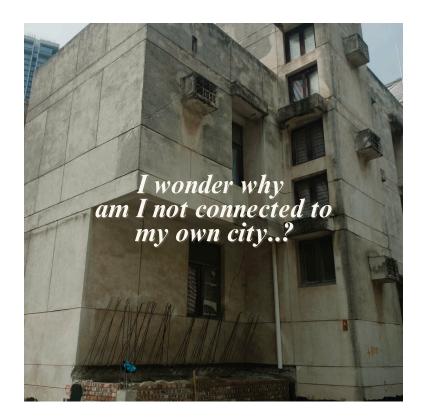
The Uncanny in Design: Abandonment, Rootlessness, and the Path to Reconnection





Contents

Introduction

Chapter I: The Origins of the Uncanny Definitions Emotions & Surrealism Architecture and the Sociological Concerns Abandonment

Chapter II: The Uncanny Disconnection

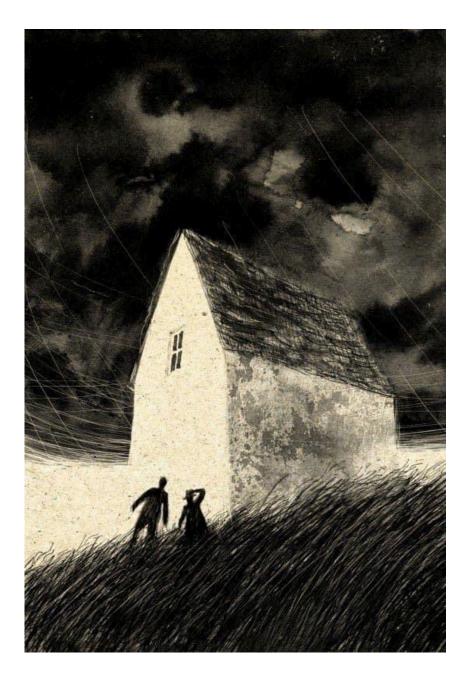
On the talk of Technology Rising Vietnam: The Story of the fading Architecture

Chapter III: The Path Forward: Embracing Traditions to Confront the Uncanny A change of Mindset and the Material Importance Emotions as a Fuel Reclaiming Tradition Through Technology Conclusion

Bibliography

Have you ever felt an eerie sense of disquiet, like walking down an alley past a place you once felt familiar with, only to spot something—something too strange, too out of place to be real? Or perhaps in your own home, you notice an object that wasn't there before. Did you put it there, or did something shift without you realizing?

The edges of the moment feel blurry, as if the world around you is not as what it seems anymore. A strange dissonance settles in—are you awake, or dreaming? The air feels heavier, the space disconnected, even if you've been here before. That creeping sense of unease, as if you don't belong here, as if this place shouldn't be real. Something *uncanny*. Out of place. Not quite right—but you can't seem to put your finger on why and how.



A Tale of an Empty House by E. F Benson

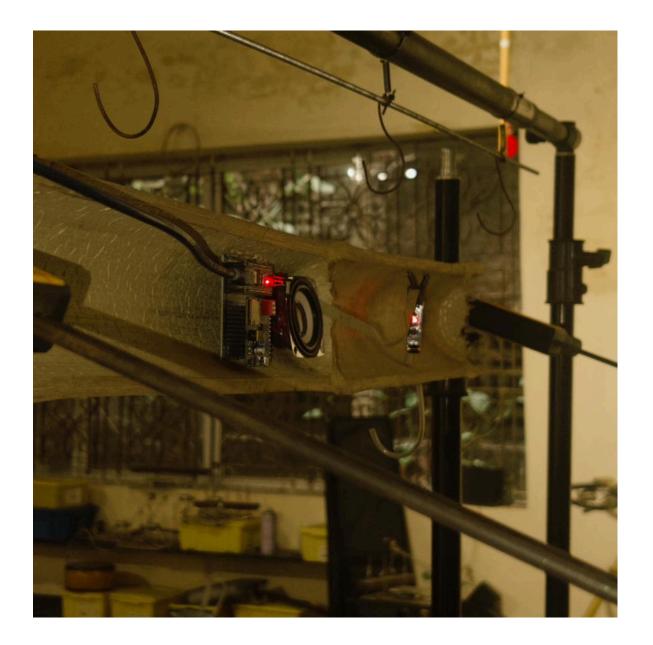
Introduction

Growing up in Vietnam, I have always been proud of how the country has evolved into one of the fastest-growing in the world, especially with the expanding real estate sector and increased imports. This growth has not only created more opportunities but also led to a more open-minded society with more playgrounds and diverse spaces, contributing to the ever-evolving urban landscape. However, this rapid expansion has made it challenging to hold on to the cultural anchors of the past. This unease is something I have felt deeply in Hanoi. Once celebrated for its Old Quarter, a tapestry of historic homes and cultural heritage, the city is now witnessing the rise of newly built Europeanstyle "castles" with many that feel completely out of context. How did these buildings come to exist? Has the standard of beauty in Vietnam changed?

And more importantly, is this still the Hanoi I once knew? A wonder lingers in my mind for this inevitable truth: Are we losing our human traditions, habits, and values so we can accept in the name of development—one that I am only now questioning because I long for a sense of *home*?

This sense of alienation and rootlessness—of feeling of disconnection—often arises when we find ourselves in foreign countries or unfamiliar landscapes. The fear of the unknown triggers anxiety. However, when this feeling emerges in one's own city, it signals a deeper concern. Rapid technological advancements and economic development over the past decade, particularly in Vietnam's real estate sector, have reshaped the urban landscape (Author, Year).





While these changes have brought economic prosperity, they have also widened social and cultural gaps. Traditional ways of living are being eroded, and people have become more attached to their phones than to their cultural heritage. As a result, I find myself becoming a foreigner in my own country, struggling to grasp a sense of belonging and pride in what I once called home.

What was once considered uncanny—buildings and lifestyles that felt out of place—has now become normalized as people chase new aesthetic ideals borrowed from elsewhere. But at what cost? And what does this mean for future generations? As foreign influences and technological shifts reshape our built environment, the uncanny has transformed from something unsettling into something expected—yet it continues to haunt our sense of identity (Freud, 1919). As designers and inhabitants of this world, can we reclaim the values that once shaped our communities, or are we merely adapting to a new reality?

This essay aims to explore not only how we arrived at this point but also whether we can understand deeply the roots of the uncanny in design, through the lens of social and cultural theories with the evolving cases of Vietnam and the echo of technology rising. Let us first discover the hidden anchors within ourselves, as we set forth on a journey to re-root our souls in a moving, uncanny world where familiarity gracefully dissolves into mystery.

Chapter 1: The Origins of the Uncanny

The uncanny is a multifaceted concept that has been studied across psychology, philosophy, and cultural theory. Freud's essay Das Unheimliche (1919) remains the foundational text on the subject. Freud defines the uncanny as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (Freud, 1919, p. 219). The term unheimlich, which translates to "unhomely," captures this tension between familiarity and strangeness. The uncanny emerges when something that was once comforting or recognisable becomes distorted, evoking unease.

Emotions

The uncanny is often triggered by an intricate interplay of psychological elements, where subtle deviations in familiar contexts evoke not only recognition and unease but also a deep-seated sense of fear. Freud (1919) argued that the uncanny arises when repressed memories resurface, eliciting a primal fear as the familiar transforms into something disturbingly alien. Jentsch (1906) similarly observed that even minor deviations from expected patterns can induce cognitive dissonance, thereby stirring anxiety and fear. Mori's (1970) uncanny valley hypothesis further illustrates how near-human representations, though seemingly familiar, can provoke a powerful emotional response —a blend of fascination, discomfort These psychological dynamics are also influenced by broader cultural narratives and the rapid pace of social change (Bauman, 2000). For example, the ambiguous, dreamlike narrative of David Lynch's Mulholland Drive (2001) creates an atmosphere where shifting realities evoke both intrigue and an underlying fear, while Daniel Libeskind's design for the Jewish Museum Berlin uses fragmented geometry to channel collective memory and an ever-present tension. In this way, fear is interwoven with memory, expectation, and perception, forming the core of the uncanny experience.

On the note of Architecture and social concerns

In architecture and spatial design, this eerie tension can be used deliberately-abandoned buildings, distorted proportions, or unsettlingly familiar spaces all evoke the uncanny, making us question our surroundings and even ourselves (Vidler, 1992). Pallasmaa (1996) links the uncanny to the loss of sensory engagement in architecture, as modern designs often prioritise visual aesthetics over tactile and emotional connections. Architectural theorist Anthony Vidler (1992) suggests, the uncanny is deeply tied to the alienation caused by modern architecture and urban planning that fail to integrate with cultural and historical contexts. Rootless, disconnected spaces don't just feel strange; they also disconnect us from our sense of belonging, from the identities that should ground us in the world. And in this disconnection, we experience the uncanny.

Surrealism

Surrealism and the uncanny are deeply intertwined through their shared exploration of the familiar rendered unfamiliar and the unveiling of the subconscious. Freud's seminal work, The Uncanny (1919), describes the uncanny as an unsettling experience where something familiar becomes eerily alien, evoking both recognition and revulsion. This duality is at the heart of surrealism, which deliberately disrupts conventional perceptions by juxtaposing ordinary objects or scenes with unexpected, dream-like elements.

Surrealist artists—such as Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, and René Magritte—leveraged techniques like unexpected imagery, free association, and defamiliarization to tap into the irrational aspects of the subconscious. In doing so, they created works that are both captivating and disconcerting. The effect is one of cognitive dissonance: viewers are confronted with elements that appear simultaneously known and unknown, prompting a psychological response that mirrors Freud's description of the uncanny. André Breton's *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924) explicitly called for an art that freed itself from the constraints of logic and rationality, embracing instead the strange and unsettling qualities of dreams and the unconscious mind.

This deliberate blending of the real with the surreal forces audiences to question the stability of their everyday perceptions. By distorting reality and exposing repressed anxieties or desires, surrealist art generates an emotional landscape that is at once familiar and alien—an experience that is quintessentially uncanny. The unsettling quality of such art is not merely an aesthetic choice but a profound commentary on the human condition, revealing how the subconscious can disrupt the orderly façade of reality.



Figure 2: Paul Delvaux, Landscape with Lanterns, 1958

Abandonment

Abandonment is another potent source of the uncanny, both in physical spaces and in the psyche. When spaces once vibrant with life are neglected, they take on an eerie quality, haunted by their lost purpose. This abandonment mirrors personal feelings of obsolescence or being left behind. One of the most fascinating aspects of uncanny spaces is their ability to evoke a collective, cultural sense of unease. For example, the abandoned spaces in cities that once thrived with human activity: factories, hospitals, schools, or train stations. These sites are often marked by their conditions, but also by the lives that once filled them. Such spaces seem to retain an emotional residue, a trace of the people who lived and worked within them. The passage of time amplifies this feeling, making it seem as if the space itself is haunted not by ghosts, but by the memories and experiences of the people who inhabited it. In this sense, uncanny spaces transcend their architectural or physical boundaries; they become repositories of collective memory & future worries, good and bad. Such places evoke a sense of eeriness because they carry with them the weight of forgotten histories, decayed structures, or unresolved traumas. The uncanny, therefore, is not just about physical characteristics but also about emotional and psychological responses to a space's latent potential for disturbance.

In Vietnam, numerous projects are abandoned before they can even be utilized. Rapid urbanization has led to a surge of unfinished or deserted developments, particularly on the outskirts of major cities. Empty housing projects and abandoned shopping centers—once envisioned as thriving spaces—now stand still due to financial setbacks, logistical challenges, or shifting priorities. Beyond their eerie emptiness, rumors of ghosts haunting these sites make redevelopment even more difficult, deepening their sense of neglect. Designed for life and activity, these spaces now serve as haunting reminders of unrealized ambitions, lingering in uncertainty, waiting for either revival or to be overshadowed by the next wave of construction



The haunted house at 300 Kim Ma Street in Hanoi

One striking example is the house at 300 Kim Ma, Hanoi, a 3,000-square-meter brutalist structure that has stood abandoned for over 27 years. Known for its raw concrete aesthetic and imposing presence, the building became infamous for ghost stories and urban legends, existing in a state of eerie stillness amid Hanoi's rapid transformation. Rather than being reintegrated into the city's fabric in a way that honors its unique architectural identity, the site is now being rebuilt into a Chinese Culture Centre, signaling not just the loss of its brutalist heritage but also raising questions about cultural presence and influence in urban redevelopment.

This transformation is undeniably interesting, as it breathes new life into a longforgotten structure. However, it also prompts a deeper reflection: Is this a necessary renewal, or another chapter in the erasure of Vietnam's architectural and cultural layers? While abandoned spaces can feel unsettling, their haunting presence also serves as a reminder of histories that might otherwise be erased. If redevelopment only replaces one form of estrangement with another—especially one that shifts cultural narratives—it brings into question what is truly being lost in the process.



Chapter II: The Uncanny Disconnection

On the talk of Technology Rising

Now in the 21st century, multiple realities and experiences coexist, creating a paradox where individuals can feel at home yet not truly belong. This aligns with Anthony Vidler's (1992) notion of the "homebody," exploring psychological dislocation caused by modernity. The home, once a refuge, has fragmented under rapid technological advancement. Social media fosters global connections while eroding real-life relationships, diminishing interpersonal skills, and increasing isolation (Turkle, 2011).

Technology has long measured human progress, from the steam engine to artificial intelligence. Mokyr (1990) calls it "the lever of riches," driving economic growth and innovation. Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) describe today's rapid advancements as a "second machine age," reshaping industries and human identity. More than a tool, technology now symbolizes ambition and the accelerating pace of modern life. As digital devices integrate into daily life, they blur the lines between human and artificial, creating anxiety when disconnected.

Not only have technological products become central, but they also shape how we interact, perceive the world, and process information. What was once anti-social, such as prolonged screen exposure, is now normalized. While technology has simplified lives and industries, it has also distanced us from natural existence. Phones act as extensions of ourselves, storing memories in the cloud. Smart home devices further merge technology with domestic life. Marshall McLuhan's Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (1964) argues that media and technology extend human faculties—phones extend voices, cars extend legs, and the internet extends cognition. As technology integrates further, it increasingly defines identity and interaction.

The rise of smartphones and social media-driven advertising has fundamentally reshaped our behavior. Online personas often prioritize appearance over authentic values, fostering a culture of superficiality. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok propagate unrealistic beauty standards and material aspirations at the expense of self-reflection (Perloff, 2014). Research indicates that such media use is linked to body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem, particularly among younger users (Fardouly et al., 2015). Targeted advertising reinforces consumer habits by elevating external validation above intrinsic worth, making authenticity, empathy, and long-term fulfillment difficult to attain.

This shift prompts us to question whether we have become more preoccupied with how we present ourselves than with understanding who we truly are. Could this be a modern form of abandonment—a relinquishing of traditions and the inner self? In response, some creative products now aim to reflect our inner lives, seeking to uncover and address the subconscious voids that we often overlook. In our relentless pursuit of external ideals, we risk losing the wonder of introspection, potentially leading to an uncanny, soulless existence. Ultimately, we might be evolving into modern NPCs—mechanistic, disconnected, and devoid of the rich inner life that defines our humanity.

Social identities and norms have changed, leading to a crisis of self-awareness. Many define themselves through digital personas rather than traditional communities, struggling with fragmented identities. Excessive screen time and social media use correlate with rising anxiety and depression (Twenge et al., 2018). Pursuing artificial happiness through technology reinforces isolation and emotional detachment. How can technology serve rather than enslave us? Is reclaiming genuine human interaction still possible in a screen-dominated era?

This shift has broader consequences—social unrest, crime, and warfare, as individuals and groups struggle with repressed emotions and unmet psychological needs. War, once an anomaly, is now an expected part of modern geopolitics, present in news, entertainment, and digital simulations. Surveillance, once dystopian, is now routine. The erosion of privacy, the spread of misinformation, and the monetization of human attention have become normalized. As technology advances to replace what we once knew, the once uncanny becomes ordinary, making it increasingly difficult to find one's anchors, purpose, belonging, and meaningful connections in a rapidly evolving world.

Nowadays, in many countries in the world, the growing idea of fantasy characters, use of lifelike sex dolls and robots exemplifies the uncanny, as their human-like appearance triggers discomfort and eeriness. Products like "RealDoll" and advanced sex robots, with articulated faces and simulated conversations, cater to personal desires but also raise concerns about social isolation. Some users turn to these dolls to cope with loneliness or avoid real relationships. The fetishisation of these objects highlights how technology is reshaping intimacy, creating an unsettling new form of connection. As these are more diffused, reliant on technology products become the new norm, we risk distancing ourselves from authentic human interactions, with the fetishisation of artificial substitutes overshadowing true intimacy and connection. Phones have become extensions of ourselves, and memories are stored in the Google Drive or iCloud. More technology installed in homes have also become parts of the house. We've become, in a way, like cyborgs, relying on technology constantly.



Figure 3: a photo of Chanel the Sex Doll (2019) one of eight sex dolls that Kristen Dickson rents through her business, House of Dolls.

The *uncanny valley* has become even more pronounced as artificial intelligence and robotics advance, blurring the boundary between human and machine. With hyper-realistic androids, deepfake technology, and virtual avatars, the eerie discomfort described by Mori (1970) is more relevant than ever. While digital humans in video games and films strive for realism, the slightest unnatural movement or emotionless stare can make them unsettling rather than lifelike (MacDorman and Chattopadhyay, 2016).



VIETNAM: The Story of the fading Architecture

"In developing countries, the erasure of historical layers and the transplantation of foreign design aesthetics create spaces that are disconnected from local traditions, fostering a sense of rootlessness and alienation" (Vidler, 1992, p. 85).

In Vietnam, modern developments frequently adopt European architectural styles, especially French design resulting in structures disconnected from their surroundings. Real estate companies further amplify this trend by advertising these imported, luxury-inspired developments as symbols of success and status. By associating European-style buildings with "wow effect" and "successful living," they subtly influence societal ideas of beauty, success, and aspiration. In these advertisements, the focus is not on cultural values or function but on the material appearance of wealth and the promise of luxury. This emphasis on external appearances reinforces the belief that beauty and success are measured by the ability to display affluence, while the deeper cultural and functional aspects of architecture are overshadowed.

The Neoclassical facades and Gothic-style towers have disregard the dense, communal, and tropical nature of Vietnamese cities. Western ideals-such as symmetrical villas and manicured lawns-clash with local living patterns, making these spaces feel odd rather than functional (King, 1995).

SunWorld's French Village at Bà Nà Hills stands as a striking example of Western aesthetics imposed on Vietnam's urban landscape. Designed to evoke a nostalgic, idealized vision of 19th-century Europe and a new Disneyland-with its cobblestone streets, Gothic cathedrals, and faux-medieval facades-it simultaneously creates a profound sense of dislocation and cultural disconnect. Instead of reflecting Vietnam's rich architectural heritage or incorporating local materials suited to its tropical climate, these buildings evoke an uncanny, almost surreal atmosphere-like stepping onto a movie set, where the backdrop feels detached from reality, purely just for entertainment mind instead of a home definition.

This stands in stark contrast to the Indochine style of the colonial era, which, despite its foreign origins, adapted thoughtfully to Vietnamese climate, materials, and way of life. The original French colonial architecture houses incorporated wide verandas, high ceilings, and natural ventilation features that harmonized with the local environment but are largely absent in today's developments. A beautiful example of climate-responsive architecture can be seen in Hanoi heritage house at 87 Mã Mây This meticulously preserved traditional home showcases shaded courtyards, natural materials on both exterior and interior design.







Figure 4: Sun World's French Village in Ba Na Hills Figure 5: Hanaka Paris Ocean Park in Bac Ninh Figure 6: Heritage House in 87 Ma May, Hanoi

Architecture has historically served as a reflection of culture, identity, and collective memory, embedding history and local narratives into the built environment. However, in many rapidly developing countries, this connection has weakened as architectural practice increasingly draws from external influences rather than internal traditions. Vidler (1992) critiques how modern architecture often produces uncanny, placeless environments, where spaces that should feel familiar instead evoke estrangement. Frampton (1983) similarly warns that the dominance of globalized design erases regional specificity, leading to cities that feel disconnected from their own histories. This issue is particularly pronounced in emerging economies, where rapid urbanization prioritizes efficiency, spectacle, and economic expansion over cultural continuity. Instead of evolving from within, architecture in these contexts often replicates foreign models, resulting in spaces that neither reflect nor nurture the identities of the people they serve. As Lefebvre (1974) argues, the commodification of space under capitalism further alienates architecture from its social function, reducing it to an instrument of economic power rather than human development. During this phase of growing, Hanoi-along with many major cities and even rural areas-feels like a mismatched puzzle, with pieces of different styles, materials, and colors that don't quite fit together.

Perhaps, it is the constant influences of social media, the rush for fast money, and the desire to keep up with trends that have led many in Vietnam to overlook our climate-responsive design roots. Modern styles are chosen not for function or cultural fit, but for density and short-term looks. Like a domino effect, this rush erases the wisdom that once shaped our homes. People move through life, unaware that each choice made in the name of progress chips away at our roots. Maybe one day we'll pause—some of us already feel the uncanny disconnection. The growing influence of digital technology and social media has accelerated the spread of "Pinterest architecture"—self-made designs that prioritize aesthetics over cultural relevance. Many homeowners and developers seek to replicate European styles, seeing them as symbols of wealth and sophistication. Neoclassical columns, grand archways, and Baroque embellishments are favored not for their functionality but for the fantasy they evoke—the illusion of living like European aristocrats. This desire for grandeur is fueled by globalized design trends, where opulent Western aesthetics are marketed as aspirational through online platforms. As a result, architecture becomes more about status than substance, prioritizing spectacle over practicality. The accessibility of design tools and mass-produced materials makes these imitations widespread, often at the expense of structural integrity and cultural continuity (Manovich, 2017; Garrido & Natividade, 2018; Nguyen & Lee, 2021). By favoring these romanticized, imported styles, Vietnam's urban landscape increasingly reflects an artificial vision of affluence rather than an authentic connection to its own history and way of life.



Figure 7: Hanoi Old Quarters Figure 8: A home of a business mogul in Ninh Binh

As individuals are exposed to these shifting norms, they undergo resocialization (Goffman, 1961), adapting their values and behaviors to align with new societal expectations. This transformation is further explained by social adaptation theory (Parsons, 1951), which highlights how external influences reshape identity, and Goffman's dramaturgical perspective (1956), which suggests that people adjust their roles based on what society deems desirable. social influence and behavioral priming (Asch, 1951; Bargh et al., 1996) suggest that prolonged exposure to new ideals-especially through globalization and social media-can subtly alter a person's perception of what is desirable or normal, often distancing them from their cultural origins. When left unchecked, these shifts can lead to cultural assimilation and identity shifts (Berry, 1997), where individuals begin to perceive their own traditions as outdated while embracing foreign aesthetics and values. This phenomenon is particularly dangerous when architecture and ways of living are influenced by imported, made-up ideals of luxury, replacing deeply rooted cultural expressions with borrowed styles that lack historical and emotional depth. If efforts are not made to nurture and protect cultural heritage, entire societies risk losing their core identity, leading to a fragmentation where modernized individuals judge traditional ways as backward, while traditionalists resist these changes, creating deep social disconnection and cultural estrangement. Over time, this disconnection can strip a nation of its unifying cultural fabric, making it increasingly difficult for people to find a common sense of belonging in their own homeland.

Moving forward, what *defines* Vietnam should not just its rapid economic growth but also the resilience and ingenuity of its people across all fields. There is nothing wrong with embracing modernization and improved living standards, but it should not come at the cost of erasing the nation's architectural heritage. Timeless designs, deeply rooted in Vietnam's rich history, should remain a source of pride and continuity. While progress allows for upgrades, it should never replace traditional ways of living entirely. When architecture and home values shift too drastically, the cultural and emotional connections that bind people together weaken, making it harder to maintain a shared sense of identity and belonging.



Figure 9: A sketch of Chùa Keo

Chapter 3: The Path Forward: Embracing Tradition to Confront the Uncanny

As we progress further into the 21st century, the architectural landscape and the potential for human life to be affected, even lost, by new ways of living, continue to evolve at an unprecedented pace. The rise of technology, the influence of globalisation, and the constant demand for novelty in urban design have led to a proliferation of spaces that, while visually striking, often lack the cultural depth and emotional connection that once characterised the built environment. This chapter delves into how designers can confront the uncanny by striking a balance between tradition and innovation, finding ways to create spaces that are not only aesthetically captivating but also deeply rooted in culture and sustainability, paving the way for a harmonious future.

In today's globalised world, it is essential for architects and designers to reconnect with local traditions, materials, and cultural contexts to create designs that are both functional and culturally meaningful. Architecture is about creating spaces that feel like "home," and the uncanny—a feeling of disconnection or discomfort—can be overcome by designing spaces that resonate with local traditions and using materials that evoke a sense of familiarity and belonging (Vidler, 1992).

Local materials carry the essence of a place, helping to ground people in the shared history of their environment. When spaces are built using materials like stone, wood, or clay—familiar to the culture and history of a region—they provide a sense of connection not only to the space but also to the people and stories that have shaped it (Alexander, 1977). These materials bring warmth and authenticity that synthetic substitutes simply cannot replicate.

The uncanny arises when a space feels disconnected from its cultural or environmental context. In many developing countries, the growing use of European-inspired designs and foreign materials such as glass and steel has created environments that, while visually appealing, feel foreign and disconnected from local traditions (Relph, 1976). In contrast, designs that incorporate local materials and reflect regional traditions restore a sense of familiarity and "home."

Understanding local context and history is crucial for designers. It's not about rejecting innovation but ensuring that technology and modern design advancements are grounded in the cultural and historical identity of the place. Designers must balance past and present, ensuring that the lessons of history are incorporated into the designs of the future (Hollis, 2006).

A change of Mindset and the Material Importance

By embracing local materials and design traditions, designers can create spaces that feel like home and preserve cultural identity. For example, the traditional wooden houses of Vietnam, made from local timber and adapted to the climate, offer inspiration for creating sustainable, culturally relevant architecture. Today, these traditional designs can be modernised by incorporating new technologies, bridging the past and present (Phan, 2020).

This approach challenges the idea that modernity requires adopting foreign influences. Instead, it encourages innovation within the cultural context, ensuring that progress doesn't erase the past. By using local materials and respecting local traditions, architects can create spaces that meet the needs of contemporary life while fostering a deeper connection to the past (Vidler, 1992).

Sustainable design rooted in history and local materials isn't just about preserving the past—it's about creating environments that are human-centred and meaningful. By embracing local traditions and materials, we can navigate the balance between modernity and tradition, overcoming the uncanny and making spaces that feel like home again (Alexander, 1977).

Emotions as a Fuel

Not only technology, but also emotions like anxiety that trigger the uncanny, can be embraced as signals for us to confront them as intrinsic aspects of being human. Uncanny feelings have been effectively utilised in creative fields like film, video games, and art to evoke emotional responses and provoke self-reflection. Rather than being something to avoid, the uncanny becomes a tool that enhances emotional depth, allowing audiences to confront their fears and uncertainties. In horror films, directors often distort familiar environments or use uncanny figures to challenge viewers' perceptions of reality, pushing them to explore both the external world and their own inner fears (Jentsch, 1906). Research highlighted by National Geographic reveals that controlled encounters with fear, such as those experienced through horror films, offer us a safe space to confront and process our deepest anxieties. In these moments, the disquiet of the uncanny mirrors our inner turmoil, allowing us to see that the sensations we recoil from can, in fact, illuminate hidden strengths. This confrontation with discomfort encourages a deeper awareness of human psychology and emotional responses. Using negative emotions as fuel, we can transform them into insights that heal and confront our deepest roots—how exciting is that?



Game Tai Uong

Reclaiming Tradition Through Technology

In a world that constantly strives for progress, there is an undeniable allure to the new, the innovative, and the futuristic. However, this rush to modernise should not come at the expense of cultural heritage. One way to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity is to harness technology in a way that respects and incorporates local traditions. This approach does not mean rejecting modern materials or techniques, but rather integrating them thoughtfully into designs that acknowledge and honour the unique cultural and environmental contexts of a place.

For example, technology can be used to adapt traditional building techniques to modern needs. In Vietnam, the use of bamboo—a material traditionally used in construction—has been revived with the help of modern engineering techniques, allowing for more durable and sustainable structures that still resonate with the country's cultural identity. Similarly, the use of computational design tools can help architects better understand how traditional forms can be adapted to meet contemporary demands, such as improved energy efficiency and sustainability, while still maintaining cultural authenticity (Nguyen & Lee, 2021). By blending tradition with technology, architects can create spaces that connect people to their cultural roots while addressing the challenges of modern life.

Tai Uong - The Scrounge is a horror game that effectively celebrates the uncanny by merging Vietnamese traditions with modern technology. Drawing heavily on local folklore, it invokes elements of hon ma (ghosts) and nga quy (hungry ghosts), deeply rooted in the cultural psyche of Vietnam. The game leverages familiar, everyday spaces—such as homes and temples-to create an unsettling atmosphere, reinforcing the uncanny by presenting these locations as both familiar and disturbing. By distorting traditional rituals meant to protect against spirits, the game highlights the tension between modernity and tradition, illustrating how globalization has reshaped cultural practices. Using cutting-edge technology like 3D animation and immersive sound design, Tai Uong -The Scrounge creates a space where players experience the eeriness of a familiar world that feels distant and foreign. This blending of the past with the present forces players to confront the uncanny within their cultural heritage, encouraging reflection on the loss and preservation of traditions in an increasingly globalized world.

Conclusion

As we look toward the future of architecture and urban design, it becomes clear that the uncanny —the discomfort we feel when the familiar becomes strange—is not simply a byproduct of modern life but a reflection of the deeper disconnection between our built environment and the cultural, historical, and environmental contexts that shape it. This thesis has explored the growing trend of disconnection in design, where the rush to embrace globalised aesthetics often overshadows local traditions and heritage. Yet, it is essential to understand that the way we design and build today will leave an indelible mark on the future, much like the butterfly effect, where each decision made now ripples through time, shaping the world we will inhabit in years to come. As designers, we can learn from the uncanny in how we approach technology: not as a tool that replaces the past but as a medium that enhances our understanding of it. Technology allows us to explore new ways of telling stories and expressing cultural identities, yet it must be integrated in ways that respect and build upon traditional foundations. This way, we can cultivate spaces where technology serves as an extension of our human experiences rather than something that alienates or disconnects us. Ultimately, the "cyborg" approach to design should not be about abandoning our history but about incorporating it into a new, dynamic way of living.

The importance of understanding history and culture in design cannot be overstated. Architecture and urban design are not just about creating functional spaces; they are about creating places that reflect our shared values, beliefs, and experiences. The spaces we occupy are a reflection of who we are, where we come from, and how we see ourselves in relation to the world around us. Ignoring this cultural and historical context leads to the uncanny—a sense of alienation and rootlessness that not only disrupts our connection to the present but also to the past.

Every design choice, whether it's the materials we use or the aesthetic we adopt, will leave a footprint that impacts the future. This responsibility demands that we approach design with a deep awareness of its cultural, environmental, and emotional implications. As architects, urban designers, interior designers and all artistic creators we must consider how our choices will resonate not only in the immediate moment but in the generations that follow.

Can you the ones that decide to reclaim the values that have shaped our cultures communities heritage, or are you simply adapting to a new reality? All physical environment we create shapes the identity of a place, affects the mental and emotional well-being of its inhabitants, and determines the legacy we leave behind.

In an era of rapid technological change and increasing globalisation, the importance of balancing innovation with cultural preservation becomes even more urgent. While technology offers exciting possibilities for improving the built environment, it is crucial that we use it in ways that respect and enhance the cultural and historical context of a place, rather than erasing it in pursuit of trends or superficial aesthetics. The future of architecture lies in integrating the lessons of the past with the innovations of the future, creating spaces that are not only functional but that foster a deeper sense of identity, belonging, and sustainability.

In the end, the spaces we create today will define how we live tomorrow. As we continue to shape our cities and communities, it is imperative that we do so with awareness, care, and respect for the histories and cultures that have come before us. By doing so, we ensure that our built environment is not just a reflection of the present, but a bridge to the future—one that honours the past, respects the environment, and creates spaces that foster connection, meaning, and belonging for generations to come.



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