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METAPHORES OF EXPRESSIONISM ARCHITECTURE

METAFORY ARCHITEKTURY EKSPRESJONIZMU

Abstract

The text refers to the dependencies that exist between architecture, which is an expression of a metaphor, i.e. a certain pretext for the creation of a work. Many creators negate the metaphorical message of architecture, focusing on rational aspects and functionality, which is obvious. There are objects that hide a number of meanings, cultural codes, and are saturated with emotions. The research was carried out on the basis of an analysis of the available literature relating to the subject of the work, as well as an analysis of selected photographic documentation.

Keywords: marine architecture, expressionism, lie and truth in architecture, poetics, metaphor

Streszczenie

Tekst odnosi się do zależności, jakie występują pomiędzy architekturą, która jest wyrazem metafory, czyli pewnym pretekstem do powstania dzieła. Wielu twórców neguje metaforyczny przekaz architektury, skupiając się na racjonalnych aspektach i funkcjonalności, co jest rzeczą oczywistą. Są obiekty, które ukrywają szereg znaczeń, kodów kulturowych, nasycone emocjami. Badania przeprowadzono na podstawie analizy dostępnej literatury, odnoszącej się do tematyki pracy, jak również analizie wybranej dokumentacji fotograficznej.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura marynistyczna, ekspresjonizm, kłamstwo i prawda w architekturze, poetyka, metafora

1. INTRODUCTION

We start by answering the question whether art is true or a lie. Picasso said, and I quote from memory, 'art is a lie, but a lie that brings us closer to the truth'. If you can say that my house is a villa-fortress, then we are in the realm of a delicate lie. I call it a GREAT LIE.¹

The words of Dariusz Kozłowski may become the motto of contemporary architecture. They can also be an optimistic thought for the creators of contemporary expressionism, whose works exude refinement with dynamic expression. Dariusz Kozłowski argues that the fiction in architecture wants to be true. He says,

¹ P. Pięciak, *W świecie fikcji, opery, wspaniałego kłamstwa i betonu* [In the World of Fiction, Magnificent Lie and Concrete], interview with Dariusz Kozłowski [in:] *Architektura Betonowa*, <https://architekturabetonowa.pl/aktualnosci/1257/w-swiecie-fikcji-opery-wspanialego-klamstwa-i-betonu> (access: 2.5.2020).

When I look at a building to be a Wankel engine, I don't quite believe it is an accurate image of the engine. I look at Picasso's portraits and see a fictional thing that wants to be real at the same time. If architecture is to be art – by the way, maybe it is not art, maybe it is something completely separate? – at least, if architecture is to be a poetic thing, and we would like it to be a poetic thing, it has this element of fiction. So it is a search for this little bit of poetry in architecture.²

As Tomasz Kozłowski claims, a work of art from the post-functionalist era is a certain statement that cannot be considered both false and true. He writes: “The viewer today operates within the scope of aesthetics that dazzle with fictional category. [...] It makes the belief in art-architecture justified.”³

2. METAPHORES OF EXPRESSIONISM ARCHITECTURE

Przemysław Trzeciak divided architectural objects into objects defined by a rational and emotional attitude. The first attitude “is represented by the creators for whom the starting point and goal of designing is a rational and optimal solution of the function. The architect is more of a scientist-technician than an artist.”⁴ Works created in the circle of an emotional attitude “or in fact, their proportions are overwhelmingly predominant, striking with an unusual form and a huge load of expression. They are always symbolic works.”⁵

The beginnings of modernism created an original language of architecture. A language that was created in opposition to realism, historical trends and art nouveau, in the era of romanticism, the era of electricity, fascination with technology, fast car, machine, ocean liner, the era of questioning the past and faith in a great future that was to come soon. Apart from the significant current of decorative expressionism, this language lasted for decades until the creative possibilities were exhausted, replaced for a while in the period of architectural postmodernism. This architecture needed a metaphor directing the artists' intuition towards expressing forms and giving them meanings.⁶

In the 1960s, freedom of expression and the “art of differentiation and imagination,”⁷ were contrasted with the purist aesthetics of the then international style. These were anti-modernist demonstrations by followers of postmodernism, represented by James Stirling, Michael Graves, Riccardo Bofill and Hans Hollein, led by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Braun. This trend turned into deconstructivism and expressionism, represented by Frank O. Gehry, Zahe Hadid, Peter Esisenman and Daniel Libeskind. An architectural thing has no front or back, because each facade is equally important. By creating “new”

² *Ibidem*.

³ T. Kozłowski, *Architektura a sztuka [Architecture and Art]*, Wydawnictwo PK, Kraków 2018, p. 11.

⁴ P. Trzeciak, *Historia, psychika, architektura [History, Psyche, Architecture]*, PIW, Warszawa 1988, p. 132.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 169.

⁶ T. Kozłowski, *Tendencje ekspresjonistyczne w architekturze współczesnej [Expressionist Tendencies in Contemporary Architecture]*, Wydawnictwo PK, Kraków 2013, p. 75.

⁷ K. Piotrowski, *Perspektywy dla designu przyszłości – od estetyki do anestetyki* [in:] J.S. Wojciechowski, A. Zeidler-Janiszewska (eds.), *Formy estetyzacji przestrzeni publicznej*, Instytut Kultury, Warszawa 1998.

art, the present day aims to imitate the great masters of architecture from all over the world. Canons are no longer relevant to design. However, we see a certain stylistic continuity in the works that are being built. The slow death of deconstructivism creates new aesthetics that refer to works from years ago. It is appropriate to agree with the musicologist and pianist Tomasz Baranowski, who wrote: 'Expressionism is an important trend in the art of the 20th century, arising from the attitude of rebellion, from disagreement with the existing order of things. The artist wishes to express his deepest, most intimate, often extreme experiences.'⁸ It is a pretext that helps to justify the viewer or find a solution to complex problems that are set for the author.

"People always compare an object with other known buildings or similar objects, thus creating a metaphor. This phenomenon occurs in greater intensity, the more the building is 'alien.'⁹ Both the mass audience and the recognized indoor ones eagerly used metaphors to define buildings, such as: duck, blocks, bird, box, or Swiss cheese and a cheese grater. There are objects that hide a number of meanings and cultural codes. The Sydney Opera House aroused many associations among the public. During the official opening of the Opera, architecture students presented a comic, showing the object of "mating turtles."¹⁰ Charles Jencks argues that "The more improbable this relationship is, the easier it will be for the viewer. A witty building is one that gives us unusual but convincing associations."¹¹ Another work which manifests itself in a number of metaphors is the chapel in Le Corbusier's Ronchamp. In Hillel Schocken's drawings, you can read the metaphor of a hand, a duck, a ship or a cap. Jencks strongly criticizes such attitudes. He writes: "As a result of such conduct, poorly chosen metaphors take metaphorical revenge on their authors and give them a kick. Buildings look like metaphors for functions and economics and as such are anathema."¹² The metaphorical message of architecture can be called "masks". Dariusz Kozłowski believes that "Announcing fiction as a game and a great lie as an excuse is the way to create things. Adopting such an idea presupposes that art should be viewed through the hazy pane of awareness that we are watching – the world of art, the artificial world, the world in a mask."¹³ Many artists negate the metaphorical message of architecture, focusing on rational aspects and functionality, which is obvious. There are objects that hide a number of meanings, cultural codes, and are saturated with emotions. The research was carried out on the basis of an analysis of the available literature relating to the subject of the work, as well as an analysis of selected photographic documentation.

The phenomenon of the interpenetration of non-geometric forms, with soft or sharp shapes, is manifested in the architecture of expressionism and futurism. The creative path to architecture leads through the prism of the artist's magnificent sketches. In the years

⁸ L. Polony, *Estetyka ekspresjonizmu w muzyce XX wieku; Tomasz Baranowski* [*The Aesthetics of Expressionism in 20th Century Music; Tomasz Baranowski*], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=xQRWlgQBv4c> (access: 2.5.2020).

⁹ C. Jencks, *Architektura postmodernistyczna* [*The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*], Arkady, Warszawa 1987, p. 40.

¹⁰ *Ibidem.*, p. 43.

¹¹ *Ibidem.*

¹² *Ibidem.*, p. 48.

¹³ D. Kozłowski, *The Truth and Lie of Architecture – Defining the Architectural Space*, Thesis of the XIX International Conference of the Chair of Housing and Architectural Compositions, Institute of Architectural Design, Faculty of Architecture, Cracow University of Technology, Cracow 2020.

1914–1917, Erich Mendelsohn published a series of expressive drawings, monumental projects: a crematorium, a railway station, a film studio with fanciful rhythmic elevation patterns, enhanced by the phenomenon of movement and play of tension. In the years 1924–1932, by designing several department stores, he built a completely new language of architecture. Mendelsohn, by introducing a simple geometric block into motion, strengthened expression, dynamism, and sometimes drama. Alexander Serafin, in his book *Geometric Abstraction and Organic Form*, considers E. Mendelsohn to be the main representative of the “emotional movement”¹⁴ in the architecture of the beginning of the 20th century. He writes that: “The dynamism and the ‘originality’ of the form become the most important elements of E. Mendelsohn’s architectural composition. [...] The rhythm inspires the architect to introduce an organic form into the composition, instead of geometric abstraction.”¹⁵ Bach’s music became another pretext for building the form of the Kaufhaus Schocken store in Stuttgart, developed in 1926–1928. Erich Mendelsohn shows the idea of the building in colored sketches, making it easier for the recipient to understand the building and the influence of music on architecture, which he describes as “harmonic and counterpoint guidance in architecture.”¹⁶ The aforementioned expressionism can be found in another Mendelsohn’s and Serge Chermayeff’s object, The De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea, realized in 1935. The sketches support the reading of the expressionist form of the building as a long rectangular block accentuated by soft non-geometric shapes of glazing of a semi-circular bay window. The writer Hermann Bahr, referring to the combination of various fields of art, claims that “expressionist painting is the music of the eyes.”¹⁷

Przemysław Bigaj wrote about the aspect of originality of the corner house in the building quarter: “The corner of the building has always been a field for experimenting with a solid with a distinguished spatial status, hence there were such architectural accent forms as bay windows, balconies, loggias, etc.”¹⁸ The work of art that Mies van der Rohe failed to build was made by Fritz Hoyer, who in the years 1922–1924 realized an unusual, expressionist corner situation (Ill. 1). “Intentional, but impossible to implement at the time, the idea of modernity of the skyscraper and architecture was replaced here with an original concept, but embedded in tradition.”¹⁹ The clinker-clad Chilehaus protrudes into the sky like a huge, pointed ship’s prow, and the facade with 2,800 windows that meet at a very sharp angle at the corner of Pumpen and Niedernstrass is a fine example of brick architecture from the 1920s and one of the first skyscrapers in Hamburg. Due to accentuated vertical elements, curved facades, and the reduced top storeys, the building gives the impression of lightness, despite its enormous

¹⁴ “The emotional trend can be called a tendency present in the aesthetic thought of the 20th century, based on empiricism. Aesthetics, the basis of which is a creative revelation, is originally derived from Henri Bergson’s intuitionism and Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology,” A. Serafin, *Abstrakcja geometryczna a forma organiczna* [*Geometric Abstraction and Organic Form*], Wydawnictwo Politechniki Łódzkiej, Łódź 2014, p. 80.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 93–94.

¹⁶ E. Mendelsohn, *Dynamika i funkcja* [*Dynamics and Function*], Muzeum Architektury, Wrocław 2001, p. 95.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ P. Bigaj, *Dom narożny w kwartale zabudowy miejskiej – znak miejsca albo ku formie predestynowanej do oryginalności* [*A Corner House in the Urban District – A Sign of a Place or Towards a Form Predestined for Originality*], Środowisko Mieszkaniowe, 2019, no. 26, p. 28.

¹⁹ E. Mendelsohn, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

size. Huge architecture with a slender, unconventional structure of the monument delights with the detail of clinker facades, which contradicts its size. The building has a reinforced concrete structure and was constructed using 4.8 million dark Oldenburg bricks. Höger used irregularly baked dark red bricks, the appearance of which changed depending on the time of day and the weather, differentiating its perception. The saturation of the rhythm, the homogeneity of the facades and the reinforcement in the corner emphasize the size and importance of the object in a corner situation that cuts through the sky, like a ship on a stormy ocean. The spectacular sharp corner with vertical articulation of the windows, brick pilasters, topped with a magnificent flat roof, and the characteristic structure and divisions, thanks to highly exposed cornices, create a work of art as an example of “ocean lining buildings” – a model of modernity, referring to the mechanized Corbusier buildings. What Tomasz Kozłowski points out when he writes: “The first thing that builds expression is the structure of the form, enhanced by the unusual corner situation. But we also see a great ship sailing out to the observer as if from an advertisement for ocean lines: after all, the ship sails in the era of transatlantic liners.”²⁰

There are works whose form resembles a “ship,” based on curved planes. The Post Office in Rome, designed by Mario Ridolfi, built between 1933 and 1935, is an example of Benito Mussolini’s rationalist and fascist architectural period in Italy (Ill. 2). Mario Ridolfi won the first prize in a competition to design a new post office, independent of foreign trade, promoting a self-sufficient economy and severing all trade relations with other European countries. He created a compact body that surrounds Piazza Bologna with a strong symmetrical facade of travertine marble, used in the rationalist period to emphasize abstract language and distinguish the symbolism of public buildings. The object, which seems to be in motion, is a compact, trapezoidal planimetric system whose main facade is a single, curved wall, leveling the corner situation in which the building is located. The selected materials and construction of the building represent the dichotomy of Italian rationalism, between tradition and modernity. The elements characterizing the front elevation are the central stairs and the entrance roof, and at the back there is a curtain wall and two glass-concrete cylinders, hiding two staircases. The tearing of a fragment of the facade from the ground and the floating fragment of the roof bring to mind the metaphor of a ship floating in the sea. The language of postal architecture, which speaks metaphorically with its expression and dynamics, may suggest an era of fascination with the ocean liner, machine and technology. When looking at the extremely poetic architecture of the post office building, one should recall the words of Maria Misiągiewicz, who write that the form “reflects the sophistication of dynamic expression, created by the distortion and setting in motion of a modernist body derived from the geometry of a right angle”²¹. Ridolfi used a very expressive language, close to the baroque style, both in terms of the composition of the building and the materials chosen, creating a building with a clear example of expressionism and undulating Italian rationalism.

Undoubtedly, the world of the expressive language of architecture includes the proposal of the Spanish company AQSO Arquitectos of a multifunctional building, including a hotel, cinema and commercial area, built in 2017 in London (Ill. 3). This concrete architecture is built by the outer shell with regularly spaced “checkerboard” openings,

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 80–81.

²¹ M. Misiągiewicz, *Architektoniczna geometria [Architectural Geometry]*, Instytut Projektowania Architektonicznego, Wydział Architektury Politechniki Krakowskiej, Kraków 2005, p. 98.

generating a rational layout, reinforced by a “bow,” evoking a ship floating in the turbulent ocean water. The dramaturgy of the building’s architecture is created by the twisting of the corner, giving the impression of unreality, and through the corner situation in which it is located, it becomes the beginning, or perhaps the end, of the quarter. The twisted facades of the AQSO hotel contrast with the rationality of the regular articulation of the openings and the sharp corner angle that rises high upwards, surpassing the neighboring houses, creating a language of extraordinary expression. A certain rigor of the simple composition is created by the extraordinary quality of the reinforced concrete facade coating. The hotel’s architecture is colorless. It is created only by shades of concrete and the colors of the glass of windows that change during the day and night, through external natural light and artificial lighting inside. Perhaps Juliusz Żórawski wrote about such a sculptural dominant as an architectural form: “there are vague and modest forms, as well as distinct and attractive, and among them those that overwhelm the entire environment with their strength and constitute strong dominants.”²²

3. CONCLUSIONS

Contemporary creativity aims to imitate the great masters of architecture. There is no theory of architecture, canons or styles. There is a certain stylistic continuity, and new aesthetics refer to historical creativity. “Architecture, perhaps more than other arts, needs some kind of motivation: a pretext, justification, theory, idea or ideology justifying the actions of the creator in his own eyes and in the eyes of the audience.”²³ As Przemysław Trzeciak claims, the creative attitude “influences the creation of works with a significant load of expression, but they are to some extent subordinated to the function and structure, because the architect aims to create conditions for the implementation of his proposals.”²⁴ The expressionism trend brought a certain language of architecture that needed strong metaphors, directing the intuition of artists towards expressing forms, giving them meanings, creating wonderful works of art. Architectural objects defined by a rational attitude are characterized only by the optimal solution of their function, and the architect plays the role of a scientist-technician rather than an artist. The words of Przemysław Trzeciak, who writes: “Only in the rationalist current do attitudes and objects appear that are not art, because they do not have to be.”²⁵ Because it is expressionism architecture, saturated with emotions, with symbolic content, characterized by dynamism, originality, and the individualism of the creator. Perhaps this wonderful poetics of expressionist architecture will have a significant impact on creating a new quality of the world of architecture for future generations of artists.

²² J. Żórawski, *O budowie formy architektonicznej* [About building an architectural form], Arkady, Warszawa 1962, p. 33.

²³ D. Kozłowski, *Architektura albo sztuka budowania rzeczy. Credo artystyczne* [Architecture or the art of building things. Artistic creed], <http://www.dariuszkozowski.arch.pk.edu.pl/> (access: 2.5.2020).

²⁴ P. Trzeciak, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 184.



III. 1. Fritz Hoyer, *Chilehaus*, Hamburg, Germany, 1922–1924, <http://www.wikipedia.pl/> (access: 2.5.2020)



III. 2. Mario Ridolfi, *Post Office*, Roma, Italy, 1932, <http://riscoprendoroma.altervista.org/> (access: 2.5.2020)



III. 3. AQS0 Arquitectos, *Shoreditch Hotel*, London, 2017 <http://www.archdaily.com/> (access: 2.5.2020)

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