International Journal of Urban Management and Energy Sustainability (IJUMES)

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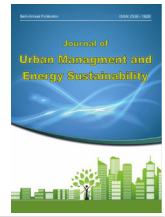

ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Explaining the Concept of Historicism in Architecture from Two Distinct Perspectives: The Explanatory and the Value-Oriented**

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:
Received 2025-11-25
Revised 2026-02-28
Accepted 2026-04-30

Keywords:
Architecture, Explanatory Perspective, Hegel, Historicism, Value-Oriented Perspective

ABSTRACT

Historicism is one of the complex and ambiguous concepts in architectural theory, with multiple interpretations ranging from approval to criticism. Rooted in Hegel's philosophy of history, the concept has been subject to diverse and often value-laden readings after Hegel, some of which led to revolutionary attitudes with historically disastrous outcomes, drawing severe critique from anti-historicist thinkers. On the other hand, historicism can be regarded as a paradigm that emerged in parallel with modernity, opposing the absolutization of natural-science methodology and the causal-descriptive approach of conventional historiography. In this tradition, historical developments including those in architecture are examined through dialectical logic and the spirit of the age. Any thought detached from its historical context is considered erroneous and lacking independent identity and truth. This study seeks to answer two main questions: What does historicism mean in the field of architecture? Is it possible to identify an epistemological interaction between the main perspectives of historicism in architecture? The research employs a qualitative, documentary-based, analytical–interpretive method. The findings demonstrate that historicism, at its core, is a robust methodology for the logical explanation and analysis of historical events and transformations. Although some scholars distinguish two distinct domains explanatory/analytical and ideological/value-oriented the study argues that an epistemological interaction exists between them. From a meta-theoretical perspective, architectural works arising from ideological aspirations and value orientations can be examined under the explanatory–analytical lens, leading to valuable insights.

DOI: 10.22034/ijumes.2026.2078958.1349

Running Title: Historicism in Architecture: Explanatory and Value-Oriented Perspectives

NUMBER OF REFERENCES 30

NUMBER OF FIGURES 04

NUMBER OF TABLES 05

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** This article is part of architecture`s Ph.D. dissertation namely "Historicim and architecture (Case study of Pahlavi period architecture in Hamedan) "with advisory of Dr. Mohammad-mehdi Soroush, Ph.D., Associate Professor which was completed at Islamic Azad University, Hamedan branch.

INTRODUCTION

Today, the term historicism is among the most widely used concepts across the humanities, particularly in art history and architectural theory. Despite this widespread usage, no single, precise, and consensual definition has yet emerged that clearly delineates the conceptual and semantic boundaries of the term (Nozari, 1992). Historicism is one of those concepts that, despite its apparent simplicity, entails considerable complexity, ambiguity, and even the potential for conceptual misinterpretation. Approaches to it across different disciplines have generated a broad spectrum of interpretations and theoretical frameworks (Iggers, 1999). While these readings reveal fundamental divergences, they also share a core premise: historicism is generally understood as an intellectual orientation that regards history as the primary source of meaning and the fundamental instrument of theorization, whereby every phenomenon is considered to be determined by its historical form and context (Jalali, 2021). Within architectural theory, historicism has been articulated as a foundational framework for analyzing the relationship between buildings, spatial configurations, and design processes on the one hand, and historical contexts and cultural narratives on the other. This approach extends far beyond the mere revival of past styles or the formal citation of historical references; it functions as an interpretive and meaning-generating tool that positions historical conditions as a basis for both the production and the interpretation of architecture (Mađanović, 2022). From this perspective, historicism enables architecture to be understood as a culturally and temporally situated phenomenon, emphasizing holism, individuality, and developmental progression within the design process. It also assists architects in establishing an informed balance between contemporary demands and historical heritage, allowing for new forms that are rooted in cultural continuity yet responsive to present needs, rather than confined to imitation of the past (Abdulmuhsin & Alanizi, 2025). Interdisciplinary analyses further indicate that historicism plays a significant role in shaping cultural and architectural identity and serves as a critical tool for understanding collective memory and the processes through which historical elements are rearticulated within new configurations (Ehteshami, 2018). In this context, the past is conceived not as a fixed model but as an active structure that continuously generates meaning within contemporary practice (Redding, 2020). At an analytical level, historicism also intersects with epistemological and philosophical positions such as pragmatism and Marxism within architectural discourse, offering a framework for examining how history is reinterpreted in the design process (Hvattum & Hermansen, 2004). These two positions the pragmatist reading, which treats history as a resource for strengthening reason, and the Marxist reading, which treats it as an ideological and socio-political instrument are examined in their own right in the Discussion, since they are essential to the value-oriented perspective that this study places alongside the explanatory one.

Given the diversity of theoretical readings of historicism within the humanities, and particularly within architectural theory, it can be argued that despite its extensive application the concept still lacks a coherent and systematic analytical framework capable of articulating its philosophical dimensions. A review of the literature reveals that a substantial portion of prior studies have either approached historicism as a predominantly formal or stylistic strategy, or reduced it to the superficial revival of historical elements. In contrast, its philosophical, epistemological, and interpretive foundations especially in relation to the philosophy of history and the notion of the spirit of the age (Zeitgeist) have received comparatively limited systematic attention. Accordingly, the central problem of this study is the absence of a clear differentiation between the explanatory and the value-oriented modes of historicism, and the consequent ambiguity in their implications for the interpretation and production of contemporary architecture. The study pursues

two aims: first, to explicate the concept of historicism in architecture through Hegel's dialectical philosophy of history; and second, to determine whether an epistemological interaction can be identified between the explanatory–analytical and the ideological–value-oriented perspectives. To this end it draws on the comparative theories of David Kolb, Alan Colquhoun, and Raymond Quek, and on the pragmatist and Marxist readings of historicism, in order to conceptualize historicism not as a return to or imitation of the past, but as an analytical framework for understanding architecture as a historically situated, culturally embedded, and dynamic phenomenon.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

From Hegel's perspective, philosophy constitutes the domain in which world history is to be comprehended, and any philosophy that fails to give an account of world history cannot, in essence, be regarded as philosophy at all (Kimpel, 1994). Hegel thus situates philosophy within the historical realm, approaching the clarification of philosophical aims and problems through historically conditioned circumstances. In this sense, historicism becomes a comprehensive and self-conscious methodological stance within philosophy itself (Turan, 2003). Within this framework, the philosophy of history signifies a reflective and critical evaluation of history: events are not ends in themselves but raw materials that guide philosophical inquiry toward an understanding beyond the events themselves (Singer, 2000). Dialectic occupies a central position in Hegel's system and refers to the contradictions and oppositions inherent in being, mind, and nature. In contrast to Kant, Hegel did not restrict dialectic to metaphysics; instead, he conceived knowledge itself as an integrated whole governed by dialectical movement. For Hegel, dialectic functioned as both a conceptual instrument and a methodological strategy through which he engaged the tension between the finite and the infinite most notably in theological–philosophical debates on the relationship between God and humanity. Within this framework, the incarnation of God in Christ was interpreted as a manifestation of the finite–infinite relation, a paradox that, according to Hegel, could be comprehended only through dialectical reasoning (Fathi & Mousazadeh, 2011). Adopting an interpretive stance toward the world and rejecting strict causal determinism (Redding, 2020), Hegel incorporated Heraclitus's notion of perpetual becoming into his dialectical philosophy (Rotenstreich, 2006). He extended this framework into art, conceiving artistic production as a sensuous and concrete manifestation grounded in intrinsic truths that, while embodied in material form, remain accessible to reason through dialectical cognition (Shoja, 2007). From within Hegel's system, dialectic is not merely a formal method of reasoning but the fundamental logic governing the movement of reality: all existence is understood as the outcome of the self-unfolding activity of reason as it advances toward absolute knowledge a condition of human self-consciousness and freedom. History, from this perspective, is not a contingent sequence of events but the necessary process through which spirit realizes itself (Fathi & Mousazadeh, 2011).

Methodology

This study is fundamental and theoretical, conducted within a qualitative framework. Given the nature of the research problem which seeks to explicate and critically reinterpret historicism in architectural theory in relation to Hegel's dialectical philosophy the study adopts an interpretive and analytical approach grounded in philosophical inquiry, and is classified as descriptive–analytical with an interpretive–critical orientation. Data collection was carried out through library-based and documentary research, involving a systematic review of primary and secondary sources in the philosophy of history, Hegelian aesthetics, and contemporary architectural theory. Primary sources include key texts by G. W. F. Hegel; secondary sources consist of theoretical works by David Kolb, Alan Colquhoun, and Raymond Quek, together with pragmatist and Marxist readings of

historicism, selected for their influential roles in articulating, interpreting, and critiquing historicism in architectural discourse. The analytical procedure is comparative. In the first stage, the conceptual structure of historicism in Hegel's philosophy is extracted through a dialectical analysis of key concepts such as Absolute Spirit, becoming, and the spirit of the age (Zeitgeist). In the second stage, the approaches of Kolb, Colquhoun, and Quek and the pragmatist and Marxist positions are examined independently. In the final stage, a comparative conceptual analysis identifies convergences, divergences, and varying levels of engagement with historicism, ranging from explanatory–philosophical to interpretive, critical, and descriptive modes. Validity is ensured through internal conceptual coherence, cross-referencing of authoritative sources, and logical consistency of argument, rather than statistical generalization.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Architecture in the Tradition of Hegelian Historical Thinking

Hegel may be regarded as a comprehensive and systematic philosopher; accordingly, he interprets artistic and cultural legacies in close relation to the fundamental pillars of his system, such as the Absolute, freedom, and consciousness (Singer, 2000). In articulating the principle of becoming within the historical process and in outlining the stages of the maturation of art, Hegel identifies three major epochs: the symbolic, the classical, and the romantic. Although architecture occupies a primary and defining position within the symbolic stage, he also addresses it within the classical and romantic modes (Robinson, 1995; Sobhani, 1997). Symbolic architecture is conceived as a spiritual form of artistic expression that, by virtue of its immaterial quality, possesses the capacity to attain varying degrees of transcendence. Within symbolic art, the contradiction between idea and form results in a non-reconciled relationship (Noble, 2014; Nozari, 1992). Consequently, the autonomous symbolic architecture of which the Egyptian pyramids are, for Hegel, exemplary instances, when interpreted within primitive symbolic art, lacks the capacity to convey elevated spiritual meanings (Mojtahedi, 1975). Hegel further distinguishes three moments within symbolic art itself. Although a symbol functions as a sign, it is neither artificial nor purely conventional but maintains a natural relationship with its referent. The first moment is grounded in unconscious symbolism, in which beauty is apprehended intuitively and the incompatibility of form and meaning remains concealed (Limnatis, 2008). The second corresponds to sublime symbolism, in which the tension between form and meaning becomes explicit. The third is characterized by conscious symbolism, in which the artist arrives at an awareness of correspondence between form and meaning, so that totalizing forms recede in favor of ornamental motifs (Motamedi, 2011). (Tab. 1 and Fig. 1).

Table 1: Architecture within the Hegelian Tradition of Historical Thought

Theorist / concept	Philosophical foundation	Conception of historicism	Implications for architecture	Examples
Hegel: architecture within the system of the arts	Absolute idealism; dialectics; philosophy of history	History as the becoming of Absolute Spirit toward consciousness and freedom	Architecture as an inherently historical art dependent on the spirit of the age	Architecture as the earliest manifestation of spirit in matter
Symbolic architecture	Dialectic of idea and form; incomplete determination of spirit in matter	Explanatory historicism; an unconscious or semi-conscious stage of spirit	Incongruence of form and meaning; dominance of mass and mystery	Egyptian pyramids; ziggurats; ritual architecture

Classical architecture	Dialectical balance of spirit and matter	Temporary realization of harmony within historical development	Unity of form and content; architecture as autonomous sculptural entity	Greek temples
Romantic architecture	Primacy of meaning and spiritual inwardness	Interpretive historicism; architecture contingent on historical–cultural context	Dissolution of classical balance; dominance of meaning over form	Gothic architecture; Christian churches
Architecture and the spirit of the age	Holistic philosophy of history	History as the determinant of meaning and value	Analysis of architecture within the framework of the Zeitgeist	Reading of monuments as expressions of their era

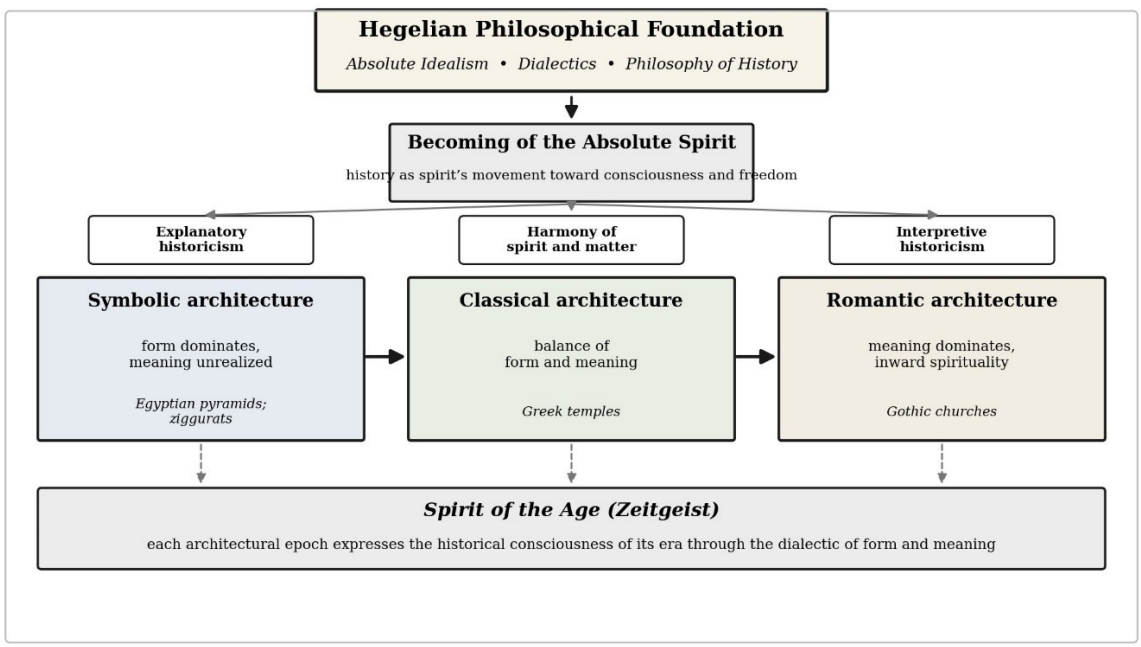


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of architecture in Hegelian dialectical historicism

Comparative Theories of David Kolb, Alan Colquhoun, and Raymond Quek

Architecture in the Tradition of David Kolb's Historical Thinking

David Kolb, a contemporary philosopher and Hegel scholar, considers Hegel a philosopher of Spirit and an idealist (Kolb, 2008). He argues that Hegel holds a kind of paternal right over many historicist currents and regards Hegel's philosophy as a method for elucidating the intellectual concerns of his time (Kolb, 1991). Regarding architecture, Kolb views architectural art, from Hegel's perspective, as one of the earliest arts, containing multiple points of departure (Kolb, 2007). According to Kolb, architecture is the art closest to raw, inanimate nature a form of art in flux that, through spiritual dynamism, reaches its perfection in the realms of poetry and music. This initial dynamism represents the Spirit's endeavor to achieve its totality in confrontation with itself; through art, the truth of the Spirit becomes a tangible manifestation in the material world. Although architecture occupies the lowest independent level in Hegel's classification and engages the material world at its highest in-

tensity, it possesses unique qualities in elevating the Spirit. Kolb emphasizes that the distinction of architecture from other arts lies in the permanence of its purposes in the sensible world. Unlike painting or poetry, meanings cannot be directly represented in architectural form, since architecture is not fundamentally an art of depiction, and practical constraints limit its forms. Kolb identifies architecture's resistance today to what he calls Hegelian "heavy" or monumental architecture as due to its unwillingness to exhibit mass, its flexibility, and the lightness of its volumes. Hegel's ideal architecture was weighty and monumental, akin to classical temples and Gothic structures; contemporary architecture, by contrast, downplays weight and material presence, relying on advanced and reflective materials. This modern approach, facilitated by scientific and technological advances including virtual reality, initiates a form of immaterial architecture based on image and meaning (Kant, 1991; Kilde, 2008). Overall, Kolb affirms the validity of Hegelian historicism for contemporary architecture on the basis of the spirit of the time and its requirements. Through his reflections on modern architecture integrated with current technologies, he seeks indications of architecture's alignment with Hegel's philosophy of the Spirit, employing a method that is interpretive–historical in nature. (Tab. 2; Fig. 2)

Table 2: Architecture in the Tradition of David Kolb's Historical Thinking

Theorist / concept	Philosophical basis	Conception of historicism	Implications for architecture	Examples
David Kolb: Hegelian reading of architecture	Hegelian idealism; philosophy of Spirit; interpretive historicism	Historicism as a method for elucidating the concerns of each era in light of the spirit of the time	Architecture as an art dependent on historical–cultural conditions	Interpretation of contemporary architecture via the spirit of the time
Architecture as the beginning of the arts	Philosophy of Spirit; becoming	History as a multi-origin, non-linear process	Architecture has multiple historical points of departure	Primitive and early structures
Limits of representation in architecture	Critique of representation	Interpretive historicism: meaning depends on material and historical conditions	Architecture is not the art of direct representation	Distinction of architecture from painting and poetry
Contemporary architecture and technology	Critique of modernity and technology	Critical historicism regarding the spirit of the present	Tendency to downplay mass; distance from monumental architecture	Transparent, lightweight, image-based architecture
Kolb's summary	Hegelian–interpretive historicism	Validity of Hegelian historicist principles for the present	Interpreting contemporary architecture in line with the philosophy of Spirit	Modern architecture integrated with technology

Architecture in the Tradition of Alan Colquhoun's Historical Thinking

Alan Colquhoun, a contemporary architect and critic, proposes a triadic framework for clarifying historicism in architecture. According to him, historicism manifests in three forms when confronting tradition (Jalali, 2021):

•Acceptance of the relativity of truths and the formulation of a historical theory. This approach holds that all social and cultural phenomena emerge from historical processes; it aims to explicate the spirit of the time. Colquhoun consid-

ers this type of historicism philosophical, deriving from the theory of the Absolute Spirit. Here periodization is not based on formal or stylistic aspects but is interpretive–historical, and works are analyzed through a synthesis of cultural, social, economic, political, and artistic data.

•Historicism as an approach. Here historicism seeks to explicate foundational traditions and fixed, universal ideals. In architecture, postmodern historicist architects sought to demonstrate the value of past forms through collage, eclectic imitation, stylistic adaptation, reconstruction, and revival. Colquhoun situates classical architecture within this approach: the spirit of a classical work is held to have been transmitted across generations through imitation, largely without alteration (Ehteshami, 2018).

•Historicism as an artistic praxis. Here forms and imagery drawn freely from various historical styles are subjected to evaluation and testing, and past models are used as templates for future prediction. This practice represents a fusion of eras without chronological precedence, emphasizing timelessness within temporal succession (Coetzee, 1999). (Tab. 3; Fig. 3)

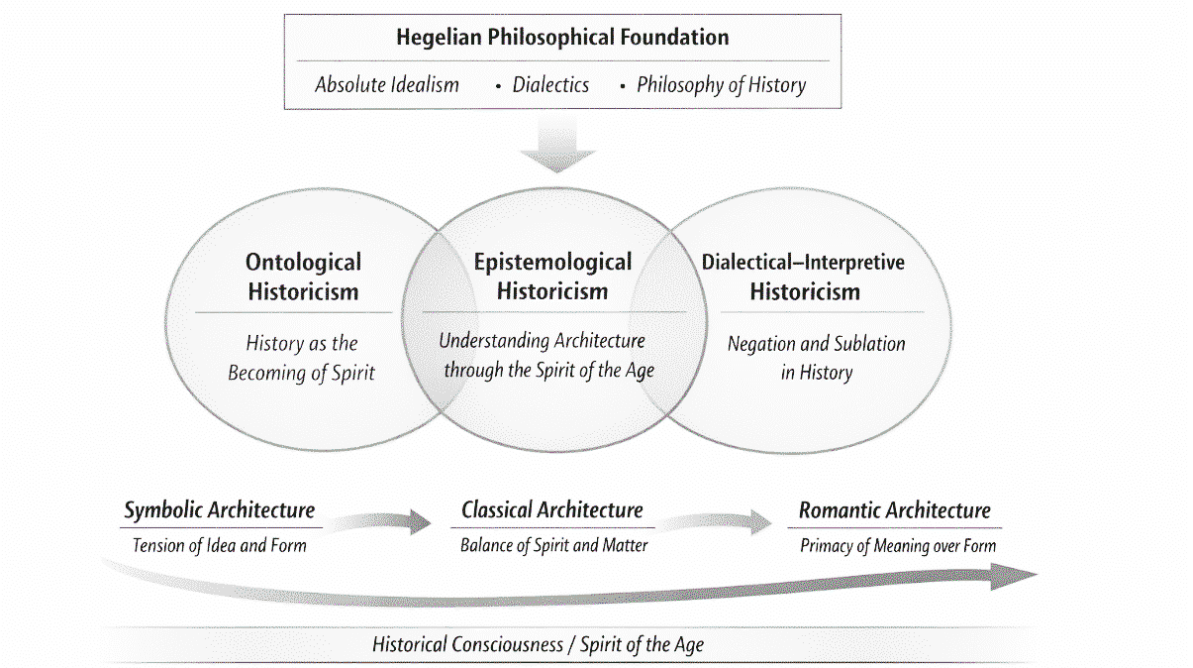
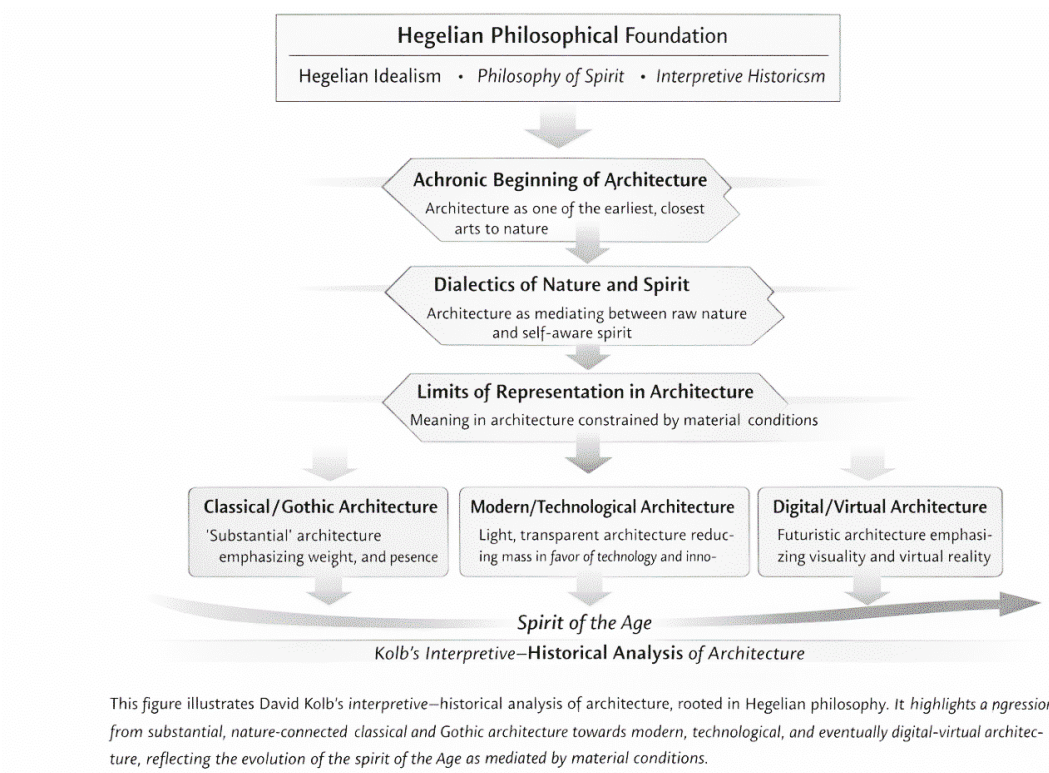


Figure X. Conceptual framework of Hegelian dialectical historicism and its manifestation in architecture

Table 3: Architecture in the Tradition of Alan Colquhoun's Historical Thinking

Theorist / concept	Philosophical basis	Conception of historicism	Implications for architecture	Examples
Alan Colquhoun: philosophical historicism	Philosophy of history; Absolute Spirit; relativity of truth	Historicism as the elucidation of phenomena via the spirit of the time	Analysis grounded in historical–cultural context, not merely form	Theoretical reading of architecture in its social conditions
Historicism as an approach	Historical essentialism	Eternity of classical art and architecture	Replication and imitation of historical forms and materials	Western classicism; historicist revival

Historicism as artistic praxis	Stylistic pluralism; non-linear history	Rejection of chronological precedence; simultaneity of eras	Freedom in using historical forms and imagery	Contemporary eclectic architecture
Colquhoun's summary	Critical–interpretive historicism	History as a field of interpretation, not imitation	Architecture as a critical interaction of past and present	Contemporary architecture with a historical–critical approach



This figure illustrates David Kolb's *interpretive*–historical analysis of architecture, rooted in Hegelian philosophy. It *highlights a ngression from substantial, nature-connected classical and Gothic architecture towards modern, technological, and eventually digital-virtual architecture, reflecting the evolution of the spirit of the Age as mediated by material conditions.*

Figure 3: Conceptual framework of historicism in architecture from Alan Colquhoun's perspective

Architecture in the Tradition of Raymond Quek's Historical Thinking

Raymond Quek, an architectural researcher, attributes three meanings to the term historicism (Quek, 2012): (a) a sense of nostalgia and reverence for a lost past, leading to the practical imitation of historical precedents; (b) a form of organizing and classifying the past into relative periods, each with a more or less consistent spirit of the time; and (c) historical patterns transformed into models for predicting the future. Whereas Colquhoun distinguished nostalgia from historical imitation, in Quek's account both fall under a single conception of historicism. For Quek, the rejection of history is observable in the work of modernist architects who claimed to eliminate historical precedent and tradition from art. (Tab. 4)

Table 4: Architecture in the Tradition of Raymond Quek's Historical Thinking

Theorist / concept	Philosophical basis	Conception of historicism	Implications for architecture	Examples

Raymond Quek	Architectural historiography; comparative studies; critique of historicism	Historicism as practical engagement with the past (nostalgia, organization, pattern)	Interpretation of architecture as a response to history rather than a philosophy of history	Analysis of architectural tendencies toward the past
Nostalgic historicism	Sense of loss and reverence for the past	History as a lost, desirable past	Practical imitation and formal reproduction	Neoclassical revival
Organizational historicism	Cognitive organization of history	History as a system of periods with a shared spirit of the time	Classification of styles and periods	Stylistic historiography of architecture
Pattern-based historicism	History as a source of patterns	The past as a template for prediction	Instrumental use of history to guide design	Adoption of historical typologies
Critique of modern architecture	Critique of the negation of history	Rejection of historicism in modern architecture	Conscious rupture from tradition	Early modern architecture

Historicism in the Pragmatist Reading of Architecture

Alongside the three theorists above, the pragmatist school offers a distinct reading of historicism that the printed version had largely omitted and that is restored here. Pragmatism does not treat history as a repository of fixed truths but as an accumulated fund of experience through which reason is tested and refined. On this view, a historical form is meaningful not because it embodies an eternal essence but because it has proven workable within a lived context, and it retains authority only so long as it continues to serve present purposes. Historicism, read pragmatically, therefore becomes a method for strengthening reason through history rather than for submitting reason to it. Applied to architecture, the pragmatist reading regards historical precedent as an instrument for solving present design problems: past types, plans, and details are consulted as tested hypotheses rather than venerated as models to be copied. Coetzee (1999) explicitly frames historicism as an aspect of a pragmatist theory of architecture, in which the past is mined for what continues to work and is revised or discarded where it does not. In this sense the pragmatist position converges with Kolb's interpretive historicism both treat meaning as contingent on context but it differs in emphasis: where Kolb seeks the trace of Spirit in contemporary form, pragmatism seeks demonstrable usefulness, evaluating historical reference by its consequences for present practice rather than by its fidelity to a philosophy of history.

Historicism in the Marxist Reading of Architecture

The Marxist reading, likewise restored here, represents the value-oriented pole of historicism most sharply. Marxism inherits Hegel's dialectic and his conviction that history is a law-governed process moving toward a determinate end, but it inverts Hegel's idealism: the motor of history is not the self-realization of Spirit but the material development of the forces and relations of production. Historicism, in this reading, becomes an ideological and teleological instrument a way of reading the past as a sequence of stages leading necessarily toward a projected socialist modernity. Applied to art and architecture, the Marxist reading treats the building as a socio-political and economic phenomenon rather than an autonomous aesthetic object. Architectural works are evaluated according to their alignment or opposition to ideology that is, according to their compatibility with the political framework and teleological aspirations of Marxist historical thinking. This is the point at which the value-oriented reading of historicism reveals both its power and its dan-

ger: it can illuminate the ideological content of built form, but, when absolutized, it licenses the subordination of architecture to a single political programme. It is precisely the revolutionary and value-laden applications of post-Hegelian historicism of which the Marxist and, in a very different register, the totalitarian appropriations are the clearest instances that drew the severe critique of anti-historicist thinkers, and that make the distinction between the explanatory and the value-oriented perspectives so consequential for architectural theory.

Comparative Synthesis

A comparative reading of the positions set out above shows that historicism in architecture originates in a holistic philosophical foundation in the Hegelian system and, in contemporary readings, evolves into an interpretive, critical, and multi-layered approach. In Hegel's thought, history is not merely a container of events but the process of the Absolute Spirit becoming conscious and attaining freedom; architecture, as the primordial art, holds a fundamental position in the first embodiment of the relationship between spirit and matter. This elevates historicism to an explanatory–philosophical level, in which architecture is understood through the dialectical relationship of form and content rather than through style. Building on this foundation, Kolb's interpretation reinterprets Hegelian historicism within lived experience and contemporary conditions, shifting from a purely explanatory understanding to an interpretive–analytical one. Colquhoun's thought represents a more critical, multi-layered engagement: by distinguishing philosophical historicism, historicism as an approach, and historicism as praxis, he shows that history in architecture is a field for negotiating tensions between tradition, form, and ideology. Quek's perspective reflects a more limited engagement, in which history is primarily a source of patterns, nostalgia, or classification, and architecture is analyzed as a formal reaction to the past. The pragmatist and Marxist readings extend this spectrum in two directions: pragmatism toward the instrumental testing of historical experience against present use, and Marxism toward the ideological evaluation of built form against a projected political end. (Tab. 5; Fig. 4)

Table 5: Comparative analysis of historicism in architecture: the Hegelian tradition and its contemporary and value-oriented interpretations

Theorist / school	Philosophical basis	Conception of history / historicism	Perspective	Implications for architectural interpretation
Hegel	Absolute idealism; dialectics	History as the becoming of Absolute Spirit	Explanatory	Architecture as the historical embodiment of spirit in matter
David Kolb	Philosophy of Spirit; hermeneutics	Historicism as interpretation of reason and experience	Explanatory → interpretive	Architecture as a domain for reading and reinterpreting meaning
Alan Colquhoun	Philosophy of history; critique of style	History as a field of interpretation, not imitation	Critical–interpretive	Architecture as a critical negotiation of tradition, form, and ideology
Raymond Quek	Architectural historiography	History as patterns, nostalgia, or classification	Descriptive	Architecture as a formal reaction to the past
Pragmatism	Instrumental theory of knowledge	History as tested experience for strengthening reason	Explanatory (instrumental)	Historical precedent as a tested resource for present design

Marxism	Dialectical and historical materialism	History as a law-governed process toward socialist modernity	Value-oriented (ideological)	Architecture as a socio-political phenomenon judged against ideology

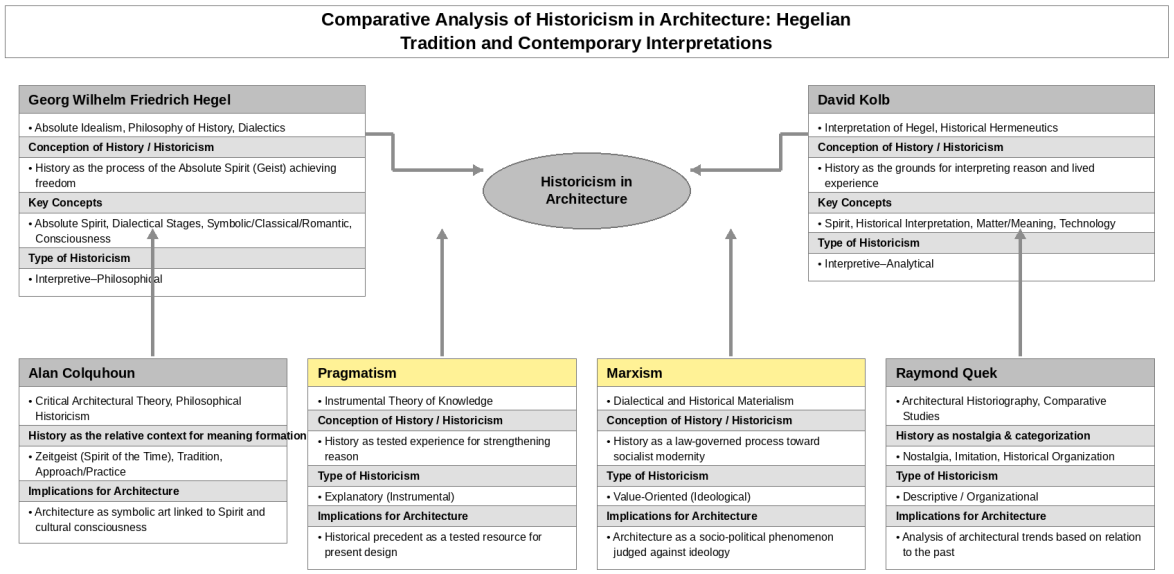


Figure 4: Conceptual framework of comparative readings of historicism in architecture, from Hegelian philosophy to contemporary and value-oriented interpretations

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

This study explicated the concept of historicism in architecture through the perspectives of David Kolb, Alan Colquhoun, and Raymond Quek, together with the pragmatist and Marxist schools, examined from both explanatory and value-oriented standpoints. Kolb, offering a fresh reading of the concept of Spirit in Hegel's system, interprets architecture as a manifestation of the evolutionary cycle of the Spirit, drawing on both historical and contemporary examples, including emerging technologies such as virtual reality. Colquhoun elaborates historicism from the perspectives of the spirit of the age, of historicism as an approach, and of historicism as an artistic praxis. Quek explains it in terms of nostalgia, the organization of the past, and patterns for predicting the future. The pragmatists, inclined toward Hegel's system, emphasize historicism as a method for enhancing reason through history and regard architectural historicism as a dimension of pragmatism. The Marxists, by contrast, sought to realize their socialist modernity through an ideological reading of Hegelian historicism, evaluating architecture as a socio-political and economic phenomenon according to its alignment with ideology. On this basis, the authentic foundation of historicism in architecture is to be sought in the movement of the Spirit within Hegel's system the Absolute Spirit, which embodies the collective will of humanity and guides history toward freedom. Historicism can accordingly be conceived as a method for explaining and analyzing events and phenomena within historical contexts while taking account of the imperatives of the spirit of the age. From this vantage point, ideological and value-oriented readings of architecture by governing powers have recurred throughout history because of the symbolic and communicative nature of the built environment; and the concept of the progressive development of rationality, which is foundational to Hegelian

philosophy, means that even power-oriented and value-laden systems can be read as manifestations of the Absolute Spirit and analyzed as such. It can therefore be concluded that, although some scholars regard historicism as operating within two distinct dimensions the explanatory and the value-oriented an epistemological interaction between these two dimensions can be identified in architecture. From a meta-theoretical perspective, architectural works arising from ideological and value-oriented imperatives can themselves be examined under the explanatory–analytical lens to yield meaningful insight. Works inspired by totalitarian principles, or emerging from the value-laden frameworks of ruling powers, as well as ephemeral national tastes for revivalist or antiquarian styles, can be studied longitudinally through an explanatory–analytical approach. Such an approach makes it possible to present a cognitive model of the determinants imposed by the spirit of the age and of the constructive factors arising from the historical context of these works. In this way the two perspectives are not mutually exclusive: the value-oriented production of architecture becomes, in turn, an object of explanatory analysis, and it is in this reciprocal relationship rather than in the dominance of either pole that the analytical value of historicism for architectural theory is fully realized.

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE
Davari,Z and Soroush,M . (2026). Proposing a Conceptual Explanation of "Historicism" in Architecture from Two Distinct Perspectives: Explanatory and Evaluative. (e735352). International Journal of Urban Management and Energy Sustainability, (), e735352
DOI: 10.22034/ijumes.2026.2078958.1349