

ON THE NEW METHODOLOGY OF HISTORICISM RESEARCH  
(theses of PhD dissertation)

*The aim and method of the dissertation:*

The long history of 19<sup>th</sup>-century architecture is emphatically connected to the problems of architectural historicism. This theoretically prepared then academically elaborated set of concepts based on a theory of style developed at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and underwent major transformations several times as the decades passed. The architecture of our age can only understand with difficulty the processes which were once revolutionarily modern but can now only be assessed in their historicity. This problem is particularly discernable in architect training, where, besides logical explanation, recognition on intuitive grounds has an important role as well.

*The dissertation endeavours to interpret the processes of 19<sup>th</sup>-century architectural history adapting to the thinking of a practising architect while employing old concepts of style that are hard to use today.*

The set of concepts currently in use can be projected back to earlier periods as well. This casts a new light on historicism as architectural behaviour and makes its processes easier to perceive.

The architecture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the following fin-de-si•cle came into a historical situation during our age which allows it to be re-interpreted, and indeed its conceptual connection with early modernisation and modern architecture to be put in a new light. *An approach based on the interconnection of function-structure-form, which is closer to the creative architect and is also decisive in our age, is more suitable for describing processes that are influential today.* This method is also able to characterise the “mass” architecture of the age of historicism.

I have summarised the academically assessable results of this work, which can also be used as a textbook, in four theories. These are the *theory of increase in scale*, provoking a break with the history of style; the need to *modernise general terminology*; an extension of the study of *function-structure-space-mass* to the age studied until now primarily from the aspect of façade forms, and the *study of the eclectic age*, its historically justified rehabilitation from the aspect of the preparation of the fin-de-si•cle and early modern architecture. The theses have further subchapters. They follow the division of the chapters of the dissertation and concentrate on concepts appreciable from a methodological viewpoint.

The discussion of the theses in the dissertation does not occupy a proportionate extent to the subjects. Precisely due to the textbook role, the notions discussed are expounded in several stages.

**First thesis:**

*With a view to modernising historicism research, in addition to the known history of style, the problems that arose from an increase of architectural scale perceivable as a general phenomenon in the age of historicism as well as the historical methods and resultant solutions need to be explored.*

The broad outline of the theory:

1.1. *The problem of the architecture of historicism*

1.1.1. Increase in scale, tradition and “belief”.  
(Comparison of the modern and historicism.)

Historicising demand arose through a change of the society determining baroque architecture. The possibility to historicise was created by the historico-social conditions that appeared at the same time. There is much literature dealing thoroughly with the history of the change of styles. The topicality of historical references, however, only in part meant the need to change forms. The *increase in scale* produced by economic and social conditions also played a significant role. At this time typically urban dwellers had buildings constructed and, as a result of the increasing concentration of capital, the number of floors and amount of floor space steadily rose. Into this conceptual environment springing from the continuously changing problem – mainly stemming from form – the notion of classicism based on rigid geometry, Romanticism based on painterly patch treatment and the eclectic based on a system approach fitted as a solution. The changes of the conditions of form thus produced solutions of form. This phenomenon is also present in the most recent history of architecture. The spread of this modern viewpoint on historicism in the final analysis results in the comparison of periods.

In the 20<sup>th</sup>-century period of modernisation – in a decisive manner – *handling of tradition* known from historicism – resting on grounds of history and form – is absent. So from this aspect the individuality of historicism emerges, which can be linked only to the late modern.

Compared to the seemingly unshakable baroque vision of the world, the architecture of change typifies both historicism and the modern movement, which can be agreed with only with a kind of *optimistic belief*. The positivist aesthetic concept of historicism had an effect later as well and remained unbroken. The problems concealed in the continuous increase in scale do not divide but interconnect historicism and modern architecture.

**Second theory:**

*In order to further update historicism research, in addition to the existing and accepted style periodizations, a unifying notion of historicising needs to be raised in which the 19<sup>th</sup>-century historicising inspired by concept of style could be generally called historicism.*

The broad outline of the theory:

2.1. *The changing judgement of historicism*

The history of historicism can be broken down into sections during which each new period gains recognition through the criticism of the preceding one. The same is true of the relation of historicism to periods following it or preceding it. While until the 20<sup>th</sup> century only classicism was able to appear in a positive light, by the middle of the century Romanticism had also been accepted. The re-evaluation of eclecticism is the task of our age. Thus, after all, today all 19<sup>th</sup>-century periods of historicism can be justified and explained with due historic hindsight.

2.2. *Criticism of established theories of periodization*

The concepts of periods widely used today were established in the age of historicism with the purpose of defining themselves. Their subsequent use and potential alteration depends on geographical location, and economic and social development, i.e. on viewpoint. Our globalising age can parcel the further contradictions arising from this later. After all, there is little point in widely disseminating an outstanding historian's concept as the perspective can change continually. Another contradiction may arise from the fact that the different style periods define style convergence as a quality criterion. Thus the continuity of clearly perceptible architectural development may become questionable.

2.3. *The necessity of a single term for historicism*

It follows from the above that another, new name must be found to characterise the age examined. Maintaining the presumption that the viewpoint of those examining the period may continue to change, the concept of a *current name* must be used. As an important problem of our age following the late modern is the issue of historicising, this concept becomes important in understanding it. Unrepeated to date, the period between the baroque and the modern movement alone used on academic grounds the method of historicising, and so today, in a relevant way, the term historicism befits it best. Although this word is already occupied for a particular terminology in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a single term it will be able to help in the further study of the *whys and wherefores* of continually developing historicising.

**Third theory:**

*In order to better understand – through a new approach – the historical development of the function-structure-space-mass concept playing a major role in our current practical architecture, the period of historicism has to be re-interpreted. The function-structure-space-mass formation continually evolved throughout the whole of historicism to reach modern architecture.*

The broad outline of the theory:

### 3.1. *The early development of functional mass and space in the period of historicism*

#### 3.1.1. Historicising formation of mass may be:

##### 3.1.1.1. Stereometric formation of mass

The formation of mass of early classicism, due to simple functional relations, closely followed the interior space. This also anticipates the later modern space-mass relations. Although a well-known concept, neoclassical stereometry is not an exclusive characteristic but can only be correctly interpreted together with the following.

##### 3.1.1.2. Additive formation of mass

Besides the rigid geometrical method of construction, an additive formation of mass always existed, which could also show more complicated relations of mass. Thus the shaping of mass became subject to free composition.

##### 3.1.1.3. Street wall approach

The most important aim of historicism was to emphasise the wall between internal and external space. This also well-known concept needs to be supplemented by the fact that in the early phases the relationship between the building and the surrounding space dominated, and later the street wall formed of a row of buildings became important. This was governed by the steady growth of in-building. The most important function of the form of the street wall became the optical closure of external space.

##### 3.1.1.4. The birth of function indicators

Primarily the abundance of Romantic forms enabled the silhouettes of Romantic buildings to indicate their function. The tower, cupola, gallery, etc. had the effect of suggesting functions behind the form to the onlooker.

#### 3.1.2. Types of historicising creation of space

##### 3.1.2.1. Survival of traditional creation of space

Historicism mainly and in its earliest phase developed in the external mass of a building, the façade. In the beginning, behind the continuous transition of the exterior, the formation of space known in the baroque period persisted.

##### 3.1.2.2. Spatial (mass) quotation

Using forms of specific monuments from architectural history usually produced spatial quotations and more rarely a quotation of mass. Thus an *abstraction of form of spaces* was created. Domed, vaulted and other spaces clearly definable by simple geometry could be called spatial quotations.

**Fourth theory:**

*The creative method of eclectic architecture, which spread from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has been and is the target of modern architecture's effective criticism. The interconnected development of the periods of architectural history, however, is present in the entire period of historicism and thus in eclecticism, too. This can be illustrated by the architectural processes accomplished later in the modern period as well.*

The broad outline of the theory:

*4.1. The modernity and progressive spirit of eclecticism*

The creative methods that emerged in the eclectic period were necessary forerunners of the innovations of modern architecture. The economic and social relations that later fashioned modern architecture were created. In detail:

*4.1.1. Separation of external mass and façade, and internal spaces as a possibility of modernising structures*

In the more complicated compositions of historicism contradictions of internal space and external mass could frequently be found. In eclecticism with many built-in storeys and an extended façade this became apparent. Details of early historicist façades still more or less followed the structural system. With the building proportions of eclecticism, however, this sometimes had to be abandoned. The conceptual separation enabled the specialisation of structure.

*4.1.2. Delimitation of space, the façade's new special role*

The eclectic façade as a street wall was in fact a variable composition creatively using known historical elements of style. The basis of eclectic façade construction was the use of a wealth of ideas for openings, mouldings and sections known from history. As such, it is a forerunner of free façade construction.

*4.2. The impact of technological development on the connection of function-structure-form in historicism.*

*4.2.1. The separation of function, structure and form became characteristic in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.*

Primarily through the spread of iron structures, but in general the growth of the distance that could be spanned, internal space formation was able to become increasingly independent from the structure. The internal space and external street front, which now could be organised separately from the basic frame structure, produced the gradual separation of function-structure-form. This further strengthened the processes that occurred for reasons of form.

*4.3. The question of co-existence of historicism and the early modern*

*4.3.1. The general requirement of lasting, traditional architectural values and the widespread concept of historicism contradict each other. The slow withdrawal of historicising typified the fin-de-siècle and early modern periods. Until the abstraction of form of the avant-garde and the emergence of the modern movement, however, numerous elements in reference to architectural monuments*

appeared on buildings. These were not actual historical monumental elements but references to well-known historic traditions. Thus historicism was able to live on in a revalued form.

The interpretation of historicism to date has merely been able to interpret historicising striving for purity of style. However, a tradition-preserving environment is satisfied with monuments and references to architectural history. If historicising is a kind of general historical remembrance (such as memorism), both the beginning and the end of 19<sup>th</sup>-century historicism, conceptually generalised, are rooted deeply and are wide-branching in the previous and subsequent periods.

Following this train of thought, the historical focal point of historicism of an extended interpretation and viewed with a unified approach no longer means highlighted examples of top architecture of pure style, but is to be sought in the metropolitan historicism symbolising its heyday. Its passing, however, was caused by the fin-de-siècle and early modern, which fed from its transformation and resulted from it.