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**SEMIOTIC ELEMENTS OF THE WORK OF**  
**ARCHITECTURE**

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In his 1937 lecture titled "Art from the Perspective of Semantics — a New Method for Aesthetics," delivered during the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Congress of Aesthetics and Science of Art in Paris, Mieczysław Wallis included architecture and music into the so-called asemantic arts, or arts which do not use signs (Wallis 1937, 1969).

Although since then various authors published extensively on the semiotics of architecture, even 30 years later Umberto Eco is still considering the work of architecture not as a sign but merely as it were a sign (Eco 1972). This approach, however, ignores an important question, namely: "is architecture an art form?" or, in other words, "is there a language of architecture?" If we were to answer this questions in the negative, we would have to agree that semiotics of architecture breeds pseudo-problems and indulges in pseudo-solutions.

One crucial assumption in semiotics is that sign is something else than its referent (Bocheński 1956). There arises the question whether this relates in any way to the work of architecture.

Sebastian Sierakowski writes: "upon looking at a building what first strikes our eyes is whether it is beautiful, then we consider its convenience, and lastly, whether it is enduring." This briefly sums up the general experience of an encounter with architecture: the work of architecture does not present itself as a whole, we are first confronted with its visual features, which is certainly not everything there is to discover (Sierakowski 1812: 2). A similar

conclusion can be drawn from remarks made by Gerard Ciołek who describes a landscape as a set of external components in the environment with natural confines (Ciołek 1964).

The work of architecture is a complex piece of creation because its formal and visual features consumed in immediate perception are relatively autonomous with regard to the whole.

Thus, one may assume that there are architectural signs which cannot be identified with the work of architecture as a whole. Even if an architectural sign does not relate to extra-architectural meanings, it still at least refers to the work of architecture that is something else than the sign itself.<sup>1</sup>

From a formal perspective, the work of architecture was, and still remains, diversified enough for us to perceive it as a whole system of signs. Therefore, the repertoire of forms recurring in many architectural works can be perceived as a language, that is, a system of signs enabling thinking, expression and communication. This paper aims to develop and justify the claims made above. To this end I shall explore the place which the language of architecture occupies within the structure of architectural work, provide an overview of forms in which it manifests itself, explore morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics of the language of architecture, as well as its place among other languages. This will help us approach themes present in the semiotics of architecture in an insightful, if not entirely fashionable, manner (Pelc 1970).

## 2

The work of architecture can be conceived as consisting of three separate layers: physical space, perceptual space and imaginative space. Each can be found in descriptions of Baroque churches built across the province of Lublin:

“(...) spatial lavishness is only emphasized by the liberal treatment of walls, which by softly concaving surfaces, curving cornices and subtle play between the dense and dispersed spacing of pilasters lend dynamics to the architectural interior and employ lighting effects to create an impression of motion, undulation and spaciousness. It seems even that the wall foregoes its material substance that its illusionistic decorative painting struggles to reinstate.”

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<sup>1</sup>There are forms of spatial division which are designed to be self-effacing, such as curtain walls, or forms that communicate their existence in a very subtle way, such as glass walls that suggest a division between exterior and interior, wrongly perceived as a possibility of passage. Some utopian projects postulated ceilings with systems of electromagnetic fields.

The art here strives to merge the real with imaginary space, the world of here and now with the world of vision, reconcile the believers with the saints in paintings and sculptures, the institute within the interior, a union between the mundane and unworldly (Miłobędzki 1963: 169-170). Architectural sign belongs to the perceptual space and can signify other layers of the architectural work or point to meanings beyond the structure.<sup>2</sup>

3

Architectural sign can also be detached from the work of architecture and the language of architecture can function outside the architectural environment, as in illusionistic painting creating imaginary spaces accessible exclusively by visual examination or scenography, which organizes space for theatrical performance but essentially constitutes an artificial and conventional arrangement designed for the purposes of the stage. Architects use this language as a tool that takes the form of orthogonal projections, perspective drawings or three-dimensional models or compositions. The elements of the architectural language represent the work, further recreated and transformed by projecting it through such media as drawing, painting, photography or film. When the architectural language becomes identified with the work of architecture itself, the latter can vanish into the visual work. It is used to create such para-architectural elements such as details of the interior. In the period of Renaissance, Mannerism and Baroque, columns, pilasters, arcades, along with the whole system of architectural orders, were used to shape altars, pulpits and confessionals, ultimately creating "architecture in architecture."<sup>3</sup>

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The smallest structural element of the language of architecture must be perceptible, it is, for example, (A) an element of texture, e.g. the granular texture of stone or concrete, the linear texture of wood or a distinctive element of plaster. The texture is not necessarily distinguishable: on smooth or slippery surfaces the reflection of light can easily blur its features or the texture may be worn off. The texture can be a structural part of the material or be manufactured artificially, as it happens with gravel applied on slabs used in residential construction. Such secondary details possess no

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<sup>2</sup>This understanding of architecture follows methodology shared by such authors as Honzík 1944, Ingarden 1966, Hesselgren 1970.

<sup>3</sup>Miłobędzki's description of church furnishings is inspired by Summerson 1949.

signification value on their own but great care and attention with which they are often treated shows that they can modulate the overall experience of architecture. If the texture is left unattended, the perceptible element is constituted by (B) such elements of spatial arrangement as ornamental or decorative features. In the ceiling decoration typical to churches built regionally across the province of Lublin one can discover such elements as beads, oeil-de-boeufs and floral motives (Miłobędzki 1963). In bases and capitals of architectural orders these elements come in the form of profiles or, as in Doric columns, flutes. They are distinguishable by virtue of being structured on a single planar or a spatial contour.<sup>4</sup>

Those perceptible elements are part of simple elements such as structural elements (beams, poles, lintels, etc.) or decorative elements — Lublin-type ornaments, for example, include profiles of cupid heads, suns and moons that form ribs, hearts, crosses and plaquettes in the shape of angels, suns, moons.

Simple elements comprise complex elements of spatial divide, such as ceilings, facades, walls, stairs, floors, doorways and windows. The elements of spatial divide comprise functional spatial elements, such as, in the case of sacred architecture, chapels, towers, naves, which can stand as an individual architectural statement but at the same time they are usually a part of a larger whole.

The arrangement of those elements serves to shape formal features of spatial design. The space can be divided into (A) simple spaces, not articulated or divided but only to a very modest degree (such as the spherical buildings of Ledoux or Ronchamp chapel designed by Le Corbusier) and (B) complex spaces.

Spaces can be complex in a regular and irregular way, and the irregularity can be either ordered or disordered. The ordering of spatial elements can be distinct or obscured (the complexity of Baroque spaces was sometimes perceived as chaotic, see Białostocki 1958). In the arrangement of space one can distinguish dynamic or static design, balance and imbalance, openness or closeness, compactness or dispersion (Bohdziewicz 1961: 161-168). When considering complex spaces the problem of syntax arises, which can be divided into the following:

1. linear (Hansen's linear system, linear rural settlement, enfilade),

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<sup>4</sup>Seeking to establish the smallest differentiating factor between architectural elements, Porębski, proposes „in the simplest case (...) juxtaposition of black — white” (Porębski 1962: 63).

2. centrifugal (as in layout preferred by Wright),
3. centripetal (central buildings).

Some basic principles followed in design include uniformity (the evening out of lines and height of buildings), accumulation (additiveness), reduction (demolition), contrast (composition by opposition).

Syntactic issues are highly relevant to the language of architecture, but a broader discussion of these matters is beyond the ambition of this paper.

5

In architectural elements and forms one can distinguish the following groups of meanings:

- A. internal meanings, relating to the work of architecture itself, that is:
- a) functional meanings, describing the intended purpose of the building,
  - b) structural meanings, describing its structure,
  - c) spatial meanings, describing its spatial division,
- and

B. external meanings, relating to the participants of the construction process (investors (founders), designers, constructors, users), as well as meanings relating to the religious, ideological and artistic aspects of architecture, such as

- d) prestige, describing place in the social hierarchy of those participating in the construction process, and
- e) symbolic, allegoric, etc., meanings (Gębarowicz 1968).

The problem of meaning arises both in the theoretical and practical aspects of architecture. Wąsowski, following Vitruvius, argues that "a column best expresses human body in correspondence of its height, width and arrangements of parts. A capital and a base represent a head and a leg, while the pillar stands for human posture, and which, if fluted, depicts creases in a robe" (Wąsowski 1975).

Sierakowski sought to demonstrate that different classes and strata are privileged to particular orders of architecture because "the façade of a building, very much in a fashion of garment, must testify to a condition and dignity of that who uses it" (Sierakowski 1812: 178). In the early years of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century this function was fulfilled by various degrees of lavishness in the façade's decoration. Housing for craftsfolk designed by Enrico Marconi was praised for, to quote one critic, "moderate decoration

and simplicity (...) lending proper character to the housing of craftsmen." Upper layers of the society were entitled to decorative façades but some harbored different ideas, favouring simple brick structures over ostentatious displays of prestige. "Simplicity of the architecture was meant to represent chastity, frugality and the thrifty exploit of resources, in other words virtues wholeheartedly embraced by those engaged with the ideals of organic work" (Kapliński 1963, quoting Rudowska 1971: 92; see also W. Krassowski 1973).

For the work of architecture to be a message, the language used by the author, or the addresser, must be familiar to the addressees. Ever since Modernism, however, and the advent of the "new art" self-righteously proclaiming that one "cannot rein in art" (Przybyszewski 1899), the artist can indulge in his own language without keeping an eye on the audience. In this new paradigm, the works of architecture representing the "new art" were free to send the message that the building is simply embodying the idea of modernity. It was the theorists of Bauhaus who clearly stated that the purpose of architecture is to express the "character of the age" (Cz. Krassowski 1978).

The work of architecture can have a number of meanings. In formal features of a church one can discover structural themes: a system of pillars, arches, walls, ceilings; functional themes: a gathering space for the believers, liturgy, sermons, a place of reflection; spatial themes: a single-nave interior enclosed by a many-sided choir, elongated and facing a particular direction, where both specific details and the whole structure are designed to carry symbolic meaning.

Meanings and themes are often subject to reductionist practices: if one adapts a church, for example, for a different purpose, say a concert hall or an art gallery, it loses its symbolic and, partially, functional meaning.

Meanings can also undergo deep transformations. Readapting a Gothic church into a restaurant goes against the axial character of the space, effectively destroying its congregational function and dissolving the atmosphere of reflection (Holcerowa, Michalczuk 1972).

Conversely, meanings often pile up. This is usually the case with sites so long embedded in the surrounding environment that they eventually become part and parcel of particular events, biographies, times and ideas.

During the lifetime of a building meanings come and go, and the change of substance or spatial forms can produce a radically different context in which the structure exists. If the idea of reconstruction is often a controversial topic for the theory, then restoration and conservation for the semiotics of architecture questions regarding the installation of a new heating system

or renewed ceiling structure are to a certain degree secondary because the primary concern lies in the preservation of message.

6

Not all elements of architectural space are signifying: the visible can signify, while the invisible can be signified. While the part can signify, the whole can only be signified. The exterior can signify, while the interior be signified. In that vein, the silhouette of a building in the metropolitan skyline can signify its location in space. Its height can signify how it ranks among other buildings and display the prestige of its founder, owner or the institution it houses (see Gimpel 1983 for competition between the towers of town halls and churches or among skyscrapers in modern cities).

The outward appearance of the structure may imply features of the interior and its spatial arrangement, but the relationship between the two is not necessarily straightforward or in any way complete. The outside of Romanesque churches still closely correspond with the inside, but as early as in the Gothic style what shrouds, and what is shrouded, was becoming unbundled and increasingly autonomous, while in the Renaissance the façade started playing the primary role not only in the spatial arrangement of the design but also signified functions and communicated symbolic meanings.<sup>5</sup>

Size and dimensions can signify too. The sacral space was thought to be reminiscent of Noah's Ark and had to be similar in size to the one described in the Bible (Davy 1964). Similarly, distances between the Stations of the Cross in landscape had to reflect those actually walked by Christ in Jerusalem (Szablowski 1933).

Also light is a signifying component of architecture. "The material lights, both those which are disposed by nature in the spaces of the haven and those

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<sup>5</sup>It is interesting to follow the evolving interactions between the outside and the inside. From well-isolated rooms to movable partitions without real isolating value, we finally arrive at the Barcelona Pavillon designed by Mies van der Rohe. It is the first example of architectural design where the continuously articulated and orienting space forces the visitors to walk through the interiors in a meandering movement determined by independently placed walls. This idea was further developed in a building prepared for a Berlin exhibition, where freely spaced walls delineated spatial areas while blurring the distinction between the interior and the exterior by being projected beyond the outline of the roof and vertical plane of windows. This trend is consequently evolving into seamless merging of the inside with the landscape outside, ultimately doing away with the idea of the signified interior and the signifying outside (Chermayeff, Alexander 1963).

which are produced on earth by human artifice, and images of the intelligible lights, and above all of the True Light itself (Panofsky 1955: 151).<sup>6</sup>

One other signifying feature of the building is the floor plan, as in the Chapels of Mary's Heart in Zebrzydowska Calvary and Pałacowska Calvary, which were erected on a plan of a heart, or a church in Sidorów built on a plan of the founder's coat of arms.

Another signifying element is the location of the building. Carlo Borromeo, demanding that the church should be built on an elevation, wanted it to rise above nature (this also suggests symbolic associations with stairs, see Borromeo 1980).

Signifying, therefore, is also present in the horizontal oppositions of high and low, hence the origin of *piano nobile*, and various degrees of floor elevation in public spaces (apart from the obvious practical purposes such as visibility), or meanings associated with the attic and the basement.

7

Motivation behind the architectural sign can be a) functionalistic, b) formalistic, c) constructivistic, d) illusionistic, e) allegoric, f) anthropomorphic, g) naturalistic, h) traditionalistic and i) historic.

Confining informative content of the sign exclusively to its functional or structural aspects and prioritizing them over other possible meanings is exemplary of functionalism and constructivism. The allegoric aspect of meaning was employed in the Baroque period, for example, where it introduced systematic orders inspired by anthropomorphism. The fashioning of architecture after natural forms culminated perhaps in the monument of Newton: its vaulting sought to emulate a starry sky both during the day and at night. Sometimes an architectural form is vindicated by its traditional value ("one has always built like that"). This should not be confused with citing past periods as a reason for the choice of a particular form in contemporary architecture: Gothic style was once thought to be the most fitting style for sacral buildings, whereas in other times Renaissance architecture was considered suitable for other purposes (Jaroszewski, Rottermund 1976). These reasons are usually not particularly straightforward. The anthropomorphic nature of various orders invited architecture to wade into the psyche.

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<sup>6</sup>This passage appears in Panofsky 1955 as a quote from Eriugena which in the original goes as follows: "Materialia lumina [...] sive quae in terris humano artificio efficiuntur imagines sunt intelligibilium luminum, super omnia ipsius verae lucis." The symbolism of light is also explored in Stróżewski 1961.



"A civil prison should instill the sentiment of sadness and melancholy, while a criminal prison that of dread and terror, and for this reason be cruder even than the Tuscan order. Bosses placed harshly and randomly, openings narrow and irregular, brickwork high and double in width, parts lavish and thick, projecting far outwards to give ample shade, doorways as if leading to caves, heavy and deep, slave postures, caryatids, other sculptures and inscriptions to magnify the dread" (Sierakowski 1812: 187-188).

In some examples of Secessionist architecture formalism emerges as a playful discussion with the prevailing style. This approach is exemplified by a tenement in Warsaw, sited at Służewska 3 street and built between 1903-1905, where linear becomes curvilinear, spherically or rectangularly enclosed is now enclosed by a semicircular or flattened curve. Once secondary elements, such as divisions and fittings of woodwork or paving of the yard are now finished with utmost attention to detail. Harmony of tectonic articulation, traditionally valued foremost in the design, is here muted, with contrasts between walls and openings toned down by smaller divisions at the edges of openings. Furniture built into the walls and seamlessly merging with the paneling is gaining in popularity (Cz. Krassowski 1978). One other approach encouraging formalist attitudes in contemporary architecture can be summed up in the formula "this has never been done before."

8

The relations between architecture and those experiencing it are partially explored by the psychology and sociology of architecture. The pragmatics of architecture analyzes such processes as the reception and reading of architecture, as well as its clarity and layers of meanings. In engaging with architecture it is important to consider spatiality not purely as a physical property, but also in recognition of its psychical, social and cultural aspects.<sup>7</sup>

This approach is mirrored in conceptions of space as a personal, intimate, social, sacral or secular environment (Chermayeff, Alexander 1963, Hall 1966, Sommer 1969).

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<sup>7</sup>To support his view that architecture is a mass medium, Umberto Eco suggests that one experiences it distractedly. This, however, seems to be too much of an oversimplification. Architecture reaches those engaging with it on various levels of consciousness depending on the personal attitude, nature of the building and the context. One can certainly identify architecture that can force itself upon those experiencing it. However, grasping the message associated with a particular building is contingent on one's competence to engage with it (Eco 1972).

Having established his relationship with the forms of space, the user develops his personal attitudes towards the environment, such as sense of ownership or alienation (Chombart de Lauwe 1961).

Attitudes towards the space depend strongly on the personality and in extreme cases can lead to excessive fetishisation or technocratic manipulation (Mournier 1961: 78-81).

The reception and shaping of architectural signs also depend on stereotyped perception and the established way of seeing. It seems that in this regard architecture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is exploiting ideas already explored in the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

"(...) as early as in the 1880s our pedagogues, taking a cue from their German colleagues, feeling responsible for instilling in their students schemata of perception, encouraged them to perceive geometrically: to see an enfilade as a straight-line succession of rectangular objects, heads as spherical objects, necks as cylindrical objects."

The same pedagogues insisted on seeing landscapes, trees, portraits, etc., as combinations of triangles (W. Krassowski 1971). Thus arises a question whether the ability for the gradual discovering of diversity and the attributing to it the highest aesthetical value, a claim advanced by Edmund Burke, was not due to the particular significance attributed to land features, and whether it was not so that conceiving natural landscape in categories of beauty further contributed to sharpening of perceptions.<sup>8</sup>

Knowing how the sign and its user interact allows for the shaping of architectural form accordingly. It may be intended to flow through intellectual or emotional channels, as in the case of the municipal court on pre-war Leszno street in Warsaw, where its monumental proportions were used to paralyze the intellect and emotionally overpower the passer-by (Cz. Krassowski 1978).

9

Drawing on the findings of Roman Jakobson one may differentiate the following linguistic functions:

A. referential function, B. symbolic function, C. imperative function, D. phatic function, E. aesthetic function, sometimes identified with artistic

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<sup>8</sup>"But as perfectly beautiful bodies are not composed of angular parts, so their parts never continue long in the same right line. They vary their direction every moment, and they change under the eye by a deviation continually carrying on, but for whose beginning or end you will find it difficult to ascertain a point" (Burke 1887: 194).

function, F. emotive function and G. metalinguistic function, also interpreted as metavisual function in visual messages (Kalinowski 1976).

A. REFERENTIAL FUNCTION describes a relation between the message and the particular object. In the work of architecture, the message is communicated through the layout, structural components, if they are not obscured on purpose, as well as its function and utility. Entrance, for example, is denoted by an opening at the level of human movement, while shelter is indicated by space-restricting elements.

Referential functions have been already discussed in greater detail beforehand, but it would perhaps be of use to note at this point an observation made by Mukařovský who suggested that the message in the work of architecture is closely related with its practical functionality. Quoting from Valéry's *Eupalinos*, Mukařovský writes: "'Here,' says the building, 'merchants gather. Here judges judge. Here prisoners lament. Here lovers revel'" (Mukařovský 1970: 78). Other elements of the inherent message in the work of architecture become visible when the building is signifying other functions than those actually fulfilled. This happens when a tenement house takes the form of a palace or a factory of a castle: the actual purpose of a building is disguised, while the primary message is associated with that carried out usually by a palace or a castle (Mukařovský 1970).

Such diversionary tactics in architecture are quite popular. A chapel adjacent to a church in the Bernardines' monastery complex in Radom features on its horizontal roof a horizontally placed outline of a dome to suggest that the structure is indeed coped with a spherical form, while a parish church in Chełmno sports a brick wall covered with a mural depicting bricks double the actual size.

B. Architectural message fulfills SYMBOLIC FUNCTION when it refers to functions which are not directly related to its practical purpose and represent ideas and ideologies.

According to Mieczysław Gębarowicz, symbolism in architecture serves as a) a surrogate of theory and history, b) an interpretive guideline, c) a means of technical communication and d) formal basis of the design (Gębarowicz 1968).

Symbolism as a surrogate of the theory and history of architecture explores the origins of architecture, architecture as knowledge, topographical symbolism, the significance of geographical-astronomical moments, materials and techniques, as well as ideologies in monumental structures.

As an interpretive guideline, symbolism invites mathematical, philological or abstract-allegoric associations. Symbolism as a means of technical

communication relates to measurement systems and methods applied to record and document architectural structures.

As a formal basis of the design, symbols may appear as:

the substitutive symbol — in structures reenacting the design of other structures carrying deeper meaning (e.g. churches of the Holy Sepulchre);

the ostensibly comparative symbol — where it serves as a means to evoke associations, illusion or suggestions referring to the unknown or imaginary buildings (e.g. Herod's Palace or Pilate's Praetorium in Calvaries);

the numerical symbol — when one introduces a number carrying symbolic meaning (towers, pillars, columns corresponding with the number of evangelists or apostles);

the object symbol — when one introduces a figure or an object of symbolic meaning.

Contrary to referential functions, symbolic functions present in the language of architecture are addressed to a smaller circle of people. Naturally, the group of addressees in both of those functions can be limited to an individual person or institutional community, or the other way round, extended to cover various social circles, but in the case of symbolic functions their reach is defined with greater clarity, if not decidedly limited.

C. The message sent by the architectural structure has the IMPERATIVE FUNCTION if it enforces a particular activity. This is the domain of superfunctional architecture, such as industrial buildings, train stations or other transportation infrastructure such as rail tunnels or underground passages that necessitate unimpeded movement leaving no time for as small a thing as looking back, or a highway where one has no choice but to cruise at the speed of the surrounding traffic (Cortázar 1973).

In this, the work of architecture boils down to its technical functionality and works as a tool, which entails reductionism in meanings carried by its external features.

Imperative functions can be introduced either by means of coercion or persuasion and predominantly features in functional architecture (Sage 1968: 340).

D. The message fulfills its PHATIC FUNCTION when it appears to be communicating something while merely serving to secure and maintain contact between the interacting parties. This function is partially fulfilled by wayside shrines or other structures of human making, bearing an individual mark and a distinct trace of the creator's personality. The architectural sign can evoke the past or future presence of other people. Architectural forms preserve customary activities of their users or caretakers.

Some details of the architectural form serve the exclusive purpose of demonstrating affiliation with architectural style symbolizing an identity of the particular community. For example, the uppermost parts of the building at Chmielna 30 street in Warsaw are highly reminiscent of the Zakopane style widely identified at that time with a national style. Analogous meaning is sometimes attributed to forms commonly associated with modernity.

Phatic function is fulfilled through recurring forms and gestures. In human interactions this happens when we make a gesture in conversation or follow established patterns of behaviour when passing others close by or at a distance. Repeating those messages supports a reassuring and familiar environment for those engaged in communication (Kalinowski 1976).

E. AESTHETIC FUNCTION comes to the fore when the architecture arrests attention for its formal features. Composing complex spatial forms with the purpose of unifying them into perceptible and understandable experience creates a relatively autonomous system that speaks of and for itself. Appreciation for particular aesthetics is heavily contingent on the prevailing tastes: some generations held Gothic, Baroque or Romanesque architecture in disregard. Today, high aesthetic value is associated with quality finishing, fine technical condition and neat form, or, in other words, minimalistic aesthetics of Bauhaus and the legacy of Le Corbusier.<sup>9</sup>

It seems that the broader notion would be that of artistic function, that is, functioning of the work of architecture as a work of art.

F. With EMOTIVE FUNCTION, the message evokes emotional response. Architectural space can be shaped to create an impression of homeliness as much as coldness or detachment, thus form may seem to be heavy or light, quieting or disquieting. Monolithic design is heavy, meshy is light, zigzagging or broken lines are disquieting, wavy lines have a quieting effect. One feels different in a small and cozy room than in a large empty space, when we face a small house the feeling is different than looking at monumental architecture. It is not the sheer size of the form but also its shape that works to evoke emotional response. Lavish ornamentation and numerous details break down and parcellate spaces, while undivided or undecorated surfaces can bring about the feeling of loss and alienation (Popiel 1959).

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<sup>9</sup>This is how a journalist describes the awareness within society: "The new initiative 'Kielce Region Clean and Tidy' has changed the face of towns, municipalities and rural areas. *Squalor is washed away while residential and commercial architecture gradually replaces thatched roofs with eternit sheets*" (*Słowo Ludu* 9 March 1976: 6, my emphasis). Assuming that "le fonctionnel, c'est le beau plus l'utile. L'utile lui-même, c'est à la fois ce qui est moral et ce qui est vrai" (Baudrillard 1972: 245) what lacks utility, thatched roof, a ruin, etc., lacks also in aesthetic value.

Associations and feelings of astonishment, curiosity, fear, pleasure or safety often merge with one's own rhythm of psychic experiences. More than anything else, emotive function is differentiated with regard to cultural background and individual experience. One can, therefore, observe that some spaces are attractive while others are repulsive (Hall 1966), compare for example the main square in Cracow with Plac Defilad in Warsaw, or stylish cafes with waiting areas in train stations. Emotive functions are correlated with the perceived properties of the space, that is, their acceptance not because of their function but one's habits and values, espoused traditions and prevailing fashions (Chombart de Lauwe 1961).

Emotive influence was primarily used in architectural forms of Mannerism and Baroque which sequenced contrasting spaces to surprise and astonish (as in castles built in Baranów and Ujazd).

G. METALINGUISTIC FUNCTION of the architectural message is fulfilled when, by means of shaping mass and air, the particular arrangement of the elements expresses the essence of spatial relations, such as height, width, length, depth, largeness and smallness, distance and closeness, fullness and emptiness, light and darkness, silence and sound. Such building becomes an architectural dictionary of sorts thanks to an unusually large number of elements as compared to all available or possible elements.

All functions discussed above can co-exist in a single architectural message. In most buildings functions overlap and interrelate, even if one tends to dominate the message.

There are reductionist tendencies in architectural design, primarily focusing on imperative function, but one is beginning to introduce the aesthetic function of buildings, however limited in scope it may still be. With the processes of industrialization and typification, however, phatic and emotive functions fade away and cannot be reestablished. Also, other means of communication reduce the significance of the architectural message in its referential and symbolic functions.

The development of metalinguistic function encourages changes in referential functions and reinvents architecture while its other functions are being taken over by microspatial messages (print, film, telephone, television, neon, road signs, painting, sculpture, etc.).

Linguistic functions are also presented through other schemata.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>If we were to define language as a system of signs designed for the purposes of thinking, expression and communication, one may single out reflective, expressive and communicative functions of language. Reflective function overlaps partially with symbolic function ("symbol provokes thought"), expressive function overlaps with

Mieczysław Porębski observed that

”in modernity, image and architecture part their ways. At that time mysteries of the universe are being increasingly explored by easel painting, followed by print, freed from the confines of space and time, first in the form of etching and then that of a book, finally culminating in the cinematic experience merging image and literature: the screening room becomes a contemporary cave for collective initiations and metonymic participations, while a more private TV set presides over our residential interiors” (Porębski 1972: 167).

Similar remarks were made earlier by Victor Hugo in *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (see also Mallion 1962).

We may therefore make the following claim: with the development of means of human communication, functions present in the language of architecture are reduced and fade away as they are taken over by verbal and visual languages, which in turn causes disintegration of architectural form along with the declining awareness of its meaning (this is particularly clear if we consider historic monuments).

The language of architecture is also becoming increasingly similar to contemporary literary conventions. It is perhaps not purely coincidental that the same period provoked the emergence of both Dadaism and architectural movement that advocated reducing architecture to monotonous repetition of rectangles and triangles. Much like ”dada” in literature sought to emulate the verbal behaviour of children, architecture boils down to block-building.

Despite reductionist tendencies in the language of architecture, no other sign save for the architectural sign has the power to unite so broad a range of references, from the most proximate to the most distant ones.

Unique languages of architecture are developed along differences between various cultures, resulting in a broad range of formal repertoires, meanings and applications.

In this sense we may speak of unique languages of the Gothic style, Renaissance, Baroque, Classicism or the Avant-garde. Having recognized those various languages one must face the problem of understanding and

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emotive function, while communicative function with referential and phatic functions.

translation.<sup>11</sup> The language may be intelligible but strike as foreign because of its forms, much like a Gothic arch and its dimmed interiors seemed downright barbaric to the people of Renaissance. The reach of language can be limited to one nation, continent, social stratum, or even a single architect employing highly idiosyncratic forms (with Antonio Gaudi featuring prominently in this category).

Seeking inspiration for a national style during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the architects of the Golden Chapel in Poznań, Greater Poland, eventually chose to model their designs after Byzantine churches built in Ravenna.

Around 1875, Russia declared the Moscow-Byzantine style as a model for imperial architecture. For this reason, Saint Florian's Cathedral in Warsaw built in a "Vistula-Baltic" style came to be regarded as the epitome of Polish sacral architecture across Congress Poland and the entire Russian Empire. Things were quite different in Galicia which culturally gravitated towards Vienna and its Saint Stephan's Cathedral. In effect, in Cracow it was the arcades of Cloth Hall or the Słowacki theatre that one associated with the "native" architecture (Cz. Krassowski 1978). In this particular case the uniqueness of the architectural language was constituted not by the formal repertoire but rather the particular feeling associated with it.

The attempts at creating a universal language of architecture have so far failed, this is so because what is ultimately decisive for its uniqueness is the attitude it inspires rather than uniformity of its formal repertoire.<sup>12</sup>

This makes the categorization of architectural expressions all the more difficult. It may be the case, and indeed there seems to be much evidence to support this claim, that a single architectural structure can be analyzed as

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<sup>11</sup>Miłobędzki writes that "[Abbé Jean-Louis de Cordemoy's] ideal was Gothic cathedral wholly translated into Greek" (Miłobędzki 1969: 426).

<sup>12</sup>Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Gothic and Renaissance styles at one time or another featured prominently on the European continent, if not to the same degree. Baroque managed to spread further to South America while Classicism was also successful in North America and Russia. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the "cardboard box" design sprawled across all continents. Paradoxically, as styles increasingly spread through the continents one observes their formal repertoire and its possible interpretations simply reproduced on a larger scale. Jean Baudrillard approached this problem in the following way: "La formule du Bauhaus, c'est en résumé: il y a pour toute forme et tout objet un signifié objectif déterminable-sa fonction. Ce qu'en linguistique on appelle le niveau de dénotation-tout le reste [...] c'est l'enfer de la connotation, le résiduel, le superflu, l'excroissant, l'excentrique, le décoratif, l'inutile, le kitsch. Le dénoté (objectif) est beau, le connoté (parasite) est laid. Mieux encore: le dénoté (objectif) est vrai, le connoté est faux (idéologique)" (Baudrillard 1972: 244-245).



belonging to more than one language.<sup>13</sup>

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We may thus speak of not one but many languages of architecture, which allows for a different approach to the problems of history and theory of architecture.

Observations and remarks presented in this paper constitute perhaps a sufficient argument for treating the language of architecture as an opportunity for combining various methodologies (Miłobędzki 1973). In syntactic studies one can apply metrological and morphological methodologies, in semantics — iconology, in pragmatics — psychology and sociology of architecture. This approach by no means exhausts what the discipline can achieve but nevertheless permits a more universal view on various perspectives without limiting their scope.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>This concerns not only structures often repeatedly remodelled over time, but also structurally uniform buildings erected at the crossroads of ages and cultures.

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