DOI: 10.23817/2026.defarch.5-10

MAREK KASZYŃSKI
ORCID: 0009-0007-9070-0594
PK Krakow University of Technology, Poland

WAY OF THE SPIRIT, WAY OF METAPHOR

DROGA DUCHA, DROGA METAFORY

Abstract

This article analyses the Resurrectionist Major Seminary, "The Way of the Four Gates" in Kraków as an example of postmodern architecture based on metaphor. Referring to the semiology of Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco, as well as theories of postmodernism, the article presents the symbolism of the building and the significance of its forms. The analysis also draws parallels with the work of Hans Hollein, Philippe Starck and James Wines. The article answers the question of the role of philosophy in shaping architectural form.

Keywords: *contemporary architecture, Dariusz Kozłowski, myth, postmodernism, semiology, sign*

Streszczenie

W artykule przeanalizowane zostało Wyższe Seminarium Duchowne Księży Zmartwychwstańców „Droga Czterech Bram" w Krakowie jako przykład postmodernistycznej architektury metafory. Odwołując się do semiologii Rolanda Barthesa i Umberta Eco oraz teorii postmodernizmu, przedstawiono symbolikę obiektu i znaczenie form. Przywołane zostały konotacje z twórczością Hansa Holleina i Philippe'a Starcka czy Jamesa Winesa. Artykuł jest odpowiedzią na pytanie o rolę filozofii w kształtowaniu architektury.

Słowa kluczowe: *architektura współczesna, Dariusz Kozłowski, mit, postmodernizm, semiologia, znak*

"True architecture is philosophy"[1] – this is the thesis proposed by the organisers of the 25th anniversary conference, "Defining the Architectural Space". We read further: "Its author should be capable of critically reflecting on their own design premise. They become a mediator between idea and reality. Their work will remain with society for years to come, and only future generations of users will determine whether it was merely a building or true architecture"[2]. In this context, it is useful to recall the debate surrounding the interpretation and reception of works of art during the postmodern period.

There is a consensus amongst historians that the term postmodernism began in criticism as a description of literary phenomena. It was probably Federico de Onís who first used the term in its modern sense in 1934 in *Antología de la poesía española e hispanoamericana*,

[1] *Thesis in English 2026* [in:] International Conference – Defining the Architectural Space, https://dpa.arch.pk.edu.pl/thesis-in-english-2026/ (access: 14.10.2026).
[2] *Ibidem*.

an anthology of Spanish literature from 1882 to 1932[3]. It should be noted, however, that for de Onís, postmodernism constituted only an internal and short-lived phase of modernism, rather than a definition of a new era.

The discourse of the 20th century and the question "what is postmodernism?" have yet to receive a definitive answer; however, it is a fact that, in the world of literature (and later in other fields of art as well), a number of artists started to play with conventions and reach for previously untapped ways of expression, such as deconstruction, pastiche and irony… One might mention figures such as John Barth, Roland Barthes, Jorge Luis Borges, Umberto Eco or Thomas Pynchon; however, for the purposes of this article, it is worth focusing on two of them.

Roland Barthes introduced the concept of myth into the semiological system. In the simplest (according to the author) definition, "myth is a type of speech"; he also points out that, consequently, everything that belongs to speech is a myth. For Barthes, speech is a form of communication that need not be oral or written, but may also take the form of a performance, a photograph, a film, a news report, a spectacle, sport or an advertisement – or, more generally, anything[4]. Everything therefore has a meaning that derives not only from its form but also from the connotations it carries.

One example is the essay *The New Citroën*, which Barthes uses to illustrate the mechanism by which a myth is created. Through Barthes's erudite and emotionally charged description, the Citroën DS 19, referred to by him as "the Goddess" (since the French word for car is feminine), becomes a marvellous and magical object whose smoothness is comparable to that of Christ's tunic[5]. Barthes observes that the car is the modern-day equivalent of Gothic cathedrals – an object created by unknown artists and used by an entire nation. It is worth noting that this description of the Citroën – which is, after all, a machine – echoes Le Corbusier's words that the era of old cathedrals, "gnawed by the ravages of time and grey with soot", is passing, and that "The machine is the master; a new era has dawned"[6].

Umberto Eco conducted a study of semiology, including research on architecture within its scope. In discussing the way signs and their meanings – both denotative and connotative – interact, he points out that "Architectural discourse is a persuasive discourse. It proceeds from accepted premises, combines them into familiar and accepted arguments, and leads to a specific type of affirmation"[7].

An example of the combination of realised architectural forms – buildings – with the poetics of describing the architect's vision, which gives these forms new meanings, can be found in Resurrectionist Major Seminary "The Way of the Four Gates" in Kraków, designed by the team comprising Dariusz Kozłowski, Wacław Stefański and Maria Misiągiewicz. The design process began in 1983, construction began in 1984, and although it was handed over for use in 1996, it was never completed according to the architects' original vision; the fourth gate remained only in the form of plans and models.

---

[3] B. Baran, *Postmodernizm i końce wieku*, Wydawnictwo Inter Esse, Kraków 2003, p. 155.

[4] R. Barthes, *Mit i znak*, trans. W. Błońska et al., selected and with a foreword by J. Błoński**,** Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1970, pp. 25–26.

[5] *Ibidem*, pp. 78–80.

[6] Le Corbusier, *Kiedy katedry były białe: Podróż do kraju ludzi nieśmiałych*, trans. T. Swoboda, Fundacja Centrum Architektury, Warszawa 2021, pp. 30, 232.

[7] U. Eco, *Pejzaż semiotyczny*, trans. A. Weinsberg, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1972, p. 319.

The site chosen for the Seminary is located in Zakrzówek – a south-western district of Kraków. Set slightly back from the main streets of Generała Bohdana Zielińskiego and Kapelanki, it is accessed via the side street of Pawlickiego. The flat site is surrounded by small-scale residential buildings – the neighbouring woodland has contributed to the area retaining a relatively low-density character. The site appears, at first glance, to be completely unremarkable. Dariusz Kozłowski even states that "at the beginning there was no context whatsoever – nothing but emptiness all around"[8]. But the apparent lack of context was misleading; after all, less than three kilometres north-east of the site is the Main Market Square – the heart of Kraków (the "road to civilization" leads towards the Main Market Square), whilst to the south-west stretches the massif of the limestone hill known as Skałki Twardowskiego (one can find the "way to Nature" in that direction). The axis drawn between the centre of the Main Square and the limestone massif of Skałki Twardowskiego became the main compositional axis of the design – the eponymous "Way of the Spirit"[9].

Dariusz Kozłowski interprets this Way as something symbolic. He points out that man's earthly journey is a constant flight from nature towards civilisation, manifested in the building of the City. He himself proposes a reversal of direction and, through architecture, constructs four gates intended to symbolise the stages of inner growth, from the City towards Nature[10]. The spatial composition of the complex is a conglomeration of diverse volumes. Janusz Sepioł describes it as follows: "Their composition does not consist of a regular arrangement, subordination or interpenetration, but rather of a seemingly random cluttering, in which they interact with one another, deforming each other in the process"[11].

Facing the main streets, the complex is surrounded by a wall – an arcade of raw concrete with a clear rhythmic pattern. The arcade encloses the space in the manner of old monastery walls, yet at the same time does not constitute a physical fence. More symbolic than functional, the colonnade brings to mind the architectural experiments with façades carried out by Hans Hollein as part of the "Strada Novissima" exhibition during the 1st Venice International Architecture Biennale in 1980. A break in the wall provides a passage into the interior of the complex: a gap, the first gate on the designated axis – the "Way" – the "Gate of Initiation".

Just beyond the wall lies a small square named by the architect the "Courtyard of Desires". The boundaries of the square are defined by the structures located around it, including the "Sisters' House", the "Gardener's House", gates with parlours poetically named the "Travellers' House", and the refectory. The sculpted, multi-layered façades serve as entrances to the buildings or lead nowhere – in which case they represent "false" directions relative to the main Way.

If a visitor decides to go straight ahead, they will come upon the monastery wall, whose arched window openings may be interpreted as references to the arcosolium – the arched tombs used by early Christians[12]. At the point where it intersects with the compositional axis,

---

[8] D. Kozłowski, K. Ingarden, R. Loegler, *Wszyscy wtedy czytaliśmy Deridę i wszystko wydawało się możliwe*, "Autoportret – pismo o dobrej przestrzeni" 2018, no. 4(63), art. 3, p. 18.

[9] D. Kozłowski, *Projekty i budynki 1982–1992. Figuratywność i rozpad formy w architekturze doby postfunkcjonalnej*, Wydział Architektury Politechniki Krakowskiej, Kraków 1992, pp. 60–61.

[10] *Ibidem*.

[11] J. Sepioł, *Oblicza postmodernizmu*, [in:] *Sztuka Polska po 1945 roku. Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1987, p. 301.

[12] B. Stec, *Wyższe Seminarium Duchowne Księży Zmartwychwstańców*, "Szlak Modernizmu", https://szlakmodernizmu.pl/baza-obiektow/wyzsze-seminarium-duchowne-ksiezy-zmartwychwstancow/ (access: 02.09.2026).

the wall has been torn open to form the "Gate of Hope". It is worth recalling that Charles Jencks wrote about the design technique of creating "ruins", citing the BEST department stores built in the United States in the 1970s (designed by James Wines and Sculpture in the Environment (SITE)): "The metaphysics of architecture leads to buildings that crack and split apart, with plaster flaking off and bricks crumbling"[13]. Yet in the fractured walls of the Seminary, one can also find theatrical and sensual elements – one need only mention the conversion of the Teatro Beatriz into the Teatriz restaurant, carried out in 1989–1990 in Madrid (designed by Philippe Starck), or the jewellery shop completed in 1975 in Vienna (designed by Hans Hollein).

The Gate of Hope leads to the largest of the buildings, whose trapezium-shaped structure, comprising three parts, defines another, inner courtyard. The building houses a vestibule, administrative offices, the rector's offices, conference rooms, professors' flats and students' rooms. The shorter side of the trapezoidal courtyard remains open, forming another of the gates situated on the main compositional axis. The "Gate of Knowledge" – as its architect named it – is flanked by oversized columns containing staircases. The majestic, cubic form of the Seminary church casts a shadow over it, whilst to the south the Gate is also flanked by the library. It is worth noting the mastaba embedded in the courtyard, which has been given a new meaning here – it is not a tomb, but an auditorium.

At the end of the complex, in accordance with the architect's original design, the "Tower of the Resurrection" was to be situated. In addition to serving as a belfry, it was also intended to form part of the final gate. The inspiration was drawn from the poem "Promethidion". This idea is expressed in two dialogues with an epilogue by Cyprian Kamil Norwid: "Christianity – through the intersection of the earthly, horizontal line and the supernatural, perpendicular line – descending from heaven – … this is the mystery of the Cross"[14]. In the original concept, the horizontal arm of the cross was to be represented by the rock massif of Skałki Twardowskiego, whilst the vertical line was to be formed by the bell tower. This element of the design was never realised, though it should be noted that from the outset it was intended primarily to appeal to the visitor's imagination[15].

The entire design is full of poetic metaphors: unconventional perspectives, distorted forms, structures giving the impression of being unfinished or having existed for ages, structures with distorted scales or illusory structures, temples, staircases and gates serving no purpose other than decoration. One can only imagine the impression these elements had to make when, during guided tours through the unfinished building, the music of Monteverdi and Gesualdo da Venosa was played[16].

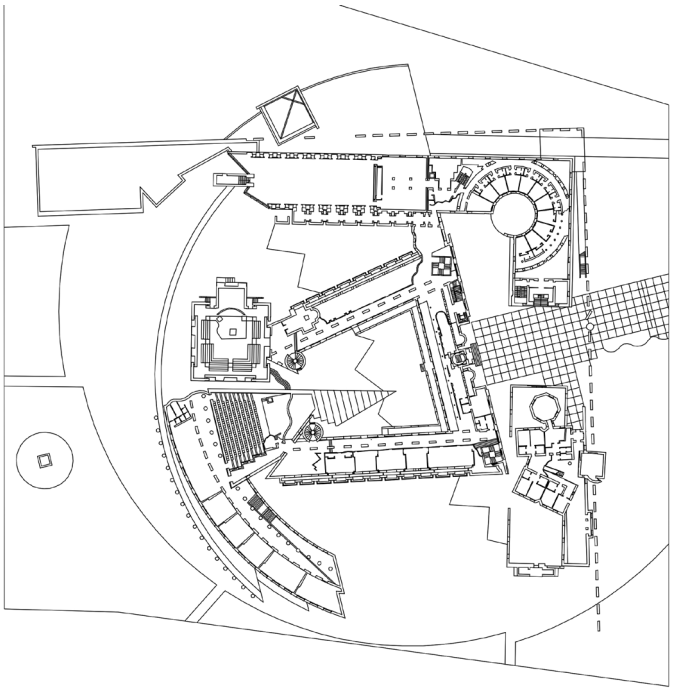
Jakub Szczęsny writes that "Architecture is an image in itself; it has the potential to communicate meanings without the need for inscriptions or reliefs", and goes on to point out that it possesses "the power of metaphor: it refers us to meanings – whether these are personal or culturally induced"[17]. "The Way of the Four Gates" confirms this thesis, whilst also serving as a unique example of postmodern architectural philosophy and a response to the questions posed to conference participants.

---

[13] Ch. Jencks, *Architektura postmodernistyczna*, Wydawnictwo Arkady, Warszawa 1987, pp. 139–140.
[14] C.K. Norwid, *Promethidion. Rzecz w dwóch dialogach z epilogiem*, Universitas, Kraków 1997, p. 102.
[15] B. Stec, *op. cit.*
[16] D. Kozłowski, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
[17] J. Szczęsny, *Architektura jako Amfora*, "Autoportret – pismo o dobrej przestrzeni" 2019, no. 2(65), p. 95.



Ill. 1. Citroën ID 19 / DS 19, source: www.citroenorigins.pl pl/cars/id-19 (access: 02.09.2026)



Ill. 2. Resurrectionist Major Seminary, “The Way of the Four Gates” in Kraków, from the archive of Dariusz Kozłowski



Ill. 3. Resurrectionist Major Seminary, “The Way of the Four Gates” in Kraków, from the archive of Dariusz Kozłowski



Ill. 4. Resurrectionist Major Seminary, “The Way of the Four Gates” in Kraków, from the archive of Dariusz Kozłowski

References

[1] Baran B., *Postmodernizm i końce wieku*, Wydawnictwo Inter Esse, Kraków 2003.

[2] Barthes R., *Mit i znak*, trans. W. Błońska et al., selected and with a foreword by J. Błoński, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1970.

[3] Eco U., *Pejzaż semiotyczny*, trans. A. Weinsberg, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1972.

[4] Jencks Ch., *Architektura postmodernistyczna*, Wydawnictwo Arkady, Warszawa 1987.

[5] Kozłowski D., *Projekty i budynki 1982–1992. Figuratywność i rozpad formy w architekturze doby postfunkcjonalnej*, Wydział Architektury Politechniki Krakowskiej, Kraków 1992.

[6] Kozłowski D., Ingarden K., Loegler R., *Wszyscy wtedy czytaliśmy Deridę i wszystko wydawało się możliwe*, "Autoportret – pismo o dobrej przestrzeni" 2018, no. 4(63), art. 3, pp. 12–21.

[7] Le Corbusier, *Kiedy katedry były białe: Podróż do kraju ludzi nieśmiałych*, trans. T. Swoboda, Fundacja Centrum Architektury, Warszawa 2021.

[8] Norwid C.K., *Promethidion. Rzecz w dwóch dialogach z epilogiem*, Universitas, Kraków 1997.

[9] Sepioł J., *Oblicza postmodernizmu*, [in:] *Sztuka Polska po 1945 roku. Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1987, pp. 291–306.

[10] Stec B., *Wyższe Seminarium Duchowne Księży* Zmartwychwstańców, "Szlak Modernizmu", https://szlakmodernizmu.pl/baza-obiektow/wyzsze-seminarium-duchowne-ksiezy-zmartwychwstancow/ (access: 02.09.2026).

[11] Szczęsny J., *Architektura jako Amfora*, "Autoportret – pismo o dobrej przestrzeni" 2019, no. 2(65), art. 14, pp. 94–97.

[12] *Thesis in English 2026* [in:] International Conference – Defining the Architectural Space, https://dpa.arch.pk.edu.pl/thesis-in-english-2026/ (access: 14.10.2026).

Author's Note

Marek Kaszyński, MSc, Architect

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

marek.kaszynski@gmail.com