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Title of doctoral dissertation:

The Architec(x)ture of Contemporary Comics and Graphic Novels for Children

SUMMARY

The dissertation is devoted to the analysis of contemporary comic books and graphic novels for children from the perspective of their architec(x)tonic organization, considered not only as a formal arrangement, but also as a fundamental dimension of narrative and communicative construction. The purpose of the thesis is to examine how the material form of a work - its format, structure, graphic layout and materials used - co-creates its layer of meaning, becoming an equal component of meaning on a par with the storytelling content presented. The dissertation is part of the current of interdisciplinary research, drawing from cultural studies, literary studies and studies of visual media and visual arts.

The analyses undertaken in this dissertation are grounded in a critical examination of the current state of scholarship, with particular emphasis on two seminal monographs. The study by Michał Wróblewski conceptualizes comics as a medium defined by fluid formal and generic boundaries, while Matylda Sęk-Iwanek underscores the imperative to develop methodological frameworks responsive to the hybrid nature of comics as an interplay of image and text. While both contributions substantially enrich contemporary scholarship on comics, they nonetheless leave a critical gap in the consideration of the materiality of the work – specifically, its architec(x)tonic dimensions. This dissertation seeks to address that lacuna by positioning children's comics as a focal point for examining multimaterial works, understood here as compositions in which image, text, typography, and physical structure (including cover, format, and paper) collectively shape the reader's aesthetic and cognitive experience.

The foundation of the reflection in this thesis lies in the development of the concept of architec(x)ture as an analytical tool that allows for the description of works of material culture not only in symbolic terms but also in spatial and sensory dimensions. The inspiration for this approach is drawn from the reflections of Bogusława Bodzioch-Bryła, initially related to digital literature, which are here transferred to the realm of children's comics (a medium that combines narrative tradition with visual experimentation). Special attention is devoted to texture as an element that shapes the reception of the work – both in material and visual terms – enhancing the emotional and aesthetic experience of the reader. The dissertation employs a broad range of methodological approaches, from literary theory (including Stanisław Dąbrowski's concept) to reflections on the artist's book, literature, and architectural literary studies, demonstrating that children's comics are not only a narrative medium but also a space for experimentation in which word, image, and materiality co-create a complex architec(x)tonic whole.

The analytical part of the thesis comprises a detailed study of the architect(x)ural aspects of contemporary children's comics, structured according to their key formal features. The investigation begins with an analysis of the physical dimension of the book as an object: its format, materials, the texture of covers and pages, as well as the overall graphic design – all elements that shape the young reader's first impression and influence their relationship with the book as a tangible artifact. This section pays particular attention to the works of, among others, William Grill, Aleksandra and Daniel Mizieliński, Nikola Kucharska, and Alojzy Rzepa. The discussion demonstrates how the materiality of the comic interacts with and supports its narrative content.

The next area of analysis focuses on illustration and color schemes, which organize the rhythm of visual narration, construct emotional tension within the story, and enrich its structural complexity. The selected examples – including works by Marcin Podolec, Tomasz Samojlik, Agata Mianowska, and the manga artist known by the pseudonym Kaziya – illustrate how stylistic and graphic decisions influence the way young readers perceive the unfolding narrative. In this context, color functions not merely as ornamentation, but as a narrative device, while illustration assumes roles traditionally ascribed to text.

A separate section of the study focuses on the textual layer of comics, encompassing the arrangement of speech balloons, narrative boxes, and onomatopoeia. The thesis reflects on their role in shaping the architectural structure of the narrative. The analysis includes both publications that rely heavily on verbal content – such as the works of Tomasz Samojlik and Adam Wajrak, as well as Alessandro Ferrari and Giulia Adragna – and those that are nearly devoid of it, such as the comics of Shaun Tan and Piotr Nowacki. This contrast allows for an exploration of the diverse narrative strategies employed in children's comics. Particular attention is given to the function of silence, understood not as the mere absence of speech, but as an active narrative element that stimulates the reader's imagination.

Chapter Seven is dedicated to experimental forms of comics that require physical interaction or reader participation in constructing the narrative. This includes analyses of gamebook-style comics, interactive works, and toy-like publications, such as those by Manuro, Gorobei, and Matthias Picard. These examples illustrate how the architecture of a comic can operate as an interactive mechanism. This part of the study argues that such reading experiences are not merely acts of interpretation, but also of exploration and co-creation of the story.

The thesis also represents the voice of a practitioner – a comics creator who not only analyzes others' work but also confronts theoretical perspectives with their own creative experience. Employing the viewpoint of a maker enables a deeper understanding of the decision-making processes behind the construction of a comic: from the visual concept and page layout to material selection. The author emphasizes that the architecture of a comic is not merely an abstract analytical category but a tangible creative challenge – one that demands the integration of conceptual thinking and manual precision.

This dissertation contributes to the development of research on children's comics by proposing a new spatial and material interpretative framework. It demonstrates that these works are not merely carriers of narrative content, but complex objects of visual culture that actively shape the reader's experience. The proposed concept of the comic's architect(x)ure offers a perspective that treats the medium as a dynamic field of experimentation, in which content and form merge into a coherent, multidimensional whole.

Keywords: children's comics; architect(x)ure of comics; architect(x)ure; materiality of the work; texture; visual culture; children's literature

