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# Architectural Criticism in the Soviet Lithuania 1958–1988: Vision of the New Architecture in the Specialized Periodicals

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## Abstract

Architecture criticism of Soviet Lithuania has not been properly addressed in scientific research. The novelty of the work relates to the branch of architecture criticism as part of the history of arts, particularly in the context of the historiography of 20th-century modern architecture. This paper is to uncover the various forms of architectural criticism and its agents among the vocational and scientific publications aimed at other architects of the Lithuanian SSR. Using a systematic approach and qualitative research methods, a database of 100 critical articles is constructed. The phenomena of architecture criticism are explored using the theoretical framework of W. Attoe from his book "Architecture and Critical Imagination" (1978). The results of the research brought several understandings. Despite the common belief among professionals that architects should be predominantly the creators of architecture criticism, architects by profession make up only half or less of the total number of texts in the specialized press. The dominating types of architectural criticism are normative and descriptive (excluding the texts that would describe the context of an architectural idea or particular building). There are very few examples of interpretative criticism encountered (except in the thematic group of criticism around interior design). Further discussion of prevalent thematic groups led to the conclusion that architectural criticism in Soviet Lithuania alongside the official "politically allowed criticism" has been using disguised forms of texts. There has been an underlying narrative to promote modernist or simply, *new architecture* principles using photography with little to no text, indirect speech, and other forms of non-explicit communication. One of the wider goals of this paper is to initiate wider research into the subject of architectural criticism of Soviet Lithuania and also validate the existence of the neglected phenomena using the specific material of professional and academic architectural publications.

**Keywords:** architecture, criticism, modernism, periodicals, Soviet Lithuania.

## Introduction



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30 years after the dissolution of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Lithuania, after historical and heritage perspectives are well covered, the time has come to look into the phenomena of architectural criticism. Naturally, one is expected to raise and present the remaining aspects of the History of Arts or Architecturology of the Soviet times that were not completely covered in the period of Soviet Lithuania. Architecture historian N. Lukšionytė Tolvaišienė lists four main areas of architecturology as a scientific subject: architectural theory, history, heritage, and architectural critique (Lukšionytė-Tolvaišienė, 2007, pp. 7–8). While the history of Soviet period architecture has been well-researched by M. Drėmaitė, V. Petrusis, and other academics (Drėmaitė, 2017; Maciuika

and Drémaitė, 2020; V. Petrusis et al., 2012), the Soviet heritage has been well explored by V. Janušauskaitė, V. Petrusis (Janušauskaitė, 2019; V. Petrusis, 2019) and considerably little has been researched around Soviet period architectural criticism. A. Samalavičius has published a monograph about architectural criticism (Samalavičius, 2010), but the author does not touch upon Soviet period specifics. V. Petrusis has an article about architectural criticism in Lithuania, but of an earlier period between the World Wars (V. Petrusis, 2021). This article will attempt to present the analysis of architectural criticism in the specialized periodicals during the years 1957 to 1990 which can be a first small step of a larger move to evaluate Soviet period architectural criticism from Lithuania in the context of the Baltic States or Eastern Europe.

Lithuanian culturologist A. Samalavičius describes in his monograph that the purpose of architectural criticism is to assess and rate architecture with a particular attachment of negativity (2010, p. 7). In contrast, the confident position of W. Attoe advocates for purposeful architectural criticism: "The key to achieving this understanding of criticism – as a tool, not threat – is to see criticism as behaviour, not as a judgment" (Attoe, 1978, p. 2). While A. Samalavičius wants to see architectural and art criticisms as parallel activities, W. Attoe stresses the distinction of architectural criticism from other criticisms of art to be future orientation and vital appreciation of the context. As a result, W. Attoe's open-eyed attitude was essential in the approach of analyzed content in the full entity as well as the survey for broader means of architectural criticism.

Contemporary researchers of architectural criticism H. Jeannière and P. Scrivano pose architectural criticism as "(...) originating and descending in large part from theory or history of architecture." (2020, p. 18). If N. Lukšionytė simplifies the introduction of architectural criticism for academic purposes, then H. Jeannière and P. Scrivano explore architectural criticism in a real-world form or rather "(...) in its multiple forms (...)" as well as W. Attoe. Further H. Jeannière and P. Scrivano expand the discussion around architectural criticism as a cultural phenomenon without clear boundaries, producing cultural exchange with nearby fields of philosophy and sociology (2020, p. 26). Leaving more complex considerations of subject boundaries for further studies of architectural criticism we ought to establish specifics of research: H. Jeannière and P. Scrivano indicate the possible categorization of architectural criticism by the type, by the agent (e.g. writer of criticism) and by the receiver (e.g. reader, as first described by P. Collins in his article "The Philosophy of Architectural Criticism", 1968) (2020, p. 20). In relationship to literature or social sciences, it has to be acknowledged that there exists even a larger variety of traditions for the forms of criticism. And with the ideas of W. Attoe that architectural criticism can be seen in the widest array of human behaviours about their closest physical environment (Attoe, 1978) a decision has been made to narrow down the research. Therefore this article explores various forms of "criticism made by experts for experts and specialists" through the singular Lithuanian Socialist Soviet Republic's professional magazine and architecture-related scientific academic publication.

H. Macinière elaborates about W. Attoe that he "rejects the model of literary criticism and art criticism" (2010, p. 38) and it was an additional stimulus to apply his vision: "(...) virtually everything people do in and about the built environment is a form of criticism." (Attoe, 1978, p. xii) to the material of the specialized press. As an outcome, additional emphasis was given in the discussion part to the photography and guided tour as means to disseminate the views of new or modernist architecture.

This research is aimed at the analysis of architectural criticism in the specialized periodicals of Soviet Lithuania with an emphasis on key aspects of the vision for new – that is modern - architecture. Modern architecture might have been understood not necessarily in the same way as in Western Europe. As a material for analysis publications for architecture field professionals were chosen: the journal "Statyba ir architektūra" (*Construction and architecture*, published from 1957, monthly; later in the text abbreviated as "S.A.") and scientific journal "LTSR architektūros klausimai"

(*Lithuania SSR Questions of Architecture*, published from 1960, irregularly; later in the text abbreviated as “LTSR A.K.”). Other specialized architectural periodicals like “Lietuvos TSR urbanistikos paminklai” (*Lithuania SSR Monuments of Urban Planning*, published between 1978 and 1988) have been omitted as the architectural criticism in the field of urban planning deals with another scale. This research is aimed at architectural criticism of the human scale, which can be observed from the human eye level (e.g. buildings and public spaces).

The objectives are:

1. Define and assess the various forms of expression for architecture criticism in the specialized periodicals.
2. Investigate who were the authors of the architectural criticism texts in the specialized architectural press of Soviet Lithuania by profession and gender.
3. Reveal explicit and non-explicit communication of the vision for new architecture and its intentions in architectural criticism.

## Methods

To tackle the phenomena of architecture criticism in stages, the primary research step has been to filter out a pool of printed material, based on the expected receptionist – a professional architect. There were two large categories of periodicals, aimed at architects in Soviet Lithuania: vocational training S.A. and scientific periodic publication LTSR A.K. After estimating the initial pool of data, a critical discourse analysis has been applied. This research uses content analysis combining both qualitative and quantitative aspects of data.

As a first step, an overview of the total production of creative and informative texts at the magazine S.A. helped to construct the basic database structure: the core being content analysis and appointment of W. Attoe’s type of criticism. Due to the large pool of data a non-probability purposive sampling of architecture criticism articles has been applied to the selected year issues of S.A. (starting with 1958 and the latest from 1986). It meant that the majority of physically available monthly issues have been researched from cover to cover, with the largest not researched gap being three to five years. Despite the quantitative aspect, the core conducted research is qualitative, using a systematic approach. Without a prejudicial position of what form architecture criticism might take, sifting through monthly issues allowed to select 1 or 2 representative texts from each issue. It has not been a strict quota, since some issues did not have any critical texts to be included in the database and others had up to six articles for special occasions (e.g. following the general assembly of the Architect’s Union at the level of Soviet Lithuania or Union of Soviet Socialist Republics). The texts were selected based on two main criteria: (1) have properties of architectural criticism (review a specific project) and/or have theoretical position; (2) thematically relate to the modernist architecture (in the context of Soviet Lithuania always called the “New Architecture”) or the future of architecture. In other words, it meant eliminating architectural criticism texts that have historical perspective or deal predominantly with the culture heritage of 19th or earlier centuries.

In the database articles can be filtered out by the author, author’s profession, keywords, and title and each has a little summary (Fig. 1). Distinguished architectural projects, mentioned in the articles, are also recorded for future analysis. This would allow us to filter most prominent projects of Soviet Lithuania at urban, architecture, or interior design scales.

Next, the articles are evaluated against the theoretical framework of W. Attoe (Attoe, 1978) and coded into dominant type of architectural criticism (see Table 1). In his book “Architecture and Critical Imagination” W. Attoe suggests the categorization of three types of architectural criticism, each type having three sub-branches. While one article can have more than one aspect, in this research, only one dominant attribute or type of architectural criticism is assigned to each article.

Žurnalo numeris	Mėnesis	Autorius	Autoriaus profesija	Straipsnio pavadinimas	Pl.	Pastabos	Raktažodžiai	Minimi projektai	Kritikos rūšis pagal Attoe	Kritikos rūšis: komentara
1963	10	Vacl. Balčiūnas	inž.-archit.	Mikrorajonas prie Verkių gatvės	20-21	Aprašomas nauji mikrorajonai D-10, D-1B, D-25 prie Verkių g. tarp Apkauš, Zalgirio ir Dzeržinskio g. Susaul aprašoma, kas bus statoma, naudojami 1-64 penkaaukščių gyvenamieji namai (užstatymo kompozicijos autorė Nijolė Monstavičiūtė).	#apšvietimas #dienosviesa #insol... #architektūra #projektai #igone... #gamtą #želdynai #gelbetonis #interjerai #kavinės #visuomeni...	mikrorajono planavimas	3-A	
1963	11	J. Bučas	Archit.	Daugiau dėmesio žaliajai statybai	29-30	Ukmergės rajono architektas - jau pažįstame žurnalo gale, viso straipsnio skaitantį atkreipti daugiau dėmesio į miesto želdymus, jų tvarkymą. Atsilekia apželdinimo darbai, trūksta projektų, darbai atliekami "nekokybiškai, be perspektyvos, nesąmoningai ir nesakingai." (29 psl.) Priešmestyje vengti apželdinti alėjus. Kauno apželdinimo problemos: reikia vengti įmantrumo, siekti paprastumo. Geriausiai įrankiai siekiant kokybės: visuomenės talkos ir rajono architektų darbas.	#keramika #menas #taikomojida... #landšaftas #triuškimas #miestopietra #mokslineis #konferencija #perspektyvos #daugabučiai #m... #propaganda #statyba #pramone #stambiaplokių #gyvenamieji #... #tarpukarioarchitektūra #tipinis #pionieriųtyvika	apželdinimas	1-A	

Fig. 1

Excerpt from the database of architecture criticism in the magazine SA

1 - Normative	1A. When it is constructed following a doctrine e.g. "form follows function"	1B. Systematic typological	1C. Systematic standardized (following Building Codes or Standards)
2 - Interpretative	2A. Explains the work of an architect	2B. Evokes a specific atmosphere	2C. Describes the impression created by the physical environment
3 - Descriptive	3A. Pictorial descriptive	3B. Presenting biographic information about the architect	3C. Presenting the discussed work in the social, political, and economic context.

Table 1

Types of architectural criticism (Attoe, 1978)

In the later stage, selected articles have been applied with thematic analysis of their content with a reference to the modernist architecture principles.

Scientific academic journal LTSR A.K. while being published irregularly by the Institute of Architecture and Construction, was the key publication to aid architecture professionals in planning. The insight on the potential architectural criticism in LTSR A.K. can make solid ground for understanding the overall phenomenon of architectural criticism therefore all of the articles (169) have been examined for features of architecture criticism texts. Because W. Attoe described architecture criticism as a behaviour related to the vector of the future, all research that deals with the history of architecture or architectural heritage from pre-II World War has been omitted. The selected scientific works that have attributes of architecture criticism, that in other words are meant to improve future architecture, have been merged with remaining theoretical articles and allowed to expand the thematic analysis of their forms of communication towards architects.

The conducted research presents initial observations about the kinds of architecture criticism text that were allowed in the specific professional publications by the all-controlling Socialist regime in the Lithuania SSR. In total 110 articles have been added to the database, which represent an overview of 14 years from 34 years of the Soviet period when the magazine S.A. was published (1957-1990). Table 2 presents an overview of dominant types of architectural criticism: out of nine groups that W. Attoe distinguishes, only five (1A, 1B, 1C, 2A, 3A) of them appear more often than others.

While this conclusion relates only to the textual forms of architectural criticism, we can already see that a large part of the types of architecture criticism are missing in the specialized periodicals. Dominant types of texts that fall under normative architecture criticism (1A, 1B, 1C) make up 44%: they either follow Socialist Modernist doctrine, either reference existing Building Codes or present requirements of typologies. Around 12% of texts at S.A. are interpretative (2A) and usually deal with a review of student's work at an architectural competition or sometimes an analysis of typified project that have correctly listed authors and suppose creative input by the architect. Rarely a built design is analyzed interpretatively in reference to its author, in many cases architects' names are simply omitted. 26% of texts at S.A. (3A) are visually descriptive texts, typically attributed to the impressions from trips abroad.

## Results

**Table 2**

Number of occurrences for the prevailing type of architectural criticism (Attoe, 1978)

The basic type of architectural criticism by W. Attoe	Sub-type of architectural criticism	Occurrences among the selected articles at S.A.	Occurrences among the selected articles at LTSR A.K.
1 Normative	1A	16	11
	1B	21	22
	1C	12	12
2 Interpretative	2A	13	2
	2B	3	0
	2C	8	3
3 Descriptive	3A	29	22
	3B	6	0
	3C	2	1
<b>Total:</b>		<b>110</b>	<b>73</b>
Texts authors: architects		54	N/A
Texts authors: women		11	7
Texts authors: men		99	66

Looking at the total output of published scientific research in the journal LTSR A.K. it can be concluded that only around 40 % of the published titles have attributes of architecture criticism (see Table 2.). Research articles that have an interest in the past or deal with historical perspective have been all omitted due to the research boundaries. Out of nine types of architectural criticism by W. Attoe only four appear more often than others (1A, 1B, 1C, and 3A). In contrast to S.A., the normative criticism (1A, 1B, 1C) make up the majority of critical texts with more than 60%. It can be related to the need for scientific publications to have quantitative arguments, and avoid subjectivity. Around the same as in S.A. – 30% of critical texts are descriptive. This usually indicates an early stage of development of architectural criticism or the type that can cause no blame for the critique of the Socialist regime in general. Another observation arises from the general tendencies of publication LTSR A.K (see Table 3.). During the first decades (1955-1975) when volumes would have mixed themes, between one-third and one-quarter of publications would have properties of criticism. During later years (1975-1990) each particular issue would have a specific theme. During that time only one thematic publication has been dedicated to the problems of architectural theory that also contain criticism of contemporary architecture challenges.

Concerning research objective number 2, a database of S.A. articles tracks each critical text author's professional title (see Table 2.). Analysis revealed that from 110 articles 54 of them (50%) were written by architects or closely related (e.g. architect-engineer) professionals. The remaining authors include political or administrative figures, art historians, or scientists. This comes in contrast with the popular opinion among the architects in Soviet Lithuania that non-architects cannot produce professional architectural criticism (Minkevičius and Mačiulis, 1986). On the other hand, LTSR A.K. does not provide any background information or titles of the text's authors and it becomes difficult to judge who wrote articles with features of architectural criticism. We can only attempt to deduct that by default contributors to LTSR A.K. would require to have academic identity or conduct scientific research at the Institute of Architecture and Construction. In the case of J. Minkevičius, he was an architect that turned to a scientific, academic career which means that sometimes the professional identity was fluid.

Also, it has been part of objective number 2 to record the gender of architectural criticism texts at both S.A. and LTSR A.K. As the Table 2 display in both vocational and academic press of Soviet Lithuania women make up only 10% of authors and men dominate it with 90%. The outcome is consistent with general tendencies of women as architects in Soviet Lithuania. The wider context is well explained in the text of M. Drėmaitė (2022). For further research, it would be valuable to track authors by gender in the cultural and popular press of Soviet Lithuania.

	Volume:	Issue:	Publication year	Total number of articles	Number of critical texts <sup>1</sup>	Thematic title of the issue
1.	I	-	1960	14	6	Mixed
2.	II	-	1964	16	7	Mixed
3.	III	-	1966	21	9	Mixed
4.	IV	-	1974	21	9	Mixed
5.	V	Book 1	1976	5	5	Recreation, Landscape Architecture, and Territorial Planning
6.	V	Book 2	1977	5	4	Public and Residential Architecture
7.	V	Book 3	1978	5	0	History of Architecture
8.	VI	Book 1	1979	6	1	Development of Settlements and Their Architecture
9.	VI	Book 2	1979/1980	7	0	History of Architecture
10.	VI	Book 3	1980	10	8	Territorial Planning, Landscape, and Recreational Architecture
11.	VI	Book 4	1982	7	7	Theory of Architecture and Perspective Problems
12.	VII	Book 1	1981	9	4	Architecture of the Settlements and Their Development
13.	VII	Book 2	1981	9	0	History of Architecture
14.	VII	Book 3	1983	7	6	Rural Architecture of Soviet Lithuania
15.	VIII	Book 1	1983	9	6	Landscape and Recreational Architecture
16.	VIII	Book 2	1986	9	1	Features of Development of Soviet Lithuania's Architecture
17.	IX	Book 1	1988	9	0	History of Architecture
<b>Total:</b>				<b>169</b>	<b>73</b>	

**Table 3**

Overview of scientific publication LTSR A.K

Qualitative systematic research lead to the understanding that there existed a somewhat case-specific terminology. Due to the ruling of the all-encompassing Socialist System, the terms such as “criticism” or “modernism” are often universally avoided, often being replaced by validation of “theory of aesthetics” or in the case “modernism” – by terms “new architecture”, “box houses” and others. This signifies that there were distinct from the Western Europe phenomena of “architecture criticism” and “modern architecture” specific to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or, even more so, to the Soviet Socialist Republic of Lithuania.

It is interesting to note that a critical stance was applied in the majority of research work related to landscape design, and recreational architecture – that is all related to nature. Analysis of titles proved that architectural criticism reached a higher level of development in the field of interior design in a contrast to architectural design. These and other discoveries allowed us to move the research further in the part of the discussion.

<sup>1</sup> This column lists a total number of texts in the particular issue that bear features of architecture criticism in relation to problems of contemporary or modernism architecture, excluding architecture historiography and themes for heritage.

## Discussion

### The Dispute of Architects as Agents of Architectural Criticism

To initiate the discussion we can look at the architectural criticism as a process of semiosis. It begins with an agent, who sends a message or a sign, that later is interpreted by the receiver. For the scope of our article is limited to the specialized periodicals, we will look at the contents of vocational architectural criticism to categorize the messages or signs being sent (1 objective) and also look at the agents of architectural criticism (2 objective). Moving on to the case examples, the key advocates of architectural criticism often attempted to associate the creation of criticism specifically with the architectural profession. In a series of articles in 1986, dedicated to architectural criticism, J. Minkevičius and A. Mačiulis answers the anonymous questions of the journal's redactor or journalist. J. Minkevičius, as a Head of the Architectural Theory and Perspective Problems Sector at the Scientific Institute of Architecture and Construction, states that only an architect by profession can reach the level of professional architectural criticism (Minkevičius and Mačiulis, 1986). Another key personality: J. Vanagas – who held the Chair of the Committee of Architectural Theory, Criticism and Propaganda at Architect's Union of Soviet Socialist Republic of Lithuania between 1980 and 1987 – travelled to Moscow in 1982 January to participate at the House of Soviet Union's Architect's Union event to discuss the field of architectural criticism. Based on his impressions he publishes an article in the 1982 March issue of S.A. where he states that architectural critics are expected to come from the field of architectural design. J. Vanagas goes a step further and argues that critics cannot be born when „(...) not talented, not perspective students“ of architecture turn to writing. J. Vanagas strongly stands behind the idea that an architectural critic is expected to know the challenges of building design in practice and not come from theoretical background (Vanagas, 1982). For an opposing, not limited to the pragmatic architectural profession's view on architectural criticism, we can take an article by G. Lasinskas. As an architect and postgraduate candidate at the Institute of Architecture and Construction Lasinskas publishes an article that proposes a novel model of methodological analysis of the aesthetics of an art object or a building (Lasinskas, 1982, p. 22) For him, aiming for an objective point of view in architectural criticism requires a broad theoretical analysis of aesthetic functions from “(...) philosophy, aesthetics, semiotics or psychology” (Lasinskas, 1982, p. 21) and is not limited to the specificity of narrow circles of architectural professionals. In the liberating context of Perestroika, J. Vanagas acknowledges the lack of real criticism produced by architects and calls criticism a subjective, biased activity which in turn is limited by the small community of professionals (1986) From these short examples we can observe that architects of the Soviet Lithuania predominantly saw themselves as the main agents of architectural criticism and at the same time felt responsible for the lack of or simply weak architectural criticism. An analysis of S.A. magazine texts revealed, it was not necessarily only the architects who produced the most influential architectural criticism. To put the problem of the architect as the main author of architectural criticism in the contemporary perspective, a good summary is given by E. Laaksonen, who describes Finland in the 21st century (the same country that the majority of Socialist modernist architects of Lithuania used to admire). Despite the available competencies to analyze buildings, architects are reluctant to produce criticism as “(...) it is considered unethical. The professional circles in Finland are very small (...)” (2010, p. 82), criticism does not reach high levels of quality as timid or formalistic reviews prevail and generally criticism is seen more as a threat to the career of an architect. This would explain in part the willingness to produce architectural criticism for academic work, competitions, and typified projects, but not for built work or its analysis.

### Nature and Landscape as Means of Thematic Escape

Selecting landscape architecture or, more specifically, nature-informed problematics as a focal point in the professional or academic critical texts resembles commencing a conversation with an unfamiliar individual about the weather: in both cases – a safe choice. The starting point of

greenery in modernist projects or alongside contemporary buildings was neutral in the context of a political regime or an authority of an architect. Or in other words – easier to disguise. For one instance J. Petrusis writes an article in 1971 that promotes the expansion of planned greenery next to the new architecture of the times. The article can be summed up by its title “Building a House – Plant a Tree”, but at the same time, the author subtly pushes the new principles of modernism doctrine as he encourages “to divide the plot into functional zones” to create a meaningful composition from plants (J. Petrusis, 1971, p. 11). Then the story is strengthened by national aspects of Lithuanian-specific plants (Lithuanian character) and the general promotion of humanistic ideals.

### **Art and New Architecture**

Another thematic group of articles deals with the interpretation and criticism of monumental artworks in the context of architecture. While artworks as well as architecture can carry multiple meanings, it appears that art, being a subjective matter in its origin, opened possibilities to establish critical positions provided they steered clear of politically troublesome themes. While discussing architectural causes of social problems in the Soviet State was generally prohibited, moving to a smaller-scale architectural criticism of interior design would prove to be generally acceptable. Monumental artworks in the interiors of larger architectural pieces allowed for a certain thematic escape from political, and ideological control or it appears by looking at author by author. Then even wider group of articles deal with interiors in public buildings, especially catering venues.

There appears to be a gradually changing position of different authors and certain emancipation in line with the chronological release of control in the Soviet State towards the 1990's. We can start the presentation of examples with K. Zykus who starts the article with socialist time markers while setting up the context for his research into the interiors of Kaunas higher education academic institutions assembly halls (Zyklus, 1976). K. Zyklus despite being politically biased uses a rather formal descriptive and comparative method. The assembly halls are drawn in schemes to be compared in size, orientation and against the existing norms for student capacity. The aspect of art or artistic formation of space is limited to the evaluation of acoustics, colour palette and viewing angles from the spectator's seat. This is a rigid, formal example of architectural criticism that majority of society have an image of when speaking about architectural criticism in Soviet Lithuania.

Rigorous, somatic analysis of Socialist Modernism interiors such as cafeteria “Vasara” in Palanga resort (architect A. Eigirdas, 1964) can be seen as an example of J. Minkevičius consolidating his authority as an architectural critic in Soviet Lithuania. In the picture published on the back cover of SA the building with single load bearing core appeared strikingly modern with ephemeral glazing. Inside there were three monumental art works and architecturologist J. Minkevičius takes up the challenge to make distinctions in the final form of the space. J. Minkevičius article “Interior Space and Monumental Art” (Minkevičius, 1966, p. 246) uses other examples of catering spaces as well, but “Vasara” stands out for its sculptural aspect of modern architecture imagery. J. Minkevičius uses the human eye viewing angle to evaluate and conclude that the artworks are crammed in a too little space.<sup>2</sup> The placement and composition of artworks in space further decrease the functional aspect. Using a scientifically drawn diagram J. Minkevičius concludes there is an absence of harmony between the sculptural works and the architectural space (1966, p. 246). From one point the author is bold and strict in judgment towards the monumental artworks however the main point is missing: the appraisal of the fact that in true modernist principle, the space of a restaurant is sheltered using a minimal amount of concrete – a single rounded cone turned

<sup>2</sup> Academic biography of J. Minkevičius supports the hypothesis about politically allowed thematic group of texts. J. Minkevičius was not allowed to defend the doctoral thesis in architectural trends abroad or about Lithuanian folk architecture and only from the third attempt was allowed to defend a doctoral thesis topic permitted in the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic context: “Compositional Foundations for the Synthesis of Architecture and Monumental Decorative Arts in Contemporary Lithuanian Interiors” (1967). The context and reasons are described in an interview with J. Minkevičius, conducted by E. Juocevičiūtė (2012, p. 63).



upside down. J. Minkevičius presents a curious point of view, but in a timid way and only based on measured calculations (e.g. human viewing horizontal eye view angle) thus avoiding any supposed subjectivity. The wider and logical continuation of the argument would have been to explore whether the architect had a word in the placement of artworks of the interior. The lack of wider context, and background of how architecture is being implemented in Soviet Lithuania – clearly for trying to avoid direct criticism of the Socialist regime – cuts short the attempt of meaningful criticism that would help to improve the harmonization between artworks and architecture that contain them. There lurks a fact evident in the printed pictures: the interior of cafeteria “Vasara” is overly decorative, in a clash with modernist, clean space. However, the statement leaves us empty-handed of any explanation that can be only assumed or guessed. Did the binge decoration in various materials and forms result from a lengthy restraint (the rest of the cities being overwhelmed by typified buildings and interiors)? Or maybe the will to demonstrate artistic capabilities of decoration when the chance arises is rudimentary of Stalinist architecture? In the words of W. Attoe, it would be like an architectural criticism without its main ingredient: an explanation of why certain things work, what was the sequence of events that led to the result and all of it – so that we would understand better how to move in the direction of the future (Attoe, 1978, p. 164).

More than a decade later appears another publication at LTSR A.K. by Estonian metal artist T. E. Vaivadienē “Monumental-Decorative Applied Arts in the Interiors of Public Buildings” (1974). The author uses not so strictly scientific methods but rather employs literary narration to persuade the reader. T. E. Vaivadienē attempts to draw a much wider context, naming a few Socialist architecture theorists that in her views match with Western modernism theorists – what could be called a disguising move to appraise Western modernist architecture. T. E. Vaivadienē continues to list successful and not-so-successful examples from Moscow and Soviet Lithuania. It is a compelling example of relaxed architectural criticism – rare to find such a position in the context of specialized periodicals in Soviet Lithuania.

### **“A Cupcake in the Bowl of Apples”**

The title metaphor illustrates the situation when a person describes the advantages of eating apples when all he or she wants is a cupcake lying in the same bowl as apples. However, if we continue with the idea that each writer of architectural criticism has his/her motives then a new layer is being unfolded in front of our eyes. There is a group of articles, written by architects, in the specialized periodical S.A. that praise certain advancements in construction technology or even declare a straightforward fulfillment of Socialist State goals (speed of construction, reduction of price or used material). But if we look at and try to understand the motives of the writers, especially when they are architects by profession, we see that they might have a secret underlining. In one instance in 1963 architect F. Bielinskis co-authors an article with academic colleagues V. Raginis and V. Sederavičius about the new series of proposed 1-318 typified project for a block of flats (Bielinskis et al., 1963). The authors use very pragmatic arguments for a new design with cross-section load-bearing walls: improved ventilation or insolation, but behind their words one can see a certain proliferation of modernist principles. Cross-section load-bearing walls – so it becomes evident looking at the printed plan schemes in the journal – would allow a free composition of flat layout and shuffle of furniture to change living scenarios as contrasted by the rigid layout of external load-bearing walls in the existing projects. In another example, F. Vitas writes an article “Contemporary Flat” where most of the text is given place to the preferable layout of functional zones of one family apartment (Vitas, 1963) and the author proposes light partitions, low profile furniture – to allow more daylight into the flats. The cross-section load-bearing walls scheme is praised again here as it allows to make windows that go up to the top of the ceiling, without obstructing the views to the outside. All of these arguments can be seen for no other reason than to disseminate the principles of the new architecture. In another research by M. Drémaitė, it is explained

how architects would use adapted talking to those who decide to build: either by declaring socialist values or either by manipulation of technocratic terminology, all of it used to persuade of modernism or fulfillment of personal architectural ambitions (2019, p. 122). Looking for an explanation for prevalent technocratic architectural criticism we can quote the Head of the Architect's Union Šiauliai branch: "We are building so much, (...) while so little is presented in the press." (Jurėnas, 1986). In the same article K. Jurėnas advocates that there should be distinguished architectural criticism and architectural theory. And while architects from Soviet Lithuania were well aware in late Soviet Lithuania about the theory from abroad: Le Corbusier, R. Venturi, W. Gropius (Jurėnas, 1986) it becomes apparent that theory and architectural criticism had fluid and overlapping boundaries in Soviet Lithuania.

Descriptive texts following the trips abroad indirectly criticize the low quality of modernist constructions in Soviet Lithuania. As E. Juocevičiūtė proved in her Master's degree work, Lithuanian architects took a lot of inspiration from Finnish architects (Juocevičiūtė, 2012). And so likewise architect N. Bučiūtė when describes her recent trip to Finland, brings hard to hide fascination with modern architecture and its lights at night into the article text of S.A. (Bučiūtė, 1964). Then it is weighed down by considerations about the Finnish connection to nature, the humanistic and social aspects of their public buildings and spaces. This play of text tone which varies between subjective impressions and the intent not to start obvious comparisons of political regimes in Soviet Lithuania and Finland can be called through the initial metaphor as an attempt to praise the apple next to the cupcake.

Following the 1959 trip to the Democratic Republic of Poland architect A. Spelskis publishes an article where he describes Polish advancement in residential mass housing (Spelskis, 1959). The author uses a rather reserved tone to describe the technical advancement in the production of separate mass-produced blocks-parts: kitchens, bathrooms, and staircases. They are later used to assemble varied shapes of the final forms of the apartment blocks. Little by little it becomes apparent that the author's motive is to persuade to shift to the typification of building parts, instead of a whole building block. When separate parts are typified the projects become easier to adapt to the existing landscape e.g. terraced layout on hills. And for the ending note, the author puts a photo of a free-standing column at the corner building. What could be a better silent advertising image of modernist architecture if not the corner concrete column?

To sum up, from this section we can see that one part of architectural criticism texts indirectly deals with modernist architecture almost like using the language of Aesop's Fables. The content is technological or just dry descriptive, thus it becomes hard to see the true intentions of implied proponents of Modernist architecture. Even the title Modernist Architecture is avoided or consciously replaced with „industrial architecture“<sup>3</sup>. But the majority of arguments presented in the critical texts, especially when they are written by architects, promote means that lead to a free plan, enabling asymmetry and variety of abstract architectural forms – exactly as Modernist architecture is perceived on the other side of Iron Curtain.

### **Non-literary Forms of Criticism**

When talking about the forms of architectural criticism and also taking into account the impact different forms have on the architects, then arise two major non-textual means that deserve a special mention. This part of the outcome was revealed after the study of secondary information around the specific architectural criticism articles.

<sup>3</sup> In Lithuanian language there are two synonyms: "pramoninis" and "industrinis" that essentially mean "industrial". However in specialized periodicals when used with the word "architecture" the former two words get new meaning. "Pramoninė architektūra" keeps the usual meaning of buildings in a factory site, production facility, while in this research "industrinė architektūra" is often used to hide the term "modernist architecture" in a sense that separate parts of modernist architecture are mass produced industrially. An exception comes with L. Šepetyš who uses the term "pramoninė architektūra" or simply "box houses" to describe the new, contemporary architecture (Šepetyš, 1978, p. 201).

A tendency has been observed that in many issues of the journal S.A. the text articles are overlaid with a photographic storyline. Pictures of modernist projects, models (included as the work of younger architects), and illustrations of finished projects, often in a “polished”, clean look – make up together an argument for the principles of modernist architecture. More often than not only an architect and basic title is annotated. In the 1964 September issue of S.A., the last cover is occupied with a night view of a restaurant in Palanga “Vasara”. Credits are given to the photographer J. Polis and the architects are omitted from the annotation text. As is observed later – some of the cases spare the architect’s name but always have correctly credited the photographer. Inside the same journal issue – a few additional daytime photographs are published with credits for the architect author A. Eigirdas, but no context or background is presented (SA, 1964). In another example, a modernist restaurant in Trakai is being presented in striking photographs of J. Polis and A. Karmazinas (SA, 1963). This time a minimal, neutral basic description in 7 sentences gives away the image of modernist building: “(...) stands in the peninsula next to the park. Built from the newest materials. Building is filled with light and airy, provides good views of the environment.” Curiously no architects are mentioned, only the fact it was a group of designers from Lietkoopsajunga (Lithuanian Union of Cooperatives). Thus we can observe in the review of SA that a silent appraisal of modernist architecture is taking place through photography and other forms of visual media.

Another tendency comes up when guided tours are used as a source of information to disseminate views on modernist architecture. Architects travel abroad, attend conferences and take part in guided tours as part of conference programs. While research of the relevance of guided tours as fully recognized forms of architectural criticism might come in the future, it would be necessary to recognize their existence. These organized experiences can be divided into groups, following the growing order of impact it might have had on the practicing architects: regular tourism guided tours (1), architects traveling abroad in organized groups (2), or lastly the guided tours organized for the guests of Architect’s Union Assembly or other formal event for the professionals of the field (3).

As the Socialist totalitarian system wanted to control all aspects of social reality (Klumbys, 2021, p. 72) it was natural that guided tours as a form of public experience had to be formalized. In the case of Kaunas, at the address, Rotušės Sq. 11 worked “Kaunas Travel and Guided Tours Biuro” which was active between the years 1961 and 1991. All the visitors and tourists to the city were able to receive guided tours only at the mentioned biuro.<sup>4</sup> There were three types of guided tours, all related to architecture of the city. First, a walkable tour – of Kaunas Old Town and its Gothic monuments, second in a bus to the Pažaislis monastery and third – took the buses with tourists to the newest residential districts (Dainava, later Šilainiai, also including 9th fort). The last thematic guided tour was intended to show the contrast of living conditions in the old and new neighborhoods of Kaunas, presenting the modernist town planning in an attractive way – as a tool for Socialist propaganda.

Looking at the list of organized trips for the members of the Architect’s Union in the Socialist Republic of Lithuania we can see numerous trips abroad. V-th International Architect’s Union Congress in 1958 was visited by K. Šešelgis and we see handwritten mark-ups of the guided tours provided as part of the official program (1958). The X-th IAU Congress in Buenos Aires hosted both Socialist State countries and democratic countries representatives where an announcement has been made by A. Rasteika (*Lietuvos TSR Architektų Sąjungos Visuotinis Suvažiavimas Nr. VIII,*

<sup>4</sup> The information is collected from a public lecture by a tour guide E. Rūkas. He graduated a special State overlooked study program to become a certified tour guide and worked in Kaunas biuro between 1978 and 1991. Rūkas gave a public lecture about his work as a tour guide in the Soviet Lithuania in 2019 May 16th, with the invitation from the local community, as part of “Kaunas 2022” program “Laboratories of the Communities”.

1974, p. 305). Trips abroad in an organized itinerary allowed the professionals to collect precedents and bring back part of the impact back home to the central planning institutes. We can raise a hypothesis that having all the professionals working in concentrated work groups allowed for easier dissemination of information about modernist architecture between its members. Part of the professionals took up writing and laid out their experiences in the articles of SA which shows how experience from organized trips led directly to the textual form of criticism (Bučiūtė, 1964). Again Lithuania SSR Architect's Union National Congresses (taking place every 2-4 years) would usually take 1 or 2 days in Vilnius, with several architects staying overnight in the hotels. The Architect's Union report from 1980 January 25<sup>th</sup> illustrates how the formal events were accompanied by organized tours in the city to see new examples of built architecture as well as trips abroad (*Lietuvos TSR Architektų Sąjungos Veikla Tarp VIII Ir IX Suvažiavimų (1974.10.18 - 1980.01.25)*, 1980). Reading the speeches from the participants at the assemblies we can already see how these organized guided tours have influenced the debates and conversations between the professionals. In the future, it can be turned into a separate research into the impact of informal critical exchange activities during the organized guided tours as a way to influence designers and discuss built architecture as an independent form of architectural criticism.

Completed research suggests that viewing through the lens of W. Attoe's theoretical position there were specific phenomena of architectural criticism in Soviet Lithuania. Due to the existing lack of research in the Lithuanian context, it is essential not only to acknowledge the existence of it but also to assess the various forms professional architectural criticism might take: through vocational and academics texts, photographic indoctrination of new architecture trends and verbal criticism in the form of guided tours and organized trips. Categorization of critical attributes and qualitative analysis of texts through the framework of W. Attoe allowed us to distinguish the dominant three formal subtypes of Normative and one Pictorial Descriptive type of architectural criticism. Qualitative research, especially in the scientific press, has brought up a relative thematic abundance of recreation architecture, landscape design, and interior design. There was little or very small number of architectural criticism texts that demonstrate Interpretative, Descriptive Biographical, or Descriptive Contextual types of architectural criticism.

While there are texts that discuss architectural competitions, student work exhibitions, and typified project design, however, there is an obvious lack of review for built volumetric architecture or implemented public buildings designs. There has been discovered a careful stance among the criticism authors' thus avoiding any deeper analysis of the project's concept, review of choices made by architects or commentary on the final built form in the social or political contexts and professional working environment. It has to be tested in further research if the layering of architectural criticism owes more to the fact that the architectural community was rather small in Lithuania and nobody wanted to disturb each other's careers, or does it owe more to the limitations imposed by the ever-controlling Socialist regime.

In relation to the second research objective, despite the voices from the professional community of architects promoting the architect as the main agent/creator of architecture criticism, the research has proved that a little more than half of the authors were coming from professional architectural backgrounds. In future research it would be a substantial step to undertake the research of cultural and popular press of Soviet Lithuania as well as explore radio and television broadcasts for the features of architectural criticism. It would be beneficial to understand the full stage of architectural criticism of Soviet Lithuania, and the impact that authors of architectural criticism delivered to the public perception of modern architecture. Expanded research would be appropriate to test the conclusions about the authors of architectural criticism as the cultural and popular press was often dominated by non-architects and women journalists in many cases.

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## Conclusion

In relation to the third research objective: analysis of the specialized periodicals and review of Architect's Union archives for context led to the conclusion that the professional community of architects felt a growing need for more, sequentially improved architecture criticism. However explicit promotion of modernist architecture would be allowed only when it went with Socialist State goals and condemned as part of the *bourgeoisie* in all other cases. This research proposes the existence of non-explicit communication of modernist or so-called *new architecture* using a replaced dictionary and adapted terminology if compared to the prevalent narrative of Modernist architecture in Western Europe. It would be of seminal importance for future research to continue analysis and explain the phenomena when "criticism" is being replaced with "theory of aesthetics". Or in other words to compare and weigh the different phenomena of architectural criticism on both sides of the Iron Curtain in the 20th century.

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