

LESZEK MALUGA

ORCID: 0000-0003-4715-4819

Wrocław University of Science and Technology, Poland

LEBBEUS WOODS – BETWEEN AVANT-GARDE AND SCIENCE FICTION

LEBBEUS WOODS – MIĘDZY AWANGARDA A FANTASTYKĄ

Abstract

Ten years have passed since the death of Lebbeus Woods – a great visionary, wonderful draftsman and unique intellectual. Many critics considered him a representative of the avant-garde of the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. The article refers to the studies by S. Morawski and Z. Bauman, which defined the features of the artistic avant-garde. In the context of distinguished features, the elements of over thirty years of Woods's creative activity were analyzed. The study allowed us to confirm the legitimacy of defining Woods as an avant-garde architect.

Keywords: avant-garde, experimental architecture, Lebbeus Woods, theory of architecture

Streszczenie

Mija 10 lat o śmierci wielkiego wizjonera, wspaniałego rysownika i oryginalnego intelektualisty Lebbeusa Woodsa. Wielu krytyków uważało go za reprezentanta awangardy przełomu XX i XXI wieku. W pracy powołano się na opracowania S. Morawskiego i Z. Baumana definiujące cechy awangardy artystycznej. W kontekście wyróżnionych cech przeanalizowano elementy przeszło trzydziestoletniej twórczości Woodsa. Badanie pozwoliło potwierdzić zasadność określenia Woodsa mianem architekta awangardowego.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura eksperymentalna, awangarda, Lebbeus Woods, teoria architektury

1. INTRODUCTION

Ten years have passed since the death of Lebbeus Woods – a great visionary architect, draftsman and unique intellectual. Many critics considered him to be a representative of the avant-garde of the turn of the 21st century.

The term 'avant-garde' (applied as a noun or as an adjective) is used in two basic meanings. First of all, it refers to the avant-garde in art of the 1st half of the 20th century, which included new artistic movements. Artists who were involved in them – including futurists, constructivists, and expressionists – brought about an aesthetic revolution in Europe. In a freer sense, the term 'avant-garde' is used as a feature of creative activity which offers new qualities, i.e. innovative creative activity which is ahead of the prevailing trends. Nowadays, critics assign this feature to individual artists who show an innovative approach and do not necessarily represent any defined trend or group of artists.

In such an understanding of this term, Lebbeus Woods is called an avant-garde artist. Therefore, a question arises, namely to what extent this feature of Woods's creative activity is superficially attributed, and to what extent the connections of his oeuvre with the essence of avant-garde art created at the beginning of the 20th century can be proved. Is Woods's creative activity avant-garde in its essence?

Comparing the features of avant-garde art described by S. Morawski with some of Woods's achievements will allow us to verify the thesis postulating that among contemporary architects Woods was closest to the original roots of avant-garde.

2. ON AVANT-GARDE CREATIVE ACTIVITY

G. Dziamski points out that art historians tend to treat the term 'avant-garde' as an ordering and not a defining concept due to its pluralistic nature¹. However, S. Morawski tried to look at this phenomenon in a synthetic way and identified the most important features which were common to various avant-garde movements. He lists four features for all avant-garde trends²:

- distance to the existing art – 'past-contemptuous attitude engaged with a fascination with what is to come, what is considered to be inevitable and what is paving the way';
- pioneering and innovation;
- the extraordinary perception of the world and art by refreshing it;
- searching for the unusual at any cost, demonstrating just any extravagant otherness (as a negative aspect of the avant-garde).

Morawski also expresses the view that it is impossible to describe a phenomenon of the avant-garde 'outside a specific historical and cultural context'³.

Bauman described the characteristics of the avant-garde made by Morawski more pointedly by listing the following six features:

- pioneering spirit,
- distance and aversion to the existing art and its role in social life,
- despising the past, especially its canons,
- theorizing about one's own creative activity,
- treating art as 'the most advanced outpost of social progress',
- drawing inspiration from science and technology⁴.

Moreover, Morawski created a typology of models of avant-garde and neo-avant-garde creative activity. Woods's activity is most similar to the model of engaged creative activity (within the framework of the first avant-garde), where 'ideological values came to the fore'⁵.

The above approach to the essence of the avant-garde by Morawski and Bauman allows us to look at Woods's architectural creative activity and point to its avant-garde values.

¹ G. Dziamski, *Słowo wstępne*, [in:] G. Dziamski (ed.), *Awangarda w perspektywie postmodernizmu*, Humaniora, Poznań 1996, pp. 12–13.

² S. Morawski, *Awangardy XX wieku – stara i nowa*, "Miesięcznik Literacki" 1975, No. 3, pp. 54–55.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ Z. Bauman, *Ponowoczesność, czyli o niemożliwości awangardy*, "Teksty Drugie: teoria literatury, krytyka, interpretacja" 1994, nr 5/6 (29/30), p. 173.

⁵ Morawski distinguished four models of avant-garde creative activity, i.e. autotelic, engaged, heroic and pessimistic as well as utilitarian and artistic; S. Morawski, *op. cit.*, pp. 56–58.

3. ON AVANT-GARDE IN ARCHITECTURE

One of the basic differences between avant-garde creative activity in art and architecture is the fact that artists can perform their works on their own. On the other hand, implementations of architectural works require considerable costs and the will of investors as well as decision makers. Artists are largely autonomous in their actions. In principle, architects 'provide services', i.e. their activity is conditioned, for example, by the demand on the market of orders.

Out of these, among other things, limitations, the area of 'independent' creative activity comes – autonomous architectural creative activity. Freed from principals, economic or implementation conditions, it makes it possible to go beyond the realities of professional practice with postulates and design concepts⁶.

In the past, autonomous creative activity was practiced by young rebellious or frustrated graduates of architecture universities (e.g. R. Koolhaas, D. Libeskind, Z. Hadid, L. Krier) or outsiders who were unable to enter the labor market, accept or adapt to the conditions of the profession, or refused to accept compromises (e.g. M. Scolari)⁷.

It should, of course, be emphasized that an autonomous attitude is not equivalent to an avant-garde attitude. As it was mentioned earlier, the terms 'avant-garde' or 'neo-avant-garde' are reserved for specific trends at a specific time by art researchers⁸. However, using the features attributed to avant-garde movements, we can try to extrapolate them to various creative attitudes, i.e. innovative, visionary, nonconformist, contesting, 'going ahead', not meeting all the attributes distinguished by Morawski. These cases can be called an avant-garde attitude.

From the beginning of the 20th century, architectural avant-gardes were created mostly in the theoretical form – drawings, models, and texts. This applies to the creators of the first avant-garde, including A. Sant'Ellì, B. Taut, H. Finsterlin, and El Lissitzki.

In the 1960s, many architects, who were inspired by new technical and technological possibilities, created visions of the future. On the one hand, they surprised people with new spatial structures, but on the other, they 'conquered' new environments, i.e. sea depths, deserts, space (Archigram, P. Maymont, Haus-Rucker-Co, P. Soleri et al.).

Peter Davey, on the occasion of the exhibition entitled *Images et Imaginaires d'Architecture* which was organized at the Pompidou Centre in Paris in 1984, expressed the view that contemporary architecture would probably look different without this type of creative activity which is a significant part of the architectural heritage⁹.

Lebbeus Woods's creative activity fits precisely in this area of autonomous theoretical creative activity and at the same time constitutes an expression of an avant-garde attitude.

⁶ L. Maluga, *Autonomiczny rysunek architektoniczny*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Wrocławskiej, Wrocław 2006.

⁷ Scolari gave up 'building', which was understood as designing with the intention of building a structure, shortly after his graduation because he did not want to work for a 'spoiled' society; H. Klotz, *Warum ich nicht baue?* (interview with M. Scolari), "Jahrbuch für Architektur" 1981–1982, p. 160.

⁸ S. Morawski, *op. cit.*

⁹ *The literal transfer of such visions into reality is terribly dangerous and often results in absurd or autocratic structures. But an attempt at eliminating the life of architecture in two dimensions is also absurd: paradoxically (which was demonstrated all too clearly in much of the architecture of the 1950s and 1960s), buildings without a two-dimensional input, of what could or could have been, just end up as absurdity and an expression of autocracy*; P. Davey, *The Potent Image*, "The Architectural Review" 1984, No. 1045, 3, p. 15.

4. LEBBEUS WOODS – CHARACTER AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY

Lebbeus Woods (1940–2012) abandoned a traditional career path of a designer in the 1970s and devoted himself entirely to developing his own concepts of architecture which stood out from the prevailing trends. He broke up with commercial design for the sake of drawing and intellectual work.

The feature which distinguished Woods from other contemporary architects was his enormous activity in the professional field, which consisted of his creative achievements and various types of activities promoting his concepts of new architecture.

He left behind not only a huge number of drawings and models, but also published texts. He published over a dozen books, published texts in collective works as well as articles in the journals. He is the author of numerous introductions to various publications, including monographs by leading architects such as H. Finsterlin, F. Kiesler, P. Cook and R. Abraham who belonged to avant-garde artists.

His concepts and views are incorporated into publications concerning future technologies and new paradigms of the civilization.

His intellectual activity and position in the world of architecture are evidenced by the fact that he worked at or was temporarily invited to many leading architectural universities (including the AA School of Architecture in London, SCI-Arc in Los Angeles; later he was connected with the Cooper Union in New York).

Especially in the 1990s, he carried out workshops for students at various universities. For this purpose, still in the 1980s, he established the Research Institute for Experimental Architecture (RIEA)¹⁰ which organized workshops, issued publications, and recruited collaborators. He participated in international conferences, gave interviews, etc. He actively animated events which linked his creative concepts with problems and events related to modern civilization.

A special area of his activity was the blog which was run by Woods from 2007 until his death (over 300 posts)¹¹, in which he posted comments on events connected with architecture, critical statements about various artists, but most of all he promoted his creative ideas.

Woods had a unique personality. Critics write about him as an archetype¹², which can be regarded as appreciation for his unconventional and innovative creative attitude.

He worked out an individual way of practicing the profession of an architect, which was freed from the requirements of the market game and the dictatorship of investors. He created space organization concepts where commercial designers did not act. As an architect, he was involved in spatial situations in the areas of wars, economic collapse, and natural disasters, namely where destruction and chaos required new types of space organization instead of rebuilding old orders.

His creative activity was characterized by radicalism and uncompromising nature, which made him popular among young people, especially students at architecture universities. Nevertheless, the older generation of architects kept distance from him.

¹⁰ At present, the center works under the supervision of G. Lafranchi in Switzerland – RIEA.ch.

¹¹ Compare: C. Jacobs, L. Woods (eds.), *Slow Manifesto: Lebbeus Woods Blog*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York 2015.

¹² In October 2012, the exhibition entitled *Lebbeus Woods is an Archetype* was opened at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc). Soon a publication was also published, i.e. E.O. Moss (eds.), *Lebbeus Woods is an Archetype*, SCI-Arc Press, Los Angeles 2013.

The architectural community, however, admired Woods for his exceptional imagination, uniqueness of intellectual concepts and excellent drawing skills. This is evidenced by a large number of press publications.

By following Woods's intellectual and artistic development, we can show logical consequences in the evolution of views and drawn ideas. Over thirty years of his oeuvre can be divided into three periods.

In the first one – the 1980s – Woods began creating a vision of architecture in abstract spaces (*terra nova*) as a new theoretical order based on knowledge (*universcience*) which rejected determinism and Cartesian order and was based on a revolution in science caused by the theory of relativity.

Architecture, however, was to serve not as a means of formal expression, but as an instrument for acquiring knowledge¹³. His structures levitating in space resemble space stations and architectural complexes resemble fantastic research laboratories¹⁴.

During this time, he developed the concept of experimental architecture which became a tool of all his creative activity. At the end of this period, he began to create works in the real context of cities such as Paris, Berlin, and Zagreb.

In the second period – the 1990s – Woods's works were focused on very sensitive issues affecting architecture and urban space. First of all, he devoted a lot of work to the war in the Balkans. Moreover, he devoted design works to, among other things, economically degraded Havana and the areas destroyed by the earthquake in San Francisco.

The rhetoric of formulated views sharpened. In the context of destroyed and chaotic spaces, he developed the concepts of 'anarchitecture' and tactics of 'radical reconstruction'¹⁵. They referred to activities which rejected the existing spatial order and traditional schemes of city and architecture functioning for the spontaneous bottom-up self-organization of people living in such areas. An example is the *wild city* in Reggio di Calabria. In the form of student workshops, he offered the help of architects in negotiations concerning the shape and function of space among inhabitants of the degraded district¹⁶. These tactics are part of a more universal idea of architecture of resistance, architecture – as Woods wrote – of a minority, partisan, impermanent, and being against¹⁷.

In the last period, which covered the 1st decade of the 21st century, until his death, Woods softened his revolutionary rhetoric, but with a new force returned to the roots of basing the concepts of architectural activities on the scientific reflection.

More theoretical design considerations and spatial experiments, in which the issues of dynamic interventions were related to the technological revolution and new paths of civilization development, began to dominate again.

An example can be projects for Vienna. A series of drawings and spatial installations illustrate architectural interventions as a tectonic expression of *energy relations in public and private city spaces*¹⁸.

¹³ L. Woods, *Anarchitecture: Architecture is a Political Act*, Academy Edition, London 1992, p. 25.

¹⁴ His drawings were used to illustrate science fiction literature (A.C. Clarck, R. Zelazny) and to create film sets.

¹⁵ L. Woods, *Radical Reconstruction*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York 1997.

¹⁶ Cf. L. Maluga, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

¹⁷ L. Woods, *Thoughts on Architecture of Resistance*, <https://dl.icdst.org/pdfs/> (access: 18.07.2022).

¹⁸ L. Woods, *System Wien*, Hatje Cantz Publishers, Berlin 2005.

5. AVANT-GARDE QUALITIES IN WOODS'S CREATIVE ACTIVITY

In the introduction to an interview with Woods, G. Manaugh wrote:

Of course, Woods is usually considered the avant-garde of the avant-garde, someone for whom architecture and science fiction – or urban planning and exhilarating, uncontained speculation – are all but one and the same. His work is experimental architecture in its most powerful, and politically provocative sense.¹⁹

E. Culea-Hong, on the other hand, includes Woods in the Chthlucene avant-garde. Analyzing Woods's tactics in the proposals for the Balkans plunged into the war, he writes:

... we aim to paint the portrait of Woods as a member of an emerging interdisciplinary avant-garde that focuses on wastelands and embraces speculative thought in order to uncover and discover ways to navigate the dangerous waters of future catastrophes.²⁰

The above statements can be justified by pointing to some of Woods's achievements. The three distinguishable periods of his creative activity bring innovative ideas and solutions to different extents and, for various reasons, deserve the term 'avant-garde'.

It is worth noticing, however, that although Woods saw the work of other architects as avant-garde and wrote about it, he himself distanced himself from the avant-garde as a mainstream phenomenon²¹. His experimental architecture, revolutionary architecture, and architecture of resistance were in principle dissociated from any relationships with tradition or liberal and consumer culture as well.

By analyzing creative achievements and statements of Woods, we can try to show those elements which evoke the features of the first avant-garde. In this way, the term 'avant-garde architect' will be credible.

A/ PIONEERING SPIRIT

S. Morawski when writing about pioneering and innovation as features of the avant-garde, draws attention to the distinction between a tendency towards otherness and unique achievements²². In this sense, the aforementioned fact of calling Woods an 'archetype' by the professional community should be understood.

¹⁹ G. Manaugh, *Without Walls: An Interview with Lebbeus Woods*, <https://bldgblog.com/2007/10/without-walls-an-interview-with-lebbeus-woods/> (access: 05.02.2022).

²⁰ E. Culea-Hong, *Revealing the Chthlucene Avant-garde: Lebbeus Woods's 'Salvage' Strategy in the Balkans* [in:] A. Pilav, M. Schoonderbeek, H. Sohn, A. Staničić (eds.), *Mediating the Spatiality of Conflicts*, International Conference Proceedings, TU Delft Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, Borders & Territories, Delft 2020, https://www.academia.edu/43439428/Revealing_the_Chthlucene_Avant_garde_Lebbeus_Woods_s_Salvage_Strategy_in_the_Balkans (access: 24.05.2022).

²¹ For example, while defining his concept of 'architecture of resistance', he wrote: *Architecture of resistance is different from avant-garde architecture. The avantgarde is just that: the vanguard of the majority, scouts leading the way for most people – those already in agreement – to follow. The avant-garde is a projection of the main tendencies in society, the values, practices, the aspirations of the majority, and cannot separate itself from them. The avant-garde is the mainstream, a manifestation of where it wants to go*; L. Woods, *Thoughts ...*

²² The avant-garde is created by those artists who express their own individuality, their unique vision,

He was a pioneer primarily in the field of new tactics in architectural practice²³. He saw the architect as an experimenter, animator, and mediator making an intervention in a complex physical and social space, and who was intellectually and politically engaged. He tried to connect his revolutionary spatial concepts with the real problems of places on Earth, which were in deep crises.

Woods's creative activity is innovative despite some similarities to earlier achievements in the field of architecture. It is possible to show formal analogies in the first period of Woods's creative activity to architectural and urban visions of the 1960s. There are also noticeable formal similarities to the early works of representatives of deconstructivism such as D. Libeskind or Z. Hadid. There is no doubt that Woods's creative activity had something to do with deconstructivism²⁴. After all, he had contacts with some of the leading artists of this trend²⁵. However, P. Noever wrote about Woods:

Of course, he is not a 'deconstructor', and he doesn't use the method of Deconstruction either as an excuse for laziness, or as an authorization for an indifferent architectural expression. No! If there is an element of Deconstructivism in his work, it is not indecisiveness, but rather a criticism of existing architecture.²⁶

B/ DISTANCE AND AVERSION TO THE EXISTING ART AND ITS ROLE IN SOCIAL LIFE

When translating this feature of the artistic avant-garde into the area of the architectural creative activity of Woods, it should be emphasized that a critical attitude to the realities of design practice was probably a motive for departing from it and accompanied him throughout his life. However, he formulated his views particularly strongly in the 1990s (the second period of his creative activity). He wrote: "Architecture has always served strength and power in society"²⁷. Woods accused architects of conformism and servility²⁸.

The effect of distancing himself from capitalist spatial and professional reality was the creation of the concept of 'anarchitecture' (a combination of the terms architecture and

while at the same time absorbing all innovative ideas by their oeuvre; S. Morawski, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

²³ He defined these tactics in his book *Radical Reconstruction* entitled *Twenty Tactics of a New Practice*. He lists, among other things, *Instigate change, Engage paradox, Stay on the move, Challenge old ideas of shaping space, thus of living*; L. Woods, *Radical...*, pp. 28–31.

²⁴ In Artforum, A.R. Galloway wrote that although Woods did not participate in famous *Deconstructivist Architecture* in MoMa in 1988 but *has done more than anyone to carry forward the experimental spirit inaugurated by the show*; A.R. Galloway, *Lebbeus Woods (1940–2012)*, Artforum, <https://www.artforum.com/passages/alexander-r-galloway-on-lebbeus-woods-1940-2012-38654> (access: 24.05.2022).

²⁵ Evidence of his relationships with progressive creators of the 1990s is his active participation in two conferences organized by P. Noever at MAK in Vienna in 1993 and 1995 with the participation of such artists as Z. Hadid, Coop Himmelb(l)au group, T. Mayne (Morphosis) or E.O. Moss.

²⁶ P. Noever, *At the Outermost Boundary* [in:] L. Woods, *Anarchitecture...*, p. 6.

²⁷ L. Woods, *Freespace and the Tyranny of Types*, [in:] P. Noever (ed.), *The End of Architecture? Documents and Manifestos*, Prestel, München 1993, p. 85.

²⁸ He believed that architects sheltered in the 'hermetically sealed capsule of professionalism', claiming that they act in the name of the higher interests of civilization and the timeless values of science and art; L. Woods, *Anarchitecture...*, p. 9.

anarchy) – politically engaged architecture, architecture of resistance, rebellion, and revolutionary (*Come the Revolution!*²⁹). Its tool was experimental architecture which looked for new forms of space organization for a ‘free’ society.

C/ DESPISING THE PAST AND ESPECIALLY ITS CANONS

The aforementioned ‘past-contemptible attitude’ can be regarded as an important feature which constitutes the avant-garde. A. Sant’Elia, in the manifesto of futuristic architecture in 1914, sharply distanced himself from the traditional architecture that was in force at that time (*I reject and despise*), among other things, avant-garde pseudo-architecture, classical architecture, from the reconstruction and imitation of ancient monuments and palaces, from vertical and horizontal lines, cubic forms and pyramids³⁰.

In 1992 Woods wrote:

An architect who designs types of buildings is a builder of pyramids, who imitates hidden forms previously written by those who dominate others and want to speak on their behalf, and who benefit from conventions, conformism and adaptation to the principles of normativity.³¹

A year later, he renewed his attack on contemporary designers: “In that case, the architects who monumentalize authority resisting change, authority that seeks to maintain itself as a status quo, are not today serving civilisation, but its enemies: categorization, oversimplification, typology”³².

He claimed that the only answer to conventional, commercial or for chosen people architecture could be anarchitecture with all its philosophy and innovative spatial structures.

D/ THEORIZING ABOUT HIS OWN CREATIVITY

An important feature of the avant-garde attitude is reflection on one’s own creative activity, which may take various forms, i.e. from creative manifestos to extensive studies combining creative practice with theory. Woods showed great publishing activity in this regard, which is evidenced by the extensive bibliography of his works.

He published many theoretical texts on the Internet, primarily on his own website (until 2007) and on his blog (from 2007).

The strongest and at the same time the shortest statement is *Manifesto* from 1993. He presented it, among other things, at the conference entitled ‘The End of Architecture?’ which was organized by P. Noever at MAK (Vienna 1993)³³. He published another

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

³⁰ A. Sant’Elia, *Manifest futurystyczny*, “Architektura futurystyczna” 11 lipca 1914, <https://rewolta.wordpress.com/2007/09/11/antonio-santelia-manifest-futurystyczny-architektura-futurystyczna-11-lipca-1914/> (access: 20.07.2022).

³¹ L. Woods, *Anarchitecture...*, p. 8.

³² L. Woods, *Freespace ...*, p. 88.

³³ P. Noever (ed.), *The End of Architecture? Documents and Manifestos*, Prestel, München 1993; After nearly 20 years, Woods reproachfully stated that the conference participants did not show enthusiasm for formulating manifestos; L. Woods, *Return of the manifesto*, <https://lebbeuswoods.wordpress.com/2011/11/29/return-of-the-manifesto/> (access: 17.06.2022).

manifesto (*Slow Manifesto*) 16 years later on his blog. He included a collection of thoughts summarizing his path of creative activity in this blog³⁴.

Woods also created a unique form of theorizing about architecture, attributing thoughts and views to a fictional architect called Baltazar Holtz (L. Woods's alter ego³⁵). His drawings and essay were published in 1999³⁶.

E/ TREATING ART AS 'THE MOST ADVANCED OUTPOST OF SOCIAL PROGRESS'

In many of his works, Woods expressed the belief that architecture can be a tool of social changes. He considered a shift away from the existing practices and forms of space organization in favor of a new 'revolutionary' paradigm based on new forms of architecture. In one of the interviews, he said:

architecture should not just be something that follows up on events but be a leader of events. (...) by implementing an architectural action, you actually are making a transformation in the social fabric and in the political fabric. Architecture becomes an instigator; it becomes an initiator.³⁷

Criticizing the current state of civilization leading to wars and economic degradation of certain regions, he saw in animating grassroots self-organization a way to create a new spatial and social tissue. Old, compromised structures should not be reconstructed, but new revolutionary tactics for organizing space and society should be introduced.

Among the main concepts of the new organization of social space, he included heterarchy as the opposite of the hierarchy dominating in the contemporary world.

In a dictionary from a book from 1992, he defined it that way: "Heterarchy: a spontaneous lateral network of autonomous individuals; a system of authority based on the evolving performances of individuals, e.g. a cybernetic circus"³⁸. This approach is adopted, inter alia, in the concept of 'wall-labyrinth' (e.g. *Bosnia Freestate*, 1993), where inhabitants who are immersed in a continuous linear structure colonize themselves the structure on an ongoing basis³⁹.

F/ DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Referring to the last of the above-mentioned features of avant-garde, Woods undoubtedly drew inspiration from science and technology. His first period of creative activity was dominated by a fascination with the revolution in science, and especially with Einstein's theory of

³⁴ L. Woods, *Slow Manifesto*; <https://lebbeuswoods.wordpress.com/2009/01/07/slow-manifesto/> (access: 19.07.2022).

³⁵ F.M. Díaz-Pinés, *Delirio y anomia en la obra de Lebbeus Woods*, "Arquitectura al margen" 2017, 18, p. 110.

³⁶ L. Woods, *Balthazar Holz: Architecture of Trans-political Thought*, www.lebbeuswoods.net (access: 15.01.2013).

³⁷ G. Manaugh, *op. cit.*

³⁸ L. Woods, *Anarchitecture...*, p. 141.

³⁹ *Idem*, *Radical...*

relativity⁴⁰. In this context, he conducted considerations on time, space, matter and light. He was interested in dynamics, processes, and ‘becoming’⁴¹. In subsequent stages of his creative activity, Woods constantly supported new creative concepts with the elements of the latest scientific knowledge. This is proved by, among other things, posts on his blog.

G. Dziamski quotes R. Poggioli’s view that

the avant-garde connections with artistic and technical-scientific mythology had (...) a purely external and superficial character, they were limited to metaphors and terminological staffage, i.e. a tendency to recall such concepts like experiments, laboratories etc.⁴²

However, in the commentary to Woods’s works, H.-P. Schwarz wrote in 1986:

Even if I cannot take seriously all the mysticism in which Woods dresses up his defensive speech to accept the unknown, I think Peter Cook is right when he writes [about Woods’s works – footnote L.M.] that architecture, since the death of Buckminster Fuller, urgently needs someone who will think again a little more universally about the world and its meaning: through light and air, through time and space’.⁴³

Indeed, Woods supplemented his projects with texts referring to scientific theories, he added glossaries containing scientific terms and neologisms he created, and he referred to scientists. He made experiment a strategic element of his work. Anyway, Morawski noticed that experimenting was connected with an avant-garde creative attitude⁴⁴. Also, often, especially in the first period of his creative activity, he referred to his buildings and cities as living laboratories⁴⁵.

6. SUMMARY

If we assume that the definition of an architect as being ‘avant-garde’ is conditioned by the fulfillment of the constitutive features – at least to a large extent – of the avant-garde, then Woods deserves this definition more than many contemporary *starchitects*. As shown in a short review of his achievements in the context of the features of avant-garde art expressed in the texts by Morawski and Bauman, Woods meets the conditions of being considered an avant-garde artist.

His creative activity stands out from the trends of contemporary thought and architectural achievements. The attitude contesting professional and cultural reality – as mentioned earlier – is not an isolated phenomenon. However, Woods developed a large independence area,

⁴⁰ It is significant that the first major work in Woods’s oeuvre is the project of a monument-tomb for A. Einstein (*Einstein Tomb*) as a symbolic reference to the cenotaph devoted to I. Newton by É.-L. Boullée (1784), which was published in 1980; L. Woods, *Einstein Tomb*, “Pamphlet Architecture” 1998, pp. 1–10.

⁴¹ L. Maluga, *op. cit.*, pp. 234–236.

⁴² G. Dziamski, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–11.

⁴³ H. Klotz (ed.), *Vision der Moderne, Das Prinzip Konstruktion*, Prestel, München 1986, p. 472.

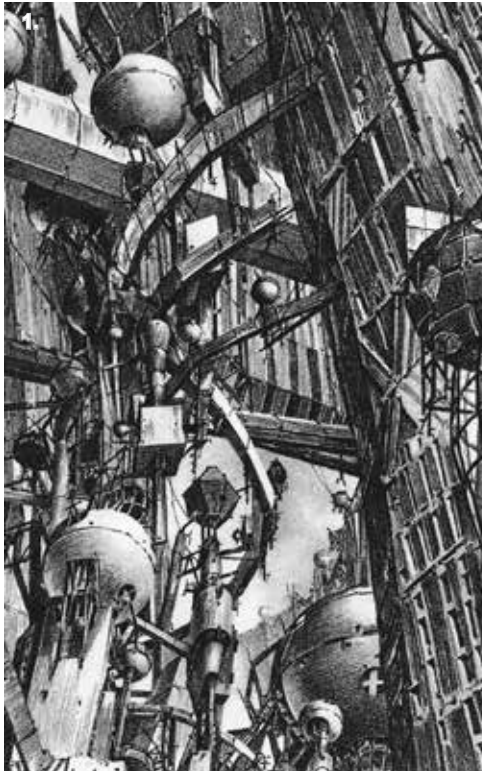
⁴⁴ *We are allowed to intuitively assume that there is no such avant-gardist who would not experiment. If someone is a pioneer, explorer, innovator, s/he obviously tests the possibilities of art by experimenting*; S. Morawski, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁴⁵ Woods commented on the ‘Centricity’ project: “It’s not a city organized for a commercial society, but one arranged for the discovery of knowledge through technology”; J. Giovannini, *Visionary’s Dream City on Paper*, <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/02/18/garden/currents-visionary-s-dream-city-on-paper.html?ref=lebbeuswoods> (access: 26.11.2012).

which on the one hand, allowed him to boldly formulate views, and on the other, to achieve the position of authority in a professional environment, especially academic.

Woods was in a class of his own and – as he was called – an ‘archetype’ indeed. In the context of this statement, it should be noticed that he did not create an avant-garde direction in contemporary architecture similar to the trends from the beginning of the 20th century, and at least it is difficult to assess this today⁴⁶. His ideas and creative methods are continued by a small group of his students, colleagues, professional friends, who once created with him or undertook similar topics (e.g. G. Lafranchi, Ch.a. Kumpusch). Experimental paths of creative searches are maintained by the employees who are connected with RIEA.ch.

As mentioned earlier, Woods did not accept the concept of avant-garde in its traditional understanding, but he was a unique visionary and had a sense of mission. All of his over thirty years of activity proved that he actively participated in various areas of professional life and created an original architectural program for ‘difficult times’. In this regard, he was a pioneer and innovator, but also a rebel and revolutionist. Therefore, he fully deserves the name of an avant-garde architect.



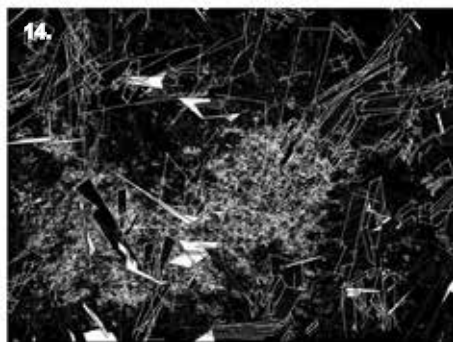
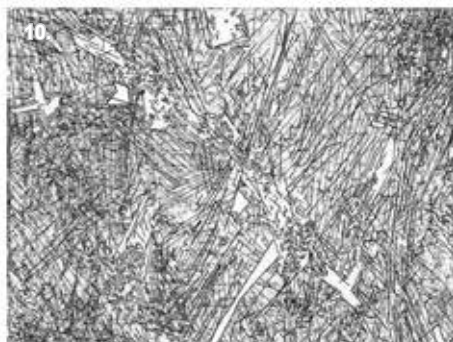
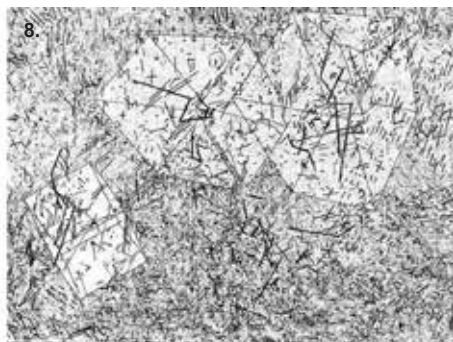
- III. 1. L. Woods, *Four cities*, 1981 (source: L. Woods, *Anarchitecture: Architecture is a Political Act*, Academy Edition, London 1992).
- III. 2. L. Woods, *Aerial Paris*, 1989 (source: L. Woods, *Anarchitecture: Architecture is a Political Act*, Academy Edition, London 1992).

⁴⁶ Morawski notices: *the avant-garde movement only after a certain, non-short, time, after the favorable historical situation, makes original phenomena emerge*; S. Morawski, *op. cit.* p. 54.



Ill. 3–5. L. Woods, Sarajevo, New Tissue, 1982 (source: L. Woods, *Radical Reconstruction*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York 1997).

Ill. 6. L. Woods, San Francisco, Wave House, 1995 (source: L. Woods, *Radical Reconstruction*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York 1997).



Ill. 7–14. L. Woods, UtopX, 2006, <http://lebbeuswoods.net/> (access: 19.01.2013).

References:

- [1] Bauman Z., *Ponowoczesność, czyli o niemożliwości awangardy*, "Teksty Drugie: teoria literatury, krytyka, interpretacja" 1994, No. 5/6 (29/30), pp. 171–179.
- [2] Culea-Hong E., *Revealing the Chthulucene Avant-garde: Lebbeus Woods's 'Salvage' Strategy in the Balkans* [in:] A. Pilav, M. Schoonderbeek, H. Sohn, A. Staničić (eds.), *Mediating the Spatiality of Conflicts*, International Conference Proceedings, TU Delft Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, Borders & Territories, Delft 2020, https://www.academia.edu/43439428/Revealing_the_Chthulucene_Avant_garde_Lebbeus_Woods_s_Salvage_Strategy_in_the_Balkans (access: 24.05.2022).
- [3] Davey P., *The Potent Image*, "The Architectural Review" 1984, No. 1045, 3, pp. 13–15.
- [4] Díaz-Pinés F.M., *Delirio y anomia en la obra de Lebbeus Woods*, "Arquitectura al margen" 2017, 18, pp. 102–115.
- [5] Dziamski G., *Słowo wstępne*, [in:] *idem* (ed.), *Awangarda w perspektywie postmodernizmu*, Humaniora, Poznań 1996.
- [6] Galloway A.R., *Lebbeus Woods (1940–2012)*, Artforum, <https://www.artforum.com/passages/alexander-r-galloway-on-lebbeus-woods-1940-2012-38654> (access: 24.05.2022).
- [7] Giovannini, J., *Visionary's Dream City on Paper*, <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/02/18/garden/currents-visionary-s-dream-city-on-paper.html> (access: 26.11.2012).
- [8] Jacobs C., Woods L. (eds.), *Slow Manifesto: Lebbeus Woods Blog*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York 2015.
- [9] Klotz H., *Warum ich nicht baue?* (interview with M. Scolari), "Jahrbuch für Architektur" 1981–1982, pp. 160–161.
- [10] Maluga L., *Autonomiczny rysunek architektoniczny*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Wrocławskiej, Wrocław 2006.
- [11] Manaugh G., *Without Walls: An Interview with Lebbeus Woods*, <https://bldgblog.com/2007/10/without-walls-an-interview-with-lebbeus-woods/> (access: 22.05.2022).
- [12] Morawski S., *Awangardy XX wieku – stara i nowa*, "Miesięcznik Literacki" 1975, nr 3, pp. 54–55.
- [13] Moss E.O. (eds.), *Lebbeus Woods is an Archetype*, SCI-Arc Press, Los Angeles 2013.
- [14] Noever P. (ed.), *The End of Architecture? Documents and Manifestos*, Prestel, München 1993.
- [15] Sant'Elia A., *Manifest futurystyczny*, "Architektura futurystyczna" 11 lipca 1914, <https://rewolta.wordpress.com/2007/09/11/antonio-santelia-manifest-futurystyczny-architektura-futurystyczna-11-lipca-1914/> (access: 20.07.2022).
- [16] Woods L., *Anarchitecture: Architecture is a Political Act*, Academy Edition, London 1992.
- [17] Woods L., *Balthazar Holz: Architecture of Trans-political Thought*, www.lebbeuswoods.net (access: 15.01.2013).
- [18] Woods L., *Einstein Tomb*, "Pamphlet Architecture" 1998, pp. 1–10.
- [19] Woods L., *Freespace and the Tyranny of Types* [in:] P. Noever (ed.), *The End of Architecture? Documents and Manifestos*, Prestel, München 1993.
- [20] Woods L., *Radical Reconstruction*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York 1997.
- [21] Woods L., *Return of the manifesto*, <https://lebbeuswoods.wordpress.com/2011/11/29/return-of-the-manifesto/> (access: 17.06.2022).
- [22] Woods L., *Slow Manifesto*, <https://lebbeuswoods.wordpress.com/2009/01/07/slow-manifesto/> (access: 19.07.2022).
- [23] Woods L., *System Wien*, Hatje Cantz Publishers, Berlin 2005.
- [24] Woods L., *Thoughts on Architecture of Resistance*, <https://dl.icdst.org/pdfs/> (access: 18.07.2022).

Author's Note:

Assoc. Prof. Leszek Maluga, PhD, DSc, Arch.

Professor at the Faculty of Architecture of the Wrocław University of Science and Technology. For many years he has been Head of the Department of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture. His scientific interests include the architect's artistic workshop, visual communication, spatial composition, connections between architecture and art, landscape architecture. He also deals with artistic creativity.

leszek.maluga@pwr.edu.pl