This is the published version of:

Beynon, David 2003, Tradition as past is a modernist idea, in 20th annual conference of the Society of Architectural Historians Australia and New Zealand., Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand, Sydney, N.S.W., pp. 27-31..

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As outlined in the theme of this conference, the problematisation of the notion of ‘progress’ relates to a questioning of the West’s teleological aspirations for the future. This critique has allowed for the presence of a multiplicity of ways of perceiving the world, including those from outside the West’s intellectual tradition. However, within architectural discourse, conceptual plurality has been largely limited to movements such as critical regionalism or postmodernism, which have tended to question the direction or desirability of progress, rather than its fundamental nature.

This paper looks at an example of recent architecture by an Asian diasporic community in Melbourne. This is a building that appears to be ‘traditional’ in style, in other words atavistic and antithetical to ‘progressive’ architectural ideals. However, looking at it through different philosophical understandings of duration can provide us with alternative interpretations to these assumptions.

By this I am not referring to disillusionment with progress, as expressed through postmodernist and neo-traditionalist movements in the West, but ways in which looking at the ‘traditional’ architectures of non-Western cultures from their own philosophical positions might provide alternative definitions of the idea of ‘progress’. The increasing presence of non-Western ‘traditional’ architecture in the West implies that Western modernity might not be the only ‘tradition’ that has a viable future. Consequently, the idea of ‘the future’ as something to aspire to, might be the outcome of a particular dominant historicity rather than a universal condition.
The notion of 'progress' is related to the West's teleological aspirations for the future, envisaged as transpiring in the unfolding passage of linear time. A positivist view of the future has sustained Western culture since the Enlightenment. However, in recent times, as disillusionment with the ability for technological advancement to provide social emancipation has become more prevalent, confidence in the idea of progress has wavered. In architectural discourse, the problematising of the progress has been has been evident in the rise of movements as postmodernism and critical regionalism. These have, however, tended to question the direction or desirability of progress, rather than its fundamental nature. Despite this, the postmodern turn in Western thinking has had other effects. One of these is an increasing interest in ways of seeing the world that derive from non-Western philosophical bases.

While there are numerous aspects of this phenomenon that have some import for architecture, from the increase in interest in t'ung shui in the West, to the growing numbers of Western Buddhists, the particular aspect that I will concentrate on in this paper concerns the growing number of public buildings of Asian diasporic communities in Australia and other Western nations. These buildings are often traditional in aspect, and so it might be assumed that the motivations for their form and detail are mainly atavistic or nostalgic, indicative of a backward-looking attachment to originary cultures rather than an engagement with modernity. However, different architectural 'traditions' are also generated from particular philosophical positions and so are grounded in different ways of seeing, and being in, the world. Ideas such as 'tradition' and 'progress' might therefore, be more be fundamentally challenged by a closer look at the implications that such other world-views might provide.

Western architectural discourse has been traditionally embedded in a world-view that considers time to be a linear unfolding of events and causalties. The universality of the West's post-Enlightenment project of progress has been, for much of the last few centuries, apparently self-evident in the wake of the West's dominance over the rest of the world, first through direct colonialism, and more recently through hegemonic globalisation. However, in a contemporary situation in which both the West's faith in its own progressive project has dimmed and in which the rise of Asian 'tigers' in economic power, and neo-Islamist movements in religious power has led to 'other' cultures contemplating futures that are anti- or non-Western, it would appear time to re-evaluate the place of non-Western world-views. This re-evaluation not only in 'other' countries, but in the centres of the West itself. One aspect of architectural interest that might be studied in this regard is that of 'heritage'. As attitudes to history have changed in the wake of postmodernist and neo-traditionalist movements in the West, attitudes towards conservation, preservation and the place of historicist architectural styles for new buildings have become contentious political issues. Furthermore, while these attitudes have hardly coalesced into a unified position, the cross-cultural applications of architectural conservation are also problematic, given that the notion of 'heritage' has particular cultural origins. This does not mean necessarily giving up a Western epistemological position but, in hermeneutical sense, accepting that there may be limitations to its 'horizon of understanding'\(^2\). These are major religious and philosophical questions, and I can only touch upon them here. However, notions of 'heritage', or 'historical style' in products such as architecture can not be divorced from culturally-held conceptions of the nature of time. It follows then, that while it may make implicit sense to look at the products within one's own cultural according to accepted understandings of progress, it does not necessarily follow that these understandings can be directly applied to the products of other cultures whose notions of historicity might be different.

To explore this supposition, this paper looks a Hindu temple in suburban Melbourne. The Shri Shiva Vishnu temple is situated in Carrum Downs, on the far southern fringe of Melbourne. Its site is semi-rural, surrounded by other suburban/rural fringe uses. Carrum Downs is an area that is experiencing rapid residential development, with remnant farmland being overcome by spreading estates of speculative housing. The temple is approached from the south. From here a driveway leads to a car park to the east of the temple, facing the twin gopuras (gateway towers) that mark the twin residences of the gods Shiva and Vishnu in the temple. Both gopuras are covered in elaborated moulded figures and symbols, in contrast to the generally undecorated exterior walls of the remainder of the temple. The exception to this is a decorative parapet around the perimeter, and shaped concrete columns which are expressed on the exterior walls. Entry through the gopuras is via carved timber doorways, behind which are sliding glass doors. The temple is a single space, the centre third of which is a raised podium, and at the rear of this (directly in alignment with the two entrances, are the two major garbhagrihas (shrines), to Shiva and Vishnu. Surrounding these are a number of smaller shrines, for the consorts of the two main deities, and to other gods and holy figures. To access many of these, there is a passage around the podium and the two main shrines. The other feature of the interior are the two main skylights, positioned in front of the shrines of Shiva and Vishnu, that allow viewing from inside of the apaxes of each of the shrines that penetrate the roof of the building.

Before the Shri Shiva Vishnu temple could be built, consultations were required with a sthapathi (temple architect) so that the correct procedure (agaama shastra) for the construction and detail of the temple could be followed. The sthapathi Shri S.S. Nagarajan was brought out from Tamil Nadu for five weeks of consultation for this purpose, preparing drawings for the shrines, gopuras (entrance towers) and other areas where ritual exactitude was deemed necessary. Fifteen shilpis (sculptors) lived on the site and worked upon the shrines and gopuras for one and a half years to complete the sculptural and decorative aspects of the temple. Many elements were also commissioned to be made in India, The granite idols, the bronze statues, the silver and copper ornaments, the wooden doors for the main entrances and the shrines and the vehicles for the deities were all made by various Indian artisans and transported to Melbourne.

The layout, disposition and decoration of the temple, are, like other Hindu temples, the result of ritual requirements that are set down in Brahmancial literature. While this is a huge and complex subject, a detail of which is far beyond the scope of this paper, the strict adherence to these texts and their import for the meaning of the building make a brief outline of the relevant precepts relevant. The most important concept for Hindu practice is dharma, which refers roughly to a 'right way of living', and, in its various forms, is inclusive of "eternal order, righteousness, religion, law and duty". Dharma is part of an overall ideology, of which other important parts are samsara (the soul’s travelling through the endless cycle of birth and death), karma (the way that conduct in one life determines status in the next), papa (sins that increase the soul’s store of demerit), punya (merit attained by good acts such as pilgrimage or the giving of devotional gifts) and moksha (the liberation from samsara sought by the soul). These collected concepts do not, however, infer belief in the same way as Christian or Muslim precepts, and in terms of worship there is a great variety of manifeststions which come under the umbrella of Hinduism. Of the many rituals that make up Hindu
practice, it is those of worship (puja) that are of concern here. A Hindu temple is the place where the deity becomes manifest, being installed by consecration in his/her idol in its inner sanctuary. Puja, or temple priests serve the idol. This involves daily preparations, not only for worship, but for the deity itself. Being resident in the inner sanctum of the temple, the deity is present there, and each day. Apart from festivals, Hindu worship is a private affair, there are no sermons and people come individually to pray, petition, or offer food to the deity.

The physical form of the temple is fundamental for its purpose. As Coomaraswamy points out, in the Hindu cosmic structure, “The human frame, the constructed temple, and the universe being analogical equivalents, the parts of the temple correspond to those of the human body no less than to those of the universe itself. Each is a microcosm of the other. The apparently riotous (to Western observers) exterior of the Hindu temple is part of this embodiment, but also symbolises the process of approaching the divine, shedding the multiple tastes, sights, and forms of the everyday world to the single image of the deity through which all these illusions are manifest. The decoration of the exterior is not, as some Western scholars have had it, symptomatic of the chaotic and irrational nature of Indian thought, but a precise model and message. Firstly, the Hindu temple is, in itself (and besides the images it protects), an object of worship. For both this role, and its role as a vehicle for the embodiment of its deities, the building embodies a conception of the universe which is elucidated in the vastu purusha. The temple does not just symbolise this sacred geometry, it’s, immanently, the universe. As Bilimoria puts it, the temple is “transubstantiated into a divine cosmos.” The worshipper, as it were, enters the divine when they enter a temple, and it is with this that the real power of its architecture is exhibited. The temple also manifests the connection between the everyday world of the senses and the world of divinity, but, more than this, makes them one. This movement to essence is stated in the Bhagavadgita; what is here (visible in the world), the same is there (invisible in the brahman); and what is there, the same is here.10 The temple makes this connection of the infinite, boundless and empty and the finite, teeming and multiple, explicitly through its geometry and its decoration. The temple is thus a liminal space in a highly specific way. One of the terms used to describe the temple is antariksha, which means a realm (lokā) between heaven and earth. Antariksha is the overlap, or threshold between the everyday world of sensation, life and death, and akasha, the unbound cosmic void. The temple thus allows those who enter it to sense akasha, to stand on the doorstep, as it were, of the ultimate. Shiva, Vishnu, and the other deities are made manifest in the temple. The temple orders the cosmos in microcosm so that they will come down to inhabit it.

Awareness in the West that other traditions conceive of time as cyclical is not recent. Moreover, as Gupta points out, this awareness has led to prejudicial attitudes to colonised peoples. Rather than opening up the West to alternate ways of conceiving the world, it has instead led to the propagation of certain essentialising tropes that have assisted colonialist and neo-colonialist projects. These tropes include the attributions to non-Western peoples of fatalism, an absence of the linearity of the West, and a cyclical worldview. These characteristics have long been considered by the West to be intrinsic to the nature of ‘other’ cultures, and provided justification for the West’s progressive mission (rather than its territorial and economic ambitions) to lead others towards a more ‘progressive’ manner of thinking.

This is due to the connection made in the West between conceptions of linearity and causality with the idea of progress. The teleological aspect to Western thinking occurs in the implicit belief that there can be an overall purpose applied to causes and effects, rather than events being just a series of mechanical effects. ‘Progress’ requires there to be a process of advancement, propelled by the active intent to move forwards, not around in circles. Given this recent history, it is still problematic to return to this apparently fundamental ‘West equals linear’ versus ‘East equals cyclical’ dichotomy. However, despite these caveats, it seems that in a West which is preoccupied with unimportance, and a sense of inevitability towards its last few centuries of progress, the re-entry into the Western world of philosophical positions that need no eschatological conclusion, would seem to serve a useful purpose. In a more practical sense, if judgements as to the cultural or ‘heritage’ significance of existing monuments or the appropriateness of particular styles in new buildings, are to be applied postcolonially, then some openness to differing understanding of these terms needs to be applied.

There are two elements to this immanently divine nature of the temple that might be distinguished here. The first is the effect of this immanence on duration, the idea that time provides a kind of moving platform upon which things, objects, beings progress and develop. Duration is the means by which time is understood in both to linear and cyclical notions of time although it has different implications. An ancient Indian sect, the Sauranākṣās, explicitly proposed a belief that all existence is momentary, a series of ‘nows’ that are constantly replaced like movie frames to constitute what appears to be duration.11 Taking the filmic analogy further, the ‘nows’ that make up apparent reality may be experienced as if there were some causality to their sequence, but from viewpoint of absolute reality can see them from outside this context. Duration in this argument is an illusion. Objective reality exists in each instant as an individual element, but their connection is a mental construct. As Withrow suggests, this is the opposite of what we hold to be the case in the contemporary West. We take moments as being actual because of their connection through the apparent reality of time. The passage of time, makes sense of a series of instants. The relation between streams and rivers and the ocean is used as a temporal analogy in the Upanishads to illustrate of the relationship between linear and cyclical time; “Even as all waters flow into the ocean, but the ocean never overflows, even so the sage feels desires, but he is ever one in his infinite peace.” [Upanishads 2.72]. The distinction is drawn between our experience of linear time, in which duration is conceptually applicable by the nature of the movement of moments to each other, and that of ultimate reality, which both supplies and receives these strings of moments, divulging and absorbing them into the limitless reality in which all things ultimately reside. In this sense, the Hindu temple’s apparent traditionality is an illusion. Its forms do not relate to a past time or event, but to an immanence that lies outside such sequential thinking. The gods are present in the body of the temple. The temple has its shape, form and detail because such details constitute a translation of divine immanence.

The second effect of a differential conception of time is on causality, the manner in which an event in one time can be understood to influence what happens at another time. While again, causality can be applied to both linear and cyclical conceptions of time, the notions of whether time is cyclical or uni-directional are bound up in particular philosophical and religious conceptions such as eschatology or karma. It is these specifics that point to the degree to which all creation might be considered to be within time’s framework, whatever its nature, or whether time’s line or cycle might be transcended by some form of ultimate reality. In such a conceptualisation, the immanence of godhead as present in the Hindu temple might be contrasted with the transcendence of the divine in the Christian church.
in a broader sense, the increasing presence of non-Western "traditional" architecture in the West implies that Western modernity might not be the only 'tradition' that has a viable future. Consequently, the idea of 'the future' as something to aspire to, might be the outcome of a particular dominant historicity rather than a universal condition. One of the necessary tasks in thinking about the nature of time and history as embodied in these religious buildings is to think outside the western conceptual divide between the sacred and the profane, or, more academically, between philosophy and religion. King contends that: "This secularist position presumes a priori that the distinction between philosophy and theology, which is, as we have seen, an historically specific consequence of social and political events in European society, is a natural decision to make. The breakdown of this particular boundary also leads to Western acceptance of Eastern trains of thought as philosophical, and so worthy of engagement in an epistemological debate. More than this, however, some proponents of Asian world-views enjoy the suggestion of links between their philosophy of illusory being and contemporary Western scientific and poststructuralist trains of thought that run counter to the West's own traditional ways of understanding the world. From such a position, aspects of contemporary society might affirm preconceptions of being-in-the-world rather than providing evidence of alienation from it.

Correlations between Eastern philosophical ideas and the poststructuralist turn in Western thought give an added import to the increasing presence of buildings such as Hindu and Buddhist temples in the West. The theoretical and political discourses of poststructuralism and postmodernism, which might be seen as antithetical to the tenets of modernism, are, as continuations of a Western tradition of thinking about modernity, still wedded to the central values of modernity. However, while one might be sceptical about poststructuralism's break with European history, its questioning of grand narratives (while possibly creating another one) does open up avenues to other ways of thinking about futures that do not require an Eastern nature to Western modernity. Moreover, if the idea of the West as progressive makers of history is debunked, then other traditions are freed from the idea that they belong in the past. As Trinh maintains, "Tradition as past is a Modernist idea." Talal Asad takes this further, suggesting that regarding religio-political movements as reactionary per se indicates an assumption "... that Western modernity is not only the standard by which all contemporary developments must be judged, but also the only authentic trajectory for every tradition (Asad 1996). Asad instead posits the opinion that the development of such movements should cause a rethinking of the idea that secular modernity is a universal condition rather than a specifically Western one.

Raymond Lee suggests in The Tao of Representation: Postmodernity, Asia, and the West that the main difference between Western and Eastern modes of thinking, is that while Western philosophy is mostly engaged in the question of being in itself, Eastern philosophy is more concerned with being at one with the world. The West, Lee contends, has traditionally tried to objectify reality and so produce rational patterns of knowing that encompass existence. It is, in this sense, only nature as conceived in the West that 'abhors a vacuum'. By contrast, Asian nature does not need fixation. Lee also describes the 'apparent recalcitrance' of Eastern traditions in the face of modernity as an outcome of the difference between Western linear time, with its transcendent traditions, and the Asian concept of time as cyclical.

While the polarising of East and West is somewhat oversimplified and essentialised, its statement is important not just for the points it raises, but for the fact that it suggests a growing political and cultural confidence within the 'East' to employ Orientalising tropes to its own advantage. This attitude is aided by a Western disilusionment with its own professedly figured philosophically through poststructuralism and postmodernism, that has led to the increasing attraction of Asian thought within the West: "Post-structuralism, as a radical response to the certitude of hegemonic being, represents a post-colonial dalliance with non-being." This idea of predicateless actually that constitutes Asian conceptions of ultimate reality is also very similar to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of haecceity, which they describe as the idea of the individuation of a period of time. This individuation applies to both a season and a moment, referring not so much to time as such, but to the way in which an interplay of relationships within time-space demarcates it from other time-spaces. Causality is not a factor, as subjectivity is dissolved.

It is the entire assemblage in its individuated aggregate that is a haecceity; it is this assemblage that is defined by a longitude and a latitude, by speeds and effects, independently of forms and subjects, which belong to another plane. It is the wolf itself, and the horse, and the child, that cease to be subjects to become events, in assemblages that are inseparable from an hour, a season, an atmosphere, an air, a life. The street enters into composition with the horse, just as the dying rat enters into composition with the air, and the beast and this full moon enter into composition with each other. The relationship of haecceity to time is scenographic. There is no predication. The components of a haecceity are not things with their own linear trajectories in time, but parts of assembled individuations that exist only in the collective time-space of the haecceity itself. Just as a line drawing of a scene can use the same pencil-lead to indicate persons, things, shadows, winds, moods, the collected assemblages of a haecceity have no meaning as objects. Such a formulation, extrapolates Deleuze and Guattari's earlier pronouncements about 'bodies without organs' but it also, in removing a sense of cause and effect, suggests a view from 'outside' the scene of the haecceity. Continuing the analogy of the drawing, being outside its space also means being outside its time, implying a non-serial view of duration that echoes Hindu-Buddhist conceptions of non-being.

The Shri Shiva Vishnu Hindu temple seems a fairly unambiguous example of such a conception, as despite geographical and temporal relocation, its geometry, form and decoration are isomorphically related to the world-view that underpins it. This does not mean, however, that the broad thrust of this paper's argument does not apply to other buildings of non-Western immigrants that are less obviously embodiments of defined philosophical positions. On the contrary, it suggests that rather assuming that apparently traditional buildings are atavistic, an openness to other interpretations might be productive. The idea that 'the future' exists as something ahead of us, let alone something to be aspired to, is an outcome of a particular historicity that the West itself is weavering on, if not questioning its ontological existence. However, while one might be sceptical about the analogy of the drawing, being outside its space also means being outside its time, implying a non-serial view of duration that echoes Hindu-Buddhist conceptions of non-being.


5An important aspect for temple worship is that while there is an underlying concept of an absolute or world soul (pramanam), this can be represented in the form of a personal Lord (shahapran or shiva), which can in turn be represented by a chosen deity such as Vishnu or Shiva. This principle (shaktideva) of a chosen deity being worshipped as the supreme god allows for the variety of different gods and goddesses to have temples dedicated to them without denying the validity of other deities. They are, however, subordinated to the chosen one, and so individual worshippers are not polytheistic in the Western sense.


7As the architectural critic Robert Harbinson has suggested about the Hindu temple: "For all its symmetrical regularity of form, to Western eyes such a building flirts with the blurring of all distinctions and the end of meaningful sequence." Harbinson, R, Thirteen Ways: Theoretical Investigations in Architecture. Cambridge Mass.: The MIT Press. 1994, p. 19.


9The poem Bhagavadgita, speaks of the three ways to salvation: enlightenment, action and devotion. For the implementation of these, in particular the action of religious ritual, and the embodiment of devotion, the construction of temples evolved for worship (puja) of icons of the gods. The correct method of siting, orientating, planning, constructing and decorating temples has been much elaborated, with various mytho-didactic texts (puranas) providing such information in minute detail. Bhagavad Gita. London, Penguin: 1962, p51. For commentary of the themes of the Bhagavadgita, refer to Ramachandran, A, Glimps: The Essential Teachings of the Bhagavadgita. Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass. 1993.

10From the Ketha Upanishad 2.1.10. (The Upanishads, as some of the oldest texts of Vedic thought, are where these ideas find some of their most precise articulation.) As also stated: "That whole is this whole. This whole proceeds from that whole. On taking way this whole from that whole, it remains whole." Bhadrasanayasaka Upanishad 5.1.1. Upanishads: 2000, p. 124.

11Similarly, the Bhagavadgita, refers to the need to think of the threshold from the point of view of the other side, to escape from transience; p13 "From the world of the senses, Arijina, comes heat and comes cold, and pleasure and pain; they come and they go; they are transient. Arise above them, strong view of the Arjuna, comes heat and comes cold, and pleasure and pain. they come and they go: they are transient. Arise above them, strong soul." Bhagavad Gita. London, Penguin, 1962, 10 [E 14].


