature and Philosophy. Since 2014 he has published numerous writings on photo history, architecture, and exhibitions. He is the author of several booklets, articles, and studies on cities (mainly on Budapest, and on his hometown, Veszprém), and their various aspects. He received the National Cultural Fund of Hungary scholarship four times on different topics, and in 2024 he conducted research in Berlin with the European Union's Culture Moves Europe grant. He has been a volunteer for the Budapest100 event series dealing with Budapest's architectural heritage on several occasions, and has led city walks in Budapest on numerous times.

Nicoleta Iliescu is currently pursuing a Master's in Concepts and Strategies of Intercultural Communication at the Petroleum–Gas University of Ploiești, where she has also earned her Bachelor's degree in Philology, specializing in Romanian and English Language and Literature. Over the past five years, she has gained experience in public relations and cultural projects through volunteer roles. Nicoleta served as PR & Communications Coordinator for the Prahova Youth Foundation and the Ploiești #LetsPLAY Youth Capital of Romania 2024 program, and as PR lead for the “Artă de patru dimineața” writers' support initiative. She also participated in over 20 student conferences and actively serves as a student representative in the University Senate. She has organized and facilitated workshops on personal branding and digital skills for young people and co-organized the Urban Street Art Festival in Ploiești, which has inspired her current research paper. Her work bridges theory and practice in visual culture, community engagement and dialogue, exploring how public art can foster inclusive urban identities.

Ana-Cristina Irian is a research-based artist, visual anthropologist, and curator whose practice bridges artistic creation, ethnographic inquiry, and archival work. With academic training in Sociology (Trento & Regensburg), Visual Anthropology (Bucharest & Perugia), and a Ph.D. in Visual Arts (UNARTE Bucharest), she explores memory, identity, and ecological relationships through participatory, interdisciplinary projects. Her work involves visual documentation, the recovery of cultural heritage, and the integration of photographic archives into contemporary art. Over the

past decade, she has exhibited in over 50 shows across Europe and published in journals such as *Anthropology of East Europe Review* and *Revelar*. She is the author of *Photographic Collections and Archives Today* (2022) and *The Production of Space and the Social Life of Artworks on the Streets* (2024). A member of EASA, the Futures European Photography Platform, and the Romanian Fine Arts Union, Cristina continues to develop work at the intersection of art and anthropology.

Ioana Iuna Șerban (b. 1990) is curator at MARE/Museum of Recent Art, researcher, poet and has a PhD in Philology with a thesis regarding the new in the image-text relation in contemporary culture and art. She has an ostensive experience in curating exhibitions, doing research in postwar and contemporary art. She authored texts for more than 10 catalogues on Romanian contemporary art, catalogues for which she sometimes also worked as a translator. She published 3 poetry books, for the latest – *Girl Meets Institution* (Vellant, 2024) – she received the prize The Young Poet of the Year 2024.

Cristian Eduard Drăgan is a Bucharest-based filmmaker and researcher. He studied directing at the National University of Theatre and Film „I.L. Caragiale” and is currently pursuing a PhD at the Center of Excellence in Image Studies (University of Bucharest). Through his projects, he explores themes such as mediality, psychogeography, alternate histories or hauntology.

Mona Vatamanu and Florin Tudor (1968/ 1974). Working together for over two decades Mona Vatamanu and Florin Tudor address the theme of history in films, installations, paintings and performative actions that revisit ideologies, utopias and modernist projects. Exhibitions selection): *Makeshift Memorials*, Small Revolutions, Kadist San Francisco, 2024; *Tara de foc*, Kunsthalle Bega, Timisoara, 2024; *The Cynics Republic*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2024; *After Rain*, Diriyah Biennial, 2024; *5th Kyiv Biennial: Against the Logic of War*, Augarten Contemporary, Vienna, 2023; *Kathmandu Triennale 2022*, Patan Museum, Kathmandu, 2022; *Omnia Communia Deserta*, La Loge, Brussels, 2020 (solo); *The Street. Where the World Is Made*, Maxxi, Roma, 2019; *Gaudiopolis – Attempts at a Joyful Society*, GfZK, Leipzig, 2018; *Prăpădenia pământului*, Salonul de proiecte, Bucuresti, 2016 (solo); *All Men Become Sisters*, Muzeum Sztuki ms2, Lodz, 2015; *Social Factory*, 10th Shanghai Biennale, Power Station of Art, Shanghai, 2014; *A History*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2014.

Mihnea Mihalache-Fiastru (1982-2025) was a Romanian writer and multidisciplinary artist known for his innovative work in documentary prose and urban anthropology. With a background in journalism, he gained recognition through projects like the docu-fiction web series *Șușanele*.

His books *Tehnologia Expunerii Universale* (2018) and *Expres* (2019) explore post-communist Romanian society through deeply personal and observational narratives.

Tapio Snellman, born in Helsinki, Finland, is a filmmaker and artist with a background in architecture and urban planning. His work encompasses cinematography, motion graphics and 3d animation. Work includes self-commissioned conceptual films dealing with urbanism and architecture. Over the years, Tapio has engaged in collaborations on animation and film projects with architects such as Herzog & de Meuron, Zaha Hadid, Steven Holl, Rem Koolhaas and David Chipperfield. Films and installations have featured in exhibitions at venues such as the V&A, The Hayward Gallery, The Guggenheim Museum, Kiasma, Tate Modern and numerous times as part of the Venice Architecture Biennale. Furthermore, Tapio has created video backdrops and virtual sets for theatre, dance and opera. Academic work includes teaching filmmaking at Universities such as the AA and LSE in London, the NDU in St Pölten, SCI-Arch in Los Angeles, ETH in Zurich and the FAUUSP São Paulo.

Jeff Silva is an artist, filmmaker, and anthropologist whose work bridges creative practice and academic research. With a Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from EHESS, he is a researcher at CNRS/La Fabrique des Écritures Ethnographiques and the A*Midex project *Alternative Narrative Forms in Audiovisual Anthropology* in Marseille. Silva's interdisciplinary work combines ethnography with film and sound to explore the human and ecological impacts of conflict, climate change, and industrialization. His films—including *Balkan Rhapsodies* (2008), *Ivan & Ivana* (2011), *Linefork* (2016), and *The Order of Things* (2022)—have screened internationally at venues like MoMA, *Visions du Réel*, and the *Viennale*. Silva's current work expands into sonic ethnography and collaborative projects with artists and researchers, offering new ways to sense and understand the shifting relationships between people and their environments.

Alex Axinte is an architect, researcher and educator who lives and works in Bucharest. Alex graduated from the University of Architecture and Urbanism in Bucharest (2004), obtained a Master of Social Science (2018) at Sheffield Methods Institute and was awarded a PhD at the Sheffield School of Architecture, University of Sheffield (2024). Alex was a guest collaborator at the Faculty of Sociology and Faculty of Architecture in Bucharest and at the Sheffield School of Architecture and since 2025 is a Lecturer at Landscape Design department, Horticulture Faculty, USAMV, Bucharest. He investigates and supports informal practices of commoning in the context of collective housing in the post-socialist city. Alex is involved in action research projects, applied education, participatory design and cultural and civic activation. In the context of his PhD research, he initiated the *OPEN Garage* (2020) space-project for research, mutual learning and community activation and *Bucharest Map of Neighbourhood Libraries* (2022) engaged research.

Andra-Maria Dobre is a communication specialist, facilitator, and certified trainer with over 15 years of experience in EU educational programmes, particularly Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. With a background in law, communication, and art history, she blends strategic thinking with creativity in designing and delivering impactful events, training, and campaigns. Passionate about performative arts, cultural inclusion, and storytelling, she uses her skills to make education accessible, engaging, and meaningful. She has coordinated national communication strategies, supported trainers' networks, and organized numerous international events. Andra is a strong advocate for the intersection between art and technology, seeing it as a transformative tool for community building and inclusion. She studied in Romania and France and speaks fluent French and English. Based in Bucharest, she is currently a communication strategist and active in promoting EU opportunities and cultural engagement. Her mission: to connect people through education, culture, and creativity.

Simona Drăgan is an Associate Professor, at the Department of Cultural Studies of the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest, where she teaches anthropology of art, comparative literature and four optional courses of art history. She holds a B.A. in Art History and Theory, a B.A. in Philology (1999), an M.A. in Literary Theory (2000) and a Ph.D. in Philology (2008), University of Bucharest. Currently she is a PhD candidate in Visual Arts (final year), The National University of Arts, Bucharest where she is working on her dissertation: *Architecture and townscapes: historical evidence in 19th-century Romanian art. From documentary drawings to the first photographs*. She is interested in art images of Romanian historical architecture, the urban history of Bucharest, documentary art, text-image relations and Italian art (Trecento and Quattrocento).

Claudiu Oancea is a postdoctoral researcher at New Europe College and adjunct lecturer at the University of Bucharest, Faculty of History. He is interested in the history of state socialism, pop culture during the 20th century, oral history and micro-history as methods of historical inquiry. His latest publications include "Music on the Turntables When the Tables are Turning: A History of Record Stores in Romania from Late Socialism until Present" (in Gina Arnold et al, *The Life, Death, and Afterlife of the Record Store: A Global History*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2023) and "From Blackened Valhalla to Hyperborean Dacia. The Romanian Black Metal Scene as a Case Study of Cultural Migration" (in Elke Weejas, Matthew Worley, eds, *Music, Subcultures and Migration. Routes and Roots*, Routledge, 2024).

Maria (Malexan) Alexandrescu is a landscape architect and current ESRC-funded postgraduate researcher at University of Sheffield, working on a project titled "Common maidan futures: caring for resilience in Bucharest's marginal and peripheral landscapes". Their work is informed by their multi-disciplinary background, holding a MA in Social Research at the Sheffield Methods Institute, a M.Sc in Landscape Architecture from TU Delft, and a B.Arch in Architecture from the University of Waterloo. Prior to starting their phd, Maria worked in landscape, architecture, and urban design practices and taught in design studio and architectural humanities courses. They continue collaborating on urban and landscape-oriented research, design, and artistic projects.

Vincentziu Pușcașu graduated in art history at Babeș-Bolyai University (Cluj-Napoca), holding a master's degree in cultural studies (Center of Excellence in Image Studies – Bucharest), a master's degree in art history and theory at the National University of Arts (Bucharest), and a doctorate in cultural studies and curatorship at University of Bucharest. He recently finished his second bachelor's degree in law at Dunarea de Jos University of Galati. Pușcașu works as an assistant professor and independent curator in the city of Galati, his field of expertise being curatorship, art history, aesthetics and cultural management. In a broadened horizon, his academic interests, research and publications include copyright topics and intellectual property, cultural management, history and philosophy of art, didactics and museology.

Cosmin Gandore is a graduate of the University of Architecture and Urbanism "Ion Mincu" in Bucharest and a PhD candidate at the Doctoral School of Architecture, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Arch. Augustin Ioan. His diploma project, "Memorial of Silence: Conversion and Extension of the Former Prison Râmnicu Sărat," was nominated for the Best Diploma Project 2021, UAUIM and at the Heritage First! biennale in 2023, an event dedicated to cultural heritage. His PhD thesis, titled "FROM MEMORY TO MEMORIAL: The Potential of Communist Prisons in Romania to be Recovered," continues the research initiated in 2021 with his diploma project, further exploring the theme of recovering and reinterpreting the memory of historical sites. As an architect (co-author), he received an honorable mention at the International Competition Piața Sfatului – Brașov Central Square (2022) and third place in the Kiosk Design Ideas Competition, organized by OAR Romania. Since 2017, Cosmin Gandore has been working as a mentor/educator at Galeria Basil, where he teaches architecture courses for high school students.