Tibetan Buddhists articulate the bardo as the gap that exists between one fundamental stage of existence and another. Its most common usage is to describe the interval between death and reincarnation, but more literally, bar means ‘in-between’ and do ‘island’ or ‘mark’. The ‘bardo experience’ is thus any one in which the ‘past situation has just occurred and the future situation has not yet manifested itself. Instruction in architectural design attempts to provide guidance in the process of guiding students across the bardo from intention, analysis, and theorisation, to the creation of architectural representations and products. As such the architectural academy operates within a history of methods and codifications which try to quantify and bring a level of certainty to this process.

Recently however, there has been a questioning of traditionally accepted ways of ‘knowing’ the world, which has manifested in challenges to received ‘truths’ and increasing interest in other, previously marginalised histories and knowledges. The critiques that flow from this questioning contend that objective cultural ‘truths’ are simply the discursive result of the dominance of particular ways of perceiving the world. The practice of architecture has not been immune from this. The field has become a subject, for instance, of sociological, feminist and postcolonial critiques. However, their bearing on the pedagogy of composing architecture remains fragmentary and contested. My interest in this subject is derived from a desire to use the opportunities presented by contemporary cultural shifts to develop design-based architectural research that will assist future architects to operate in the uncertainties of an irreducibly plural global community. This paper will explore some ways in which academic research might bear upon the design studio’s negotiation of architectural bardos.

**Keywords:**

**Abstract:**

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Australian architecture schools currently attract students from a wide variety of locations, including many from former colonies of the British and other empires in Asia and elsewhere, in addition to Australian students from a variety of ethnic and national backgrounds. At Deakin University’s School of Architecture and Building, as in other Australian architecture schools, there are international students from a wide variety of Asian, African and Pacific nations in architectural design, along with local students who also represent a number of cultural backgrounds. Within their respective institutions, all of these students are subject to the same body of knowledge, types of projects and methods of assessment, in the process of their gaining an ‘Australian’ architectural education. Apart from instrumental issues, such as whether particular knowledges and skills (such as an understanding of Australian brick-veneer construction) are relevant to the future architects of other countries, what interests me is how an ‘Australian architectural education’ ought to respond to a contemporary context in which many formerly assumed ‘truths’ are now seen as meta-narratives with particular agendas, histories and implicit biases. Three points of focus are the increase in the numbers of Asian students in Australian architecture schools, the growing desire or need for Australian architects to work or set up practices in Asia, and the increasing requirement for architects to engage culturally diverse Australian clients and users of architecture. All of these possibilities suggest negotiations of spatial, programmatic and symbolic difference.

This is more than the issue of what might constitute appropriate ‘training’ of future building industry professionals in a global sense. Architectural education has not yet had to really respond to the contemporary cultural critiques that have emerged in the resurgence in influence of Asian and other non-Western cultures, in particular, what has become broadly known as postcolonialism. More broadly, architectural discourse as a whole has not really taken on the plurality of ‘other’ voices that, particularly
through the lens of postcolonialism, have complicated discussion of art, literature, and other cultural products. This is not just an Australian attitude. Architecture throughout the world remains epistemologically defined by the West. Despite this, it does not appear that the architectural world can continue to ignore these identity shifts, not least in the education of its future members. These students may represent difference, but what of their architecture? Should they form spaces and structures that are recognisably 'different' from what surrounds them, or deliberately juxtapose items seen as incongruous within their architectural host culture? Architectural design, after all, is mostly embedded in formal discourse. The underlying principle of this discourse is that buildings are viewed primarily as 'their' architects' creations rather than the results of cultural, political or social forces. So where does this leave the next generation of architects, especially those from nations who are in the process of negotiating the legacy of their pre-colonial and colonial pasts with futures that are necessarily both local and globalised in nature?

To give more background to these questions, it is worth reflecting on the discipline's own attempts to deal with globalisation. In the wake of international Modernism there has been a push for architecture to be more attuned to the particularities of different global locations. Such an attitude has been broadly termed 'regionalism', and stems originally from a response to the uncritical movement of modernity around the world. Regionalism purports to be supportive of locality, its landscape, culture, climate and particular history of building, and takes its legitimation from notions of localised authenticity. It has, however, also been questioned on the same grounds; on its parochialism, its focus on the past, and on its potential ethnic or cultural biases. An attempt to link the regionalist idea of locational specificity with the universalising mission of modernism has been termed 'critical regionalism'. Frampton's essay 'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance', the most important text on 'critically regionalist' architecture, suggests that ideally, it assumes an arrière-garde position, . . . one that distances itself equally from the Enlightenment myth of progress and from a reactionary, unrealistic impulse to return to the architectonic forms of the preindustrial past.¹ However, this 'distancing' is still premised on the idea of 'universal civilisation'.² It does not consider that the global or universal portion of such a position might be from elsewhere, from the non-West or from other world-views. Even if critical regionalism might respect non-Western methods and meanings within the confines of their localities, it is taken for granted that they would have little influence on the West itself.
Much of what follows draws upon theoretical ideas that could be broadly described as postcolonial. Hulme states that the usefulness of ‘post-colonial’ as a term is its reference to a process of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome which takes many forms and is probably inescapable for all those whose world has been marked by that set of phenomena.

Use of the term 'postcolonial' in a discussion centred upon Australia needs to be clarified. Australia is profoundly different to other ex-colonial locations such as Malaysia or Sri Lanka. In these areas the indigenous population greatly outnumbered the colonists, and have eventually regained (though in ways deeply affected by their colonial experiences) control over their own territory. By contrast, as discussed in the previous chapters, Australia has a population made up largely of the descendants of settlers from the centre of the British Empire, augmented, mostly within the last twenty-five years, by people from much more diverse backgrounds. These two groups are overlaid on an indigenous populace who, 200 years on, remain the subjects of a barely admitted invasion of their territory.

Similarly, Hall maintains that the imperialist legacy is still a force due to the continuing demarcation that exists between what is considered inside or outside the system put in place by colonial rule. In Australia this demarcation is played out in persistent centrality of Anglo-Celtic (or as Ghassan Hage puts it more bluntly 'White') culture as normative, in comparison firstly to indigenous culture, and secondarily to the diversity of migrants from other backgrounds. The conflation of 'Anglo-Celtic' and 'White' serves here to suggest that while the idea of what constitutes 'Australian' might be broadening (from Anglo, to Anglo-Celtic, to Northern European, to Western, etc.), this does not mean that the core of such an identity has been displaced by this process. Hage uses the term to signify that this core identity remains a fantasy heavily derived from European imperial expansion. Australia's position on a cartographic projection of power and influence is somewhat anomalous, a situation lucidly put by Ien Ang:

*the sense of danger associated with 'Asianisation' is more than a question of cultural xenophobia; it is intensified by the paradoxical geographical positioning of Australia, far from Europe and on the margins of Asia, an isolation that is manifest in persistent popular discourses on the 'distance' of Australia from the centres of US and European cultural and political*
power and influence, and on public debates on the 'place' of Australia, 'in' or 'out' of Asia, as quintessential to the nation's selfhood. Ang asks what the cultural implications are of the shift towards Australia now being 'in Asia', when most of the history of Australian nationhood is based upon the opposition to this? Further to this, if we have the idea of 'Australia in Asia' then what does this do for the positions of 'Asians' in Australia?

Postcolonial approaches to architecture are comparatively recent, in comparison to their application in other cultural fields, a phenomenon that implies a certain resistance to its critique. Nalbantoglu and Wong's suggestion is that to think 'postcolonially' about architecture means not just to think about architecture's place in the process of decolonisation, but to question the epistemological boundaries of the field of architecture, to reveal and undermine the structures that institutionalise the discipline. This is not a unifying process. More than just problematising existing modes of classification, a postcolonial approach questions traditional methodologies of research altogether. The whole process of methodically classifying and 'ordering' of 'subjects' (as objects), to be fitted into externally derived theoretical constructs, is politically dubious in an era of supposed reflexivity and 'the empire writing back'. To use the terms 'postcolonial' and 'space' together would seem to force architecture's encounter with its extra-formal meanings. What is important about this is a breaking down of assumed universalism in the appraisal of architecture's properties. Visuality is not necessarily given primacy, form is not autonomous, history's assumed linearity is disrupted. As Nalbantoglu asks, in relation to looking at the architecture of the non-West;

Can we conceive of non-Western architecture, no-architecture as neither surplus nor lack? Can we attribute a productive plenitude rather than lack to the prefix 'non'? To what extent is it possible to undo the architectural gaze?

There are two opposing approaches to the field of architecture that might be taken here. The first is to argue for the admission of 'other' buildings, building types and modes of building construction into the existing pantheon of what is considered to be properly 'architectural', as pre-defined by existing modes of historiography. The second is to question the epistemological limits of architecture that make it necessary for arguments about inclusion to take place at all. Is it useful to bring a 'new' set of phenomena under the umbrella of the 'known', to just enlarge the canon of 'architecture' to admit buildings and processes that have been hitherto ignored or
excluded? By doing this, are we merely perpetuating systems of ordering that originate from the terrain of Western Academe to yet more unwilling 'others', over and above meanings ascribed by 'native informants' themselves? Furthermore, is this term even relevant in dealing with the sectors of particular societies from which the architects of developing nations tend to emerge?

Edward Ihejirika puts forward the argument that contrary to those theoretical positions that might place architectural production entirely within the field of the discursive, a work of architecture may operate as a validator of praxis, in that its production is inherently heuristic, and so the experience of a building engendered by process, usage and even observation implies that it is capable of not only embodying meaning but in communicating it. As he puts it, architecture reinforces 'mytho-ethical conceptions of human life' in that it is not only a product, like a work of art, but also embodies a cultural process.¹³ Ihejirika's concern is how a specifically black perspective on architecture might be utilised to question some of these mytho-ethical conceptions. In the actual experience of architecture lies the possibility of evaluating that experience. Architecture's formal properties cannot be considered in a unmediated way. They are always construed through knowledge of a cultural context. For architecture to be 'meaningful' it must make explicit its connection with some other reality. A black perspective on modernism must then come to terms with its intervention into colonised or post-colonised societies at a particular time of Western cultural hegemony. Modernism's disavowal of meaning (in terms of representation in architecture) are what made it, while modernity was still seen as the most potent force for the future, seem 'appropriate' to be laid across Africa and Asia. The result was, in Ihejirika's opinion, a disarticulation of the architectural 'object' and its possible meanings (other than, of course, the question of its ontological nature). This refusal to interpret was, of course, in itself a result of a particular cultural trajectory. As such, there remains today a 'void' of meaning that a postmodern or multiculturalist celebration of cultural difference cannot fill. Ihejirika likens such attempts to add symbolism in such a context as 'the beating of drums outside the context of the ritual which gives meaning to each beat', as the produced gestures become merely formalistic.¹⁴ Ihejirika looks, as an alternative, for the 'authentic continuation of non-Western traditions in the context of the orthodoxy of popular culture'. Though he does not state how the distinction should be made between the authentic and the merely gestural, the overall suggestion is that the answer lies in the social, political and economic aspects of architectural culture.
While sorting through this tangle of agendas, a sense of the difficulty of dealing postcolonially with issues beyond the abstractedly architectonic becomes evident. In this sense, the concept of _bardo_, as defined in the introduction to this paper, may be useful, both as a device for conceiving of difference in its own terms, and as a culturally specific indicator of the emergence of non-Western forms of thought within the contemporary globalised environment. Beyond this specific background, however, the concept has also been recently likened to wider processes of change of state and interval.\textsuperscript{15} One of the messages of the _Bardo Thötröl_ is that we vainly try to bridge states of 'in-betweenness' by trying to understand the other in our own terms. However, the other can only be understood in _its_ own terms. The philosophical underpinnings of Buddhism involve the shedding of the baggage of the present to take on the new. The _bardo_, the zone of the in-between, must thus be successfully negotiated. Apart from the particular conceptual parallels that are raised here, such links suggest a growing Western acceptance of Eastern trains of thought as philosophical, and so worthy of epistemological engagement. More than this, however, some proponents of Buddhist world-views enjoy the suggestion that there might be closer links between their philosophy of illusory being and contemporary Western scientific and poststructuralist trains of thought than the West's own traditional ways of understanding the world.\textsuperscript{16}

How then, are we to proceed? Do we allow a multiplicity of voices to infiltrate the canons of architectural 'knowledge', to pare back the criterion of design to the facilitative, the programmatic and the constructional, leaving construals such as 'meaning', 'style', 'order', to negotiation? More fundamentally, should the emphasis on architectural design shift from concentration on those areas traditionally considered intrinsically 'architectural'; form, space, light, material, etc., to address the implicit historical and geographical biases within the received understanding of the medium? In ideal terms, I would say 'yes' to both of these questions, but this does not mean that architectural design studios should dispense with designing buildings. The ability to 'craft' architecture remains at the core of the architectural design discipline. What is required is an openness to the ways in which this craft can be explored and honed by would-be architects of different backgrounds. As Lesley Naa Norle Lokko asks:

For the black architect, struggling with and through this language and history, what are the metaphorical, physical, material and spatial opportunities and shortcuts available to him/her? How does the same architect achieve, amongst other things, 'meaning and response-ability'?\textsuperscript{17}
The opening up of architectural discourse to radical fragmentation of the means by which it might be conceived is overdue. Ultimately an inquiry into architectural design education is an inquiry into the nature of the discipline of architecture, and the limits of its field. Such an inquiry is one counter to the reductionist notions of architecture and a tool in thwarting a “narrowing of architecture as a form of knowledge into architecture as a knowledge of form.” The internationalisation of the student population, overlaid on the diversity of backgrounds already extant within Australia’s comparatively young cities, would appear to be a vibrant testing ground for expanding on architectural design as a ‘form of knowledge’. One of the messages of the *Bardo Thötröl* is that we vainly try to bridge states of ‘in-betweenness’ by trying to understand the other in our own terms. This means that as well as the staples of design studios, *bardos* of idea – design and concept – application, *bardos* also need to be negotiated between Western-derived notions of what constitutes architectural modernity and non-Western ways of constructing the contemporary world. Such a message is not intended to be a set of explicit instructions, but highlights the necessity to openness towards different ways of seeing.

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11. A prominent example is Sir Bannister Fletcher’s *History of Architecture*, particularly the ‘Tree of Architecture’ that defines a lineage generating from Greece and Rome through the various styles of architecture to the present day (of the edition). In such a framework non-European styles are relegated to lower side branches, primitive early offshoots with no relevance to the ongoing growth of ‘world’ architecture.
12. Such an approach parallels feminist approaches to the existing meta-narratives of architecture.
15. “O son of noble family, listen carefully without distraction. There are six bardo states: the bardo of birth, the bardo of dreams, the bardo of samadhi-meditation, the bardo of the moment before death, the bardo of dharmata and the bardo of becoming.” *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: The Great Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo*, p40