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SHIFTING PARADIGMS: SEMIOTIC READING OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT TRANSFORMATIONS IN LITHUANIA 1986–2004

Summary. The research delves into the complex and multi-layered transition of Lithuania from a Soviet to a post-Soviet society, focusing on the architectural landscape as a reflection of ideological shifts. It explores the period from Gorbachev's initiation of perestroika in 1986 to the Baltic States' entry into the EU and NATO in 2004, a time marked by significant transformations within the architectural, social, and political realms. First, using Greimasian Square, the study categorises and analyses the reactions toward Soviet Modernist architecture, observing the gradual shift from a representation of state ideology to a canvas reflecting a myriad of individual and collective experiences, also assuming the artistic value of the architects' output. Second, utilising frameworks from Western architectural criticism figures such as Peter Blake, Robert Venturi and the Situationists, the study contextualises and collates with architectural trends in public interiors or private constructions in Lithuania. Additionally, presumptions are correlated with a crisis in the architectural profession, characterised by a rise in private constructions without architects. Through semiotic view architectural discourse becomes a vital element in understanding the broader cultural and political shifts in post-Soviet Lithuania.

Keywords: Soviet Modernism, Lithuanian architecture, architectural criticism, Algirdas Julius Greimas' semiotics, space transformations.

INTRODUCTION

On the 11th of March 1990, in Vilnius, the first democratically elected Supreme Council of Soviet Lithuania declared rehabilitation of the independent State of Lithuanian Republic. The act took place in the main hall of the Palace of the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR. The palace was built in Soviet Modernist style in 1982 by architects Algimantas and Vytautas Nasvytis which tectonically employed the powerful figure of the overturned pyramid and a rather formal, repetitive structure in the elevations.¹ The semantic appropriation 'from Soviet to Lithuanian' is grounded in the tumultuous events around the palace on January 13, 1991. Here we can illustrate well the theoretical problem of this particular research: why was the building turned into the Lithuanian Parliament without the physical alteration of the building itself (except the replacement of the Soviet emblem with the national coat of arms in the main hall)? Art historian Rasa Antanavičiūtė concluded that while monuments in this period were swiftly replaced, the changes to the architectural environment were slow and

considered expensive.² As a semantic 'acquirement' of the Parliament only in 2007 a separate memorial, mostly from glass, was built around the concrete blocks that remained there since 1991 when they were used to block the possible entry of Soviet soldiers.³ While this is just one instance from the history of architecture perspective: the transition period from Soviet Lithuania to an independent Lithuania was multilayered and sometimes contradictory due to multitude of individual experiences.⁴

As historian Irena Štutiniė explains, the collective memory of new Lithuanians could be called post-totalitarian, which, it is argued, prompted varying degrees of reaction to the existing and newly built environment;⁵ (Robert Venturi would call it 'the difficult whole').⁶ In terms of time boundaries, this article follows the methodological approach of Estonian researcher Ingrid Ruudi who chooses Mikhail Gorbachev's announcement of perestroika in 1986 as the beginning of changes in architectural, social and political environments.⁷ This research

covers the period until the Baltic States entered the European Union and NATO in 2004 when the 'period of reaction' is considered completed.⁸ This research aims to apply the semiotic structures of manifestations (Algirdas Julius Greimas' Square) to the diachronical reading of architectural space in Lithuania.⁹ Architectural style signifiers are of secondary importance, because in this research the core interest lies in the architectural environment as the signifier of semic articulation (or the absence) of the changes in the ideology.

As an initial display of a particular scientific method, we are applying the Greimasian Square as a semiotic tool to categorise and explore various reactions towards the Soviet Modernist public buildings in Lithuania, following the fall of Soviet Union. We choose the following binary pairs: A = Soviet / nA = Non Soviet, B = Non Physical / nB = Physical.¹⁰ The first contradictory pair A/nA describes the degree of political message (is the building seen more as a legacy of an anonymous Socialist regime or is more associated with individual creative minds?). The second pair of semic

oppositions 'B/nB' is not limited to materiality but also measures aspects of 'Modernism,' like traits of specific periods of architecture. The initial assertion can be attributed to a building that is a representative symbol of Soviet Modernism, while an absence of Soviet Modernism together with a whole building is 'B' – meaning does not exist in a material form anymore anywhere. Contradictory to 'A' but remaining in physical form, is 'Non-Soviet.' Lastly come the categories of 'A' and 'nB,' interpretation of which could be called the initial impetus for this article: is it enough to rename the Lithuanian Parliament to erase the negative denotation of the Socialist image? (Fig. 1).

Research relies on the structural semantics which, as described by Greimas, calls the scientific subject to be not the objects (such as buildings), but the relationship between such objects.¹¹ As a result, each building examined in this research is not viewed in isolation but within its contextual framework, as 'objective reality does not exist'.¹² It is proposed that the structure of semiotic oppositions will encompass multiple readings of reactions in

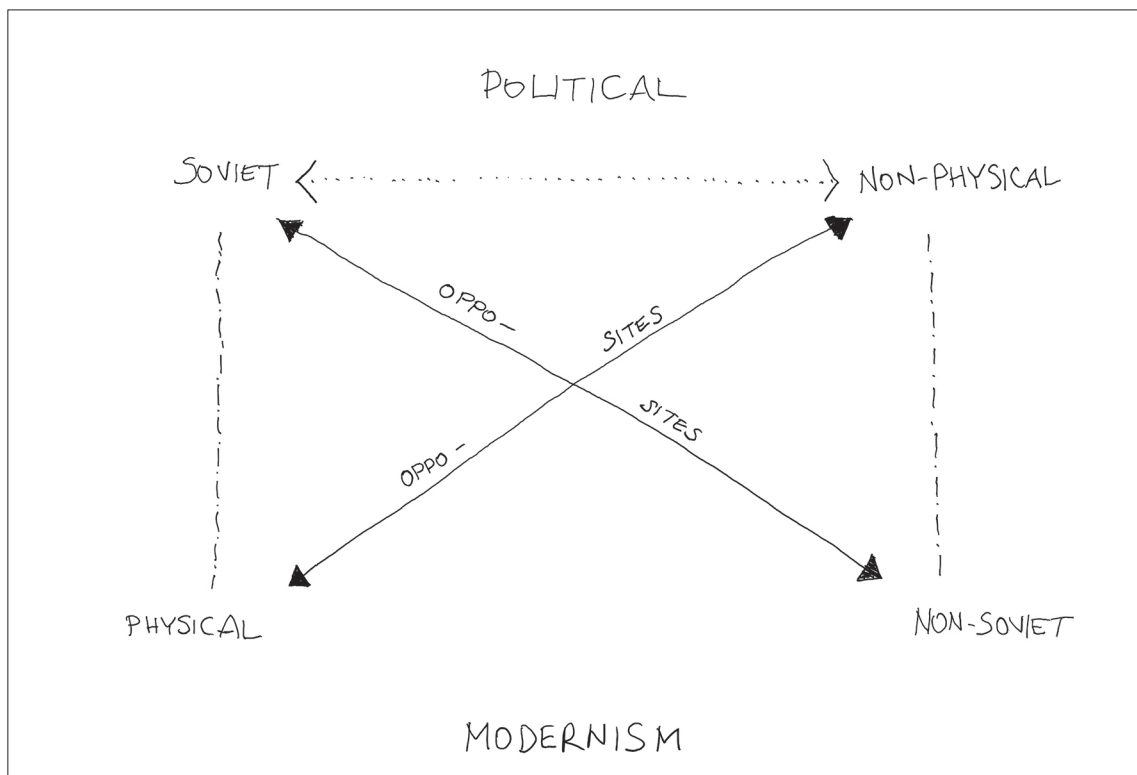


Fig. 1. Mapping binary oppositions in qualitative features of Soviet Modernism: Greimasian framework. It attempts to cross over physical (that of Modernism in built form) and abstract (that of political associations) contexts in structural mapping of concepts. Diagram by Algimantas Grigas

the built environment: transformation, reconstruction or inaction (which is also a reaction).¹³ Thus the following three goals of the research are raised:

a) analyse the reactions towards the built environment of 1986–2004 Lithuania using structural semiotics and delineate the differences by applying the Greimasian Square to key Soviet Modernist public buildings.

Based on Greimas' ideas, consecutive semiotic squares employing binary oppositions such as 'Soviet – Non-Soviet' could be applied to new buildings after 1990, public catering interiors, or private houses. While the limited scope of the research excludes such derivative analysis, it is also aimed:

b) to record the key case studies of transformations in smaller-scale architecture (public interiors and private housing) on the selected semantic axes and contrast their general tendencies with modern Western architectural discourse and critical ideas;

c) contrast the transformations of the 1986–2004 built environment in Lithuania with the non-tangible field of the architectural profession as an assumption for architectural criticism to be found;

The article has four parts: goal a) is answered in the first part; goal b) is covered over the second and third part of the research; and goal c) is answered in the fourth part. The topicality and relevance of the research problem can be a logical outcome if we acknowledge the body of conducted contextual research comprising much original data, such as interviews, but few models for theoretical evaluation. To name just a few, the key publications: Julija Rėklaitė and Tomas Grunskis,¹⁴ as well as Marija Drėmaitė and John V. Maciuika,¹⁵ employ interviews with Soviet Modernist architects, complemented with an on-going research by Vilnius Tech architectural historians.¹⁶ If we could call, hypothetically, the recorded transformations of architectural environment in Lithuania a rising 'hunger' for scientific understanding, then A. J. Greimas' semiotics would create the methodological basis as 'bread'. To

finish the trope of sandwich, we have 'butter' which is represented through the methodological inclusion of critical ideas from theorists like Peter Blake, and Robert Venturi, and the collection of writings surrounding the Situationists. Eventually the 'topping' can be selected as different typological groups as will be demonstrated in further research.

PUBLIC BUILDINGS: READING AS AN ICON

Between 1965 and 1985, distinct principles of Modernist Architecture were predominantly applied to the design of public buildings in Soviet Lithuania.¹⁷ Architectural historian Drėmaitė explains that external influence came through printed media from both Europe and the United States. Following the 1992 interviews with Modernist architects of Lithuania, Maciuika concluded: 'Frequently, it must be also noted, Western architecture was simply copied, although "copying" as such is never mentioned by the architects because it has such negative associations.'¹⁸ Architect Gediminas Baravykas discusses the creativity Lithuanian architects in the context of foreign influences: 'were we sufficiently matured as professionals in order to evaluate, understand use these influences.'¹⁹ Architects took up the references and quoted them. Although limited to the internal rules of the central planning institutes, they designed museums and administrative buildings in the city centres based on principles of asymmetry, free composition of volumes, and functional priority of building plan, which in turn formed a certain image of the representative architecture in the eyes of the society.

The conative aspect of 'Soviet' architecture is readily apparent in structures through their use such as the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR (Nasvytis, 1982), the Central Committee office of the Lithuanian Communist Party (Vytautas Edmundas Čekanauskas, 1982), and the Vilnius Palace of Sports (Eduardas Chlomauskas and others, 1971) (Fig. 2). Despite this, they have seamlessly transitioned to ideological ownership in independent Lithuania, while largely maintaining their original visual appearance.

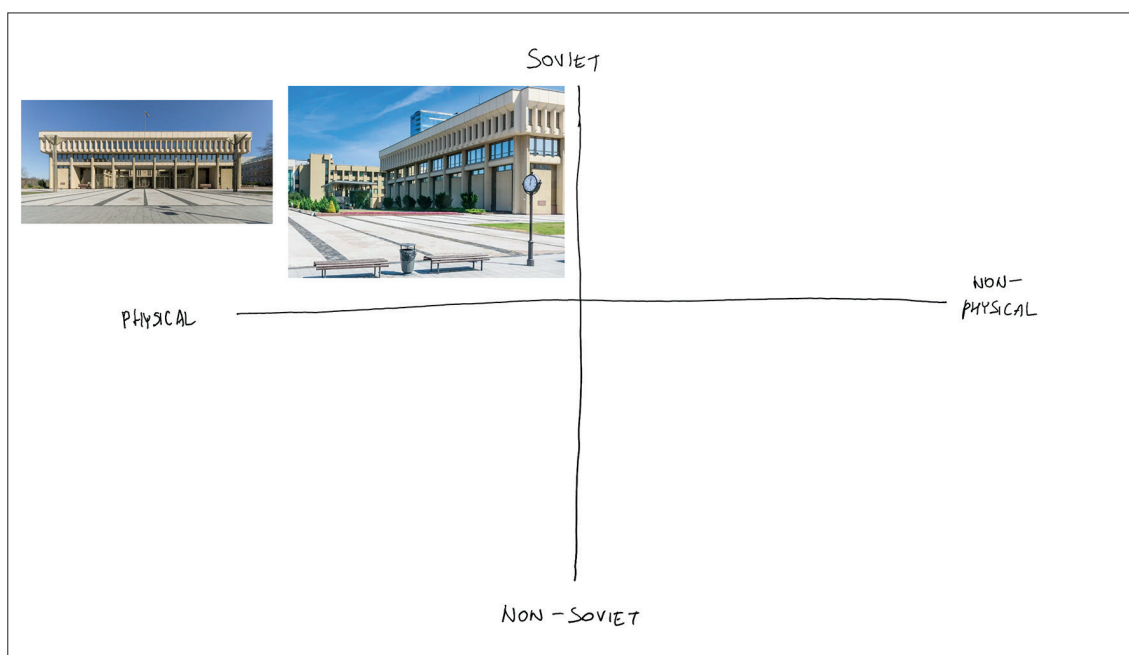


Fig. 2. Palace of the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR (1982) ⇒ Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania (1991). Diagram and collage by Algimantas Grigas

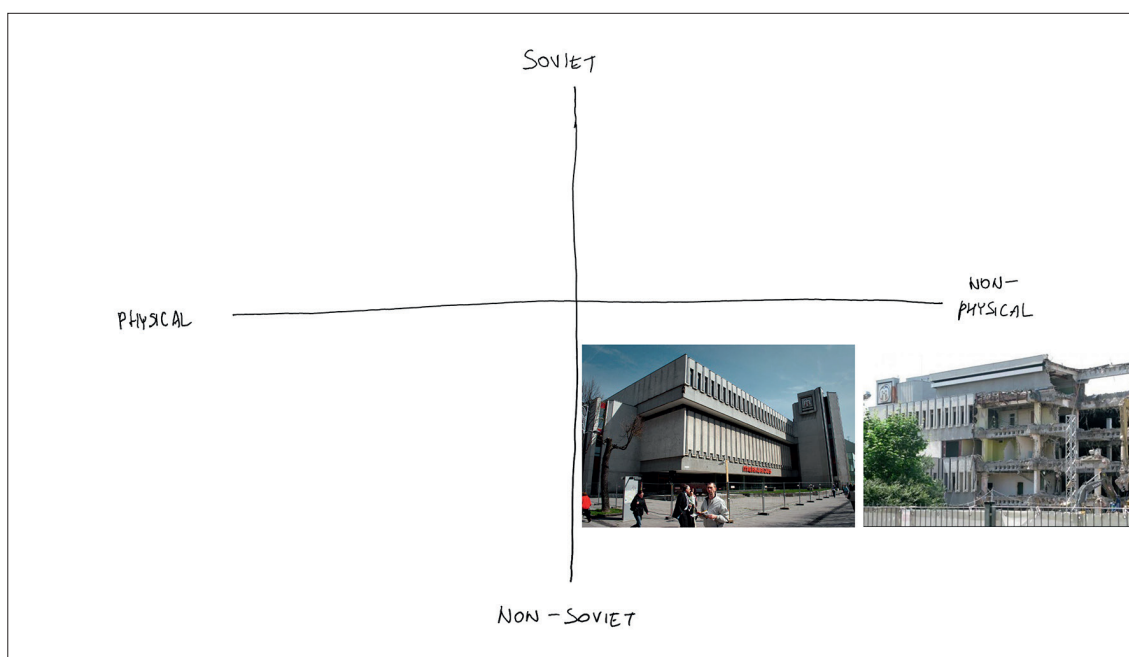


Fig. 3. "Merkurijus" shopping centre (1965–1982) ⇒ demolished in 2009. Diagram and collage by Algimantas Grigas

Contrasting to 'Soviet' we have 'Non-physical' for demolished or replaced buildings. One such key building that was seen as a direct reminder of both Soviet times and the negative aspects of Modernism – was the 1965 'Merkurijus' shopping centre in Kaunas. The building was deemed economically impractical, also embodying a reminder of the Socialist – allowing its demolition in 2009 (Fig. 3).

It is a loss, because as Vaidas Petrulis explains 'historical inheritance has a specific task in the process of city establishment – it helps unfold the individuality of the place' of which 'Merkurijus' was an important marker.²⁰ Other cases that were demolished include the commercial centre 'Kalniečiai' in Kaunas (Eugenijus Miliūnas, 1979–1989) and the cinema 'Lietuva' in Vilnius (typified design).

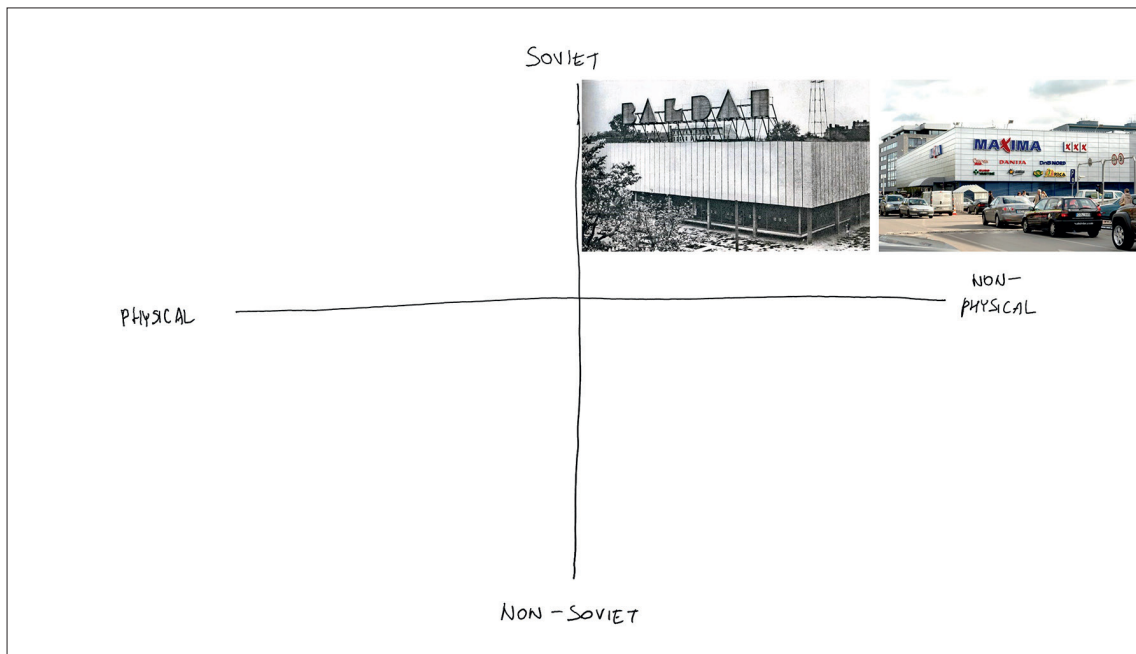


Fig. 4. Furniture Store “Vilniaus baldai” (1968) ⇒ “Maxima” shopping centre (1999, 2017). Diagram and collage by Algimantas Grigas

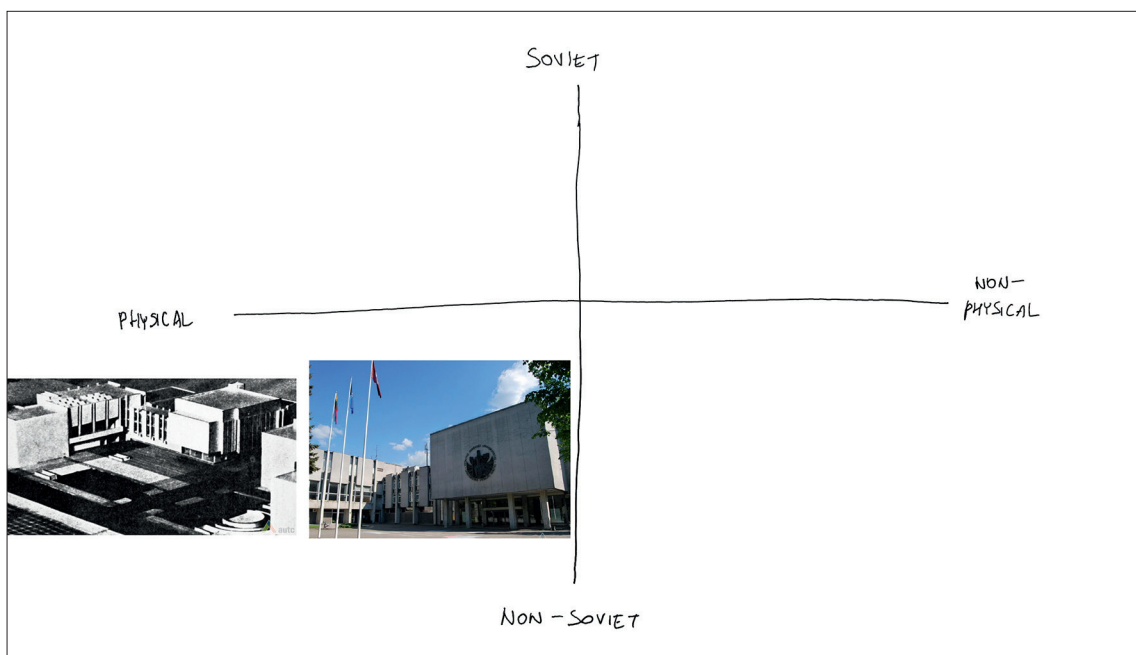


Fig. 5. House for the Political Education (1974) ⇒ Vytautas Magnus University (1991). Diagram and collage by Algimantas Grigas

Next, we will analyse the categories ‘Non-Soviet’ and still ‘Physical’ which are buildings altered beyond recognition or simply reduced of an original semiotic message. Furniture Store Pavilion (architect Nijolė Bučiūtė) in Vilnius was built in 1974 as a very clean functionalist building. However, after its reconstruction in 1990, the impressive presence and clean appearance were beyond recognition. The building, once an authentic

example of Modernism, now serves as a symbol of commercialism in Vilnius (used to be the first 24-hour supermarket in Lithuania) (Fig. 4). It was, as a denial of form and open plan space, turned into Venturi’s board sign and became an ‘architecture of communication over space’.²¹ Other examples include the commercial centre ‘Rėda’ in Kaunas (Miliūnas, 1976–1986) or Headquarters of the Institute of Industrial Construction and Planning

'Pramprojektas', Kaunas branch (Sprindys, Vladas Stauskas, 1959–1965).

The last category overarches buildings that have negated the 'Soviet' aspect, but at the same time have kept the 'Physical' category, in essence, that they are Modernist buildings which kept the original forms intact. These kinds of structures were rejuvenated following a change of function or simply by replacing the symbols and titles on the building. It is difficult for foreigners to comprehend how the Palace of Political Education in Kaunas (Boleslovas Zabulionis, 1974), which faced the statue of Lenin during the Soviet occupation, could seemingly shed its Soviet associations by simply adding the coat of arms of the newly reopened Vytautas Magnus University to its front elevation (Fig. 5). Similarly, like Vilnius Wedding Palace (Baravykas, 1974), the Museum of Revolution (Baravykas, Vytautas Vielius, 1980) or Kaunas Picture Gallery (Liucija Gedgaudienė, Jonas Navakas, 1978) have kept their physical forms, however negative 'Soviet' associations have been overarched by compliments about architectural values in their Modernist expression (Fig. 2).

Soviet Modernist buildings in Lithuania were examples of monofunctional planning: for instance, central planning institutes had rows of repetitive cabinets and rarely included any variation in their application other than administrative functions. There were exceptions in a sense, that Modernism critic R. Venturi calls complexity of meaning, or at least an attempt to create poetical space by adding to the Soviet Modernism buildings in the form of State commissioned artworks (stained glass, bas-relief, sculpture, etc.).²² Apart from artworks, the interior space of State institutions was still bare, regulated, and driven empty of personal markers. The way Blake presents an argument for the 'Fantasy of Function', a critique of Modernism, was similarly put into real life in Lithuania after the 1990s.²³ What is interesting is that the free market and establishment of small-scale businesses took over Soviet Modernism buildings with ease, without too many physical alterations. It was necessary only to change locks, and the same

rows of cabinets were taken over by a multitude of companies: printing or translation services, music and language schools, architecture or engineering offices. Examples in Kaunas might include the Kaunas Radio Factory (Savanorių pr. 64), Institute of Agriculture Development (Gedimino g. 47), or later, a complex of buildings for the 'Banga' factory (Draugystės g. 19). On the exterior, the elevations remained unchanged, except that they were dotted with numerous advertisements and company logos. If we would return to Blake, he promotes recycling period modernistic buildings. In essence, several Lithuanian Soviet Modernism buildings demonstrated this capability to adapt to changing functions, while only a smaller part of them demonstrated good results in architectural terms.

SYNCHRONY OF MODAL FUNCTION IN THE DESIGN OF PUBLIC CATERING PLACES

Architect Baravykas, reflecting Soviet Lithuanian architecture, admitted the potential for architectural expression in the typology of interiors: 'novel architecture first took form in the interiors.'²⁴ Distinguished examples were 'Neringa' (Nasvytis, 1956–1960) in Vilnius and 'Tulpė' (Vytautas Dičius, Algimantas Mikėnas, as reconstruction 1961) in Kaunas. Both restaurants are spread out in open-plan, single-level spaces. What distinguishes 'Neringa' and 'Tulpė' from other period types of public catering is that both of them were infused with an exploration of national character through folklore motifs: either by large-scale thematic mural paintings or figurative, sculptural elements in the interior, complemented by decorative figures of flowers or rural life.

Other Soviet period restaurants, cafeterias and canteens were usually confined to a limited material palette and rigid layout, as well as reduced decorative aspects like in the creation of the 'Lietkoopsąjunga' restaurant by Justinas Šeibokas in 1986.²⁵ The majority of the remaining rather bland or repetitive, typified leisure interiors (especially those that did not have an appointed architect) were part of Socialist programme goals: reduce independent or

impulsive life decisions and just continue with the regular, daily life of the Soviet reality.

After 1990, with the growing economic opportunities, and import of new materials, products, clothes, and equipment, society and architects immersed themselves in the pool of personal expression. An apparent abundance of economic possibilities, and bold clients, enabled the architects to exit their comfort zone: in the city, restaurants and clubs appeared that broke the tradition with the Modernist space. Many restaurants moved deeper in the building, often to the basement. This could be interpreted as a rebellious rejection of Modernist architecture's aims for daylight and hygiene, prioritising certain architectural expressions over the needs of users.

With the help of artificial light, high-tech styled furniture and novel materials, architects were able to create 'Non-Soviet' atmosphere, for instance, with the figurative club-restaurant 'Los Patrankos' (Audrys Karalius, 2000).²⁶ Other authors, such as Valdas Ozarinskas, were drawn to high-tech, industrial aesthetics, and created bars/clubs like 'NATO' (1995) and 'Neperšauinama liemenė' (1996).²⁷ Next, inspired by popular culture and music clips, architect Loreta Janušaitienė designed spaces for the club 'City Metro' in 2003.²⁸ Another public catering place 'Ritos slėptuvė' was created in Vilnius in 1993 by Audra Kaušpėdienė, following an American model of catering, flooded in homely, indirect artificial light. Kaušpėdienė went a step further in improvising a Mexican-style restaurant 'Vidudienis' in Vilnius in 1997, with an interior design that boasted a brave colour palette as never before.²⁹ Surrealist 'banana' chairs and 'soft cactus' decorations became fantastical objects removed as far as possible from 'Tulpė' or 'Neringa' restaurants' chairs, becoming a tool for rhetorical architectural criticism in the form of metonymy. The majority of the described interiors were lost, as the public deemed them unfit for normal, prolonged use and their aesthetic expression went quickly out of fashion.

REIMAGINING HOME: PHYSICAL EMBODIMENT OF REJECTING THE PAST

Taking Kaunas as an example, Soviet modernist panel housing was initiated in 1962 and continued throughout the 1960s and 1970s as the number of residents in Kaunas nearly doubled. New inhabitants had limited choices in the way they wanted to live. There were very few, except cooperative housing, and practically no other options for private construction in Kaunas City.³⁰ The construction of private houses was strictly limited in Kaunas and Vilnius 1958–1987. Building materials were formally not available to attain for private needs.³¹ What started in perestroika and immediately after 1990 was an end to austerity and moderation in all forms of daily life. It was probably true when Blake, in his critique of Modernism, the monograph 'Form Follows Fiasco', stated: 'So there is a very real resistance to standardisation in a free society.'³² Not only did the political regime change, but peoples' inner urge for individuality coincided with the end of years of limitations in the physical form of typified mass housing.

In 1990s Lithuania, the largest marketplace Gariūnai was opened. On the outskirts of Vilnius, self-made tents and booths created abundant opportunities to buy clothes and create one's individual appearance. State controlled companies broke down, were privatised, people were free to start a business and all kinds of opportunities were opened up. As writer Rimantas Kmita expressed: '[t]here was neither the time nor any particular reason to study economics. No rules yet existed. The world was just beginning to take shape.'³³ While this sounds like the background for the Situationists' new utopia, the outcome was rather perverse: [private] '[h]ouses were to resemble castles.'³⁴ In general, this signified that ordinary people, not limited by political views, could suddenly go about without a real architect and build a private house of 100–300 square meters. They could find the projects printed in the annexe 'Naujakūrio patarėjas' of the monthly magazine 'Statyba ir architektūra.'³⁵ The owners would later adjust it in a more beautifying

way for themselves, altering beyond recognition or where the imagination of the owners ends.

We can see specific aspects of the growing popularity of individual residences after the 1990s in the background of critical regionalism theory. People were willing to move out of mono-functional neighborhoods into more green areas or away in the outskirts. A common wish to create coziness in the house appeared: a certain inclusion of the natural landscape as the regional aspect. There was a growing popularity of winter gardens, glazed pools, saunas, or at least lush vegetation in the garden around the house, which in turn became the manifestation of 'Non-Soviet'.³⁶ The peculiarity and other features of anti-modern housing have been well described by Aistė Galaunytė.³⁷ The rejection of signs from the Socialist rule after the 1990s expanded into a hard-to-control variety of stylistic trends, a mixture of the material palette in the new buildings and personal expression was favoured among all. It was as if independent Lithuania felt an urge to construct its new identity from a collection of external influences shedding away the Soviet memories, sporadically employing signs of place-form in an exaggerated almost comical way.³⁸ Grand open staircases, classical balustrades of open terraces or balconies, and arched entrances and windows reminiscent of grand churches were the tools for the rejection of Socialism and the celebration of personal identity.

In the face of rapid spatial changes often omitting the architectural authorship, it took time for the architectural community to gather themselves and take a position: this was only on March 19th 1996, when the National Construction Act was ratified, and the same year when the independent architectural press was founded. The magazine 'Archiforma' and the newspaper 'Arkitektas' (later renamed as 'Statybų pilotas') propagated the authority of an architect and advocated appreciation of the architectural profession. In reality, still, architecture was conceived 'among social and economic chaos', where only a minor part of society would hire professional architects to help them create and build their own houses.³⁹

Emancipation of private ways of inhabitation was allowed not only by growing economic capital and permission to build almost on any private land, but also by the appearance of new building materials. Apart from abundant white silicate bricks, many new materials were arriving from abroad. Not only cars were imported from Western Europe, but also new construction materials (e.g. plastic windows) or types of interior finishes (e.g. a variety of ceramic tiles). As Soviet blocks of apartments usually had their staircases painted only in the trademark 'Soviet green', then one can imagine the possibilities opened up with the new colour palettes of foreign producers. One shop of such kind – 'Valkor' – was opened in 1996 on the second floor of the Soviet Modernist shopping centre 'Kupa' (1985, architect Alfredas Paulauskas) in Kaunas. This case opens a chance for semiotic analysis as a new denotative relationship between the signifier (essentially a Soviet Modernist building) and its signified commercial aspect of the new times is being formed. The shop offered 'Pittsburgh Paints' products, introducing the buyers to the previously unknown concept of priming, and in general elevating the quality of the shopping experience.⁴⁰

There was a growing popularity for information on private construction methods, as a considerable number of people chose to do much of the building work themselves. As Galaunytė sums up: '[t]hus at the end of 1980s there appeared clients, who had sufficient finances to buy a ready-made project and build a house.'⁴¹ At this point, we can remember the Situationists and attempt to place them next to the Lithuanian architectural community in the first decade of independence after 1990. Of course, the first was an international, ideological artistic movement, and the second was a national case of architectural representation. On the other hand, both had a common opponent: Modernist architecture. Despite the creative ideas and output at the same time, both were virtually inconceivable due to a 'methodological vacuum',⁴² in the case of the Situationists, and in the case of Lithuania, the 'new architectural tendency in Lithuania did not become radical opposition to modernism.'⁴³ In other words, Situationists complemented spaces and

architectural objects that were found by chance, accident, or passage of time, instead of following their own, consistent and concrete programme to create a new physical reality.⁴⁴ Whereas the refusal of Modernism built by the Socialism and certain architectural trends in Lithuania after the 1990s never managed to free themselves from the political, social, and financial aspects.⁴⁵ Early in Lithuania's independence, numerous events overwhelmed architects, hindering the formation of a consistent position. Moreover, it appears like a real-life experiment – the birth of a new world and at the same time, a test for anti-modernist approach application in real life – has been concluded in Lithuania.

NARRATIVE TRAJECTORY OF ARCHITECTS' AUTHORITY

As the market economy prevailed in the early years of Lithuanian independence there were not too many to challenge it, including the architects. Most members of society were preoccupied with survival in the free market and adaptation to the new ways of life without the overruling Socialist state. In the meantime, other spheres of creative activity opened up: artistic expression saw no control and architects attempted to take on it. In a far-reaching comparison, like the Situationists movement challenged the established forms of art in the 1960s and 1970s in Europe, there was a similar enthusiasm in

Lithuania in the 1990s to experiment with mixed media art, performance art, or even informal street art (graffiti).⁴⁶

In the architectural field there appeared new tools of architectural criticism, in which we can see similarities with Situationist *détournement*. This meant novel forms of artistic expression gained more attention: comics, posters with collages, juxtaposition, and publications recycling the well-known icons of Modernist architecture. Much of the legacy has been initiated within a liberating academic environment at the 'Students' Ideas Competition' or 'SIKON' (started in 1983).⁴⁷ As Marius Bliujus lists, one of the reasons for starting these informal activities was dissatisfaction with the Modernist approach to academic teaching.⁴⁸ Without departing too much into a discussion about architectural education, it is important to say, that architect Karalius was one of the co-organisers of 'SIKON' as well as the editor of 'Statybų Pilotas', where Karalius continued an alternative approach to the criticism of architectural processes. The general stance and way of expression in the articles describing architectural works was witty and inventive, often employing tools of Situationists – like that of drift (continuous flow of ideas) and *détournement* in the form of caricatures. For instance, the 2nd issue of 'Statybų pilotas' cover page boasted a sketchy drawing illustrating a critique of the just finished, boldly modern Estonian Embassy in Vilnius⁴⁹ (Fig. 6).

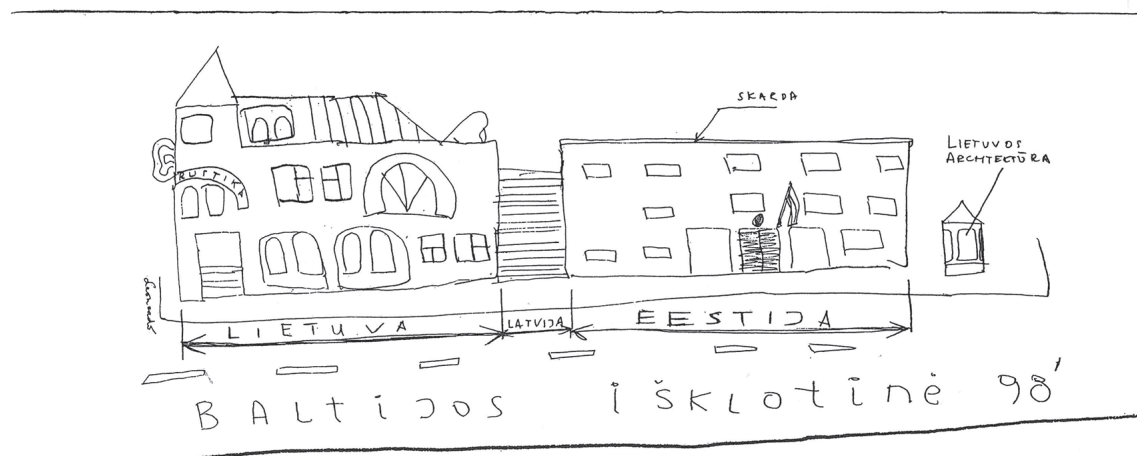


Fig. 6. Caricature drawing, *Statybų Pilotas*, 1998 April 23, No. 2. Courtesy of Audrys Karalius. The annotation below the sketch translates as "The Elevation of the Baltic States"

Sociologist Dalia Čiupailaitė has described well the challenges of the architectural profession in Lithuania after 1990. New professional publications attempted to establish an authoritative position of the architect as an artist, as a solitary character in the society responsible for the space development control.⁵⁰ However, it was largely in disparity with the context as the architects detached themselves from the economically driven construction market, by being more and more limited to the task of aesthetic decoration.⁵¹ While the social aspect was notable in the construction of Modernism architecture in Soviet Lithuania, during the described period architects rejected not only Modernism but also the attempt to solve the social aspect of the Modern architecture: 'architecture is removed from the social relationships network, that has many interests, participants.'⁵² This illustrates that through examples of architectural publications like 'Statybų pilotas', architects in Lithuania after 1990 concentrated too much on architecture as art, removing themselves from the need to listen, educate and communicate with the users of architecture.⁵³ While architect Aldo van Eyck, a member of the Situationists, was in search of 'precise relationships between architectural form and socio-psychological need' and thus later left the reactionary Situationists for that same position, the Lithuanian architects after the 1990s found themselves at the dead-end of 'high-mindedness'.⁵⁴

Architect Gediminas Baravykas explained the founding of Postmodernist architecture as deriving from Modernism's inability to improve social processes, and continuing to add a negative connotation to the isolated status of the architectural profession of the time.⁵⁵ Without being needed by society, they made assumptions about what society needs from architecture and got lost in the void of consistent planning of how a high art-infused environment should be created. Despite the profession's idealistic dogma defining what an architect should be, Lithuania experienced rapid and seemingly chaotic development after 1990, as well as immediately dissonant evaluations towards Soviet Modernism – a phenomenon Baravykas described in the key text 'Winds from the West' in 1990.⁵⁶ In

general, the thunderous change of architectural trends was not only a reflection of the context but also an effort to review Modernist architecture and reassess its underlying values.

CONCLUSIONS

Looking at the change of perception towards Soviet Modernist built environment, such as ideological appropriation (keeping as it is) or physical alteration (reconstruction), including destruction can help to distinguish an original object of art or architecture (meaning a candidate for preservation despite the Soviet connotations) from non-original/derivative object of art or architecture (Fig. 7). In this article Modern Western architectural discourse (critical ideas from Blake, Venturi and the Situationists) were contrasted with the semiotic meaning in shifting of the interior aesthetics of public catering venues, and the liberalised construction of private residences in Lithuania. While foreign critical perspectives were not explicitly adopted, as they were probably not widely known at the time, juxtaposing these ideas with Lithuanian architectural developments reveals a significant correlation with application of Modernist critique in tangible scenarios.

The research highlights that the period 1986–2004 saw at least two coinciding critical waves: one towards the Soviet aspect and another, indirectly, towards the values of Modern architecture (typification, limitations in space and personal expression). Semantics from Greimas allowed to follow how some Soviet-era buildings were repurposed or retained their physical form, others were demolished or significantly altered, underscoring broader, multimodal narratives of rejecting or renegotiating the past. The study points out that despite substantial physical changes, the deeper semiotic shifts in the built environment suggest a nuanced interplay of memory, identity, and cultural reinterpretation.

Another key finding is that there exist values attached to the authority of selected architects which transcend the Soviet or Modernist aspects. Moreover, the research critically examines the

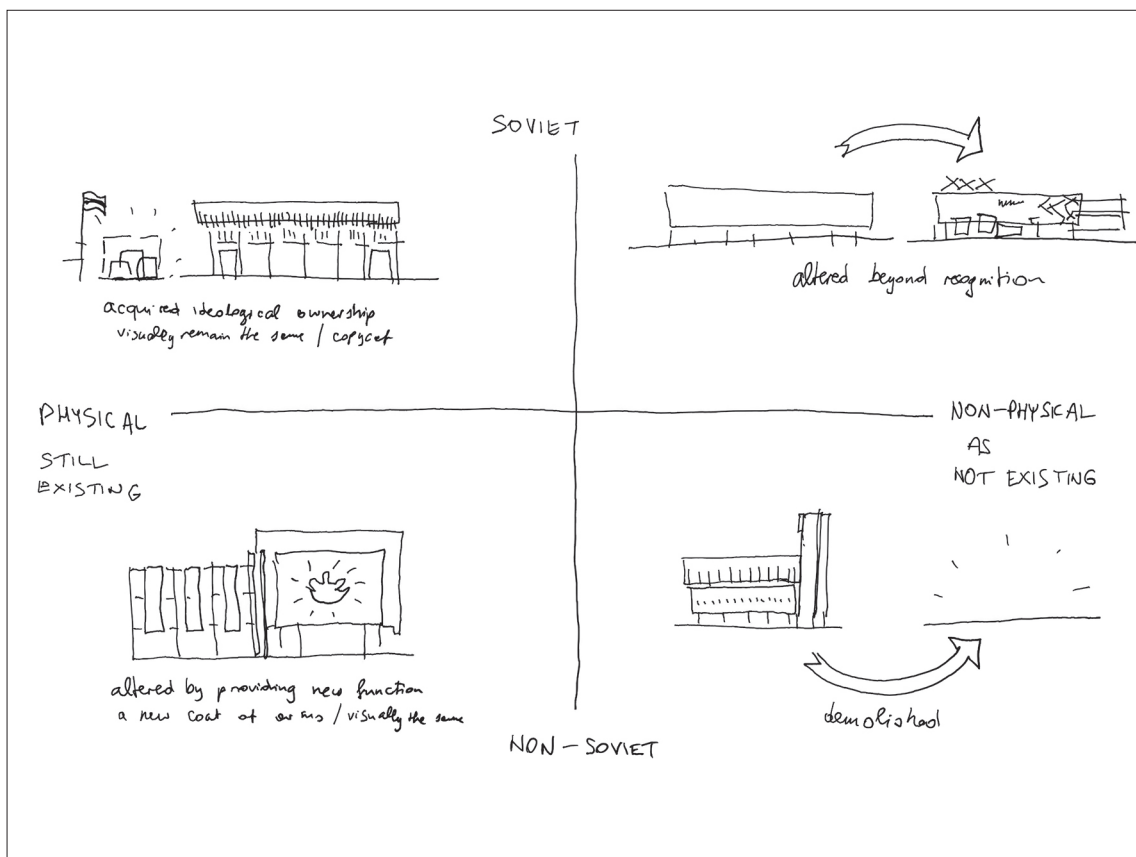


Fig. 7. Greimasian Semiotic Square: visualising reactions towards Soviet Modernist buildings dichotomies. Diagram and drawings by Algimantas Grigas

architectural profession's evolution from 1986 to 2004, noting a drift towards more personal driven architecture, away from the socialist ideological constraints. A hypothesis is raised that there existed an increasing disparity between the perceived and actual authority of Lithuanian architects. They often positioned themselves as sole creators, echoing Modernism's authoritarian tendencies but neglecting the social imperatives of Postmodernism.

This study argues that the architectural responses to Lithuania's new socio-economic conditions were not merely about aesthetics but were deeply intertwined with the nation's struggle to redefine its identity and heritage in a rapidly changing context. A deeper examination of Lithuania's architectural landscape from 1986 to 2004 reveals underlying confusion, competitive tensions, and inconsistent objectives within the architectural community, reminiscent of the Situationists' experiences in the 1960s.

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PARADIGMŲ KAITA: UŽSTATYTOS APLINKOS TRANSFORMACIJŲ SEMIOTINIS SKAITYMAS LIETUVOJE 1986–2004

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A L G I M A N T A S
G R I G A S

Santrauka

Tyrime gilinamasi į sudėtingą ir daugiasluoksnį Lietuvos perėjimą iš sovietinės į posovietinę visuomenę, daugiausia dėmesio skiriant architektūriniam kraštovaizdžiui kaip ideologinių pokyčių atspindžiui. Tyrimas apima laikotarpį nuo Michailo Gorbačiovo inicijuotos *perestroikos* 1986 m. iki Baltijos šalių įstojimo į ES ir NATO 2004 m., kuris pasižymėjo reikšmingomis architektūrinėmis, socialinėmis ir politinėmis permainomis. Pirmiausia, pasitelkiant Algirdo Juliaus Greimo kvadratą, tyrime kategorizuojamos ir analizuojamos reakcijos į sovietinio modernizmo pastatus, stebint laipsnišką jų perėjimą nuo valstybinės ideologijos reprezentantų iki žinutės nešėjų, atspindinčių daugybę individualių ir kolektyvinių patirčių, taip pat atsirandančių architektų kūrybos meninės vertės vertinimą. Antra, pasitelkus Vakarų architektūros, modernizmo kritikos figūrų, tokių kaip Peteris Blake'as, Robertas Venturi, bei Situacionistų idėjas, tyrime kontekstualizuojama ir sugretinama su tendencijomis Lietuvoje: visuomeniniuose interjeruose ir privačioje statyboje. Tokios kritikos prielaidos siejamos su architekto profesijos krize, kuriai būdingas privačių statybų be architektų gausėjimas. Semiotiniu žvilgsniu architektūrinis diskursas tapo esminiu elementu, padedančiu suprasti platesnius kultūrinius ir politinius poslinkius posovietinėje Lietuvoje.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: sovietmečio modernizmas, Lietuvos architektūra, architektūrinė kritika, Algirdo Juliaus Greimo semiotika, erdvių transformacija.

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