

LESSONS OF HISTORY AND SEARCH FOR “NEW GLOBAL STYLE” IN ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract

The diversity of theoretical concepts in the modern architecture has led to the situation that in early 21st century one of the trends of the modern architectural theory is the search for the ways of creating a *New Global Style*. A similar situation was observed in the middle of the 19th century, when classicism was replaced by numerous *neo-styles*; and the main problem of the architectural thought was a search for the style of the epoch. The paper deals with the analysis of “lessons of history”.

Keywords

Architectural theory, style of the epoch, global style

1. Introduction

The newest theoretical concepts are reflecting the attempts to support individual trends and directions of modern architecture with some philosophical justification; or represent the ideas of architects-innovators. The diversity of these concepts has led to the fact that at the turn of the 20th-21st centuries, we see increasing attempts to formulate the concept of the “New Global Style”. A similar situation was observed in the middle of the 19th century, when the “search for the style of the epoch” was the main focus of the architectural theory. These analogies confirm the vitality of the aphorism of the German researchers M. Brix and M. Steinhäuser that “the history only is contemporary” and is able to give answers to many pressing questions (Brix M., 1978). The paper deals with the analysis of the history of the “search for a new style”.

2.1. Discussion about “new style of the epoch” in 1830–1850s

In late 1840s, Classicism turned into one of *neo-styles*. It was not only squeezed out by mediaevalist and “national” directions, but by that period, the collapse of its artistic system was over. In 1842, the English architect T. L. Donaldson declared, by summing up “the style development of the romantic architecture,” the then established “equivalence” of styles, and stressed that “there is no longer any single dominant style; we are now straying within a maze of experiments” (Kazhar, 2000, p. 217).

By the middle of the 19th century, a lot of currents evolved in architecture, which may be roughly placed between two poles. At one of them, architects were searching for the *architecture of constructive truth* and of *truthful use of material* (Fig.1). The opposite pole hosted the theory of neo-styles, dominated by a search for some symbolic meaning of individual forms. By applying *styles of the past*, architects also restored the ideas related thereto (Fig.2).

“They say that everything has been invented; and the times of openings are over. The only thing remaining for the art is to choose and imitate,” J. Savage wrote in “Overview of Styles in Architecture” in 1836. “Who said that architects of our time are deprived of new opportunities? Who said that they won’t be able to create an authentic architectural style out of a thousand different types of ... Egyptian, classical, Gothic, or any other motives...” A. Bartholomew objected in his article “Specification of Practical Architecture” (1846) (Kazhar, 2000, p. 217). The decade that stretches between these two statements marked a transition to a new problem of the architectural theory – the search for the ways of creating a *new style of the epoch*. After studying historical styles, theorists, set the task to define some general criterion of architecture, which could create some *integrated style*.

The discussion about the new style was launched by the work of the German theorist H. Hübsch “In What Style Should we build?” (1828) (Fig.3.). The very emergence of the *discussion about a new style*

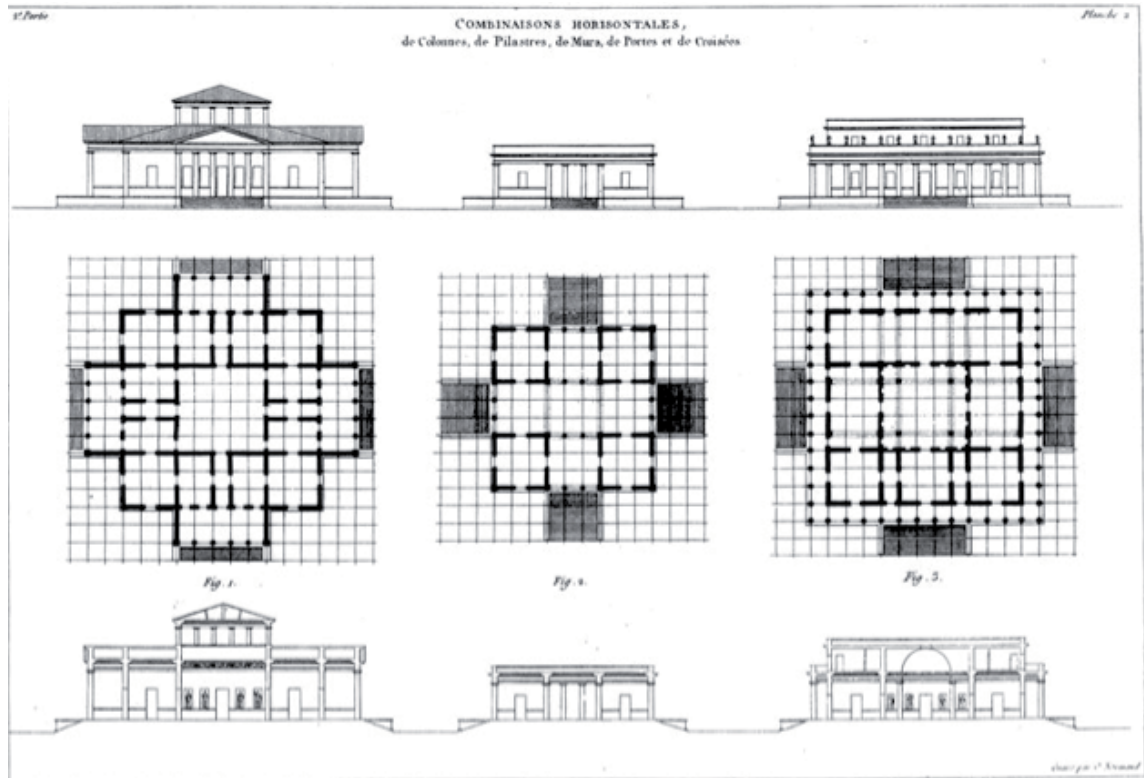


Fig.1. Grid system as the basis of “sustainable architecture”, J. N. L. Durand, Plate from *et parallèle des édifices de tout genre, anciens et modernes : remarquables par leur beauté, par leur grandeur, ou par leur singularité, et dessinés sur une même échelle* by J.N.L. Durand. pub. D. Avanzo; (1830?)

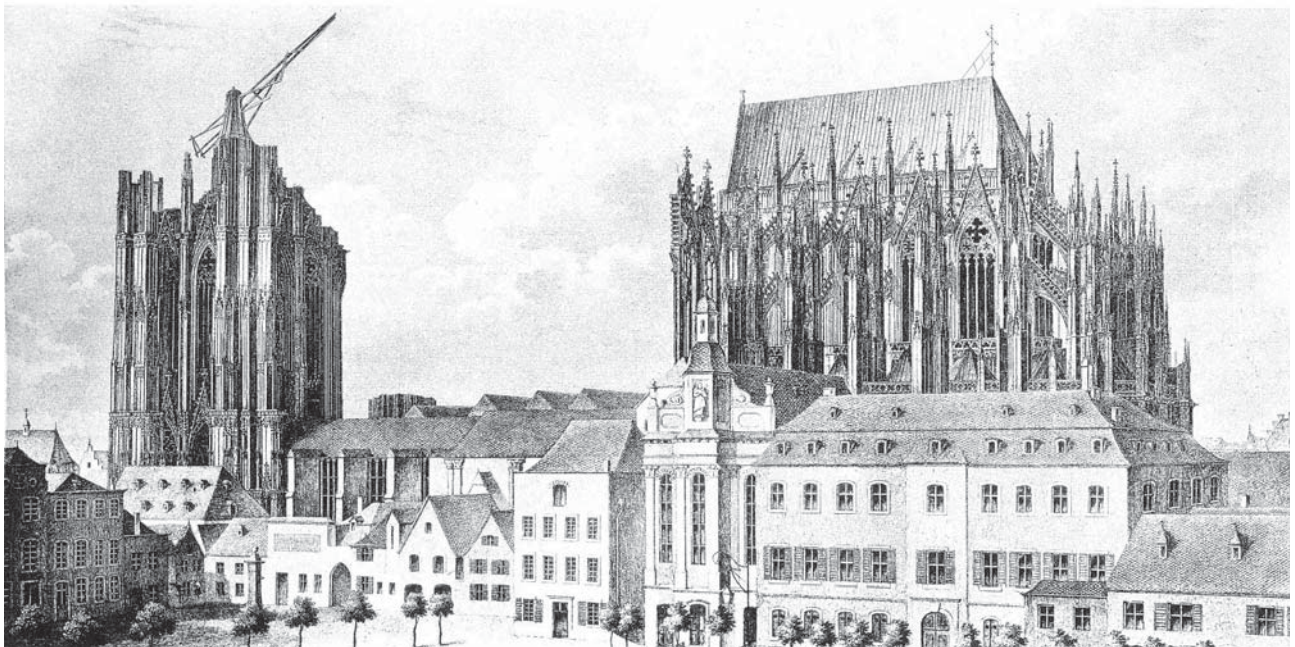


Fig.2. Completion of the Cologne Cathedral - an expression of the idea of building of the “Fatherland altar” (1248, 1842–1880)

was an indicator of the absence of a clear definition thereof. Most European researchers realized the *multiplicity* of the then concept of style. According to French theorists, the range of definitions spread between the poles of the *artist’s style* and the *style of the epoch*. E. E. Viollet-le-Duc, for example, distinguished among *the style of the epoch* and

the style of arts. He also highlighted the notions: *the relative style* (dependent on the nature of the subject) and *the absolute style* (defined by the dominant aesthetic concept) (P. Krakowski, 1978, p. 41–42). *The dual nature* of the style of the 19th century (its scientific and artistic aspects), or, rather, the constructive basis and the method of aesthetic

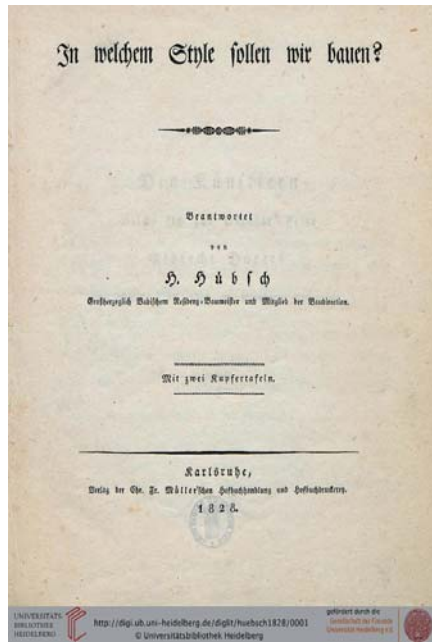
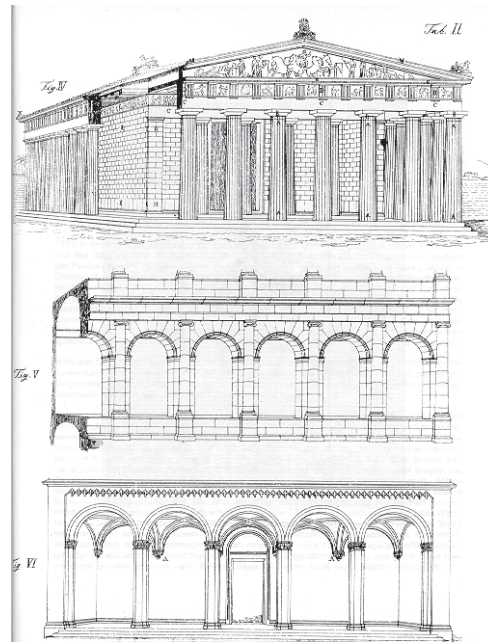


Fig.3. H. Hübsch “In what style should we build?”



impact, was emphasized by S. Dali (P. Krakowski, 1978, p. 37).

The German theorist G. Semper defined the style as “the highest level of artistic embodiment of the main idea of a piece of art, with account of all the internal and external factors that affect it.” H. Hübsch wrote that “the style should be understood as something universal that fits to all the buildings of a certain nation” (Kazhar, 2000, p. 221). The *new style of the epoch* had to have the *dignity and greatness, to be economical*, and have *the nature of a monument of arts*. The French master E. E. Viollet-le-Duc claimed that “a style is an expression of the ideal, which rests on certain rules” (Kazhar, 2000, p. 223).

All the architects, who proclaimed the idea of synthesis of historical and contemporary forms, in their practice used the *method of eclecticism*. It was based on a free use of the whole architectural

heritage, and was considered to be the main instrument for creating a new style.

The masters, who used the method of eclecticism, were opposed by a group of theorists-rationalists, who believed *the proper use* of material and design, and the account of utilitarian purpose of the building to be the main aspects in creating a new style (Fig.4.).

The formation of the rationalistic trend reflected the important contradictions of the architectural theory of the 19th century. On the one hand, we saw architects’ desire to preserve the traditional forms; on the other hand, they wanted to use modern technical achievements, which inevitably led to a departure outside traditional frameworks. This situation allowed the Swiss researcher W. Hermann to state in 1932 that “never in the 19th century, architecture in its buildings and aspirations was closer to the

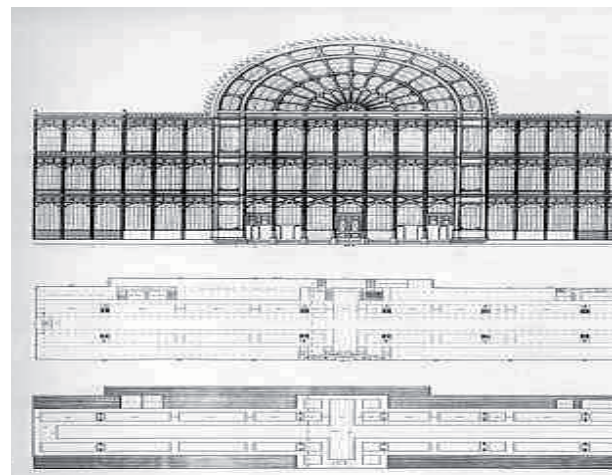
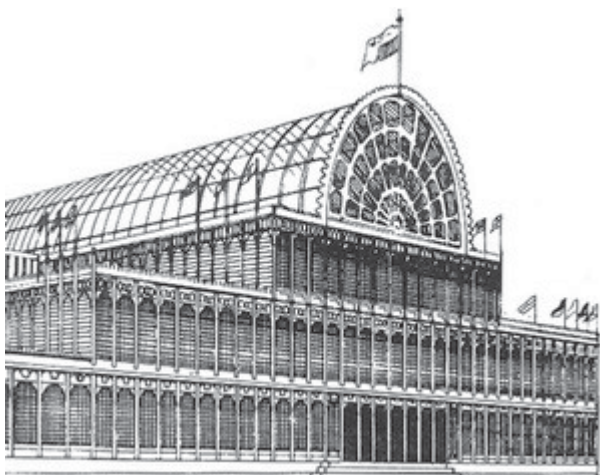


Fig.4. Joseph Paxton, The Crystal Palace in London, England, to house the Great Exhibition of 1851

modernity than in the decade from 1830 to 1840” (W. Hermann, 1977).

Theorists of the rationalist direction were opposed by the architects, for whom the *spiritual* and ideological-aesthetical aspects of style were the main points. They tried to find *some ideal period* in history and solve their contemporary problems through the use of the creative experience of that period (Fig.5.).

The main dispute was about the choice of the epoch to imitate. Most theorists thought that the right choice of the historical prototype will solve the problem. For example, G. Palm in his article “Style Distribution Among Individual Types of Buildings” (1845) tried to select *an appropriate style* for each type of buildings (Kazhar, 2000, p. 225).

The architectural theory of the 19th century was influenced by the progress of sciences, history and studies of the nature. The leading German theorist G. Semper defined the results of the style search from the standpoint of the “empirical theory of style.” He categorized the debaters into three “schools” (“purists”, “materialists” and “historians”). Similar to Semper, in 1863, S. Dali also identified three schools – the “historical”, “eclectic” and “organic” ones.

The climax of the search for a new style was the contest announced by the Bavarian King Maximilian II in 1850. The programme of the contest closely tied architectural issues with public and social problems. The point was in the “architectural mission of the time” and in the role of architecture in “combining all the life interrelations and vital forces in the interests of the nation.” The terms of the contest stated that the time was characterized by the development of the scientific thought and the ongoing long discussion about a possibility of creating a new architectural

style. There was a need to change the situation of the first half of the century, when architecture “fluctuated between classicism and romanticism,” while new forms evolved on the basis of turning to the past. Therefore, “there was an internal need to create new not only on the basis of borrowing the forms or fragments of the past, but to create something really new” (Kazhar, 2000, p. 229).

The programme oriented to creating something *new* was eclectic by itself: the style intended “to express the nature of the time” was to appear on the basis of historical prototypes. Each participant of the contest was allowed to “enjoy complete freedom with different architectural styles and their ornamentation for the expedient solution of the assigned tasks” (H. W. Krufft, p. 354). The search for the “new style”, combining the “appropriate dignity and greatness”, “practical expediency” and “economic efficiency” was to be completed with the creation of “a characteristic monument of arts and education.” Although they hoped to get an “original, beautiful and organic whole”, all the presented projects were pronounced examples of eclecticism (Kazhar, 2000, p. 229).

The contest outcomes were summed up by G. Semper: “Thus, at the highest royal will and order, in Munich, the Maximilian style appeared, which is based on the following idea: our culture is composed of elements of all previous cultures. Therefore, our modern architectural style should be a mixture of styles of all times and nations” (M. Brix, 1978, p. 197) (Fig.6.).

Semper saw a reason for the failure to create a uniform style of the epoch in the development of sciences and industry, which provided new materials at the disposal of architects. As to these materials, architects “firstly do not know how to use them; and,



Fig.5. Heinrich Hubsch. Search for a national style, Theatre of Karlsruhe

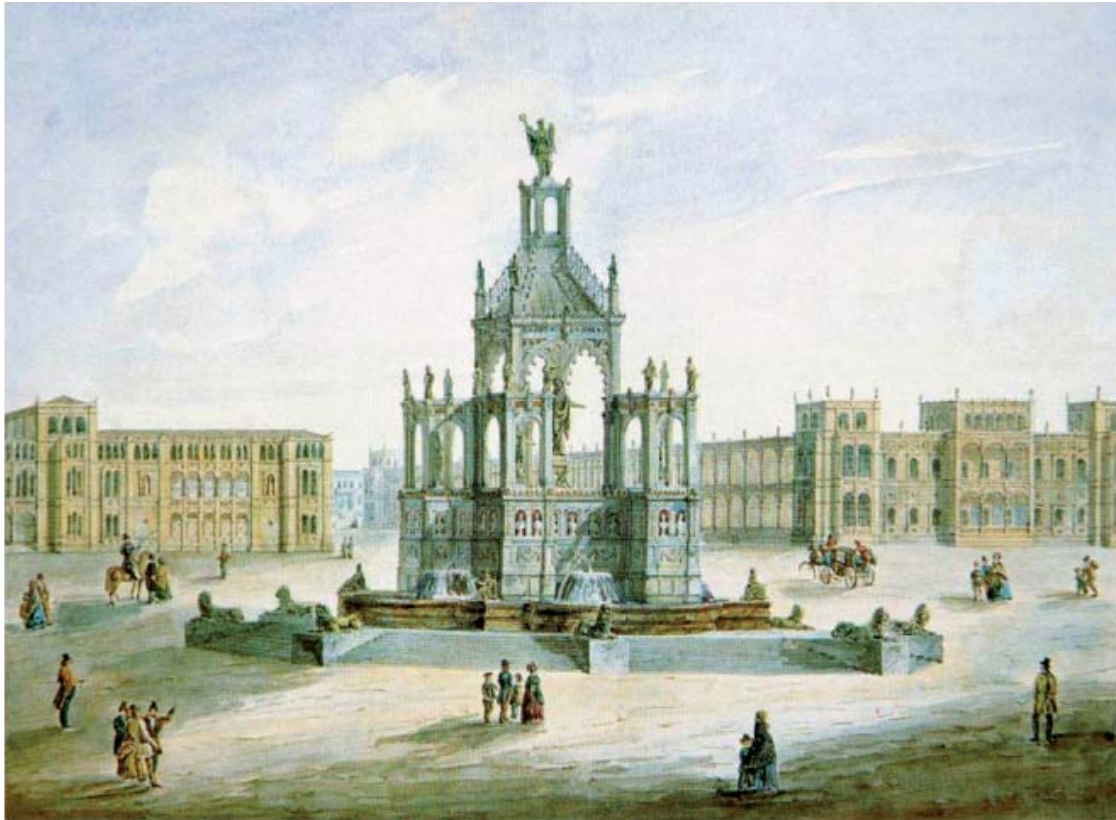


Fig.6. August Voit, Project of a Square in Munich, example of “Maximilianstil”, 1850

secondly, there are no social conditions,” which could contribute to rapid development of “new skills”. He saw another reason in architect’s dependence on the taste of the customer. He was dissatisfied with the situation, where a master had to deal primarily not with artistic tasks, but think about the way of expressing the “customer’s property status and social position.” The free artistic expression was also restricted by the new market relations, under which the “high art, too, entered the market” (Kazhar, 2000, p. 226). In the opinion of the theorist, an important reason for the decline of the art was also in “the absence of essential social ideas.” G. Semper defined the situation in the architecture of his time as “a state between destruction of the old and creation of the new” (Kazhar, 2000, p. 230).

The problems raised during the discussion on the new style of the epoch were not solved in the 19th century. The problem of style retained its relevance for the architectural theory in the decades that followed. In late 19th-the first third of the 20th centuries, the idea of the revival of “grand style” based on “eternal laws of creativity” was analyzed in the works by H. Wölfflin, K. Fidler, H. von Marées, A. Hildebrand and others.

2.2. Search for “New Global Style” of the 21st century

Today, we see a revival of the interest in the style of architecture. The topic is covered in the works by

A. I. Dobritsina, A. V. Ryabushin, A. G. Rappoport and others. S. O. Chan-Magomedov suggested considering the history of architecture as a dialogue of international “super-styles”: classicism (based on the order architecture) and modernism (S. Chan-Magomedov, 2007). Nowadays, at the Ural State Academy of Architecture and Arts, L. P. Cholodova and her pupils attempt to identify the “fundamentals for the formation of the third global style, after classicism and modernism” and formulate the concept of the *super-style* of the new millennium, “which could consolidate and explain the latest global trends in architecture” (L. P. Cholodova, 2010).

Among foreign studies of recent decades, we can note the publications by U. O. Attoe, H. P. Bont, M. Vance, P. Eisenman, M. Tafuri and others.

In 2008, in London, Patrick Schumacher, published an article “Parametricism – A New Global Style for Architecture and Urban Design”¹. Given the today’s absence of succession and a break of the links of modern architecture with its historical heritage, Schumacher suggested understanding the architectural style as a scientific-research programme and a paradigm.

¹ At the 11th Architectural Biennale in Venice (2008), the article was called the “Manifesto of Parametricism”. The author is engaged – for the second decade already – in developing his theory of “parametric architecture”, based on several sciences: mathematics, biology, computer-based simulation and architectural programming.

Having highlighted *epochal* and *transient styles* in the history of architecture, Schumacher has introduced a concept of *auxiliary styles*, both historical and contemporary. For example, in modernism, we can distinguish functionalism, rationalism, structuralism, brutalism, metabolism and high-tech. All these intermediate styles of modernism have clearly followed the principles of functional designing: from the general to the particular. The postmodernism and deconstructivism have addressed historical styles in a new form by means of irony and collage (Fig.7).

The modern style of parametricism, on the one hand, is based on scientific methods and digital technologies; but, on the other hand, it creates new aesthetic criteria for the development of the newest system of form-shaping. Within this style, a number of *auxiliary styles* are developing: digital Baroque; digital morphogenesis; parametric urbanism, morpho-



Fig.7. M2 building in Tokyo (architect K. Kuma, 1991)

ecological designing and parametric ornamenting. Each of these auxiliary styles is developing its own architectural aesthetics, but they are all focused on the creation of new compositions from dynamically changeable geometric objects (Fig.8)

Patrick Schumacher has noted that “although parametricism is rooted in digital animation techniques of the mid-1990s, it has fully manifested itself only in recent years with the development of advanced parametric designing systems. Now, parametricism has become a dominant and the *only style in the avant-garde practice*” (highlighted by NK). The author has emphasized that the new style “succeeds modernism as a new long wave of systemic innovations” and “terminates ... the transitional period of uncertainty, born by the crisis of modernism and notable by some brief episodes, including postmodernism, deconstructivism and minimalism” (P. Schumacher, 2008). According to Schumacher, parametricism “demands immensity in all areas – from architecture and interior design to large-scale urban planning” (Fig.9). This style precondition defines its “programmatic complexity” and its ability to adapt to the architecture and urbanism of the new “socio-economic era of post-Fordism” and “mass society” (P. Schumacher, 2008).

For Schumacher, a change of style means the achievement of a new level of development, a progress of architecture, and a process, in which the evolutionary development within the style is followed by a revolutionary leap and advent of a new style. For example, the crisis and decline of modernism led to the *current eclecticism*, which should be replaced by the *New Style*. The time will show whether it will be created, unlike the efforts of masters of the 19th century.



Fig.8. Galaxy Soho, Beijing, China. Zaha Hadid Architects, 2012

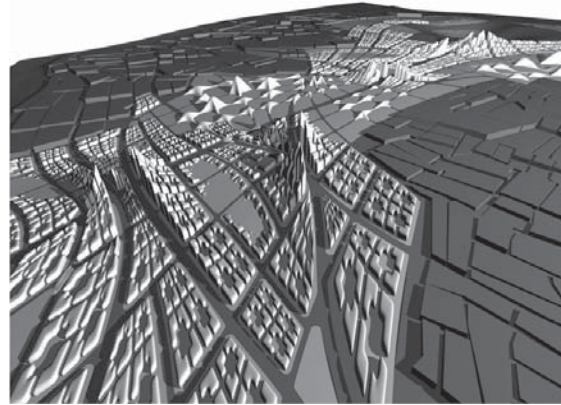
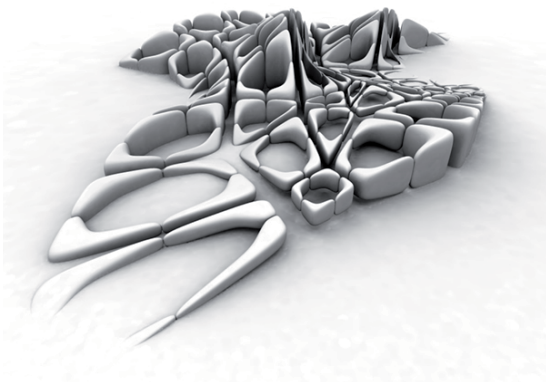


Fig.9. Zaha Hadid Architects, Kartal-Pendik Masterplan, Istanbul, Turkey, 2006

3. Conclusions

As a result of a critical rethinking of the fundamental concepts of the architectural knowledge of the second half of the 20th-start of the 21st century, we can conclude that the formation of the modern creative thought is accompanied by a revision of the history of architecture and a change in evaluating its current status through the prism of today's ideas about the spatial environment. The strategy and tactics for solving the problems of modern urbanism depend on the depth of understanding the relationships of architecture with the human world

in all their complexities and diversities. Modern theorists have suggested that the *New Global Style* can be created through the synthesis of historical traditions with modern achievements of science and technology. A significant help in addressing the problem may be provided by “lessons of history”, in particular, the history of searching for the style of the epoch, which defined the content of the architectural thought of the 19th century.

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