

Beyond stylistic mixture: A critical reconceptualization of architectural eclecticism

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<i>Article history:</i> Received June 21, 2026 Received in revised form July 21, 2026 Accepted August 18, 2026 Available online September 01, 2026 <i>Keywords:</i> Architecture Eclectic Form Function Layers of meaning *Corresponding author: Purnama Salura Department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering, Universitas Katolik Parahyangan Email: purnama.salura@unpar.ac.id ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3652-7192	<i>Architectural eclecticism has traditionally been interpreted as the simple combination of architectural components derived from multiple stylistic traditions. Such an interpretation, however, diverges considerably from the original philosophical foundation of eclecticism, which emphasizes the deliberate and critical selection of historical precedents, followed by their thoughtful integration to generate new and more refined conceptual frameworks capable of advancing existing architectural knowledge and professional practice. This study seeks to deconstruct the prevailing interpretation of architectural eclecticism, reconstruct its conceptual foundation according to its original philosophical meaning, and operationalize the reconstructed concept into a systematic analytical model that enables the critical selection, integration, and evaluation of historical precedents within architectural design. The analytical procedure consists of several interconnected stages, including extracting the fundamental concept of eclecticism from its philosophical origins, identifying the distortions that have shaped its interpretation within architectural discourse, reconstructing the conceptual framework of architectural eclecticism, and subsequently operationalizing this reconstructed framework into an analytical model capable of guiding the systematic selection, critical synthesis, and comprehensive evaluation of architectural precedents. The principal findings demonstrate that architectural eclecticism can be regarded as conceptually valid only when it fulfills the essential purpose of architecture, namely, its capacity to support human habitation through a coherent and inseparable relationship between function and form. Consequently, the effectiveness of architectural eclecticism should not be assessed according to the complexity of its composition, the diversity of its formal expressions, or the stylistic origins from which its elements are derived. Instead, its success should be evaluated based on its ability to preserve an integrated relational structure that enables human activities to occur in conditions that are both safe and comfortable.</i>

Introduction

Change is an unavoidable characteristic of existence. Since the era of ancient Greek philosophy, reality has been understood as a

dynamic condition in continuous transformation (Heraclitus in Kirk, Raven and Schofield 1983). Likewise, within social and cultural domains, change has long been recognized as an intrinsic attribute of the evolution of societies and cultures



(Giddens 1990). Under such dynamic circumstances, human beings cannot depend exclusively on fixed bodies of knowledge; instead, they must critically examine, selectively adopt, and reinterpret historical precedents to formulate innovative ideas and solutions that remain relevant to contemporary conditions (Piaia 2022). Within the philosophical tradition, this process of critical selection and synthesis is identified as eclecticism (Donini 1988).

From an etymological perspective, the word *eclectic* originates from the Greek term *eklegein*, meaning "to select" (Merriam-Webster 2026). In its earliest philosophical usage, eclecticism denoted the intellectual capacity to identify and adopt the most valuable ideas from existing historical precedents. Until approximately the eighteenth century, eclecticism was widely regarded as a rigorous process of critically evaluating historical knowledge and integrating selected insights into innovative, solution-oriented modes of thought (Donini 1988). Based on this original definition, architectural eclecticism may be understood as a potentially significant and highly relevant design strategy for responding to the complexities of an ever-evolving world.

Despite its philosophical origins, contemporary architectural discourse generally interprets eclecticism in an overly simplified manner, reducing it to the combination of elements borrowed from multiple architectural styles or treating it merely as an aesthetic strategy concerned with visual composition (Salura 2018). Such an interpretation transforms eclecticism from a rigorous intellectual methodology into a superficial formal exercise. Existing scholarship on architectural eclecticism predominantly documents stylistic combinations through formal and visual analyses, while offering limited explanation of the conceptual mechanisms that govern the critical selection and integration of historical precedents during the design process. Consequently, architectural eclecticism has progressively lost its theoretical depth and practical significance within architectural discourse and design practice. This condition reflects a broader criticism of eclecticism itself, namely its perceived tendency to assemble heterogeneous ideas without the guidance of a coherent evaluative framework (Zeller 1883; Simon 2005).

This reductionist interpretation gives rise to several fundamental issues. First, there remains

little conceptual clarity regarding what constitutes "critical" selection within an architectural context or how such a critical process should be conducted. Second, no comprehensive framework exists for distinguishing coherent integration from arbitrary stylistic aggregation. Third, architectural eclecticism gradually loses its relevance as a design methodology because it fails to explain how the interdependent relationship among function, form, and meaning is preserved or transformed throughout the process of integrating historical precedents.

Although previous research has examined eclecticism as a process of critical selection (He 2021), no theoretical framework has yet explicitly operationalized eclecticism as a design mechanism grounded in the ontological foundations of architecture as a condition that supports human habitation. Existing approaches, including precedent-based design, typological studies, and collage theory, address the utilization of historical precedents; however, they primarily emphasize formal and visual characteristics rather than explaining the ontological relationship between architectural precedents and the requirements of human habitation. Consequently, there remains no operational framework capable of employing eclecticism as an architecture-based evaluative instrument.

In response to this theoretical gap, the present study pursues three principal objectives. First, it seeks to deconstruct the prevailing interpretation of architectural eclecticism. Second, it reconstructs the concept of architectural eclecticism by returning to its original philosophical foundations. Third, it operationalizes the reconstructed concept into a systematic analytical model capable of guiding the critical selection, integration, and evaluation of historical precedents.

The originality of this research lies in its explicit distinction between architectural eclecticism and the three dominant approaches to precedent utilization in architecture: precedent-based design, typology, and collage theory. Within this study, architectural eclecticism is positioned as a mechanism of critical selection in which precedents are integrated according to their ontological relationship with human habitation. In contrast to precedent-based design, typological approaches, and collage theory, which generally emphasize the classification, replication, or transformation of formal characteristics, this research regards precedents as entities that must

be critically evaluated according to their contribution to the integrated relationship among function, form, and meaning. Accordingly, architectural eclecticism is no longer interpreted as the mere adaptation or combination of stylistic forms; instead, it is understood as a critical evaluative process through which each precedent is assessed according to its capacity to preserve, reinforce, or potentially undermine the fundamental relationship between function, form, and meaning in architecture.

Nevertheless, this study does not intend to dismiss alternative approaches to architectural inquiry, including phenomenological, semiotic, or cultural perspectives. Rather, its scope is intentionally confined to the development of an evaluative framework through which historical precedents can be systematically examined according to their performance in supporting human habitation.

Accordingly, this research contributes to three complementary domains. From a theoretical perspective, it redefines both eclecticism in general and architectural eclecticism in particular. From a methodological perspective, it establishes an operational model that enables a systematic, transparent, and verifiable process for selecting and integrating historical precedents. From a practical perspective, the proposed model functions not only as a design methodology but also as an evaluative framework for analyzing empirical architectural works. Consequently, this research addresses an important theoretical deficiency while simultaneously responding to the practical demands of contemporary architectural design.

Methods

Materials

This study adopts a theoretical research approach in which the selected body of literature is treated as the primary source of case analysis. Consistent with the objectives of this investigation, the literature examined is organized into the following three categories.

Philosophical literature on eclecticism

The investigation primarily examines the concept of eclecticism as articulated by influential thinkers, including Claudius Galenus (c.129–c.216 CE), Potamo of Alexandria (fl. late 1st

century BCE), Christian Thomasius (1655–1728), Jacob Brucker (1696–1770), Denis Diderot (1713–1784), and Victor Cousin (1792–1867). To establish a more comprehensive understanding of the intellectual context, secondary sources discussing the historical background and philosophical development of these scholars' perspectives on eclecticism are also reviewed.

Architectural theory

This component focuses on literature addressing the fundamental purpose of architecture. A preliminary review indicates the existence of two principal perspectives concerning the origin and purpose of architecture (Salura 2026a). The first emphasizes universal formal principles, exemplified by Laugier's concept of the Primitive Hut. The second regards architecture primarily as a medium for accommodating human activities. This research adopts the latter perspective. Accordingly, the theoretical foundation is established through Vitruvius' discussion of the origins of architecture in *De Architectura* (1914), Gottfried Semper's theory concerning the four primary elements of architecture and the rationale behind their emergence (Semper 1984; Hvattum 2004), Quatremère de Quincy's interpretation of the origins of the three primitive dwelling types (Younés 1999; Hvattum 2004), and Purnama Salura's theory of architectural ontology together with its operationalization through the function–form–meaning framework (Salura 2026; Salura-Fauzy 2013).

Literature concerning design methods and architectural precedents

The third category encompasses two complementary groups of references. The first consists of studies explicitly addressing architectural eclecticism. The second includes literature discussing precedent-based design methodologies, particularly precedent studies (Clark and Pause 1985; Frampton 2015), typology (Colquhoun 1972), and design collage (Shields 2023).

The literature in the first category is examined to reveal the transformation in the meaning of eclecticism as it evolved from its original philosophical context into architectural discourse. The second category serves as a comparative framework for clarifying the conceptual distinctions between the use of historical precedents as formal references and the

understanding of eclecticism as a rigorous process involving the critical selection and systematic integration of precedents.

Analytical framework

The analytical framework developed in this study is organized into three interrelated conceptual layers.

Layer 1: Ontological

At the ontological level, architecture is understood not merely as a tangible physical artifact but as a condition that enables human habitation. Within this perspective, architecture is defined by the dynamic relationship between the human body and the spatial structures that allow individuals to orient themselves, interact with their surroundings, and perform specific activities.

Layer 2: Relational

At the relational level, the ontological perspective is translated into an operational framework through the interdependent relationship among function, form, and meaning. Although considerable scholarly debate continues regarding the precise interpretation of these three concepts, this study adopts definitions that are consistent with its ontological foundation. Function is understood as the pattern of human activities requiring spatial accommodation. Form refers to the spatial configuration and arrangement of architectural elements that enable those activities to occur effectively. Meaning is defined more specifically as the interpretation emerging from the relationship between human habitation and its corresponding spatial configuration. This definition intentionally limits the scope of meaning so that it remains assessable in relation to the performative requirements of habitation, while simultaneously acknowledging the potential existence of symbolic, cultural, and ideological dimensions.

Layer 3: Evaluative

At the evaluative level, the framework further refines the understanding of architectural meaning by distinguishing between basic meaning and secondary meaning. Basic meaning encompasses aspects directly associated with habitability and the continuity of the relationship between function and form. Secondary meaning, by contrast, refers to symbolic, representational, or cultural attributes that arise incidentally. This distinction provides an evaluative instrument for

determining whether the precedents selected through the eclectic process reinforce or weaken the fundamental architectural relationships upon which human habitation depends.

Analytical steps

The analytical procedure is structured into four sequential stages.

Step 1: Extracting the concept of eclecticism from the philosophical tradition. The first stage seeks to uncover the ontological foundations of eclecticism by examining the original intellectual purpose for which the concept emerged. Three principal aspects are identified during this process: (1) the purpose of eclecticism, (2) the processes through which eclecticism operates, and (3) its epistemological and ontological implications. The outcome of this stage is the identification of the core conceptual principles that define the philosophical meaning of eclecticism.

Step 2: Identifying the distortions in the architectural interpretation of eclecticism. The second stage investigates how eclecticism has been interpreted and applied within architectural theory and practice. Particular attention is given to identifying conceptual shifts that reduce eclecticism to little more than stylistic combination or visual composition. Through this examination, the discrepancies between the philosophical understanding of eclecticism and its architectural application become evident.

Step 3: Reconstructing the concept of architectural eclecticism. Drawing upon the findings generated during the preceding stages, eclecticism is reformulated as a mechanism for selecting historical precedents according to the ontological principles of architecture, namely human habitation and the integrated relationship among function, form, and meaning. This stage culminates in the development of a conceptual framework that unifies ontological and relational perspectives in redefining architectural eclecticism.

Step 4: Operationalizing the concept of architectural eclecticism. During the final stage, the reconstructed conceptual framework is translated into an analytical model capable of systematically guiding the critical selection and integration of historical precedents. In addition, evaluative criteria are established to assess the outcomes of the eclectic process, particularly in determining whether the selected precedents strengthen or diminish the fundamental

relationship among function, form, and meaning within architecture.

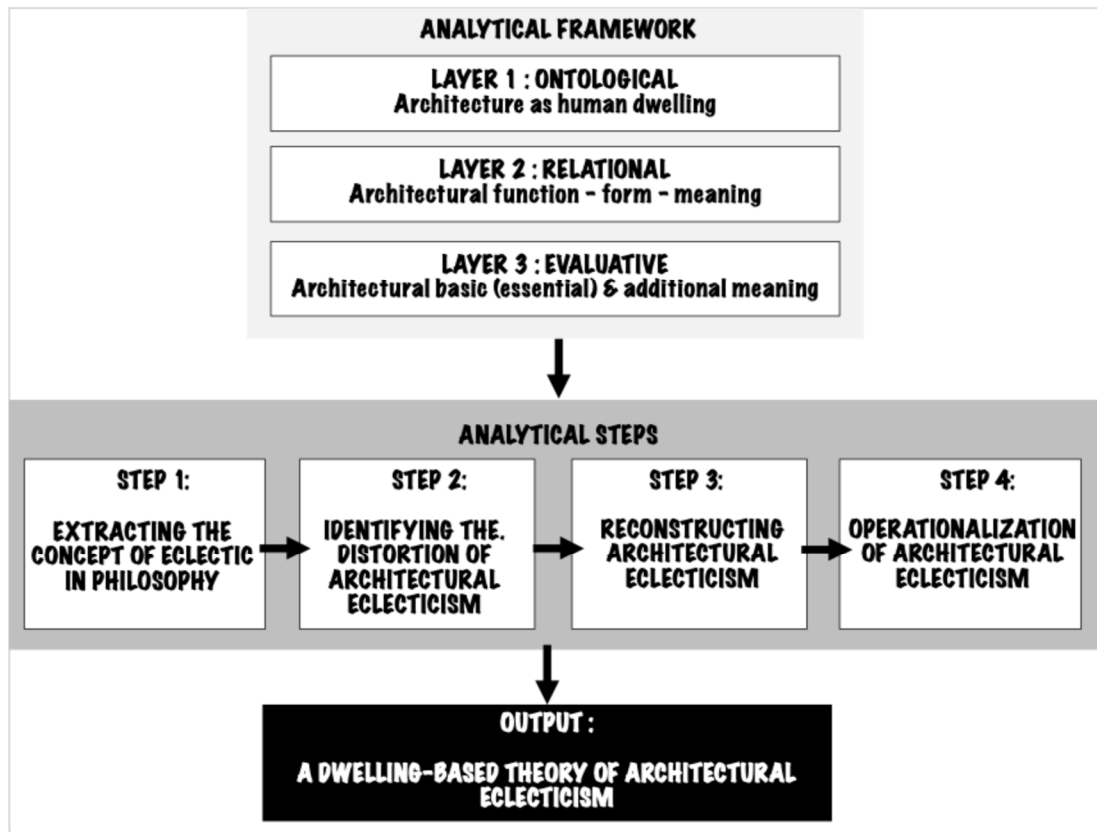


Figure 1. Conceptual framework and analytical process for reconstructing architectural eclecticism

Results and discussion

Eclectic in philosophy

The concept of eclecticism originates from the Greek term *ἐκλεκτική* (*eklektikos* derived from *eklegein*) (Merriam-Webster 2026). Etymologically, *eklektikos* denotes "one who selects," whereas *eklegein* signifies "to choose" or "to select the best" (Donini 1988). Historical evidence indicates that the earliest documented use of the concept is attributed to Claudius Galenus, the Greek physician, philosopher, and writer. In his medical writings, Galen emphasized intellectual autonomy and independence from rigid medical and philosophical sects. He argued that genuine knowledge cannot be attained through unquestioning loyalty to any single school of thought but instead emerges through the careful identification and adoption of truths found across different traditions. Consequently, he

discouraged exclusive affiliation with particular sects, advocating instead the long-term study, comparison, and evaluation of multiple philosophical traditions. Galen further criticized sectarian thinkers who subordinated evident truths to partisan commitments and engaged in intellectual disputes motivated primarily by rivalry rather than by the pursuit of knowledge (Hatzimichali 2011).

Since the period of Ancient Greek philosophy, eclecticism, as an act of deliberate selection, has functioned as an intellectual strategy for refining established doctrines, challenging dogmatic assumptions, and generating more comprehensive systems of thought. Philosophers identified as *eklektikos* critically evaluated and synthesized the most valuable insights from earlier philosophical traditions in order to formulate ideas capable of addressing both present and future challenges (Dillon 1988).

As a philosophical movement, eclecticism gained prominence during the first century BCE through the work of Potamo of Alexandria, who opposed both dogmatism and sectarianism by advocating a non-partisan search for universal truth. His position did not promote skepticism; rather, it emphasized a rational process of critically selecting and integrating ideas originating from diverse intellectual traditions (Hatzimichali 2011). Although the influence of eclecticism declined during the Middle Ages, its intellectual spirit reemerged in the seventeenth century through scholars such as Christian Thomasius. Rejecting both syncretism and sectarianism, Thomasius emphasized intellectual independence and rational judgment as indispensable principles governing the selection of knowledge (Piaia 2022).

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, eclectic philosophy was further developed by thinkers including Jacob Brucker and Denis Diderot. They regarded eclecticism as a methodological approach for constructing an independent philosophical system through the rational selection of principles considered demonstrably valid. According to this perspective, the eclectic philosopher rejects unquestioned piety, inherited prejudice, obsolete traditions, and the unquestionable authority of the past. Instead, such a thinker exercises independent judgment, pursues the clearest and most universal principles, critically evaluates them through systematic inquiry, and accepts only those ideas that withstand the scrutiny of both personal experience and rational analysis (Donini 1988; Catana 2008).

Subsequent interpretations, particularly those associated with Victor Cousin after the eighteenth century, gradually shifted the meaning of eclecticism toward a reconciliatory approach. This reinterpretation later attracted criticism because it increasingly emphasized the reconciliation of disparate ideas without establishing sufficient conceptual rigor. Cousin was therefore criticized for assembling the ideas of major philosophers rather than producing an authentically independent philosophical system through transformative intellectual innovation. As a consequence, eclecticism progressively came to be interpreted as little more than an amalgamation intended to reconcile conflicting viewpoints without developing a coherent conceptual foundation (Manns 1994; Bolus-Reichert 2009; Whistler 2018).

The historical analysis presented above reveals two principal interpretations of eclecticism. The first defines eclecticism as a process of critical selection and rational integration intended to overcome dogmatism, examine historical precedents rigorously, and generate innovative, relevant, and enduring ideas. The second interprets eclecticism as the arbitrary combination of unrelated ideas, ultimately leading to conceptual relativism. The present study adopts the first interpretation, exploring eclecticism as a conceptual framework capable of supporting architectural design.

Viewed as a process of critical selection, eclecticism is characterized by four fundamental principles.

- Eclecticism originated as an intellectual response to dogmatism and sectarianism.
- Eclecticism promotes learning from history through the careful identification and selection of the most valuable historical precedents. Accordingly, historical precedents are examined critically for future advancement rather than appreciated merely as objects of nostalgia or romanticism.
- Because eclecticism is grounded in critical evaluation, it requires comprehensive knowledge of historical precedents together with a consistent and rational process of selection, rather than an indiscriminate accumulation of opinions lacking demonstrable validity.
- The ultimate objective of eclecticism is the creation of new ideas and works capable of improving existing conditions within a particular field while maintaining meaningful continuity with preceding traditions. Consequently, the resulting work preserves an integrated awareness of the past, present, and future within a coherent intellectual framework.

Eclecticism in architecture

a. The distortion of the meaning of eclecticism in architecture

The concepts of *eclectic* and *eclecticism* were first introduced into architectural discourse during the nineteenth century through the writings of Sir Alexander James Beresford Hope (1820–1887), President of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). In his lecture entitled *The Common Sense of Art* (1858), Hope advocated what he termed Progressive Eclecticism as a means of resolving conflicts among competing

architectural styles. Nevertheless, because architectural discourse during that period remained largely preoccupied with visual appearance, Hope interpreted eclecticism in a limited sense as the combination of architectural styles. This stylistically oriented interpretation persisted throughout much of the nineteenth century and has continued to shape subsequent understandings of architectural eclecticism.

A review of architectural scholarship clearly demonstrates this tendency. Most studies addressing architectural eclecticism continue to define it primarily as the combination of stylistic traditions. For example, "Self-Conscious Eclecticism" characterizes eclecticism as the arbitrary selection of historical inspirations irrespective of the building's functional requirements or accommodated activities (Hamlin 1952). "Creative Eclecticism" emphasizes the integration of diverse architectural styles to generate new formal expressions (Meeks 1953). "Radical Eclecticism" interprets eclecticism as the hybridization of architectural styles that produces cross-pollination, mutation, and transformation of historical precedents, consistent with the postmodern architectural spirit Jencks, 1979–1991 in Steen (2015). "Rational Eclecticism" approaches eclecticism primarily as the systematic classification of historical architectural forms (de Sola-Morales 1987). "Modern Eclecticism" regards it as the quotation of historical architectural elements leading toward historiography rather than critical historicism (Porphyrios 2009). "Stylistic Eclecticism" identifies historical stylistic references as the defining characteristic of eclectic architecture (Harisah, Sastrosasmito, and Hatmoko 2007). "Syncretic Eclecticism" defines eclecticism as the superficial combination of isolated elements derived from various historical architectural styles (King 2012). "Aesthetic Eclecticism" emphasizes the visual fusion of historical styles according to aesthetic considerations (Neville 2020). More recently, "Eclecticism" has been described either as a stylistic synthesis of multiple architectural traditions or as an extension of Classical architecture (Cheng and Neisch 2023).

Beyond interpreting eclecticism merely as stylistic combination, many of these studies also associate it primarily with the expression of particular cultural or ideological meanings. Eclecticism is therefore frequently positioned as a historical alternative to the universalizing

tendencies characteristic of modernist architecture. Such interpretations, however, raise a fundamental architectural question: can cultural or ideological symbolism alone constitute architectural meaning if the essential condition of human dwelling is disregarded?

Among the existing body of scholarship on architectural eclecticism, only three studies explicitly conceptualize eclecticism as a process of critical selection rather than as a stylistic synthesis: Longstreth (1982), Salura (2018), and He (2021). Longstreth characterizes eclecticism as a design approach grounded in comprehensive and rigorous knowledge of historical architecture, enabling architects to make informed critical decisions that establish meaningful continuity between architectural precedents and contemporary design requirements (Longstreth 1982). By contrast, Salura's study critiques the widespread misinterpretation of eclecticism within architectural discourse. Returning to the term's etymological roots, Salura defines eclecticism as "the selection from diverse systems, doctrines, and sources of thought," emphasizing that eclecticism represents a philosophical mode of inquiry capable of refining, extending, or even rejecting existing ideas in order to generate more advanced conceptual frameworks (Salura 2018). Importantly, this interpretation introduces function, understood as human activity, as an essential criterion in the process of critical selection. Consequently, both Longstreth and Salura reinterpret architectural eclecticism not as a purely visual phenomenon but as an intellectual and operational methodology that informs architectural design. Likewise, He (2021) disputes the prevailing assumption that eclecticism simply denotes an arbitrary combination of stylistic elements. Through a renewed examination of the historical development of eclectic philosophy, He argues that eclecticism should instead be understood as a disciplined process of selection directed by explicit evaluative criteria rather than unrestricted stylistic freedom. Collectively, the interpretations proposed by Longstreth, Salura, and He redefine architectural eclecticism as a systematic process of evaluation, critical selection, and conceptual integration rather than a merely visual or stylistic practice. This shared understanding provides the theoretical foundation upon which the present study further develops the concept of architectural eclecticism.

b. The fundamental problem of reducing eclecticism to mere stylistic expression

The preceding discussion demonstrates that interpreting architectural eclecticism solely as the combination of architectural styles gives rise to two major conceptual problems.

The first is aesthetic reductionism, whereby architectural eclecticism is regarded exclusively as an issue of decoration or stylistic representation. Such an interpretation overlooks eclecticism's original intellectual capacity as a process of critically selecting and coherently integrating historical precedents. Consequently, eclecticism ceases to function as a design strategy capable of maintaining continuity between historical knowledge and contemporary architectural production, becoming instead a matter of visual appearance alone. Addressing this limitation requires repositioning eclecticism from a representational concept to an operational one. Within this revised perspective, eclecticism is understood not as the expression of stylistic diversity but as a systematic design mechanism governing the critical evaluation, selection, and synthesis of architectural precedents. Such a shift situates eclecticism within the logic of the design process itself rather than treating it merely as a visual characteristic of the completed architectural work.

The second problem concerns the ambiguity of the design process. Once eclecticism is reduced to the simple blending of architectural styles, it no longer explains how historical precedents should be selected, how they ought to be integrated, or what constitutes critical judgment within architectural practice. Without a clearly articulated methodological framework, evaluating the effectiveness or shortcomings of eclectic design becomes exceedingly difficult. Likewise, from a practical perspective, architects lacking a comprehensive understanding of eclecticism face a considerable risk of merely reproducing or imitating historical forms instead of critically reinterpreting them. To overcome this methodological ambiguity, eclecticism must be reformulated as an operational framework capable of systematically explaining the procedures through which historical precedents are evaluated, selected, and integrated. Within this framework, the notion of criticality should not be interpreted simply as subjective assessment but rather as a rigorous process of investigating architectural precedents, including their underlying assumptions, conditions of validity,

conceptual limitations, and broader architectural implications.

Reconstructing the concept of architectural eclecticism

a. Architectural ontology

The historical investigation presented above demonstrates that, in its original philosophical context, eclecticism did not signify the indiscriminate combination of disparate ideas or formal expressions. Instead, it functioned as an intellectual methodology founded upon the critical evaluation of diverse traditions of thought and the rational synthesis of carefully selected precedents. Throughout the philosophical tradition, the eclectic process consistently depends upon two essential conditions: first, a profound understanding of multiple intellectual traditions; and second, the capacity to evaluate, select, and integrate their most valuable principles into a coherent conceptual system. Accordingly, the defining characteristic of eclecticism, its critical nature, extends beyond logical reasoning to encompass intellectual depth. Within philosophy, such depth requires understanding not only the characteristics of individual traditions but also the epistemological boundaries governing human knowledge itself. Translated into the architectural domain, this depth of understanding requires investigating the conditions that make architecture possible, identifying its essential constitutive principles, and recognizing the limits of architectural knowledge.

Debate concerning the fundamental origin of architecture has persisted throughout architectural history. One perspective argues that architecture, as a branch of artistic production, originates primarily from the designer's creative imagination and finds expression through formal and aesthetic composition (Geddes 2012; Gambrill 1861). An alternative perspective maintains that architecture arises from humanity's fundamental need to sustain, protect, and develop life. These contrasting viewpoints continue to shape architectural discourse, where architecture is alternately interpreted either as the subjective artistic expression of its creator or as a response to the essential requirements of human habitation.

Historical accounts concerning the origins of architecture indicate that architectural construction began when early humans recognized that caves offered protection from severe climatic conditions and dangerous animals

(Vitruvius 1914). This realization encouraged the imitation of nature's protective qualities through the construction of primitive shelters using mud, branches, and other naturally available materials. Through continuous observation, experimentation, and incremental improvement, including reinforcing walls and developing roof configurations capable of efficiently draining rainwater, these elementary shelters gradually evolved into increasingly sophisticated hut forms capable of responding more effectively to human needs and environmental conditions.

A comparable interpretation was later advanced by Gottfried Semper (1803–1879). Based on his investigation of architectural origins, Semper argued that the four primordial architectural elements identified in the Caribbean Hut did not emerge merely from artistic imagination but instead evolved directly from human activities undertaken to satisfy essential needs. These primordial elements comprise the hearth, serving as the focal point of domestic life; the mound, establishing the distinction between interior and exterior ground levels; the roof, supported by structural columns; and the woven enclosure, which forms the intermediate enclosing element or walls (Semper 1984; Hvattum 2004).

Another influential interpretation was proposed by Quatremère de Quincy, who investigated architectural origins by distinguishing among three categories of early human society: hunter-gatherers, nomadic communities, and agricultural settlements. Hunter-gatherers possessed little or no knowledge of building construction, relying primarily on caves and naturally occurring shelters. Nomadic societies developed portable tents capable of being repeatedly dismantled, transported, and reconstructed in accordance with their patterns of movement. Agricultural communities, by contrast, established permanent settlements and constructed huts intended for long-term habitation. These three primordial architectural manifestations, the cave, the tent, and the hut, represent distinct origins corresponding to different traditions of dwelling, each generating its own characteristic patterns of human activity. Through this tripartite classification, Quatremère de Quincy concluded that the origins of architecture cannot be explained through universal formal archetypes but instead originate in the simultaneously natural and particular activities of human beings (Hvattum 2004).

Consequently, the essential purpose of architecture is to provide an environment that accommodates activities corresponding to specific traditions of dwelling.

Taken together, the perspectives advanced by these three theorists indicate that architecture did not originate merely as a medium for artistic self-expression or as a representation of cultural identity. Rather, architecture emerged fundamentally to satisfy humanity's essential need for habitation. This constitutes the original ontological purpose underlying the existence of architecture.

Within contemporary architectural theory, this ontological position is reaffirmed by Purnama Salura (Salura 2026a; 2026b). Although this perspective represents only one among several theoretical approaches currently available, it is adopted in the present study because it provides a clear operational basis for evaluating the relationship among function, form, and meaning. According to Salura's theory of architectural ontology, architecture should not primarily be understood as a building, formal composition, or technological artifact. Instead, it constitutes an ontological relationship connecting the human body, the necessity of dwelling, and the spatial configurations that enable habitation. Accordingly, the ontology of architecture is defined as the principle of embodied human dwelling within spatial organization. This ontological perspective emphasizes that architecture cannot be reduced to a material object alone but instead represents the condition that enables human beings to inhabit space, orient themselves within their surroundings, sustain life, and pursue its continued development.

The practical manifestation of this ontological perspective is expressed through the inseparable relationship among function, form, and meaning (figure 1). As the setting that enables human habitation, architecture accommodates all activities necessary for sustaining and enriching human life. Within this study, these patterns of human behavior are defined as function. Every activity possesses its own characteristic spatial requirements and is fundamentally conditioned by the biological nature of the human body. For example, eating is optimally performed while sitting because this bodily posture supports the activity more effectively than standing or running.

To facilitate these activities under conditions that are safe, comfortable, and protected from environmental influences, architectural space is

enclosed by overhead elements (roof), vertical enclosing elements (walls), and horizontal supporting elements (floor). Together, these structural and enclosing components establish a specific spatial configuration referred to as form. From this perspective, architecture does not originate from form itself but from humanity's fundamental need for an environment capable of accommodating meaningful patterns of activity (Salura and Fauzy 2013; Man and Salura 2025).

Moreover, the relationship established between function and form is continuously interpreted by individuals who experience architectural space through their embodied existence. This interpretative process constitutes meaning. Consequently, unlike anthropology, philosophy, or the social sciences, which may define meaning as any symbolic or cognitive interpretation architectural meaning is understood

specifically as the interpretation emerging from the embodied relationship between human activities of dwelling and the spatial configurations that accommodate them.

Based on the foregoing discussion, two principal conclusions may be established. First, architecture should not be equated solely with visual form but rather with the dynamic relationship between the human body and architectural space. Second, although architectural creation may indeed originate from humanity's interpretation of the surrounding world, architectural meaning never precedes the embodied relationship between body and space. Architecture begins with human activity (function), which is accommodated through an appropriate spatial configuration (form); only afterward does the interaction between these two dimensions generate architectural meaning.

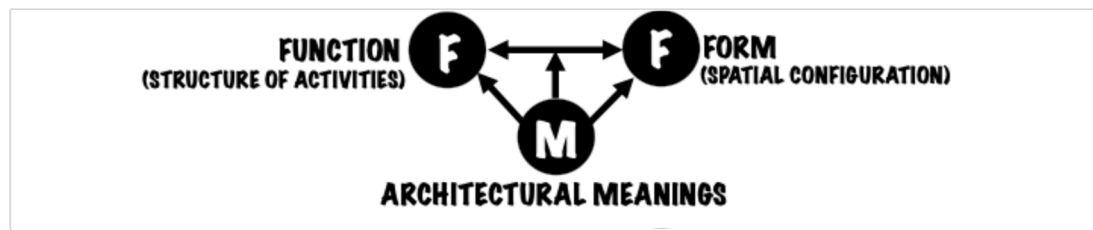


Figure 2. The relationship of Architectural Function-Form-Meaning elaborated from Salura-Fauzy (2013)

b. Layers of architectural meaning

Although Salura (2026b) argues that architecture should not be understood merely as a physical artifact, he simultaneously establishes a clear distinction between architecture as the ontological basis of human dwelling and architecture as a medium for expressing particular cultural or ideological values. Within this conceptual framework, understanding the hierarchical structure of architectural meaning becomes indispensable.

As discussed in the preceding section, architecture fundamentally functions as the setting that enables human habitation. Consequently, architectural space must facilitate human activities under conditions that ensure safety, comfort, accessibility, and spatial orientation. The activities accommodated by architecture originate primarily from humanity's biological condition. Patterns of activity are therefore determined by the characteristics of the human body, which requires protection from environmental conditions, the ability to orient itself within space, and the freedom to move and

interact effectively with its surroundings. Nevertheless, human beings are not merely biological organisms. As symbolic beings, they continually construct meanings that extend beyond the satisfaction of basic physiological needs (Cassirer 1944). When universal human activities become embedded within particular cultural environments, they develop into distinct social and spatial practices. Dining provides a clear illustration of this relationship. In traditional Japanese culture, meals are commonly consumed while sitting on tatami mats surrounding a low dining table. By contrast, dining customs throughout much of Western Europe are generally organized around elevated tables, individual chairs, and clearly defined personal dining spaces. Although the biological activity of eating remains fundamentally identical, the spatial arrangements through which it is accommodated vary according to cultural traditions. A comparable condition may be observed in the architectural treatment of doors. At the most fundamental level, every doorway must possess dimensions that permit individuals to enter and leave a space safely and

comfortably. However, the architectural expression of this element frequently reflects specific cultural interpretations. Traditional Chinese houses commonly incorporate raised thresholds that symbolically distinguish sacred from profane domains while simultaneously serving to repel negative spiritual influences (Knapp 2005). In European Gothic cathedrals, entrance portals are intentionally designed with monumental proportions to symbolize humanity's spiritual journey toward salvation (Frankl and Crossley 2000). Conversely, the nijiriguchi entrance of the traditional Japanese tea house is deliberately constructed with a reduced height, requiring visitors to bow before entering as an expression of humility and social equality (Okakura 1906; Itoh 1972). These examples demonstrate that while the underlying human needs and patterns of activity remain universal, the architectural forms through which those needs are expressed develop according to particular cultural traditions and, in many instances, broader ideological frameworks.

Architecture that successfully accommodates fundamental human needs by organizing patterns of activity, facilitating interaction among occupants, and integrating those activities within coherent enclosing spatial elements is understood to embody basic meaning. This level of meaning is described as basic because it represents the essential characteristics that every architectural work must possess by virtue of the historical and causal conditions from which architecture originally emerged. These characteristics explain why certain architectural works continue to remain functional, meaningful, and enduring across extended historical periods.

Human beings, however, do not produce only basic and substantial meanings. Rapid technological advancement has enabled society to create a wide range of objects including architectural works that embody meanings extending beyond the fulfillment of fundamental human needs, frequently motivated by the pursuit of novelty, innovation, or symbolic expression. At this increasingly imaginative, yet often arbitrary, level, architectural production is no longer governed primarily by its essential function. Instead, designers may introduce architectural elements whose purposes are unrelated to, or even contradictory to, the building's primary role as a setting for human habitation (Parsons and Carlson

2008). A simple illustration may be drawn from the example of a frying pan. Its essential purpose is to provide a heated surface for preparing food. Nevertheless, the same object may subsequently be employed as a weapon, used as a paperweight, or even displayed as an object symbolizing the owner's prestige. A comparable phenomenon may also occur in architecture. Designers occasionally incorporate architectural forms principally to communicate particular traditions, cultural identities, or ideological positions that bear little relationship to the human activities accommodated by the building itself. One familiar example is found in residential architecture throughout many developing countries, where ornamental columns inspired by Greek architecture are incorporated not because they enhance the performance of dwelling, but because they symbolize prosperity, affluence, or elevated social status. Likewise, modern minimalist architecture may, within one historical context, represent ideals such as openness and democracy, whereas under different political circumstances the identical architectural language may instead become associated with authoritarianism or totalitarian rule.

Under such conditions, the role of architectural enclosing elements gradually shifts from facilitating human dwelling toward emphasizing symbolic or ideological representation. These symbolic interpretations constitute what this study defines as additional meaning. Such meanings are contingent rather than essential because they frequently bear little relationship to the activities accommodated within architectural space and, in certain circumstances, may even undermine the building's primary function as a setting for habitation. Nevertheless, additional meanings should not automatically be regarded as detrimental. When appropriately integrated, symbolic, cultural, or ideological dimensions may strengthen spatial orientation, reinforce collective identity, cultivate a stronger sense of belonging, and enrich the overall experience of dwelling. Consequently, the critical issue is not the mere existence of additional meaning but rather whether these supplementary layers preserve and reinforce the coherence of the function–form relationship, which constitutes the ontological foundation of architecture.

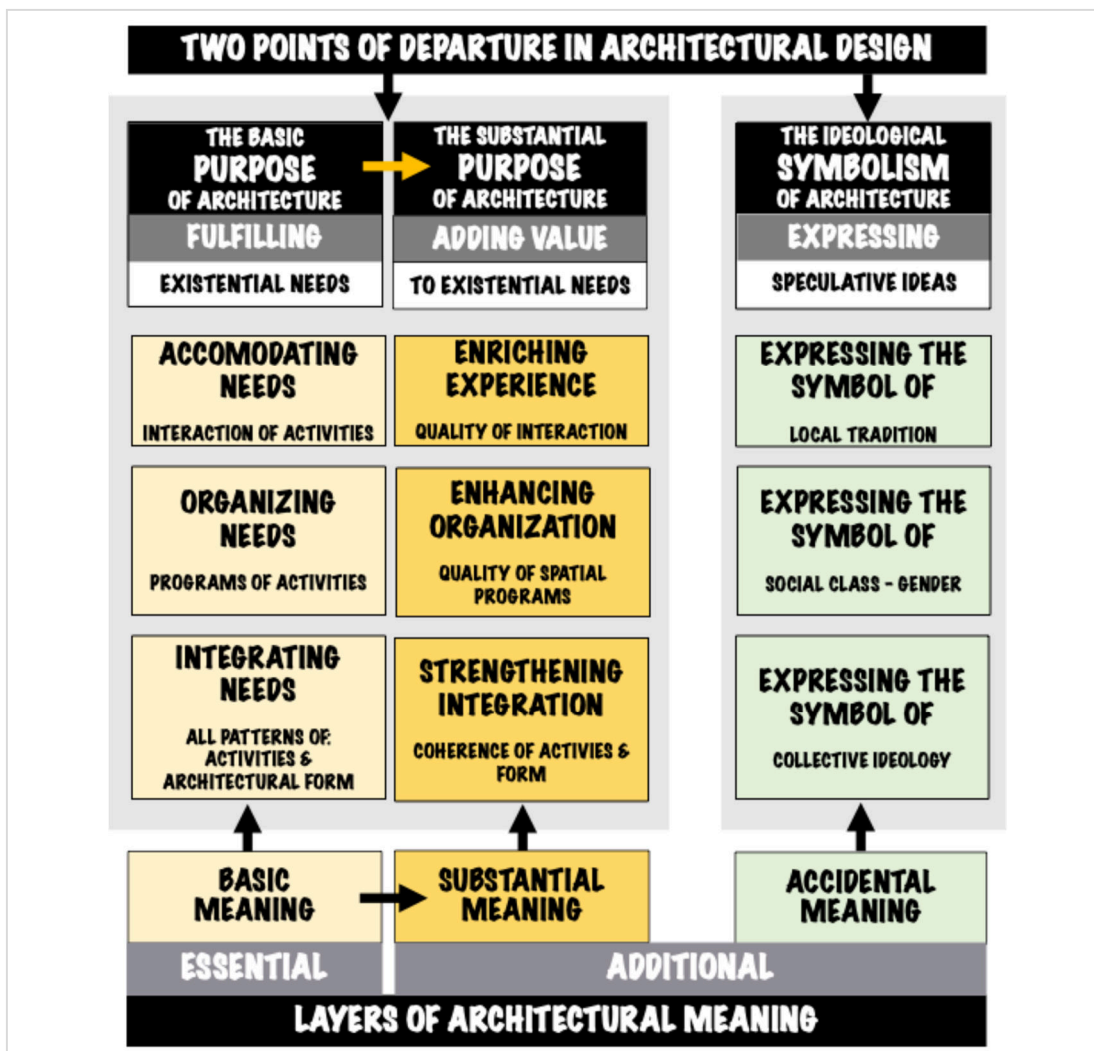


Figure 3. Layers of architectural meaning

In practice, the boundary separating basic meaning from additional meaning should not always be interpreted as rigid or absolute. Architectural elements originally introduced primarily for symbolic purposes may, through continued use and cultural development, gradually become integral components of spatial orientation, collective identity, or the lived experience of dwelling. Accordingly, the distinction proposed in this study should be understood not as a fixed binary classification but as an analytical framework for identifying the dominant relational structures operating within a particular architectural work.

To clarify this distinction more systematically, the present study proposes a straightforward evaluative approach founded upon the function–

form relationship. An architectural element may be regarded as substantial when its presence is indispensable to the spatial organization that enables human activities to occur. Stated differently, if the removal of that element would significantly diminish spatial performance, disrupt orientation, or weaken the continuity between human activity and architectural space, the element contributes directly to the substantial meaning of the architectural work.

Conversely, an architectural element should be regarded as accidental when it can be modified, substituted, or entirely removed without materially affecting the performance of dwelling or the primary spatial organization. Such elements generally function as symbolic, cultural, or ideological expressions whose presence is not

fundamentally required for architecture to fulfill its essential role as a setting for human habitation. Through this evaluative framework, it becomes possible to distinguish more systematically between architectural components that contribute directly to the basic meaning of architecture as a place of dwelling and those that merely introduce supplementary interpretative layers without determining the continuity of the underlying function–form relationship.

c. Operational Model of Architectural Eclecticism

To transform architectural eclecticism into an operational and empirically examinable design framework, this study introduces a model composed of four interrelated stages:

- The first stage involves precedent identification, which focuses on determining the historical architectural precedents to be incorporated into the design. These precedents may include spatial organizations, enclosing components, or specific architectural principles. At this stage, each selected precedent must be justified according to its relevance and suitability for addressing the intended design objectives and functional requirements.
- The second stage consists of precedent analysis through the function–form–meaning relationship. The objective is to achieve a comprehensive understanding of each precedent by examining the activities it accommodates, the manner in which its form including every enclosing architectural element creates spatial conditions that enable those activities, and the meanings that emerge from the interaction between function and form. Accordingly, a precedent is interpreted not simply as a visual or stylistic reference but as an integrated architectural system whose constituent elements collectively establish the conditions for human habitation.
- The third stage is critical selection, during which every precedent element is carefully evaluated to determine whether it effectively supports human activities through an appropriate spatial configuration while simultaneously contributing to the realization of architecture as a setting for dwelling. Rather than relying upon stylistic or aesthetic preferences, this evaluation is grounded in conceptual and architectural principles so that only those elements reinforcing the essential relational structure of architecture are retained.

- The fourth stage is integration, whereby the selected architectural elements are synthesized into a new design proposal. This phase extends well beyond the mere combination of formal components, requiring the establishment of relational coherence and spatial integrity so that the final design functions as a unified architectural system instead of a fragmented aggregation of unrelated parts.

To strengthen the reliability and validity of this operational process, the model is further supported by four evaluative parameters:

- Functional evaluation examines whether the integrated architectural elements genuinely accommodate and facilitate the intended patterns of human activity.
- Formal evaluation investigates whether the integrated elements contribute to the creation of spatial environments that enable activities to occur safely, comfortably, and efficiently. More specifically, this evaluation considers whether the architectural components and their spatial organization successfully facilitate interactions among users, structure functional programs, and integrate patterns of use with the facilities required to support them.
- Basic meaning evaluation determines whether the resulting relationship between function and form continues to preserve architecture's fundamental role as a setting for human dwelling or whether it has instead deteriorated into a purely symbolic expression detached from functional performance. This situation may occur, for example, when architectural forms derived from artistic or cultural discourse are merely appended superficially without contributing to the essential relationship between function and space.
- Additional meaning evaluation assesses whether the symbolic meanings introduced into the design enrich and reinforce the overall architectural structure or, conversely, weaken its coherence and diminish its architectural integrity.

Through these sequential stages and evaluative criteria, architectural eclecticism can be understood as a systematic, accountable, and theoretically grounded architectural process for selecting, evaluating, and integrating historical precedents. Furthermore, this conceptual framework clarifies the distinction between architectural eclecticism founded upon the

principle of dwelling and several other precedent-oriented design approaches, including precedent studies, typological design, and collage.

Architectural eclecticism, as conceptualized in this study, differs substantially from the conventional approach of precedent studies. Foundational precedent-based investigations, including those developed by Clark and Pause (1985) and Frampton (2015), were originally intended to uncover underlying design logic, identify architectural principles capable of adaptation and transformation, and cultivate reflective engagement with architectural history and design practice. In practice, however, precedent studies have frequently been reduced to the documentation and categorization of architectural forms. Such investigations often emphasize the recording and classification of formal characteristics while giving comparatively little attention to evaluating how those forms perform as spatial settings that accommodate actual human activities. Although both approaches rely on historical precedents, precedent studies and architectural eclecticism are fundamentally distinguished by the manner in which precedents are interpreted and transformed. Conventional precedent studies generally conclude with the documentation, classification, and interpretation of architectural form, without critically assessing how effectively those forms function as environments that support human occupation. By contrast, dwelling-based architectural eclecticism places the relationship between function, the human body, and space at the center of the processes of precedent selection and integration. Consequently, historical precedents cannot be incorporated indiscriminately; instead, every precedent must first be evaluated through the integrated relationship among function, form, and meaning before it is considered suitable for application. Within this framework, eclecticism extends beyond serving merely as a strategy for referencing historical examples and instead becomes an ontological principle that determines the architectural legitimacy of a design.

Architectural eclecticism also stands in clear contrast to the typological approach. In his influential discussion of typology and architectural methodology, Colquhoun (1972) argued that typology should not be understood simply as the classification of architectural forms. Rather, he viewed typology as an abstraction of recurring architectural configurations that

function as conceptual models for interpreting architecture and generating architectural meaning. From this perspective, typology operates as a coding system through which architectural artifacts are classified, interpreted, and used to transmit cultural significance. Implicit within the typological method are several interconnected processes, including abstraction, through which recurring patterns are extracted from historical precedents; classification, by which architectural forms are organized into recognizable types; transformation, whereby these types are adapted to new design contexts; and reinterpretation, in which typological forms are related to contemporary cultural circumstances. Nevertheless, despite these analytical processes, typology continues to operate primarily at the level of architectural form as representation. Dwelling-based architectural eclecticism, by comparison, functions at the more fundamental level of the body–space relationship as an architectural reality. Accordingly, typology may be understood as a design methodology that employs architectural types as representational models for organizing and transforming forms derived from historical precedents and cultural traditions. The model of architectural eclecticism advanced in this study, however, adopts a fundamentally different position. Rather than relying primarily on representational types, it emphasizes the critical selection and integration of historical precedents according to the validity of the function–form–meaning relationship, with the primary objective of preserving and strengthening the conditions necessary for human dwelling.

Architectural eclecticism is also fundamentally distinct from the concept of design collage. An extensive examination of collage within architectural discourse is presented by Shields (2023), who conceptualizes collage neither as a design technique nor as a completed architectural artifact. Instead, he frames it as a cognitive mode of inquiry and a medium through which fragmented, layered, and temporally situated embodied experiences may be understood. From this standpoint, collage is conceived as an assemblage of heterogeneous fragments whose interaction produces meanings that do not inherently exist within the individual components themselves. Consequently, Shields interprets collage not simply as a strategy of visual composition, but as a multilayered semantic construct. Nevertheless, the conception

of collage advanced within this framework remains confined to the relationships among fragments and does not extend to the more fundamental relationship between human beings and architectural space. Whereas Shields regards architecture as an accumulation of experiences, the architectural eclecticism proposed in the present study understands architecture primarily as the relational unity between the human body and space that enables human activities to occur. Within collage, all fragments are generally treated as possessing equivalent status; by contrast, the critical selection inherent in architectural eclecticism recognizes that not every architectural element can function as a “free fragment,” since certain elements are indispensable to sustaining the conditions of dwelling. Put differently, collage possesses a generative capacity because it facilitates numerous design possibilities; however, it cannot determine whether the resulting configuration satisfies the essential requirements of architecture. Such an orientation consequently directs architectural inquiry toward experience, perception, materiality, and layered representation, remaining predominantly within phenomenological and representational domains without establishing an ontological foundation capable of ensuring architecture’s effectiveness as a setting for human dwelling. As a result, collage risks developing into a form of “misplaced eclecticism” lacking critical rigor, rendering it incapable of distinguishing meaningful architectural integration from arbitrary fragmentation.

Finally, these three approaches also differ substantially from the architectural eclecticism advanced in this study with respect to their methods of validation. Typology, precedent studies, and collage have primarily evolved as frameworks intended for classification, interpretation, transformation, or conceptual investigation. Accordingly, they generally do not establish explicit operational criteria through which architectural validity may be assessed in relation to the performance of dwelling. Within typological approaches, validation typically remains internal to the typological system itself, emphasizing whether a design continues to be identifiable as belonging to a particular typological family or whether it successfully transforms that type in a coherent manner. However, achieving typological consistency does not necessarily ensure that the resulting architectural form adequately supports human

activities. Consequently, typological validation remains fundamentally representational rather than performative with respect to dwelling. In precedent-based studies, validation generally depends upon the successful adaptation or transformation of established design principles. Nevertheless, the effective transfer of such principles is not invariably accompanied by an assessment of whether the resulting design genuinely responds to the lived conditions and requirements of its users. As a consequence, precedent studies may remain confined to reproducing design logic without verifying the actual performance of architectural space as a setting for human activity. Similarly, collage as a design strategy prioritizes creative experimentation through the juxtaposition, layering, and fragmentation of architectural elements, thereby relocating validation toward conceptual expression and narrative construction. Within such an approach, criteria for success become inherently relative, depending primarily upon the accompanying discourse or conceptual narrative rather than upon the capacity of architectural space to concretely sustain human dwelling.

In contrast, the architectural eclecticism proposed in this study introduces an explicit, multilayered evaluative framework grounded in the ontological essence of architecture as dwelling. Validation is therefore no longer confined to formal correspondence, precedent interpretation, or the persuasive strength of conceptual narratives. Instead, evaluation is directed toward examining the fundamental interrelationship among function, form, and meaning. Accordingly, a design outcome may be considered invalid as an expression of architectural eclecticism, and may even diminish architecture’s capacity to function as a setting for dwelling by privileging formal or symbolic representation, whenever the integration of precedents weakens or disrupts the essential function-form relationship that constitutes the prerequisite for dwelling. Within this perspective, eclecticism is no longer understood as unrestricted freedom to select and combine architectural elements. Rather, it becomes a disciplined process of critical selection governed by the ontological principles that define architecture itself.

Despite these contributions, the present study acknowledges several limitations. First, the proposed framework remains primarily

conceptual and has not yet been examined through comprehensive design simulations or detailed empirical case studies. Second, the discussion of architectural meaning concentrates predominantly on the function–form relationship within the context of dwelling and therefore does not encompass the full range of phenomenological, semiotic, or representational perspectives that characterize contemporary architectural theory. Third, the operational model introduced in this study requires additional examination across a wider variety of cultural contexts and building typologies in order to evaluate both its adaptability and the boundaries of its applicability. Consequently, further investigations are necessary to strengthen both the empirical validation and the methodological refinement of the proposed framework.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this investigation, several principal conclusions may be drawn.

First, this study proposes a redefinition of architectural eclecticism that fundamentally departs from conventional interpretations. Eclecticism is no longer understood as the simple combination of stylistic elements originating from diverse architectural traditions. Instead, it is reconceptualized as a mechanism of critical selection through which historical precedents are evaluated according to the function–form–meaning relationship that constitutes the foundation of architecture. Within this framework, the legitimacy of architectural eclecticism is determined not by the diversity of historical references employed, but by the extent to which those selected precedents preserve the coherence of architecture’s essential relational structure as the necessary condition for human dwelling.

Second, the findings indicate that historical criticisms directed toward architectural eclecticism have not fundamentally targeted the practice of combining precedents itself. Rather, such criticisms have consistently arisen from the absence of explicit principles governing the selection and integration of historical precedents. Arbitrary combinations lacking adequate conceptual justification tend to generate incoherent architectural compositions while failing to clarify the relationships among form,

function, and meaning. Consequently, the central problem of eclecticism lies neither in the act of combination nor in its engagement with historical precedents, but instead in the absence of a principled mechanism of selection grounded in architecture’s ontological foundation.

Third, the principal finding of this study demonstrates that architectural eclecticism may only be regarded as valid when it fulfills the most fundamental meaning of architecture, namely its capacity to support human dwelling through a coherent relationship between function and form. Historical precedent elements that fail to contribute to this foundational meaning, or that actively undermine it, serve only to express secondary and accidental meanings, thereby offering no assurance of architecture’s continuity as an integrated system. Accordingly, the success of architectural eclecticism should not be evaluated according to formal complexity, stylistic diversity, or the historical origins of its references. Instead, its validity depends upon its ability to preserve the relational structure through which human activities can occur safely, effectively, and comfortably.

Fourth, the implications of this study extend across three major domains. Within architectural design, the proposed framework offers architects a conceptual foundation for critically selecting and integrating historical precedents rather than merely adopting formal characteristics in a superficial manner. Within architectural evaluation, the framework establishes parameters for determining whether a work of architecture reinforces or instead weakens the relationship among function, form, and meaning. In the context of architectural education, the study encourages a reconceptualization of eclecticism from a predominantly stylistic concern into a design mechanism firmly grounded in the ontological principles of architecture. Unlike approaches such as precedent-based design, typology, or collage, which generally operate through formal reference, classification, or visual composition, the present study situates architectural precedent within architecture’s ontological relationship to human dwelling. Consequently, the architectural eclecticism proposed here should not be regarded as merely another variation of these existing approaches, but rather as a fundamentally distinct theoretical framework governing the study, selection, and evaluation of architectural precedents.

In conclusion, architectural eclecticism cannot be considered valid whenever it undermines the function-form relationship that constitutes the essential foundation of human dwelling. Any attempt to select and integrate historical precedents while neglecting this indispensable relationship risks redirecting architecture away from its primary role as a setting for dwelling and toward the dominance of purely visual or representational composition. Accordingly, the architectural eclecticism proposed in this study is understood not as unrestricted freedom to combine forms arbitrarily, but as a disciplined process of critical selection that preserves the coherence of the relationship among human activities, spatial organization, and architectural meaning.

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Stephanie Clarissa contributed to the research concepts preparation, methodologies, investigations, data analysis, visualization, articles drafting and revisions.

Purnama Salura contribute to the research concepts preparation and literature reviews, data analysis, of article drafts preparation and validation.

Ignatius Bambang Sugiharto contribute to methodology, supervision, and validation.