

## HYBRID HERITAGE(S)/

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**Abstract.** The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) is changing design processes, enabling the creation of unprecedented forms that challenge traditional aesthetics. However, this pursuit of defamiliarization through AI-driven innovation raises critical concerns about the psychological well-being of users and the erosion of cultural identity. This paper addresses the research gap concerning the balance between technological advancement and cultural familiarity in architecture. By exploring historical and contemporary examples of architectural hybridity, the paper proposes a systematic methodology for developing hybrid architectural aesthetics that harmonize innovation with cultural resonance. Through an interdisciplinary approach incorporating neuroscience, cultural theory, and architectural practice, the study underscores the imperative of integrating AI technologies ethically and sustainably to foster environments that are both intellectually stimulating and emotionally comforting.

**Introduction.** Architecture today is increasingly influenced by advanced computational technologies and the complexities of cultural identity in a globalized world. The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into architectural design processes marks a significant shift, positioning machines as collaborators rather than mere tools. AI has evolved from its traditional role to become an independent agent capable of generating innovative forms that challenge established conventions [1].

This technological evolution connects with Viktor Shklovsky’s concept of *ostranenie*, or defamiliarization, a principle rooted in early 20th-century literary theory. Shklovsky [2] argued that art’s transformative power lies in making the familiar appear strange, thereby rejuvenating our perception. In contemporary architecture, this idea has been adopted as a framework for innovation, encouraging designs that challenge conventional expectations and promote new ways of engaging with spaces.

However, the quest for aesthetic disruption raises significant concerns about the psychological and social impacts of defamiliarized environments. Neuroscientific research highlights the importance of familiarity in enhancing cognitive processing, reducing mental strain, and fostering emotional well-being [3]. On the other hand, environments characterized by unfamiliarity or estrangement have been associated with increased stress, discomfort, and anxiety, potentially undermining the human-centered goals of architectural practice. Prolonged exposure to such environments may alienate inhabitants, challenging the fundamental purpose of architecture as a discipline that supports human flourishing [4].

The tension between the avant-garde aims of defamiliarization and the fundamental human need for cultural familiarity raises important questions about the ethical and psychological aspects of architectural innovation. How can architects address this dual challenge, especially in a globalized

world marked by hybrid cultural identities? Homi Bhabha’s concept of the “Third Space” [5] emphasizes the fluid and negotiated nature of identity in contemporary societies, where diverse influences come together to create complex cultural hybrids. This reality calls for a shift in architectural practice towards hybrid approaches that effectively balance the competing demands of familiarity and innovation.

To address these tensions, this paper presents a systematic methodology for developing hybrid architectural aesthetics. The first step focuses on understanding the cognitive and cultural frameworks through which users perceive and experience architectural spaces. The second step involves analyzing the physical, cultural, and environmental factors that shape the site, including historical influences and contemporary cultural dynamics. Finally, the process synthesizes insights from these stages to create architectural models that balance tradition and innovation. By exploring the potential of hybrid architectures, this paper provides a framework for reconciling the demands of innovation with the cultural and psychological needs of human experience. This reconciliation positions architecture as a medium through which the complexities of identity, memory, and technological progress can be harmonized.

Building upon these considerations, this paper posits that ‘architectural hybridity’ emerges from a continuum wherein historical precedents and AI-driven methodologies converge. By drawing on layered cross-cultural examples—such as Gandhāra and Mudéjar—and situating them within contemporary design contexts, hybridity is understood as a dynamic negotiation between tradition and innovation. In this view, AI tools function not as mere novelties but as contemporary agents that extend a long lineage of cultural exchange and adaptation. Consequently, the resulting hybrid architectures are neither mere stylistic collages nor purely technological artifacts, but rather fluid constructs that reconcile evolving forms and material capabilities with the enduring imprint of cultural memory and local identity.

**A Critical View of Defamiliarization.** The integration of AI in architecture has enabled the creation of forms that challenge traditional aesthetic and functional norms. AI’s ability to process large datasets, simulate material behaviors, and optimize complex geometries has positioned it as a transformative force in design. Lev Manovich [6] observes that AI has evolved from being a supportive tool to becoming an autonomous agent in cultural production, capable of generating designs that broaden the boundaries of architectural imagination. This evolution is vividly illustrated in projects such as the ICD/ITKE Research Pavilion, where robotic filament winding techniques inspired by biological exoskeletons resulted in a structure that is both materially efficient and visually striking [7]. Similarly, Michael Hansmeyer’s concept of the “unimaginable artifact” encapsulates the potential of AI to create forms that defy conventional expectations [8].

A central theme in the discussion of AI aesthetics is the concept of defamiliarization. In architecture, this process involves using computational tools to produce forms that disrupt standard spatial and aesthetic expectations. Designers like Matias del Campo have employed neural networks and machine learning algorithms to create what he describes as “estranged

objects”—architectural forms that challenge perceptual norms and encourage new ways of interacting with space [9]. Such designs resonate with Shklovsky’s theory of *ostranenie*, which posits that art’s purpose is to estrange the ordinary, thereby renewing perception [10].

While defamiliarization can stimulate intellectual and sensory engagement, its psychological ramifications are concerning. Studies in neuroaesthetics reveal that defamiliarized forms activate brain regions associated with emotional processing, often leading to feelings of stress, discomfort, or unease [11]. Mild stressors can enhance resilience—a concept known as *hormesis*—but chronic exposure to unfamiliar and alienating environments can lead to adverse psychological outcomes, including heightened anxiety and cognitive strain [12].

This raises ethical questions regarding the purpose of design. Alison Hills and Alexander Bird warn that creativity devoid of value risks producing innovations that alienate rather than enrich [13]. In architecture, where the well-being of inhabitants is paramount, it is crucial to distinguish between meaningful innovation and novelty for its own sake. Furthermore, the relentless pursuit of aesthetic “progress” aligns with accelerationism, which suggests that the rapid advancement of technology inevitably results in a rupture with traditional human experiences and values [14]. While accelerationism advocates for the speed of technological and cultural change, it often overlooks the potential consequences on human experience and social cohesion.

Thus, while AI-driven defamiliarization broadens the possibilities of architectural form, it also presents significant challenges. The risk that these designs could become disconnected from cultural and social contexts necessitates a reevaluation of architectural priorities. There is an urgent need to balance innovation with cultural relevance, ensuring that architecture remains a medium that supports human experience rather than undermines it. Tension between the *avant-garde* aim of defamiliarization and the fundamental human need for cultural familiarity raises important questions about the ethical and psychological aspects of architectural innovation. How can architects address this dual challenge, especially in a globalized world marked by hybrid cultural identities?

**Cultural Familiarity in Architectural Design.** Cultural familiarity plays a crucial role in how people engage with architectural spaces, influencing their perceptions, navigation, and emotional responses to these environments. This familiarity goes beyond aesthetic preferences; it is deeply rooted in cognitive processes, emotional well-being, and social dynamics. Neuroscientific research shows compelling evidence of the psychological and physiological benefits of culturally familiar environments, highlighting their ability to enhance cognitive efficiency, reduce stress, and foster a sense of belonging. Studies in neuroarchitecture have revealed that environments that align with individuals’ cultural backgrounds facilitate better cognitive processing, as they match pre-existing cognitive schemas. For instance, Mecklinger et al. found that participants exposed to architectural forms reflective of their cultural heritage exhibited reduced activation in the N350 event-related potential (ERP) component. This indicates that familiar stimuli require less cognitive effort to process [15]. This finding

aligns with the hedonic fluency hypothesis, which asserts that stimuli that are processed easily are perceived as more enjoyable [16]. Consequently, familiarity enhances aesthetic appreciation by lowering cognitive load, allowing individuals to interact with architectural spaces in a more intuitive and fulfilling way.

However, the concept of cultural familiarity becomes increasingly complex in a globalized world characterized by hybrid identities and intersecting cultural influences. Traditional architectural design approaches, which often emphasize singular representations of cultural heritage, risk oversimplifying the diverse and dynamic nature of contemporary identities. The concept of the “Third Space” provides a critical framework for understanding cultural hybridity, emphasizing that identity is negotiated within a fluid space where various cultural influences intersect. This perspective challenges architects to move beyond static interpretations of heritage and engage with the complexities of hybrid cultural contexts.

Cross-cultural research illustrates that different cultures perceive architecture in unique ways. Richard Nisbett argues that cognitive styles are profoundly influenced by cultural backgrounds, with Western thought being analytical and object-focused, while Eastern thought is holistic and context-sensitive [17]. Luo, Zhu, and Han support this view, demonstrating that cultural experiences are deeply embedded in the brain’s network structure. Their study reveals that individuals from Western backgrounds show stronger connectivity in brain regions related to self-referential processing, whereas participants from Eastern backgrounds exhibit heightened connectivity in areas associated with socio-emotional processing [18].

In this context, the fragmentation of identities presents significant challenges for architects. The rise of hybrid identities reflects a complex interplay of global and local influences, historical legacies, and socio-political contexts [19]. As Jan Nederveen Pieterse notes, cultural hybridization is accelerated by contemporary globalization, which challenges traditional notions of cultural dominance and opens new avenues for creativity and innovation [20].

To effectively incorporate cultural familiarity into architectural design, a nuanced understanding of identity, context, and perception is essential. Architects must draw from insights in neuroscience, anthropology, and cultural theory to create spaces that resonate with diverse user groups and address the psychological and emotional aspects of design. This approach not only enhances the relevance and accessibility of architecture but also strengthens its role as a medium for fostering cultural continuity and social cohesion.

**Hybrid Architectures.** The concept of cultural hybridity in architecture is not a recent development. Throughout history, cultural exchanges and interactions have led to the creation of architectural forms that embody a fusion of diverse traditions. These historical examples provide valuable insights into how hybridity can enrich architectural practice and reflect complex cultural identities.

One of the earliest and most notable examples of architectural hybridity is the Buddhist architecture of Gandhāra. Located at the crossroads of ancient trade routes, Gandhāra became a melting pot of Hellenistic,

Persian, and Indian influences. The region's stupas and monasteries are characterized by a unique blend of Greco-Roman artistic techniques and Buddhist iconography. For example, the drapery and anatomical precision of Gandhāran sculptures reflect Hellenistic artistic traditions, while their spiritual themes and symbolism remain deeply rooted in Indian Buddhism [21]. This synthesis of artistic and architectural elements illustrates how hybridity can create forms that are both innovative and culturally resonant.

Another compelling example of hybridity is the Mudéjar architectural style that emerged in medieval Spain, during the coexistence of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities. Mudéjar architecture features the integration of Islamic decorative motifs, such as intricate geometric patterns and calligraphy, with Gothic and Romanesque structural forms. This style reflects the dynamic cultural interactions of the period, where Islamic artisans adapted their techniques to fit within Christian architectural frameworks, resulting in a unique and enduring aesthetic. Ila Nicole Sheren describes Mudéjar as “an allegory of cultural negotiation,” where architecture serves as a medium for expressing the complexities of identity and coexistence [22].

In the Americas, the adaptation of Mudéjar techniques in colonial contexts further exemplifies the versatility of hybrid styles. Indigenous artisans in Latin America incorporated local materials and motifs into Mudéjar designs, crafting a new architectural language that reflects the interplay of European and indigenous traditions. This process of transculturation highlights the dynamic nature of hybridity, where architectural forms are continually reinterpreted and transformed through cultural exchange [23].

The Art Deco movement of the early 20th century serves as a modern example of architectural hybridity. Described by Benton et al. as a “curious mixture” of traditional and contemporary styles, Art Deco drew inspiration from ancient civilizations, such as Egypt and Mesopotamia, while embracing the geometric abstraction and technological optimism of the modern era [24]. Iconic structures like the Chrysler Building in New York City illustrate how Art Deco seamlessly combined historical references with industrial materials and innovative design techniques, creating a style that was both timeless and forward-looking.

Despite the historical success of architectural hybridity, the modernist movement often rejected such fusion in favor of universal principles and functionalist aesthetics. Modernism emphasized breaking away from the past, which frequently led to a disconnection from traditional or regional styles in favor of global and universal designs. This ideological shift resulted in a homogenized vision of architecture that stripped away cultural specificities and local resonances. The extreme distance from the past advocated by modernism relegated premodern styles to the status of historical artifacts, emphasizing a discontinuity that treated these styles as relics rather than living practices.

In response, Critical Regionalism emerged, seeking to reconcile modernist innovation with a renewed respect for the local and particular [25]. It advocates for architecture that employs modern techniques and materials while being deeply engaged with the specific context of place—its culture, climate, and history. However, it has faced critiques for potentially over-

simplifying regional identities and marginalizing alternative voices [26]. The work of Mexican architect Luis Barragán, for instance, is celebrated for embodying regionalist qualities but has also been criticized for aligning with a nostalgic, conservative vision that caters more to elite tastes than to the broader population.

Hybrid architectures offer a way forward by embracing the complexity of cultural identity, representing a profound rethinking of design culture, where the integration of diverse cultural, stylistic, and material elements transcends traditional boundaries. As Ferda Kolatan argues, hybrids are not mere amalgamations or juxtapositions of disparate components but entities that embody the productive tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the traditional and the innovative. Kolatan describes hybrid architecture as a process of reconfiguration and adaptation, where architectural forms are shaped by the interplay of conflicting forces, creating designs that are complex, ambiguous, and layered. He emphasizes that hybrids are not static or predetermined but dynamic and evolving, reflecting the fluidity of cultural and social identities in the contemporary world [27].

Kolatan's concept of “genuine hybrids” challenges conventional architectural classifications by highlighting forms that emerge from unexpected intersections of cultural, technological, and material influences. These hybrids are not necessarily deliberate or intentional; they often arise organically from the interactions between diverse forces in urban environments. Kolatan suggests that such forms, which are often dismissed as architectural anomalies, possess a unique capacity to capture the complexities of modern life. By embracing the idiosyncratic and the irregular, hybrid architectures disrupt normative design paradigms and open up new possibilities for creative expression.

To operationalize hybrid architectures effectively, a systematic methodology is essential. This paper proposes a three-phase approach that integrates perception, context, and synthesis to develop designs that balance innovation with familiarity. Each phase incorporates interdisciplinary insights from neuroscience, cultural theory, and architectural practice.

The first phase, “Canvassing Perception,” focuses on understanding the cognitive and cultural frameworks through which users perceive and experience architectural spaces. Utilizing insights from neuroscience and embodied cognition, architects can identify design elements that promote cognitive fluency and emotional well-being. Tools such as virtual reality simulations and cognitive mapping can help visualize how users interact with proposed designs [28]. Ethnographic research is also critical; by engaging with communities to explore their cultural narratives, traditions, and aesthetic preferences, architects can identify elements that resonate with users' identities. This empathetic, user-centered approach ensures that the design processes enhance the human experience.

The second phase, “Canvassing Context,” involves a thorough analysis of the cultural, historical, and environmental factors that shape the site. This includes mapping local traditions, assessing historical architectural forms, and engaging with community stakeholders to identify shared values and aspirations. Concepts such as transculturation, which emphasize the dynamic interplay of cultural influences, provide a framework for integrat-

ing both global and local elements [29]. Environmental analysis, which incorporates sustainable practices and biotectonic strategies, ensures that designs respond to ecological challenges while aligning with broader sustainability goals. This holistic understanding of context allows architects to create spaces that not only respond to their environment but also reflect the complex cultural identities of their users.

The final phase, “Hybridizing Models,” synthesizes insights from the previous stages to develop architectural models that harmonize tradition with innovation. Hybrid tectonics acts as a key tool in this process, enabling architects to integrate classical, digital, biotectonic, and quasi-tectonic approaches into a coherent framework. By combining traditional materials and forms with advanced computational techniques—including AI-driven generative design processes—hybrid designs can achieve a dynamic balance between cultural resonance and technological exploration. Prototyping and iterative testing are crucial here: by creating both physical and digital models, architects can experiment with diverse formal expressions and rigorously assess their effectiveness in reconciling familiarity with novelty. Drawing on the data gathered from earlier perception and context analyses, these AI-based simulations help refine formal opportunities in real time, ensuring each intervention remains firmly grounded in human-centered principles. Finally, interdisciplinary collaboration with experts in anthropology, sociology, and environmental science further enriches the process, integrating multiple perspectives on complexity and ensuring that the resulting designs remain culturally meaningful as well as technologically innovative.

This methodology provides a replicable framework for integrating cultural familiarity and technological innovation in architectural practice. By aligning design processes with cognitive, cultural, and environmental dimensions, it ensures that hybrid architectures are not only aesthetically compelling but also deeply connected to the lived experiences of their users.

**Conclusion.** The tension between defamiliarization and cultural familiarity encapsulates broader questions about the purpose and ethics of architecture in the 21st century. While AI-driven design has expanded the creative possibilities of architecture, the psychological and social impacts of unfamiliar environments highlight the necessity of grounding innovation in human-centered principles.

Hybrid architectures offer a compelling solution to this tension, integrating the best of both worlds to create spaces that are intellectually stimulating, emotionally resonant, and culturally meaningful. By synthesizing insights from neuroscience, cultural theory, and technological innovation, hybrid architectures address the complexities of identity, memory, and perception in a globalized world.

Historical precedents demonstrate the enduring value of hybridity as a source of architectural enrichment, while contemporary examples illustrate its potential to navigate the challenges of modernity. Through a systematic methodology of canvassing perception, canvassing context, and hybridizing models, architects can create designs that reflect the pluralistic realities of today’s societies while pushing the boundaries of creative expression.

As architecture continues to evolve in response to technological advancements and cultural shifts, the adoption of hybrid approaches offers a pathway to reconcile the demands of innovation with the imperatives of human experience. By embracing hybridity, architects can transform heritage into an active and dynamic participant in contemporary design, ensuring that architecture remains a vital and inclusive force in shaping the environments we inhabit.

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## Figures.

FIGURE 1 - The 2014 ICD/ITKE Research Pavilion, showcasing 'unnatural' design and fabrication techniques, achieving forms and structures unattainable through conventional methods. Photograph by Roland Halbe.

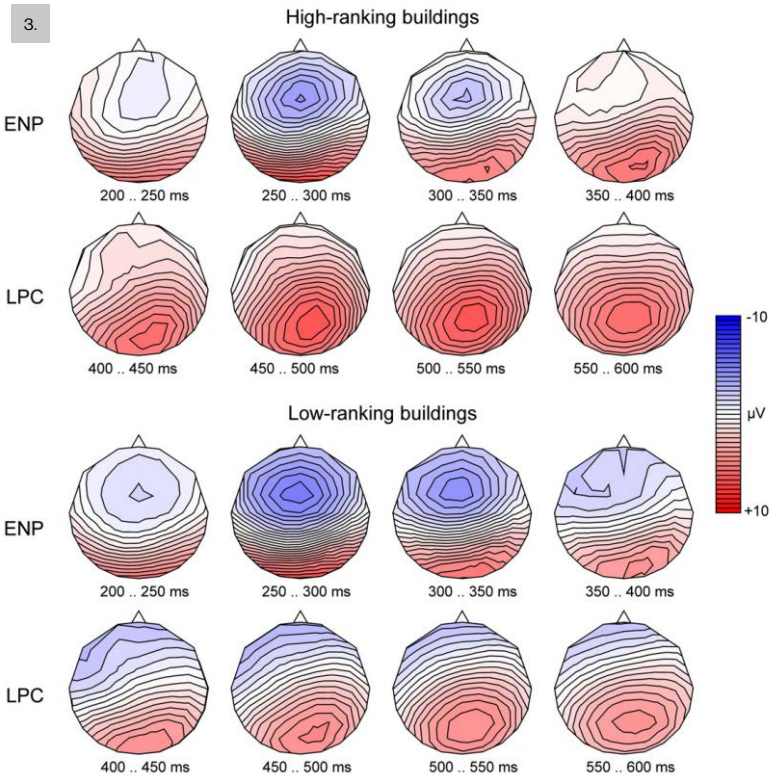
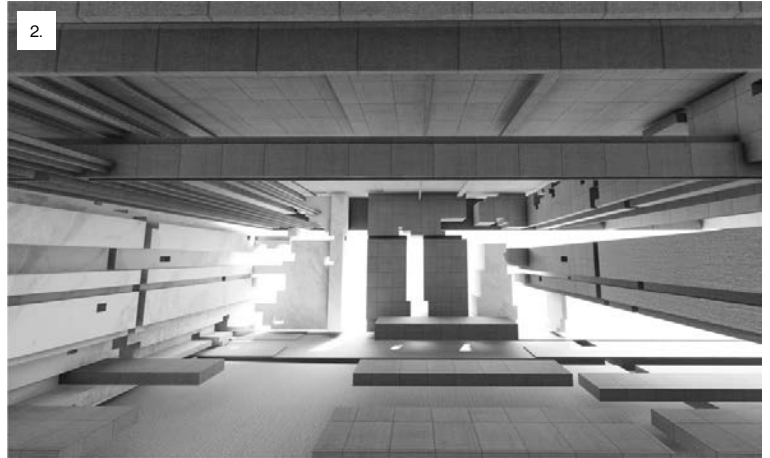
FIGURE 2 - Master Bedroom of the Deep House, an exploration by Matias del Campo into the aesthetics of defamiliarization. While the design is captivating and represents a significant experiment in reinterpreting traditional architectural knowledge, the creators themselves recognize the strangeness and incompleteness of the spaces, engaging in a dialogue with their client on whether to refine the algorithms behind these outcomes.

FIGURE 3 - Brain activation patterns for High-Ranking vs. Low-Ranking Buildings. Topographic maps display the scalp distribution of ERPs in response to high- and low-ranking buildings, measured between 200 and 600 ms post-stimulus in 14 healthy subjects. ENP refers to the early negative potential, and LPC to the late positive component (From Oppenheim et al., 2010).

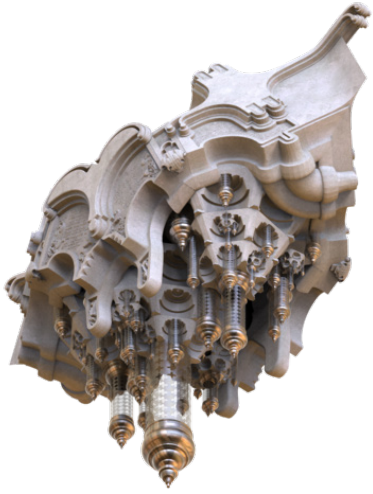
FIGURE 4 - This image showcases the unique fusion of Hellenistic and Buddhist architectural elements characteristic of Gandhāra. The Greco-Roman artistic influence evident in the Buddha's drapery and facial features exemplifies the hybridization process discussed by Kurt A. Behrendt. It visually represents how diverse cultural influences converged to create a distinctive architectural style in the Kushan period. Photography courtesy of JI FilpoC.

FIGURE 5 - Student work from Caleb Birch Ehly at the Weitzman School of Architecture in the Oddkin Architecture Istanbul III, held by Ferda Kolatan. The image presents twisting and turning architectural machinations, that do a certain dancing of styles and scales, canvassed and re-woven together from the rich hybrid tapestry of Istanbul. Image courtesy of the Weitzman School of Architecture.

FIGURE 6 - Hybrid architectural ornaments, generated by the author using Midjourney, following a "Classical + Futurism + Biophilia"-based instruction prompt.



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