

OPEN ARCHITECTURE 5 3200 + 1000

Mike Austin

School of Architecture

Unitec New Zealand

Te whare Wananga o Wairaka

Private Bag 92025

Auckland

New Zealand

64 9 815 4321 ext 7148

maustin@unitec.ac.nz

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Abstract.

. The history of architecture revolves around the notion of closure. It is concerned with shelter, protection and differentiation. A history of openness in architecture has yet to be written. It does not see origins in the forest or the primitive hut but instead in the ocean and the boat. Open architecture is not concerned with closed rooms courtyards or squares. It is instead about platforms, decks, terraces, and beaches

Hodges, the artist on Cook's first voyage, was confounded by the aesthetic appeal of Pacific and Asian architecture which couldn't be explained by reference to the architectural canon of ancient Greece. Oceanic societies lived in a way that contradicted traditional European architecture

This architecture of the new world introduced the notion of the open and provoked the introduction of the modern. The skyscraper, the suburb, the freeway are New World examples of open architecture. The negatives of openness are well known; the boredom of suburbs the waste of the freeway and the banality of the skyscraper city. Nevertheless the outcomes are sometimes sublime.

The architecture of openness endlessly strives for porosity, connection, or view, rather than enclosure, shelter, or containment. The positive story to be written is about the achievement of openness as a way of examining the architecture of the Pacific Islands.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND ARCHITECTURE

OPEN ARCHITECTURE

The history of architecture revolves around the notion of closure. Peter Sloterdijk claims that every architectural act “is an act of sphere formation, that is to say the creation of an interior.”¹ Open architecture on the other hand is not concerned with closed rooms, courtyards or squares. It is instead about platforms, decks, terraces, and beaches. The architecture of openness endlessly strives for porosity, connection, or view, rather than enclosure, shelter, or containment. The skyscraper, the suburb, the freeway are all new world examples of open architecture, while the open road figures in American life and myth as a dominant architectural trope. The negatives of the open are well known; the boredom of suburbs the waste of the freeway and the banality of the high-rise city, but the outcomes are sometimes sublime and are the locations of contemporary society. The history of openness is yet to be written.

Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown might be said to be the first to argue for open architecture in their book *Learning from Las Vegas*.² They claim that “architects have been brought up on space, and enclosed space is the easiest to handle.”³ Venturi and Scott Brown criticised the spatial preoccupations of architects and they compare Las Vegas to Rome by analysing the use of open space in both cases. Although they have often been seen as heralding postmodernism in architecture they describe the modernist forms of the cloverleaf and the airport as examples of open architecture.

Venturi and Scott Brown describe how architects have been ‘bewitched’ by the open space of the Piazza but the piazza is of course also a closed space.⁴ They expressed hope that having discovered the Piazza in the nineteen forties that

“architects are perhaps ready for similar lessons about large open space, big scale, and high speed.”⁵ The contemporary architect Koolhaas can be seen as pursuing this dream.

THE OPEN SOCIETY

During the second world war Karl Popper's wrote his famous book *The Open Society*,⁶ in Christchurch. Popper doesn't refer to New Zealand but he does mention Maori as an example of a closed society. “The early Greek tribal society resembles in many respects that of people like the Polynesians, the Maoris for instance.”⁷ Polynesian society is we know much more complicated but in this paper I want to propose that Pacific architecture is characterised by the quality of openness and one question is whether the open in architecture relates to Popper's ‘open society’, which in turn is part of the bigger question of the relation of architecture to social formations which has plagued history and theory in architecture for so long.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND ARCHITECTURE

The material/ social distinction appears to have also divided anthropology.

Malinowski, is generally considered to have held material culture “in contempt”.⁸ Yet his village plan has been endlessly reproduced amongst architects and he gives a great deal of attention to canoes, and it seems it was the very very quality of the material culture that attracted Malinowski:

"Fascinating as may be the Motuan habitations standing on high piles in the middle of a lagoon, or the neat streets of an Aroma or Mailu settlement, or the irregular warren of small huts on the Trobriand coast, all these cannot compete in picturesqueness or charm with the villages of the Southern Massim. When, on a hot day, we enter the deep shadow of fruit trees and palms, and find ourselves in the wonderfully designed and ornamented houses hiding here and there in

irregular groups among the green, surrounded by little decorative gardens of shells and flowers, with pebble bordered paths and stone paved sitting circles, it seems as if the visions of a primeval, happy, savage life were suddenly realised, even if only in a fleeting impression."⁹

SACRED HOUSES

The big communal Pacific houses evoke the sacred in observers such as Bateson who likens the latmul mens house to "the nave of a darkened church" and he compares this building with the domestic dwelling as a means of contrasting the ethos of the men in latmul culture with that of the women:

"Broadly, we may say that the men are occupied with the spectacular, dramatic, and violent activities which have their centre in the ceremonial house, while the women are occupied with the useful and necessary routines of food-getting, cooking, and rearing children- activities which centre around the dwelling house and the gardens. The contrast between ceremonial house and dwelling house is fundamental for the culture and will serve as the best starting-point for ethnological description." ¹⁰

It has often been pointed out that this perspective has come about because most anthropologists were men and this is perhaps a factor in the dismissal of the domestic.¹¹ On the other hand to call Pacific architecture huts serves to domesticate the architecture and has led to a lack of consideration of other constructions such as platforms, stages, poles and canoes. It also tends to neglect open space constructions such as the marae in Polynesia or the dancing grounds in Melanesia, which are fundamental to life in the Pacific.

Margaret Mead, who was always interested in the architecture. In Papua New Guinea she got the 'natives' to build her accommodation.¹² and she describes the house kind of museum in reverse that she and Bateson occupied in the Sepik. "We are installed in our new home, very oddly assembled but quite comfortable... The house is rather like a series of booths at a fair, with a fine open appearance calculated to display all the wares and exhibits inside."¹³ In Alitua in the Maprik area of the Sepik region: "the way they built the house was amusing but difficult to follow. At least 100 men, most of them from surrounding villages must have come in and done a little work, put up a post or put on a bit of thatch and then drifted away, often to never return and claim any remuneration."¹⁴

In spite of Mead's interest in the architecture she usually lived apart from the objects of her study. In Samoa in a letter justifying her decision to not live in a fale spoke about "[t]he nerve wrecking conditions of living with half a dozen people in the same room in a house without walls always sitting on the floor and sleeping in the constant expectation of having a pig or a chicken wish itself upon ones notice"¹⁵ Mead chose instead the classic colonial location for interactions, the verandah sheltered from the open, but not giving access to the closed rooms of the bungalow

Tuzin, a disciple of Mead, also worked in Alitua and continues her interest in architecture.¹⁶ He devotes a chapter of his book to a detailed description of the building of a 'house Tambaran', which Tuzin says is "anthropologically inviting" and is what he calls "a constructed reality in the literal sense".¹⁷ He claims that "What gives the edifice visual power and intensity is a skillfully restrained use of the cantilevering principle." Skillful yes, but what is meant by restrained? And just what is the "cantilevering principle" that is involved? Tuzin's description of members as "horizontal and vertical rafters" is innovative but about as helpful as an architect inventing some novel kinship terms, and the same could be said about his expression "structural tensivity".¹⁸

This description of the house while extensive is architecturally unsatisfactory as are the illustrations - in terms of proportion, scale, detail and draftsmanship.. Drawings titled 'front elevation' are in fact perspectives and architecturally the building is under-described - there is for instance no plan. There is not the information that a straightforward measured drawing would provide. And it so happens that measured drawings have been made of these houses but Tuzin criticizes the architects concerned:

" Only a Philistine would dispute the value of, for example, the prodigious work being done by Mack and Ruth Ruff and Christian Coiffier to survey, preserve, and encourage manufacture of artistic and architectural masterpieces of the Sepik, but it is perhaps worth asking what the continuation of these traditions might accomplish, other than attracting affluent tourists to the area."19

Interestingly this is in a publication that uses these drawings and has Ruff's drawing of an latmul house on the cover - without acknowledgement.

Tuzin claims that his concern is "cultural authenticity" a phrase that he says is "intentionally ambiguous" and he invokes Mead to call for an "authentic, ethnological understanding of the region".20 He discusses loss and childhood while claiming that "the gates of the Garden have locked behind them".21

Paradoxically this nostalgia links Tuzin to the architects he criticises - they all feel the loss but are dependent on that loss for the justification of their work which Marcus has called the salvage mode of anthropology.22

But this is all old anthropology

ARCHITECTURE AND ANTHROPOLOGY

Architects have been attracted to anthropology hoping to gain answers to their endless questions and the museum is the site where anthropologists actually encounter architects. Staying within Melanesia we shift from Papua New Guinea

to New Caledonia where Renzo Piano is the architect for the Tjibaou Culture Center. The building is perhaps the first anthropologically based architecture that has excited international commentary. There was an anthropologist on the design team and the buildings publicity explicitly makes ethnological claims on ethnology.²³ The building is claimed to be based on the traditional house (case) and village plan but it covers the open space of the traditional village and opens the traditional Kanak house to the sky. Not all the commentary has been favourable

“For Piano enthusiasts the result is a successful negotiation of the local and the global, for others it might evoke a contemporary version of primitivist Deco as though a village were first simulated, then abstracted, and finally sized to the scale of a theme park.”²⁴

OCEANIA AND ARCHITECTURE

The Pacific gave early explorers contact with the phenomenon of the open. Hodges, the artist on Cook's first voyage, continued to be confounded by the appeal of an architecture which couldn't be explained by reference to the European tradition of buildings derived from the architectural canon of ancient Greece.²⁵ Bernard Smith has suggested, that this confrontation with the Pacific provoked the beginnings of the modern.²⁶ Pacific societies also lived in a way that contradicted traditional European norms. Often gestures were misinterpreted, the classic example being the Polynesian baring of genitals, an act that was taken as an invitation but was intended as an insult. ²⁷

To discover openness in Oceanic architecture we have to look to the marae Joseph Banks on viewing the marae at Mahaiatea proclaimed.

."certainly the masterpiece of Indian architecture in this island so all the inhabitants allowed. Its size and workmanship almost exceeds belief."²⁸

The nineteenth century representation of marae operates with the picturesque idiom while, almost by contrast, in the twentieth century the forms have been reduced to technical diagrams devoid of materiality or context. Both representations show the marae as uninhabited giving differing versions of a nostalgia for the ruins of the departed culture .

As is well known the marae is found on islands throughout the Polynesian triangle. At two of the apexes (Hawaii and Easter Island) the form is given different names while at the third in Aotearoa/New Zealand the form changes and the name remains.²⁹ Inter-island and naming complications abound.³⁰ It would be convenient if these changes could be explained by two millennia of settlement in Polynesia, but contemporary functioning marae are found on the islands currently thought to be inhabited first (Samoa) and last (Aotearoa/New Zealand).³¹ In between these two are the numerous ceremonial complexes of East Polynesia. These contained several structures "...such as round-ended priest's houses, raised wooden platforms for sacrifices, sacrifice pits, and small portable god-houses for religious paraphernalia (including human skulls).³² Also trees probably abounded"³³. But the closed buildings on the heiau or marae as closed objects draw attention to the openness of the platform.

Marae means open and the ocean is referred to as marae roa the big openness. The openness of the marae is endlessly reinforced by the activities that take place on it. By contrast the Maori whare is a building characterised by being almost completely closed. But as with all Oceanic buildings interior partitions are not tolerated within – the interior space is unicellular and resolutely open. In Aotearoa/New Zealand the word marae is used to also refer to the complex of meeting house and associated buildings which cluster around the marae.³⁴ This complex relates to the surrounding landscape in a most remarkable way and in a pattern that can be shown to be consistent.. These structures are a palimpsest of

the landscape but in turn the structures organise and give significance to the landscape.

In some ways the architectural form of the marae can be understood by what it is not. This space is not the closed square of Europe. It is not a linear street and it is not the absence of building which is what open space is in the grid planned cities. It is the making of openness the creation of a horizontal platform the re-creation of the horizontality of the sea.³⁵ Objects are placed on this open platform but always separate from each other retaining the openness relation. The marae is a calm platform in the turbulent landscape of volcanic and sculpted islands. It is the still horizontal surface desired by the mariner after the incessant movement of the sea.

Potential for the marae as a basis for planning in Aotearoa/New Zealand already exists in the design of churches, museums, campuses and culture centres. The Auckland Cathedral and the National Museum (Te Papa Tongareva) in Wellington are both projects based on the marae, but Te Papa Tongareva half encloses the marae and Museums enclose and entomb the open architecture often with strange results. Te Papa has a fale but it is only half of the Samoan building.

The fale is the classic example of an open building and its extraordinary openness has astounded visitors. there are all sorts of cultural sanctions against closure. The fale has coconut blinds (pola) around the perimeter but these are used as wind protection rather than for privacy. “Even when there is a storm, Samoans have told me that some of the blinds – at least one- should always remain up because if all of them are lowered ‘it becomes very danAgerous’”.³⁶ The fale is like an island, the edge mimicking the permeability of the beachfront. The fale is unicellular and unconnected to other unicellular buildings as is the situation throughout Oceania. The va as the open space between the buildings makes the

village in some respects polycentred. However the whole village is organised around the malae.

OPEN AND CLOSED

However to argue for openness only is to suppress its opposite and is of course a binary. In 'The Artist as Ethnographer' Hal Foster says "... only recently have postcolonial artists and critics pushed practice and theory from binary structures of otherness to relational problems of difference, from discrete space-times to mixed border zones."³⁷

The lived world is of course endlessly both open and closed but living with openness is to value closure. An example as the extreme closure of the hut or cabin on an open boat. But closure from openness is singular while multiple closures and partitions (as say room to room) is never allowed in the Pacific, and the extreme closure of the Maori meeting house allowing just one door and one window makes the inhabitant extremely aware of the openness outside.

It is well known that the house is an ancestor with head, arms, backbone etc. To Pakeha however 'IT' is still just a building. This is a refusal to understand as an architecture that opens to the past. All architecture plays with the open and closed but working from closure is to search for openings. Sundt in his research assumes the real architecture is the architecture of the church and the meeting house is a version of it, Maori assume the meeting house derives from the whare and the marae is adjunct to the house.

The example of the whare draws attention to the nature of the open. Even the openness of the sea is closed by the horizon. Outer space is the ultimate open and is impossible for most of us of to imagine in an ever-expanding universe.

Instead our understanding of space is structured by the forms of the stars and planets. There is always open and closed. Scully speaking of Greek Temples says: “They in fact functioned and, in their fragments, still function as no buildings before or since have done. They not only created an exterior environment – which is one of architecture’s primary function to do - that was wider, free, and more complete than architectures have encompassed.”³⁸

The origin of Greek architecture is argued to be the primitive timber hut a story with a long history with Oceanic architecture as a variation - the grass hut. However it is suggested here that this architecture is of a different order best understood by its overriding characteristic of openness. Openness not differentiate it endlessly connects as in the famous sea of islands example. Cartographers draw the coast as a line but as a line of closure it is complex and contestable (especially in New Zealand where there is huge controversy with the foreshore. It is unlikely that this edge is nearly as clear to Pacific people. And now with rising sea levels the line is even more subject to dispute.

Finally to finish with the question that we started with, The analogy between open architecture and the open society doesn’t appear to hold. But architects (or at least the stararchitects) continue to propose it when the talk of the transparency and openness of their designs parallel the transparency and accessibility of the democratic process.³⁹ This points to the dilemma of appealing to openness while remaining closed (with glass) like the old ideas of transparency were thought to be achieved with glass. But it isn’t actual transparency or actual openness. And anyway glass is not an open material or suited to Oceanic architecture.⁴⁰

¹ Peter Sloterdijk, *Microsphereology*, (London: Semiotext(e), 2011), 10-12.

² Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Steve Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas The forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1977).

³ Venturi et al, (1977), 7.

⁴ Venturi et al, (1977), 7.

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- ² Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Steve Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas The forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1977).
- ³ Venturi et al, (1977), 7.
- ⁴ Venturi et al, (1977), 7.
- ⁵ Venturi et al, (1977), 18.
- ⁶ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, (London: Routledge, 1945).
- ⁷ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Vol 1., (London: Routledge, 1945), 171.
- ⁸ "...the man-made object is of no interest to him in itself; only insofar as it indirectly illustrates a series of abstractions, "functionalism," "economics," and so forth." Douglas Newton, *Massim*, (New York, The Museum of Primitive Art, 1975), 17.
- ⁹ Malinowski, 36.
- ¹⁰ Bateson, 123.
- ¹¹ M.R Austin, 'The House Tambaran of Papua New Guinea', *Assemblage* No. 20, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 10.
- ¹² Derek Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*, (Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1983), 99.
- ¹³ Margaret Mead, *Letters from the Field 1925-1975*, (New York, Harper and Row, 1977), 224.
- ¹⁴ Mead, 104.
- ¹⁵ Derek Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The making and unmaking of an anthropological myth.*" (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 99.
- ¹⁶ 'Nggwal's House: The Architecture of Village Spirituality.' Donald F Tuzin, *The Voice of the Tambaran* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980), 151.
- ¹⁷ Tuzin, 131.
- ¹⁸ Tuzin, 153, 151.
- ¹⁹ Donald Tuzin, 'Fighting for Their Lives: The Problem of Cultural Authenticity in Today's Sepik', Nancy Luktehaus et al (eds), *Sepik Heritage*, (Bathurst, Crawford House, 1990), 364-365. Another paper in the same book indicates that the very attraction of tourists led to a large ceremonial house being built at the village of Yensan where it is said that: "Their success has strengthened their self esteem." Jurg Schmid, 'The Response to Tourism in Yensan', Nancy Luktehaus et al (eds), *Sepik Heritage*, (1990), 244.
- ²⁰ Tuzin, (1990), 364.
- ²¹ Tuzin (1990), 366.

²² George E Marcus, 'Contemporary Problems of Ethnography in the Modern World System', James Clifford and George E Marcus (eds), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986), 165.

²³ Alban Bensa, *Ethnologie & Architecture: Le center Culturel Tjibaou: une realization de Renzo Piano*, (Paris, Societe nouvelle Adam Biro, 2000).

²⁴ Hal Foster, *The Art-Architecture Complex*, Verso, London 2011. Hal Foster, *The Art-Architecture Complex*, Verso, London 2011.P 60-61.

²⁵ William Hodges,, *Travels in India During the Years 1780, 1781, 1782 and 1783*, (London: J. Edwards), 1793.

²⁶ Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985),

²⁷ Anne Salmond, *Aphrodite's Island: The European Discovery of Tahiti*, Auckland. Penguin), 2009, 51.

²⁹ On Easter island Metraux says: "...there is little doubt that the ahu is the equivalent of the marae." Alfred Metraux, *Ethnology of Easter Island*, Bernice P Bishop Museum Bulletin 160 (Honolulu : Bishop Museum, 1971), p. 283.

In Hawaii the marae are known as heiau . Although in the early nineteenth century the heiau are often referred to as "morai." John Stokes, *Heiau of the Island of Hawai'i: A Historic Survey of Native Hawaiian Temple Sites*, (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1991) , p 45. Emory himself uses the word marae for the monuments on Necker Island in the Hawaiian group. Kenneth Emory, *Archaeology of Nihoa and Necker Islands*, Bishop Museum Bulletin 53, (Honolulu: Bishop Museum, 1928)

³⁰"The council platforms of the Leeward islands are perhaps the original "maraes" of the Society islands, for as meeting and council place they fulfil the function of the New Zealand marae. The shrines today called "maraes" were probably anciently called "ahu" for numerous maraes in the Society islands have "ahu" in their names...In the northern part of the Marquesas and in Easter island the equivalents of Tahitian maraes are called "ahu" and in New Zealand "tu-ahu." Kenneth Emory, *Stone Remains in the Society Islands*, Bernice P Bishop Museum Bulletin 116, (Honolulu: Bishop Museum, 1933), p. 41. The Marquesas have both tohua and me'ae for which Linton uses the term ahu "to save confusion" He further claims that "in the Society islands it [the marae] was at least sometimes known as the tahua." Ralph Linton, *Archaeology of the Marquesas Islands*, Bishop Museum Bulletin 23, (Honolulu: Bishop Museum, 1925), p. 31 and 42.

³¹ Geoffrey Irwin, *The Prehistoric Exploration and Colonisation of the Pacific*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Both cultures incidentally have strong tattooing traditions Alfred Gell, *Wrapping in Images: Tattooing in Polynesia*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

³² . Bellwood, *Man's Conquest of the Pacific :The Prehistory of Southeast Asia and Oceania* (New York: Oxford University Press 1979) p. 340.

³³Emory, 1947 p. 10.

³⁴ M. R. Austin, "A Description of the Maori Marae", in *The Mutual Interaction of People and their Built Environment: a cross-cultural perspective*, ed Amos Rapoport, (Mouton: The Hague, 1976) pp. 629 - 642.

³⁵ "In Hawaiian *malae* means calm; calmness smooth as a plain" Linton p. 53.

³⁶ Serge Techerkezoff, "First Contacts in Polynesia: The Samoan Case (1722-1848)," (Canberra: ANU EPress, 2004), 42 -43.

³⁷ This move was difficult because it runs counter to the old politics of alterity.

Basic to much modernism the appropriation of the other persists in much postmodernism. In *The Myth of the Other* (1978) Italian philosopher Franco Rella argues that theorists as diverse as Lacan, Foucault, and Deleuze and Guatarri idealize the other in the negation of the same- with deleterious effects on cultural politics ' p 178-179 Hal Foster *The Return of the Real : The Avante-Garde at the End of the Century*, Cambridge, Mass MIT Press 1996.

³⁸ Vincent Scully, *The Earth, The Temple and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979).

³⁹ "'Foster" {the architect not the author}" suggests an analogy between architectural and political openness, not only at the Reichstag but also at City hall ('It expresses the transparency and accessibility of the democratic process ' we are told; " Londoners see the Assembly at work" Yet the analogy is shaky from the start , and, when applied to The Singapore Supreme Court (2000-05)—Foster touts the "dignity, transparency, and openness" of its design- it seems absurd given the track record of that government in general. How can architects continue to sell this line? Or more saliently , why do we continue to buy it." Page 48.

⁴⁰ Architects have attempted to avoid the politics of the colonial by providing supposedly neutral technological solutions – to for instance climatic conditions. They tend to forget that many indigenous people enjoy their climates and have already a range of architectural and other devices . It is however hard for anyone to resist air conditioning.