

MAREK KASZYŃSKI

ORCID: 0009-0007-9070-0594

Cracow University of Technology, Polska

ARCHITECTURE AFTER THE DEATH OF MODERNISM

ARCHITEKTURA PO ŚMIERCI MODERNIZMU

Abstract

Postmodernism in architecture was not intended to be a new canon, but rather to encourage non-canonical thinking. It involved using the language of well-known forms and historical elements in new ways. Eclecticism, metaphor, irony, and a love of colour became the distinguishing features of architecture in the second half of the 20th century. Contrary to its name, it did not appear with the death of modernism, but grew much earlier, in parallel. The aim of this article is to identify and analyse selected examples relevant to the movement.

Keywords: postmodernism, history, contemporary architecture, Dariusz Kozłowski

Streszczenie

Postmodernizm w architekturze nie miał stanowić nowego kanonu, zachęcał natomiast do myślenia niekanonicznego. Polegał na wykorzystaniu języka znanych form i historycznych elementów w nowy sposób. Eklektyzm, metafora, ironia, zamiłowanie do koloru stały się znakiem rozpoznawczym architektury drugiej połowy XX w. Wbrew nazwie nie zaistniał wraz ze śmiercią modernizmu, ale wyrastał dużo wcześniej, równolegle. Celem artykułu jest wskazanie i analiza wybranych przykładów istotnych dla kierunku.

Słowa kluczowe: postmodernizm, historia, architektura współczesna, Dariusz Kozłowski

According to one of the theses that were presented to the participants of this year's conference:

Modernism stripped classical forms of the remnants of historical detail, leaving the possibility of composing shapes according to very general rules. The function and the correct solution of the building became paramount. One should remember Otto Wagner's words: *Anything that is not functional cannot be beautiful*. And yet, arguably the most beautiful painting in the world, the *Mona Lisa*, serves no function and is nevertheless pure art and beauty¹.

Charles Jencks marks the end of modernism at 3:32 p.m. on 5 July 1972, the time at which the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis, designed by Minoru Yamasaki and built between 1952 and 1955, was demolished². A new era is occurring in architecture, but its beginnings lie much earlier.

¹ *Thesis in English 2025* [in:] International Conference – Defining the Architectural Space, <https://dpa.arch.pk.edu.pl/thesis-in-english-2025/> (access: 22.10.2025).

² C. Jencks, *Architektura postmodernistyczna*, Arkady, Warszawa 1987, p. 9.

In his book *Postmodern Architecture*, Charles Jencks, one of the most important theorists of postmodernism, publishes a “tree of evolution” in which he lists the following as the main trends in contemporary architecture: historicism, direct revivalism, neo-native style, ad hoc urbanism, metaphor and metaphysics, and postmodern space, which in turn branches out into dozens of others³. For the author, the term “postmodernism” is broader than it later became in professional debates. Among the buildings published in the book there are such stylistically diverse ones as Casa Baldi in Rome (1959–1961) by Paolo Portoghesi and Vittorio Gigliotti, which is a modern interpretation of Baroque forms; the J.P. Getty Museum in Malibu (1970–1975) by Norman Neuerburg, which is partly a replica of the Villa of the Papyri destroyed along with the entire town of Herculaneum in the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD; to the iconically “postmodern” monumental Abraxas Spaces in Marne-la-Vallée near Paris (1978–1982), designed by Ricardo Bofill and Taller Arquitectura, which Dariusz Kozłowski calls “the greatest work of postmodernism”⁴, and the metabolist, futuristic Nakagin Capsule Tower in Tokyo (1972, demolished – *o tempora, o mores!* – in 2022) by Kisho Kurokawa.

Perhaps a more accurate title for this period would be *Architecture after Modernism*, as proposed by Diana Ghirardo in the title of her second important publication. She points out that “serious attacks on modernism” and signs of upcoming changes can already be found in earlier books, such as Jane Jacobs’ *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), Robert Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966), Aldo Rossi’s *The Architecture of the City* (1966), and Hassan Fathy’s *Architecture for the Poor* (1969)⁵. However, as Piotr Winskowski notes in the context of Robert Venturi, it is important to remember that the aim at that time was not to create a new canon in architecture, but to open up to non-canonical ways of thinking⁶.

While searching for nomenclature, the voices of Polish postmodernists should also be mentioned. Dariusz Kozłowski notes, “However, since it seems that the term ‘postmodernism’ in architecture should be reserved for strictly defined effects of creative activity, a more capacious term and formula of post-functional architecture was adopted in this study”⁷. Marek Budzyński, on the other hand, says, “The term postmodernism is simply overused. It is overused primarily when one wants to categorise from the position of a scientist or, for example, an eminent critic – then it is easiest to say ‘postmodernism.’ It is a bag that will accept everything and say nothing”⁸, which may be a comment on the wealth of examples cited by Charles Jencks. Justyna Swoszowska also writes about postmodernism escaping all frameworks and remaining faithful to the principle of “no rules”⁹.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

⁴ D. Kozłowski, K. Ingarden, R. Loegler, *Wszyscy wtedy czytali Derridę i wszystko wydawało się możliwe*, interview by A. Gzowska, M. Karpińska, D. Leśniak-Rychlak, “Autoportret” 2018, no. 4(63), p. 18.

⁵ D. Ghirardo, *Architektura po modernizmie*, VIA, Toruń 1999, p. 13.

⁶ P. Winskowski, *Zasypywanie przepaści w architekturze*, interview by A. Beryt, “Autoportret” 2018, no. 4(63), p. 31.

⁷ D. Kozłowski, *Projekty i budynki 1982–1992. Figuralność i rozpad formy w architekturze doby postfunkcjonalnej*, Wydział Architektury Politechniki Krakowskiej, Kraków 1992, p. 5.

⁸ M. Budzyński in an interview with A. Gzowska and L. Klein [in:] *Postmodernizm polski: architektura i urbanistyka. [2]*, Stowarzyszenie 40 000 Malarzy, Warszawa 2013, p. 28.

⁹ J. Swoszowska, *Oblicza postmodernizmu*, “Autoportret” 2018, no. 4(63), p. 63.

The fact is, however, that the changes that took place in architecture (but not only), especially in the second half of the 20th century – tended towards a return to historical, regional, and ethnic characteristics. There was a trend towards pastiche and nostalgia, and architecture became eclectic, contextual, allusive, metaphorical, but also playful; after the modernist whites, a love of colour returned. In its heterogeneity and ambiguity, “its greatest value was to change the world into a happier and more joyful place”¹⁰.

Perhaps the first person to decide to create a catalogue of architectural languages was the Roman Emperor Hadrian, who ruled from 117 to 138. When he returned from his tour of the empire, he decided to erect a complex of buildings near Tivoli that imitated the most famous monuments, architecture, works of art, and places he had seen around the Mediterranean¹¹. Temples and canals from Egypt and caryatids from Greece were copied, and even Hades was built. Hadrian treated the Villa as a “library”¹². More than 1,800 years later, Hadrian’s Villa has become “an important example, model, and point of reference for architects and critics as diverse as Louis Kahn and Siegfried Giedion, Mathias Ungers and Vincent Scully – that is, modernists and postmodernists”¹³.

The classical architecture collected by Hadrian is inextricably linked with architectural order, visible in the detail of the columns. Architects in the 20th century also took up this type of symbolism. In 1922, the *Chicago Tribune* newspaper announced a competition for its new headquarters, with the building to be “the most beautiful office building in the world.” The winners were John Mead Howells and Raymond M. Hood with their proposal for a neo-Gothic building, which was later constructed. Among the 263 entries submitted – architects such as Walter Gropius, Bertram Goodhue, Walter Burley Griffin, Bruno Taut, and Adolf Loos took part in the competition – the work of the latter was also noticed. The monumental column was a double pun based on a play on words (column – “newspaper column,” tribune – the name of the newspaper)¹⁴.

In 1939, the first block of the Battersea Power Station on the south bank of the Thames in London was completed, followed by the second in 1955. The building was designed by Giles Gilbert Scott. The four tower-like chimneys resemble classical Doric columns. Charles Jencks later wrote, “The column-like chimneys rise at the four corners on a massive base (which has become a symbol of the power station, making the whole structure resemble an upside-down table). Smoke flies out of the columns, which are not finished with any capitals or entablatures, thus enslaving the fluted columns”¹⁵. Tomasz Kozłowski points out that “it is not only the creators of the postmodern era who cannot break away from their memories”¹⁶.

In 1980, Paolo Portoghesi became curator of the first edition of the International Architecture Biennale in Venice and, with his exhibition *Strada Novissima* (The Newest Road), “announced the end of prohibitionism”¹⁷. Consisting of two street frontages, each façade designed by a different architect (including Frank Gehry, Rem Koolhaas,

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

¹¹ D. Ghirardo, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

¹² C. Jencks, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 111.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ T. Kozłowski, *Architektura a sztuka*, Wydawnictwo PK, Kraków 2018, p. 51.

¹⁷ S. Marini, *Koniec ludyczności*, “Autoportret” 2018, no. 4(63), p. 113.

Charles Moore, Hans Hollein, and Franco Purini), the model became an important place of exploration for the post-modernist movement. Dariusz Kozłowski later described Hans Hollein's colonnaded façade as an example of a phenomenon where "a form found in nature or a work of art is perceived by the observer not in its limited context, but as the sum of its details"¹⁸.

Between 1985 and 1996, according to a design by Dariusz Kozłowski, Maria Misągiewicz, and Waław Stefański, the *Way of Four Gates – the Higher Theological Seminary of the Congregation of the Resurrectionists* – was built. The complex was located in the Zakrzówek district of Krakow, an area lacking any distinctive features. According to the author, this "lack of context" became a reason to seek further inspiration¹⁹. Distant views of the Old Town from the east and Skałka Twardowskiego from the west became the inspiration for the compositional axis around which the subsequent elements of the complex were planned. The symbolic gates of Initiation, Hope, and Knowledge are created with the help of architectural forms – both functional and theatrical, false and devoid of function. The last, unrealised gate of Faith was to be a concrete, vertical *Column of Resurrection*, against the background of the horizontal horizon marked by the outline of Twardowski's Rocks. The entire complex is surrounded by a wall – a colonnade, about which the author writes: "This massive reinforced concrete arcade symbolizes rather than fulfills the function of old monastery fences"²⁰.

In 1990, in Krakow's Podgórze district, an area of single-family homes, a "factory" was built, the HEAN cosmetics factory – *Dom Alchemików* (House of Alchemists). Built right next to houses with workshops, it forms a coherent complex with them. The author of the designs is Dariusz Kozłowski. The building is clearly inspired by the columns of Adolf Loos and Giles Gilbert Scott. It consists of two parts – a residential section and a production hall. The rectangular brick structure is topped with four concrete obelisks, "leaving the viewer uncertain as to their purpose"²¹. As the author himself writes, the concrete forms may prompt reflection on whether they are merely obelisks or chimneys.

Architecture and history are inextricably linked. New trends arise as a continuation or negation, but neither of these directions would be possible without an understanding of the language of forms. Piotr Winskowski writes about architecture as a constellation of many dependencies, drawing attention to the need to notice spatial "words," small pieces of space²², while Dariusz Kozłowski writes that "the past serves as material for creating new languages of architecture"²³. Riccardo Bofill's words therefore seem true: "it is very important to be able to use the vocabulary and elements of architecture from the past [...] before developing a new symbolism that is only possible in a genuinely modern society of the future"²⁴.

¹⁸ D. Kozłowski, *Projekty i budynki 1982–1992...*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁹ D. Kozłowski, K. Ingarden, R. Loegler, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

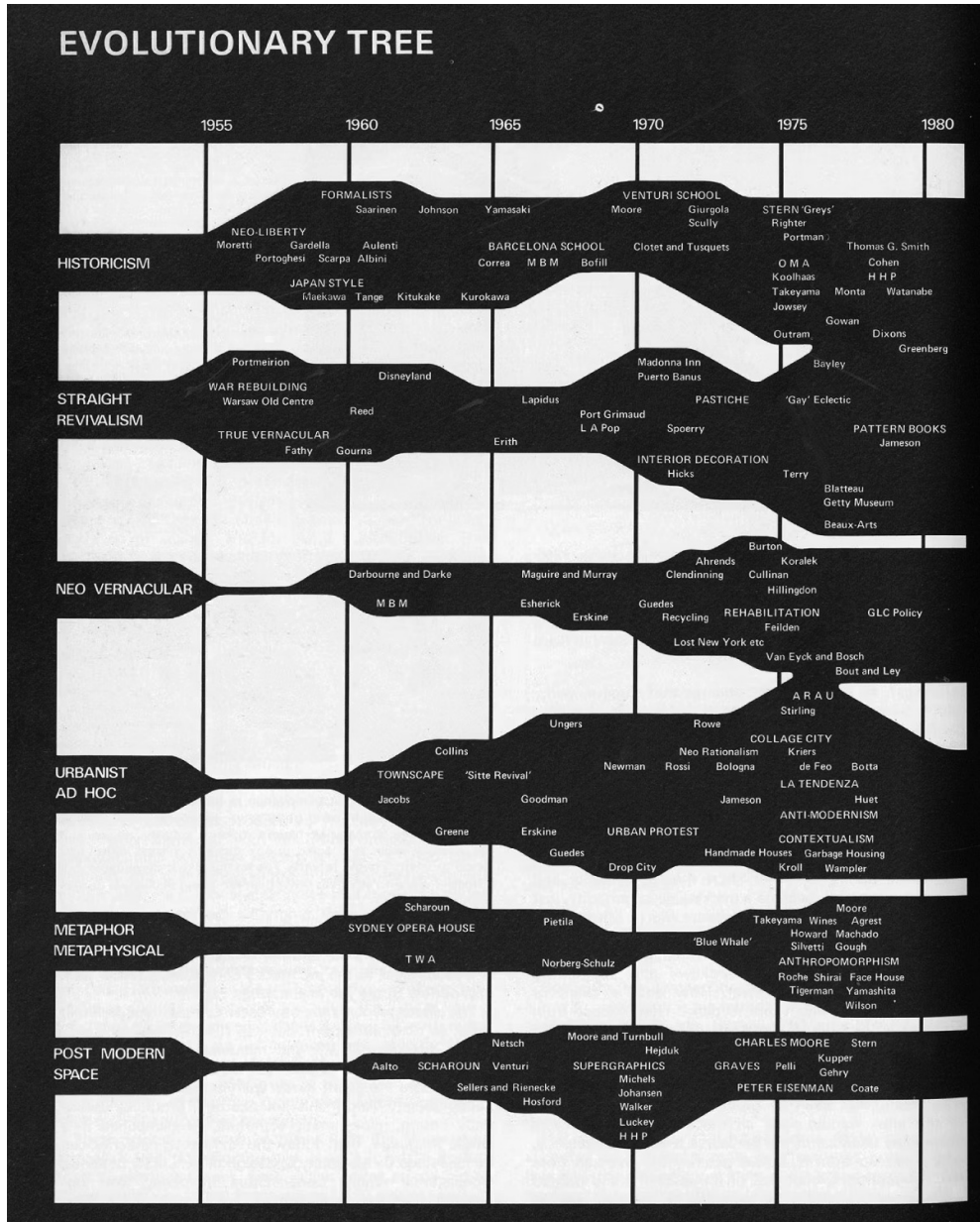
²⁰ D. Kozłowski, *Projekty i budynki 1982–1992...*, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 77.

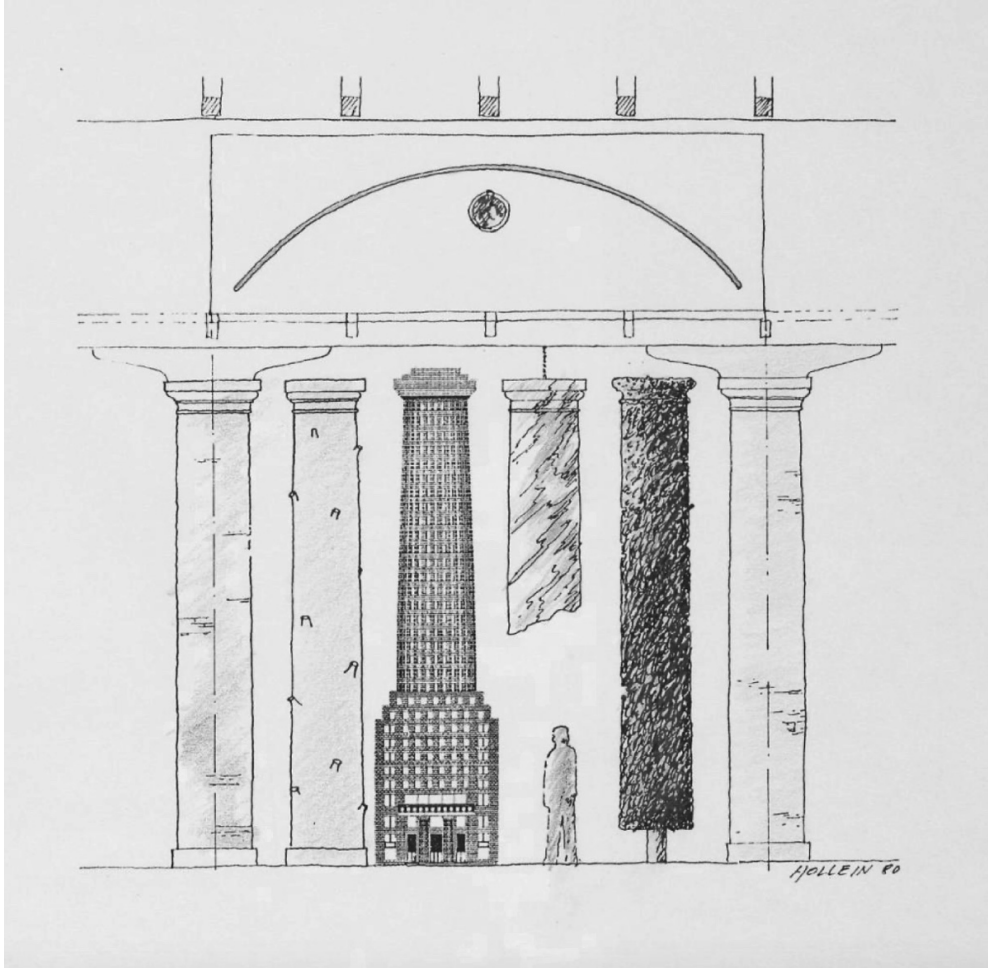
²² P. Winskowski, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

²³ D. Kozłowski, *Architektura czyli sztuka budowania rzeczy*, "ARCH" 2012, no. 10, p. 25.

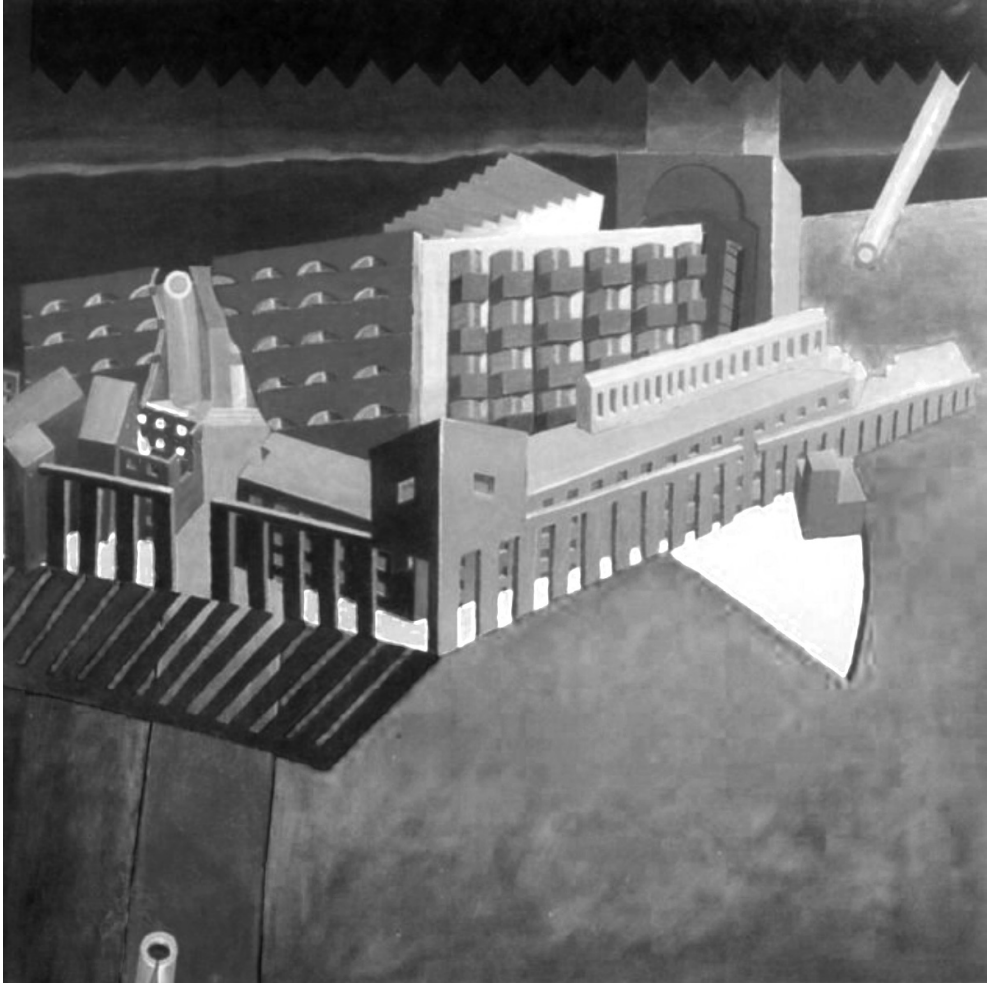
²⁴ After: D. Kozłowski, *Projekty i budynki 1982–1992...*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.



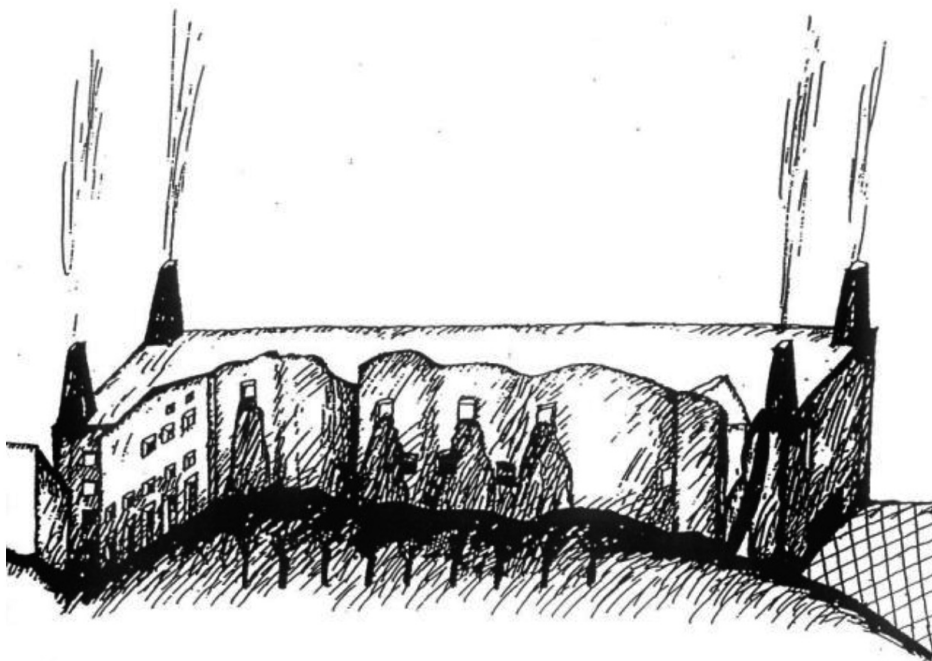
Ill. 1. *The Evolutionary Tree*, Charles Jencks, source: M. Wigley, *The drawing that ate architecture* [in:] Jencks Foundation, 2023, <https://www.jencksfoundation.org/explore/text/the-drawing-that-ate-architecture> (access: 8.10.2025)



III. 2. *Strada Novissima*, Hans Hollein, source: *Esquisse pour la façade de la Strada Novissima* [in:] Centre Pompidou, 1980, <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/en/ressources/oeuvre/cAnBeb7> (access: 8.10.2025)



Ill. 3. *The Way of the Four Gates – Higher Theological Seminary of the Congregation of the Resurrectionists*, Dariusz Kozłowski, Maria Misiągiewicz, Waclaw Stefański, source: author's own archive from: <http://www.dariuszkozlowski.arch.pk.edu.pl>



III. 4. HEAN Cosmetic Factory – *The Alchemist’s House*, Dariusz Kozłowski, source: author’s own archive from: <http://www.dariuszkozowski.arch.pk.edu.pl>

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A u t h o r ' s N o t e

Marek Kaszyński, MSc, Architect

Chairman of the Council of the Małopolska Regional Chamber of Architects of the Republic of Poland, the Main Audit Committee of the Association of Polish Architects, and the Municipal Urban Planning and Architecture Committee in Krakow.

marek.kaszynski@gmail.com