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REFINED ART OF THE AVANT-GARDE. SHIP – A NAME THAT EVOKES THE MEANING OF FORM

WYRAFINOWANA SZTUKA AWANGARDY. OKRĘT – NAZWA PRZYWOŁUJĄCA ZNACZENIE FORMY

Abstract

The text aims at showing the attractiveness and beauty of architecture, which is full of metaphors and poetics. The subject matter focuses on the dependencies that occur in architecture, which is an expression of metaphor and ideas. Works from the world of architecture have been selected, showing the phenomenon of the ship's metaphor. Sometimes it is perceived immediately, some other time through an element associated with the maritime theme and, on another occasion, the name of the work itself informs the recipient about it. A particular type of architecture is one where metaphors remain hidden, waiting for the viewer to confront the creator of the work.

Keywords: avant-garde, metaphor, poetics, ship

Streszczenie

Tekst ma na celu ukazanie atrakcyjności i piękna architektury, przepełnionej metaforami i poetyką. Tematyka koncentruje się wokół zależności, jakie występują w architekturze, która jest wyrazem metafory i idei. Wybrano dzieła ze świata architektury ukazujące zjawisko metafory okrętu. Niekiedy dostrzeganej w sposób natychmiastowy, innym razem poprzez element kojarzony z wątkiem marynistycznym, a kiedy indziej sama nazwa dzieła informuje o tym odbiorcę. Szczególny rodzaj architektury to taki, gdzie metafory pozostają w ukryciu, czekając, aż widz skonfrontuje się z twórcą dzieła.

Słowa kluczowe: awangarda, metafora, poetyka, okręt

1. INTRODUCTION

Dariusz Kozłowski wrote about the need to name an architectural thing, that is, “gentle symbolism”.

The name does not read the metaphor of shapes that are of completely different origin. The name only creates a metaphor. It allows you to see something previously invisible. Upon the appearance of the term, it may seem that the Ark was named ‘The Ark’. The name plays the

role of a 'signum' in relation to the form which becomes a 'signatum', regardless of whether it was created sooner or later than the architectural reality.¹

The perception of architecture depends on associations evoked by emotions, as its individual elements may contradict the function of the work. Dariusz Kozłowski asks questions:

Should the church look like 'Church', house like 'Home'...? So, is there such a thing as a sacred, residential form ...? But is there a form suitable for a psychiatric hospital, a prison, a secret police headquarters, or a tetrahedral box factory? If such forms exist, they are a thing of the past. How does this relate to avant-garde art, which is a denial or detachment from known meanings?²

He answers:

In order to communicate its functions, architecture must be based on relevant codes, – to be understandable, architectural codes are based on sets of already existing solutions, – there is no new thing in the world, there is only a reminder, – and any novelty is only forgetting /Bacon/, – architecture should use new codes to announce its meanings, – new codes become a thing of the past.³

One should agree with Tomasz Kozłowski, who writes: "The modern world understands signs more than ever; signs now appear everywhere, also in the form of self-explanatory icons on computer screens, signs recognizable by both adults and children"⁴. There is no doubt that the world of postmodern architecture is created based on the use of metaphorical stylistics. Because the multi-layered nature and richness of such architectural expressions draws motivations and pretexts, often giving the form a poetic meaning. The world of architecture presents us with various metaphors. Marcin Charciarek believes that:

A metaphor is a reference to a certain common feature of the things and concepts juxtaposed with each other. It is a phenomenon that 'transfers' the work of architecture into the sphere of references based, above all, on the use of non-architectural sense rather than its literal representation.⁵

He distinguishes examples of

'anthropomorphic metaphor', the metaphor of a machine with a wealth of techno and biomorphic forms, as well as the similarity of machine aesthetics to a building resembling a ship – imaging has always been treated by the creators as an extension of the tradition of using quasi-architectural marine forms.⁶

The author's fascination with discovering an architectural metaphor focuses on the metaphor of a building – a boat, an ocean liner, a ship or an ark, and is the result of his belief in the universality and ease of reception as well as the significant role of this phenomenon in building the contemporary world of architecture.

¹ D. Kozłowski, *Projekty i budynki 1982–1992 Figuratywność i rozpad formy w architekturze dobie postfunkcjonalnej*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Krakowskiej, Kraków 1992, p. 23.

² D. Kozłowski, *Miasto nieśmiertelnych* [in:] A. Pęcowska (ed.), *Architektura stosowana*, Polska Akademia Nauk, Kraków 1990, p. 104.

³ *Ibidem*. p. 105.

⁴ T. Kozłowski, *Architektura ekspresjonizmu i Ein Stein*, "Pretekst" 2010, No. 3, p. 64.

⁵ M. Charciarek, *O metaforze w architekturze współczesnej*, PhD thesis prepared at the Faculty of Architecture of the Cracow University of Technology under the supervision of Prof. D. Kozłowski, Cracow 1999, p. 166.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

Works from the world of architecture have been selected with the aim of showing the phenomenon of a ship's metaphor. Sometimes this metaphor is immediately noticed, some other time only an element associated with the maritime theme helps, and on another occasion, the name of the work itself informs the recipient about it. Excellent examples of contemporary buildings, built in space or only "on paper" with a visible phenomenon of the ship's metaphor, both in terms of shaping the composition of the facade and the form of the building are: Willa Bateau-Bateau and the "Transpodgórze" Apartment Block in Krakow, Dariusz Kozłowski and Maria Misiągiewicz; NEMO Science and Technology Center in Amsterdam, Renzo Piano; Flooded Modernity in the Danish fjord, Asmund Mikkelsen and Port House in Antwerp, Belgium, Zaha Hadid.

2. SHIP – A NAME THAT EVOKES THE MEANING OF FORM

There are buildings that can be defined by their cubature, material, but the form and purpose remain shrouded in mystery. A special type of multi-threaded architecture with maritime features is the two-family villa Bateau-Bateau in Krakow (Ill. 1). The recipient would not be able to immediately read the intentions of the creators, so it is important to understand the words contained in the gloss for the project, in which the authors: Dariusz Kozłowski and Maria Misiągiewicz explain the idea of the "Ship House", anchored on the bank of the Rudawa River:

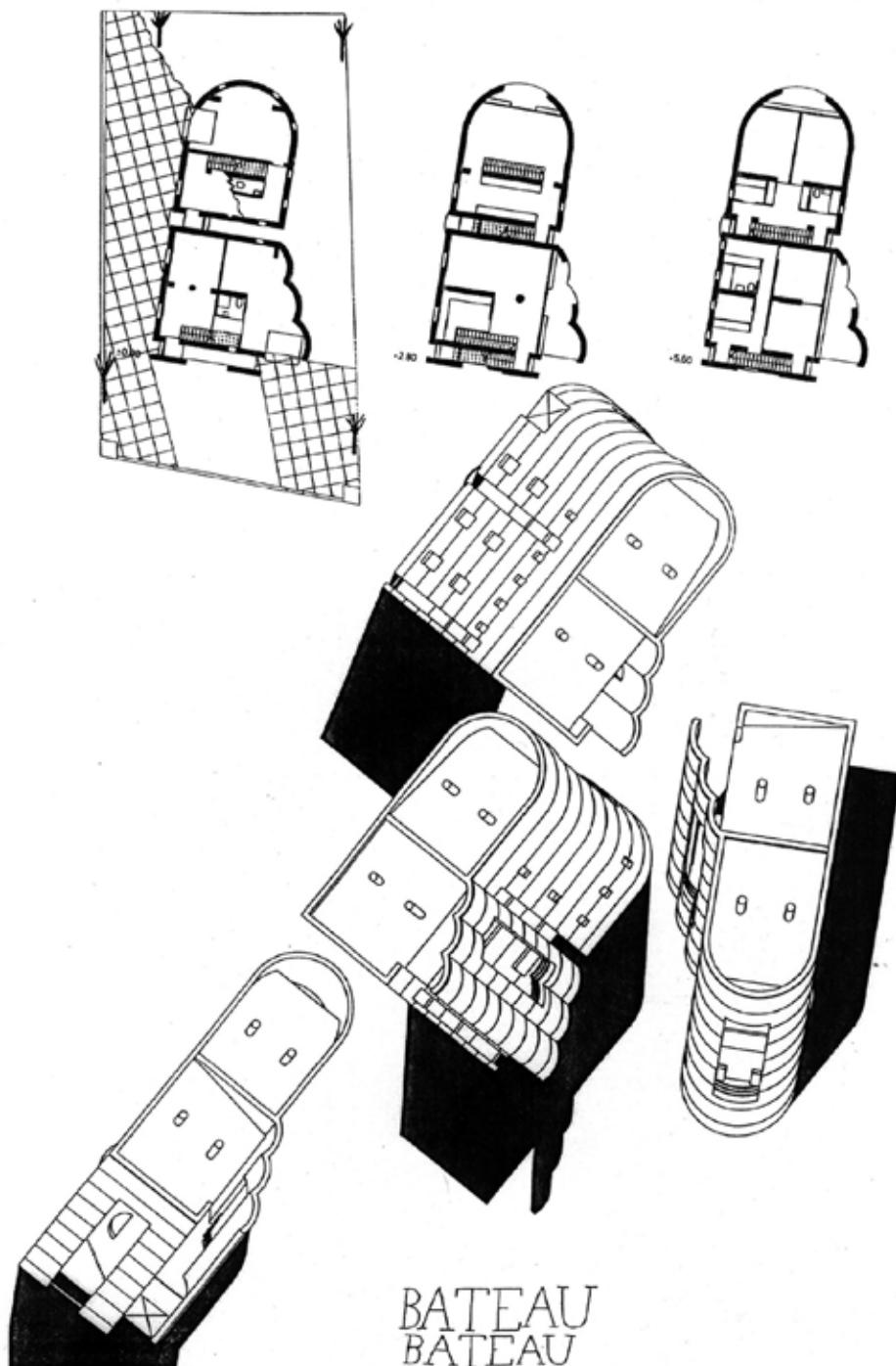
The villa consists of two houses with full functional independence, independent accesses and drive-ways, arranged on a common plot. [...] The villa shows a certain vision of a representative building. This symbolism is carried by the walls of the outer building, that are demonstratively autonomous and separated from the interior space. The thing was called – Villa Bateau-Bateau – and such, a bit romantic, image conveyed by the name was included in the shape of the space. A certain coherent language of forms was used to demonstratively separate the outer, representative and obvious shell of the Ship from the interior inaccessible to the viewer. The external form is also built by the ship's architectural detail of the finishing and balustrades, as well as the grey colour of the paint monotonously covering the whole building. Only here and there the outer shell, accentuating its autonomy, reveals the inner structure. At the same time, 'interior' and 'housing' fulfill the coexisting semantics related to the need for representation and functions of everyday use of the house.⁷

"The work demonstrates its external form, filled with a multitude of threads and hidden meanings. The form will try to dispel doubts arising from the name, but let's not try to explain them completely: the poetry of space allows it"⁸. The front of the building, which is the stern, or the undulating one of the walls, betrays the idea of the Ship House of the creators of this work. The ship metaphor is not so obvious here. The character of this architecture is also determined by its theatricality, about which Monika Gała-Walczowska writes: "The architectural form and the way the building's body is sculpted, the composition of individual facades and the dominant grey colour determine the theatrical nature of the villa, and at the same time change the views of this architecture"⁹. The Bateau-Bateau Villa is an architectural sculpture, reminiscent of a ship – a work of architecture, only floating.

⁷ D. Kozłowski, M. Misiągiewicz, *Willa Bateau-Bateau*, "Rezydencje" 1996, No. 2, p. 65.

⁸ *Ibidem.*, p. 64.

⁹ M. Gała-Walczowska, *Architektura domu jednorodzinnego w krajobrazie*, PhD thesis prepared at the Faculty of Architecture of the Cracow University of Technology under the supervision of Prof. M. Misiągiewicz, Cracow 2014, p. 217.



Ill. 1. Dariusz Kozłowski, Maria Misiągiewicz, Willa Bateau-Bateau, Cracow, Emaus Street, 1991,
Source: [in:] D. Kozłowski, PROJEKTY I BUDYNKI... op. cit.

For Boullée, construction was neither the goal nor the cause of architecture: “it was only a way of achieving it, and sometimes even ineffective. The real tool of this art would be ‘composition’, a tool that allows building relationships between elements offered by nature – again a ‘teacher’, in the form of simple solids and lighting effects”¹⁰. “What is Architecture? Should I join Vitruvius and define it as a building art? No, because the definition is grossly wrong. Vitruvius confuses effect with cause. To implement it, it is first necessary to invent it”¹¹. Undoubtedly, the composition “built” on paper belongs to the world of architecture. The vision of the assumption discussed below does not constitute a construction or executive design, but only presents its idea. For, as Wilkinson wrote: “Contrary to the typical, precise technical drawings made on drawing boards, these visions reveal their secrets only to those who give them enough attention. Others, although literal, can also charm the viewer”¹².

An example of the “ocean liner” metaphor, as Maria Misiągiewicz aptly puts it, “built only on paper”¹³, the exploration of which is quite simple due to the name, but, as the author claims, is “stuck” on, is the Housing Block – “Transpodgórze” (Ill. 2). It is a monumental apartment block, designed by Dariusz Kozłowski, in the area of Śliska and Kalwaryjska streets in Krakow’s Podgórze district. “The composition and metaphor of the program and spatial study give a new meaning to the remaining, previously built blocks, which began to flow slowly again, moved by a mysterious force, disenchanted”¹⁴. Not only the name helps to see and understand this metaphor, but also to justify the adopted idea contained in the glossary:

The entire inner settlement – from a bird’s eye view – looks like a compact, calm and orderly convoy, flowing through the fragmented buildings of this part of the city. Surrounded by small elements of tenement houses plunged into the chaos of disordered yards, filled with some smaller development of cells, garages and farm buildings, it demonstrates the pride of certainty, disregarding the existing directions of planes and lines, with views and smells, with habits. Once upon a time, breaking up this unworthy environment in anticipation of its death, this past triumphant convoy, now it seems lost, flowing nowhere, helpless, frozen in motion. A new element of the composition – Transpodgórze – stands out from the ensemble as a whole: it took over the chairmanship and showed the direction. He has strayed slightly off course. At the same time, it manifests its separateness. As if he were demanding an answer: can the rest of the convoy’s facilities accept it? As if it were asking more important questions: is it still possible to build apartment blocks today? Or maybe the situation is completely different. Perhaps the Block of Flats – Transpodgórze gave a new meaning to the remaining, previously built blocks, which began to flow slowly again, moved by a mysterious force, disenchanted. Perhaps in this way they came into existence again anew. The new building flows not only in ordering the meanings and form of the immediate neighbourhood; existing in the silhouette of this part of the city, it demonstrates its contradictory position in the discussion on the present, past and the future of architecture and the city space – Transpodgórze announces the passing of time.¹⁵

¹⁰ R. Neri, *Oparte na wiedzy*, “Pretekst” 2019, No. 9, p. 50.

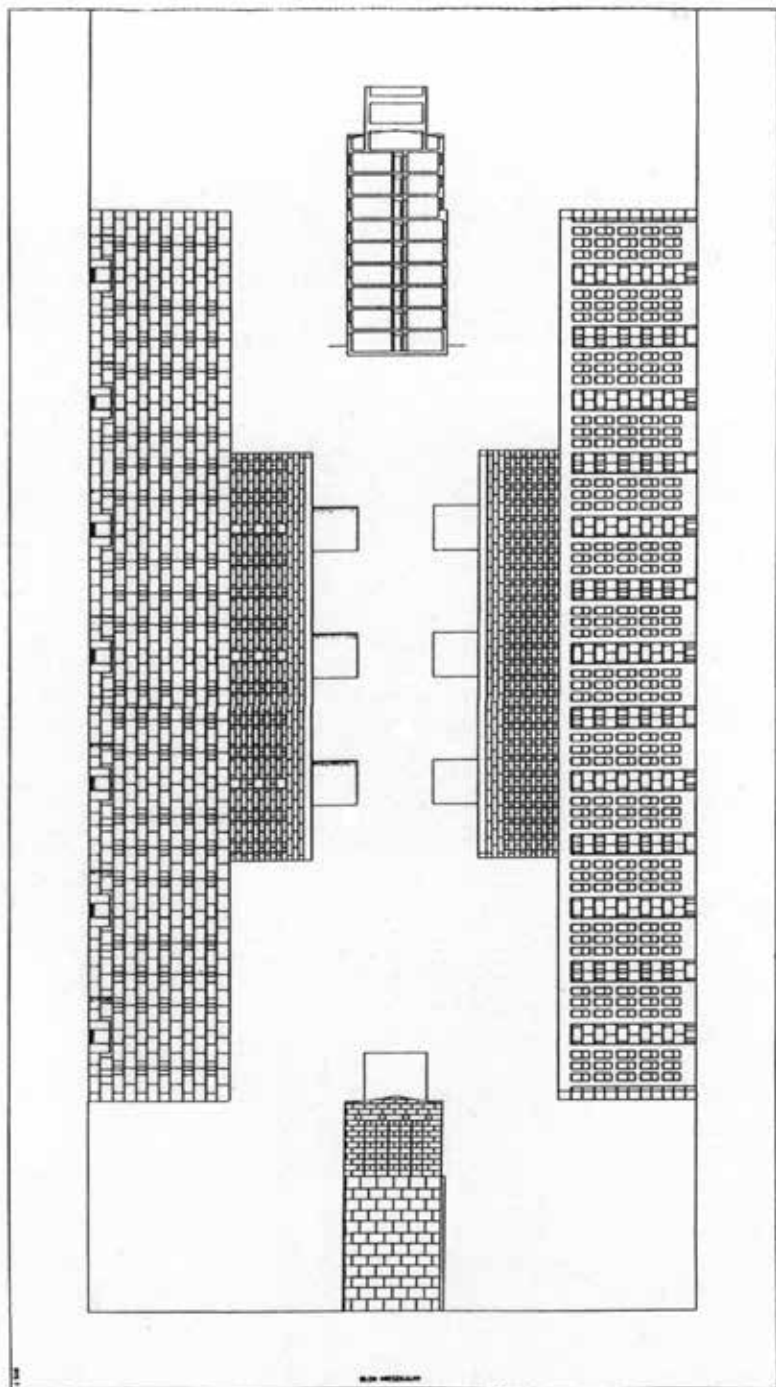
¹¹ H. Rosenau, *Boullée’s Treatise on Architecture*, London 1953 [after:] R. Neri, *Oparte na wiedzy...*, p. 48.

¹² P. Wilkinson, *Architektura – wizje niezrealizowane*, REBIS, Poznań 2019, p. 11.

¹³ M. Misiągiewicz, *O prezentacji idei architektonicznej*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Krakowskiej, Kraków 2003, p. 62.

¹⁴ D. Kozłowski, *Projekty i budynki...*, p. 75.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.



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III. 2. Dariusz Kozłowski, Maria Misiągiewicz, Apartment Building – “Transpodgórze”, Kalwaryjska, Sliska Street, 1986, Source: [in:] D. Kozłowski, PROJEKTY I BUDYNKI... op. cit.

The monumental size of the building, its multi-level structure: the lower hull, middle deck and upper funnels, testify to the similarity to a liner ship. The question is, would a different name for this work create a completely different architecture? The answer lies in the essence of the “name” which evokes the meaning of the form, suggests it and gives it meaning.

The fact that another piece of architectural work “grows” out of the water makes the ship’s metaphor quite obvious to read. It is the NEMO Science and Technology Center (Ill. 3) created in Amsterdam in 1997 by Renzo Piano. Tomasz Kozłowski writes directly that: “The thing simply resembles a ship, the hull grows out of the water, its surfaces are covered with a greenish sheet”¹⁶. Time gave the outer form the character of a wreck, or, as Kozłowski claims,

it looks rather as if it moored to the quay a long time ago, or maybe it was abandoned here ... in the future? [...] The upturned beak gives things a dynamism almost like from a poster of the ocean-lining era, and the decomposed sides create intriguing images visible from a distance, through the vast pool of water.¹⁷

The ship’s metaphor is represented by an upturned bow pointing upwards, oxidized facades covered with a perforated copper sheet and a chimney. The name of this work seems to suggest the idea of the creator and evokes the meaning of the form. Perhaps it is the submarine “Nautilus”, the helm of which was himself Captain Nemo from the novel by Jules Verne.

There is no doubt that Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye is a symbol of modernist ideas. This time, the work presented as part of the artistic installation “Flooded Modernity” (Ill. 4) by Asmund Mikkelsen, a creator from Copenhagen, was sunk in 2018 in the Danish fjord, like a shipwreck. It is a creative manifesto reminiscent of the blowing up of the Pruitt-Igoe residential complex in St. Louis in 1972 – the death of modernist architecture. The artist comments on current political events. The floating sculpture is a sinking symbol of modernist, purist ideals. The author expresses his personal opposition to the collapse of modern values: democracy, freedom, the rule of law, feeling a threat in the development of technology¹⁸. It cannot be denied that Stanley Tigerman created a similar game in his famous 1978 photomontage, which presented the steel and glass building of Mies van der Rohe’s Crown Hall as the Titanic wreck in Lake Michigan. Mikkelsen writes about his work:

For me, Villa Savoye is a symbol of modernity and enlightenment. It represents faith in the critical powers of the human mind in relation to progress and ... the public sphere. [...] Our sense of modernity has been ‘flooded’. I sense the need to ‘reformulate’ our political institutions – because our old ones have ‘sank’.¹⁹

It is a moving allegory concerning the architecture of Le Corbusier, who eagerly used the metaphor of ocean liners in his works – now truly submerged. “The ‘sinking’ sculpture

¹⁶ T. Kozłowski, *Od ekspresjonizmu intencjonalnego do metafory*, “Przestrzeń i Forma” 2014, No. 21, p. 189.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ A. Mikkelsen, *The man who sank the Villa Savoye*, “Design” 2019, No. 2, p. 55.

¹⁹ *Idem*, *Artist Creates Full-Scale Model of Sinking Villa Savoye*, Dezeen, <https://www.dezeen.com/2018/08/01/le-corbusiers-villa-savoye-sunk-danish-fjordasmund-havsteen-mikkelsen-installation/> (access: 15.08.2022).



Ill. 3. Renzo Piano, Science Center Nemo, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 1997. Source: photo Przemysław Bigaj.



Ill. 4. Asmund Mikkelsen, Flooded Modernity, Vejle, Denmark, 2018, Source: www.asmundhavsteen.net, photo: H. Binet, (access: 2.08.2022).

is another metaphor that shows how false information or the total disinformation carried out by digital media and psychometric algorithms refutes the values of modernism. These values are like wrecks of sunken ships – the forgotten ones rest on the bottom”²⁰. Here, the metaphor takes the form of a manifesto and without justification would remain an ordinary joke – an impermanent fragment of the pavilion floating on the surface of the water.

The author of the text does not hide his lack of sympathy for glass architecture, because its transparency weakens the meaning of the form. However, in the case of Zaha Hadid’s new seat of the Port House administration in Antwerp (Ill. 5), Belgium, the material used reinforces the perception of the poetic metaphor of the ship. The overhanging form above the building of the former fire brigade refers to the geometry of the ship’s hull, and the undulating glass facades, composed of triangular elements, twinkle in the light like sea waves.



Ill. 5. Zaha Hadid, Port House, Antwerp, Belgium, 2016, Source: www.zaha-hadid.com, (access: 2.08.2022).

²⁰ A. Bzdyra, *Villa Savoye – tonący symbol modernistycznych idei*, Point of Design, <https://pointofdesign.pl/sztuka/villa-savoye-tonacy-symbol-modernistycznych-idei/> (access: 2.07.2022).

Ewa Węclawowicz-Gyurkovich considers this work to be a clear example of the “new expressionism trend”. She writes:

Here we can find experiments analogous to those from the 1920s and 1930s, when expressionist buildings appeared. Similarly to almost a hundred years ago, when we observed the fascination in architecture with modern cars, airplanes and transatlantic liners, a strong, dynamic ship appeared here, although on the outside it was finished with a different, contemporary material.²¹

Or maybe the metaphor is completely different – it’s a diamond, which is the symbol of Antwerp.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Dariusz Kozłowski claims that “the demonstrative announcement of fiction as a game and a great lie as a convention can be a pretext for creating things. The end result depends on the artist”²². Playing with discovering multithreaded meanings can be extremely interesting from the point of the recipient’s view. Sometimes these metaphors can be decoded at first glance, their sense and meaning can be understood, other times help might be needed in the form of the name of the work, given by the author or established in the consciousness of a wider audience. A particular type of architecture is one where the metaphors remain hidden, waiting for the viewer to confront the creator of the work. Their mutual communication takes place by means of a gloss to a project or a poem that ambiguously explains the intention. The above-mentioned examples from the world of architecture, extremely attractive to the author of the text, aim to present the ship’s metaphor as a certain language of representational architecture. This word is closely related to the form. It can suggest the creator’s intentions, and sometimes falsely suggest a different meaning. “The name ‘stuck’, evoking the meaning of the form, and the shape unambiguously prompting and proclaiming the term – name”²³. This magnificent architecture “looks for solutions in metaphors, semantics and various metaphysics”²⁴. Therefore, the author is convinced, in order to understand the world of architecture, it is necessary to delve into exploring not only the work itself, but also to study the idea written in the words of the creators. For “the most attractive seems to be refined art, embedded in deep aesthetic contexts and ideas, art ambiguous and multi-layered, composed, and with all the consequences of its ‘artificiality’, fictional, unrealistic and, above all, a Great Lie”²⁵.

²¹ E. Węclawowicz-Gyurkovich, *Przemiany stylistyczne w twórczości Zahy Hadid* [in:] Teka Komisji Urbanistyki i Architektury, PAN, Kraków 2020, p. 106.

²² D. Kozłowski, *Projekty i budynki...*, p. 46.

²³ *Ibidem.*, p. 23.

²⁴ P. Krakowski, *Architektura stosowana* [in:] *Architektura stosowana...*, p. 14.

²⁵ D. Kozłowski, *Projekty i budynki...*, p. 76.

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