

---

## Introduction

---

# Pacific Spaces

Dialogues between Architecture and Anthropology



**Lana Lopesi, A.-Chr. Engels-Schwarzpaul and Albert L. Refiti**

The chapters in this volume travelled an undulating path to arrive at this point. Beginning in 2006, with our discovery of the Tropical Islands Resort in Germany, and a Samoan *fale* (traditional house) produced for their Tropical Village, we developed an interest in the relationships of Pacific spaces and buildings with different communities and locations. We formalized this interest in a research project, *Travelling Houses*, and ensuing discussions with other artists and scholars in the field, like Salā Lemi Ponifasio, Aiono Fanaʻafi Le Tagaloa and Hūfanga-He-Ako-Moe-Lotu Ōkusitino Māhina. This continued in 2014 with extended *talanoa* (dialogue) which brought together a mixture of architects, cultural studies theorists, artists and anthropologists from across the Moana (Pacific),<sup>1</sup> the United States and Europe. In 2015, Leasiolagi Malama Meleisea offered the project some sage advice, stressing that Pacific architecture needed some attention.

While the engagement of Indigenous Moana concepts such as *mana* (prestige, authority, power, influence), *tapu* (sacred, prohibited, restricted) and *noa* (ordinary, unrestricted) for the creation and maintenance of space, particularly in contemporary buildings, were of great interest initially, we found that participants also raised questions concerning ecology, creativity, transpersonal wayfinding, the relationships between openness and

Pacific Spaces

Translations and Transmutations

Edited by A.-Chr Engels-Schwarzpaul, Lana Lopesi, and Albert L. Refiti

<https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/Engels-SchwarzpaulPacific>

Not for resale

thresholds, fluidity and control in social space, and cross-cultural global encounters – all of which sit at the intersection of architecture and anthropology. This became even clearer during the following year, when Paige West noted a convergence between architecture and anthropology in our discussions and considered this convergence one of the most interesting and novel aspects of the collaboration. This was perhaps not coincidental since this orientation aligns generally with the work of our Vā Moana – Pacific Spaces research cluster at Auckland University of Technology (then called Pacific Spaces). The cluster provides an international research platform, engaging both Moana and Western thought, to investigate Pacific Space, or Vā Moana. Our aspiration is to transform current thinking about contemporary and customary Indigenous Moana ways of knowing the world, by examining modes of producing space, objects, rituals and performance. How do Moana concepts affect the production of space and the use of the built environment? Moana people have always produced novel ways of understanding the world, based on and extending tradition – how does this relationship play out in contemporary environments?

These collaborations and discussions over the past decade set our own, primarily spatially and performatively inflected lens in relationship with anthropological forms of exploration of the same spaces. Paige West in her comments referred to Povinelli (2001: 320), who argues that if ‘indeterminacy refers to the possibility of describing a phenomenon in two or more equally true ways, then incommensurability refers to a state in which two phenomena (or worlds) cannot be compared by a third without producing serious distortion’. This observation prompted Paige to query how we read ‘spaces, affects, relations (and possibilities of relations), and what kinds of lens different kinds of theoretical abstractions bring to our thinking’ (West 2016). Each paper in the *talanoa*, she noted, asked the reader to think about a phenomenon in at least two ways, and then ‘use those refractions to tell us something about both the phenomenon and how differently situated humans experience the phenomenon’. The conceptual observations and reflections between anthropology and architecture the contributors made ‘about how space, affect, and relations are and are becoming across the Pacific’, she thought, constituted the strength of the collection. Relations, in her words, are the ‘various forms of exchange, interaction, and co-production between beings, forms, objects, and processes as they are understood through multiple ontologies’.

In refining the chapters for this publication, we were guided in our decisions by these considerations. Our editorial stance was refined by one of the reviewers, who suggested that the ‘across’ mentioned by Paige West spans multiple disciplines, not just architecture and anthropology. This is generally not surprising. Many Moana researchers do not necessarily

identify and align themselves with Western disciplinary areas and methods (Wood 2003: 388), and that quite often leads to innovative strategies and transformation of genres. Some examples here in Aotearoa are Albert Wendt, Selwyn Muru, Teresia Teaiwa, John Pule, Karlo Mila and Filipe Tohi. Disciplinary confinement, which many Western educated creative practitioners and scholars take as read, is not a given for 'Indigenous writers and artists, who often work in multiple media and who often juxtapose genres and forms, such as a written poem and a drawing, painting, sculpture, carving, textile, basket, photograph, moving image, or live performance' (Allen 2012: xxii). Moreover, when disciplines 'separate the spiritual from the political, literature from history, or economics from psychology', they misconstrue how people in Oceania commonly live (Wood 2006: 36) and place an undue pressure for coherence on many interpretations. Transdisciplinary projects come perhaps with a risk, by embracing difficulty, but they can also be more adventuresome and stimulating (Allen 2012: xv), creating an 'ever-shifting, ever-vibrant space' for 'attachments to land and ancestors and ... identities formed in experiences of travel, relocation, and dislocation' (Wood 2003: 388).

This collection comes to Pacific spaces from a variety of disciplinary perspectives and interpretations to think through disciplinary translations between anthropology and architectural practice, mostly in the context of the transportation of Pacific spaces. One reviewer suggested that we change our title to *Pacific Spaces: Translations and Transmutations*. In adopting this suggestion, we thought more about the implications of the particle 'trans-' – as in the transnational groups in which people live outside their homelands. Its etymological roots imply 'crossings', which resonates with voyaging, but also 'overcoming', perhaps as in adversities or difficulties. In science, 'trans-' can designate a compound of two distinct chemical groups.

For Chadwick Allen, 'trans-' enables the augmenting and expanding of broader fields of enquiry. If comparative projects focus on 'trans-' rather than 'ands', they may hold in balance 'the complex, contingent asymmetry and the potential risks of unequal encounters' across different fields and indicate specific agencies and interactions (Allen 2012: xiv). As a metaphor to think with, 'trans-' invites a broader spectrum of comparisons between pairs of distinct concepts that lies beyond the scope of this collection. Suffice it to say that thinking of the world in pairings of *hoa* or *soa* (Māori or Samoan/Tongan: friend, companion, pair) underpins, as Tēvita Ka'ili observed in his keynote at the Interstices Under Construction Symposium in 2017, Moana philosophy.<sup>2</sup> *Hoa/soa* implies notions of 'similarity, complementarity, duality, equality, tension, conflict' (Ka'ili 2017: 9:51) and seems to resonate with comparisons performed under notions of 'trans-'. We can only make a start

here, and it would be interesting to see, as the other reviewer noted, what positions, perspectives and exchanges are possible from perspectives including more and other Moana communities. Transindigeneity, writes Ka'ili (see Chapter 7), 'focuses on the strategic juxtapositioning of Indigenous traditions, knowledge, histories, arts, literature, and orature to see what insights, cultural truths, and possibilities ... might emerge.'

For this purpose, translations are required, often even between groups using the same or similar language. Translation is a relationship that involves everyone, an opening for dialogue, working across knowledges and positions. It is 'a putting in touch with', or nothing (Berman 1992: 4). To bring concepts and terms from different traditions together can be a first step in building relationships (see Engels-Schwarzpaul, Chapter 10). In the context of this collection, translation offers a way to understand how (spatial) distance operates in the travels of Pacific spaces, literally or metaphorically. It also helps to explain the acts performed when moving between disciplines.

The contributors to this book – architectural practitioners, architectural and spatial design theorists, anthropologists and historians – show not only how new theoretical perspectives can arise out of the rubbing of aspects specific to one discipline against their equivalents of another. They also demonstrate how, in a juxtaposition of terms and concepts proper to Moana ontologies and epistemologies, on one hand, and their corresponding counterparts in Western knowledge traditions, on the other, a space of emergence is created for something that goes beyond both, enhancing both fields of potentialities. We will say more about the development of this space in the conclusion.

Rather than attempting direct translations between the disciplines and cultures, most contributors engage, sometimes obliquely, with the question of how buildings corral and hold communities and their rituals together in the Pacific. Preserving specific cultural and social positions throughout multiple readings of sites or buildings, they unfurl a shared horizon within which to re-explore Pacific concepts related to *mana* and *tapu*, *whakapapa* (genealogy) or *mafua'aga* (origin), *vā* and *vā fealoaloa'i* (relational space and social relationships), *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship) and *utu* (reciprocity). Such concepts and their attendant actions can mostly be traced back to homeland contexts and then extended to encompass recent diasporic situations into which buildings, people and ritual spaces have moved. To reassess contexts and rituals is especially important in the chapters by Pacific scholars, who attempt to construct Indigenous perspectives by drawing on these concepts and the intersections between them.

Collectively, the authors consider a broad spectrum of *hoa/soa* notions derived from Western scholarship, such as traditional – contemporary,

locally intensive – globally dispersed, relational – singular. They provide fresh insights into the conception, production, designation, articulation and use of physical and cultural states and constructs in the Moana. From the in-between, they suggest different possibilities of thinking about and looking at space and its experience. Further, while all contributors explore spatial relationships in the built environment across the Moana, their observations and arguments also involve strong cultural, geographical and temporal dimensions. The changes that occur in the spatio-temporal movements between people and place, architecture and use, are partly transmutations initiated by coincidental developments in other spheres, or deliberate translations of concepts across different architectural and social traditions.

Writing and thinking from the in-between, or *vā* (Samoan/Tongan/Fijian: space between), positions this collection within a unique network of researchers from several discipline areas. Early discussions, mostly at ASAO (Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania) meetings, were concerned with anthropological approaches, including perhaps particularly what Marilyn Strathern (2015) calls a counterweight – comparison for the sake of understanding one's own routine assumptions, as a starting point of an enlarged and more precise 'thinking between or among' (Allen 2012: xi).

A significantly greater number of contributors have been instrumental in the project's development at different stages than those assembled here. We would like to acknowledge those who previously presented or developed papers with us for this *kaupapa* (initiative).<sup>3</sup> Looking forward, we hope this transdisciplinary approach to conceptualizing Pacific spaces will offer a framework for thinking from the in-between in the future. Our conversations across disciplines and cultures concerning *vā moana* eventually led to a research project, *Vā Moana: Space and Relationality in Pacific Thought*, which, at the time of publication, will be nearing its completion.

## Chapter Overviews

This collection brings together twelve scholars writing and thinking on Pacific spaces from the in-between. Each chapter enacts various translations and transmutations in their conceptualizations of Pacific spaces, expanding current perspectives on how we come to see and know space in the Moana. These ten chapters can be grouped loosely into two sections. The first section addresses disciplinary translations directly demonstrating the productive tensions of moving between modes of practice, and kinds of knowledge. The second section works to answer the question of how Moana notions of space translate and transmute as they move and shift.

Pacific Spaces

Translations and Transmutations

Edited by A.-Chr Engels-Schwarzpaul, Lana Lopesi, and Albert L. Refiti

<https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/Engels-SchwarzpaulPacific>

Not for resale

Deirdre Brown acknowledges the long history of anthropology on Māori architecture. This constellation is now shifting, as more architecturally trained Māori scholars take up the work of architectural anthropology, and more and more university-trained Māori utilize *kaupapa Māori* methodologies and participate in architectural design and criticism, advancing a decolonization of Māori architecture. A part of a decolonizing practice recognizing 'Indigenous sovereign rights over their cultures and stories' is the inclusion of Māori communities. This, Brown contends, has led to a decentralization of anthropological methods, resulting in a richer multi-disciplinary approach.

Athol Greentree is one scholar who exemplifies an architectural anthropology from the position of an architectural practitioner. In his chapter, Greentree writes on the critical junction between the *itu* (gable roof span) and the *tala* (rounded ends) sections of the roof of Samoan *fale*. A 'tectonic layer' ensures a structurally sound connection between two fundamentally different geometric forms, which also maintains a 'commitment to mobility'. A focus on construction origins, Greentree argues, would lead to contemporary *fale* building, in Sāmoa and the diaspora, based on Indigenous construction methods, rather than Western ones that try to be 'ornamentally Indigenous'.

In the following chapter, I'uogafa Tuagalu introduces the Samoan concept of *vā* as intertwining social and sacred spatial relationalities. Tuagalu discusses the meaning of *vā* over time in several dictionaries, as well as different types of *vā* and their energies. He suggests that *vā* can be 'conceived as a field, in which objects are located and wherein *vā-forces* operate'. Involving concepts developed by Bourdieu, Bennardo, as well as Lehman and Herdrich, Tuagalu probes into the forces which bring objects into relation, those functioning in *vā* relations (e.g. *mana*, *tapu* and *alofa* meaning love), as well as corresponding *vā-energy* flows in Samoan *fale*.

Anne Allen returns to her field work material of the early 1990s to translate and re-translate between French philosopher Henri Lefebvre's spatial theorizations and the Samoan concept of *vā*. Allen argues that architecture and the human body, and their placement within *vā*, function as statements of social organization and are active agents in the Samoan socio-political sphere, which can be read through the lens of Lefebvre's *Representations of Space*. The translating necessary for this process, according to Allen, generates 'a useful vocabulary' for non-Samoans to understand physical and relational spaces in Sāmoa.

Jake Culbertson comes to architecture from anthropology. In his chapter, Culbertson constructs his ethnography based on the time he spent practising with the carvers he writes about: he worked in the House of Knots, carving daily, for periods between two weeks and six months, during the

five years leading up to 2011. Through this practice of carving, Culbertson contends, carving as it exists in the House of Knots goes beyond serving as a source of inspiration for architectural approaches; it is, rather, a relational practice of care with its own life force.

Albert L. Refiti and Ross Jenner write between classical European and Pre-contact Polynesian architectural traditions to find corresponding histories of sacrifice. Ritual arrangements were the formal means to accommodate acts of sacrifice and bloodletting, which, as Refiti and Jenner argue, gave rise to the respective architectures' primary structural elements. This chapter, too, moves between Moana and Western thought to create shared ground through a reflective dialogue. In the contact zones between these two enquiries emerges a particular kind of transmutation, or (as the authors call it) Zombie architecture.

The remaining four chapters explore how spaces, forms and materials are imbued with symbolic aspects when people move, or when buildings themselves are moved. Focusing on the ways in which Pacific spaces are practised enables one to 'think about similarities and differences between diasporic Oceanic groups and those who have remained nearer to their ancestral islands' (Wood 2006: 46). Mobilities of peoples and spaces is a translation in and of itself but, as the chapters outlined below reveal, often also lead to a transmutation.

Vince Diaz and Kehaulani Kauanui's notions of transportation and transplanting offer James Miller a way to think through diasporic mobilities, specifically Marshallese place-making in Northwest Arkansas and Oregon. Miller explores Marshallese cultural transference in the reshaping and redefining of their immigrant homes, but also of their environment in the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Notions of place-making and transplanting land, Miller suggests, move us away from damage-centred interpretations of Pacific diasporic spaces and toward more generative futures.

Tēvita Ka'ili focuses on early diasporic settlements across the Pacific from 1200 AD, referring to shared names across the Moana as evidence of early Pacific mobilities. Part of this mobility was the introduction of the rectangular-shaped *heiau* (place of worship) to Hawai'i. Ka'ili recounts the deep history and ancient geography of one specific *heiau*, Maunawila Heiau, which has helped to reconnect ancestral links between Hawai'i and the rest of the Moana. Remembering these deep connections, Ka'ili argues, encourages trans-Indigenous connections, which maintain Indigenous particularities while reaching across Indigenous communities.

Hinemihi o te Ao Tāwhito, a *whare whakairo* (carved meeting house), was purchased in Aotearoa New Zealand by William Hillier Onslow in 1891 and dismantled in the following year to be transported to England by sea. Since 1897, Hinemihi has been in Clandon Park, where she has

become a spiritual home for Māori in the London diaspora. In 2017, Anthony Hoete, as chairman of Te Maru o Hinemihi, proposed to the UK National Trust to restore Hinemihi by creating replacement carvings for her original size (before it was shortened in Clandon Park by half) and by extending the *whare* to serve, again, as a *whare manaaki* (house to care for guests). Anthony Hoete proposes trans-disciplinary collaborations for the co-design of Hinemihi 2.0, a *whare*-for-export.

Hinemihi is an example of what Tina Engels-Schwarzpaul describes as travelling houses. Locating Hinemihi in a wider network of Māori and Samoan houses in Europe and the USA, Engels-Schwarzpaul focuses on aspects of translations and transmutations that are activated when the houses themselves move (or are moved) away from the people. At several levels, Engels-Schwarzpaul addresses epistemological questions regarding translation and transmutations central to this collection. Translation, Engels-Schwarzpaul contends, with its literal sense of moving from one place to another, ‘appropriately mobilizes meaning and expands interpretive frameworks, facilitates multi-perspectival discussions, works around the blind spots in each culture and helps to uncover or articulate new affinities between Pacific and Western types of knowledge.’

The intention for this volume was to instigate dialogues in and across different locations around the Pacific, as well as translations between different disciplines, primarily involving anthropologists and people working in architecture. Such dialogues had already been started in the 1960s, but then disappeared a decade or two later. We hope not only to have taken up the loose threads again but to have opened up a space for new conversations – this time including, notably, a majority of Indigenous scholars as authors and addressing a wider range of concerns. The ensuing discussions reflect the complexity and range of this emergent field of research, in celebration of the productive frictions and tensions between.

**Lana Lopesi** is Assistant Professor in Pacific Islander Studies at the University of Oregon and author of *False Divides* (2018) and *Bloody Woman* (2021). Currently she is Editor-in-Chief for the *Pacific Art Legacy Project*, Editor for *Marinade: Aotearoa Journal of Moana Art* and Arts Editor, *Metro Magazine*. She received her PhD in 2021 from Auckland University of Technology on Moana Cosmopolitan Imaginaries. Lana is a researcher for the Vā Moana – Pacific Spaces research cluster at Auckland University of Technology.

**A.-Chr. Engels-Schwarzpaul** is Professor in Spatial Design and Post-graduate Studies at Auckland University of Technology – Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau, in Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand. She was



Executive Editor of *Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts* from 2005 to 2012 and edited around eight special issues for *Interstices*, *ACCESS* and *Knowledge Cultures*. She also edited *Of Other Thoughts: Non-traditional Ways to the Doctorate: A Guidebook for Candidates and Supervisors* (2013, for Sense Publishers, with M.A. Peters) and edited and translated *Atmospheric Architectures: The Aesthetics of Felt Spaces* (2017, for Bloomsbury, author Gernot Böhme).

**Albert L. Refiti** is a research leader in the field of Pacific spatial and architectural environment with an extensive research and publication history in the area, supported by his teaching and lecturing in the last fifteen years. His current research is on Pacific concepts of space, how they are formulated and enacted, the aim of which is to find out how this understanding might play a role in rethinking the ways that Pacific people can create new modes of working and creating new notions of place and citizenship in the diaspora towards a Pacific cosmopolitic.

## Notes

1. ‘Moana’ refers to what Europeans later called the ‘Pacific Ocean.’ The term has become increasingly accepted as one denoting Moana (Pacific) communities, that is (mostly), Polynesian peoples in their homelands, as well as transnational urban communities outside of those homelands. However, the term is still debated: not all people in the Moana feel included. We use ‘Moana’ here interchangeably with ‘Pacific’, as a currently mostly accepted, but problematic and quite possibly interim term.
2. Many Moana cosmologies revolve around cosmic pairs, as in Aotearoa, Papatūānuku and Ranginui.
3. Fa’afetai tele lava to: Mike Austin, Michael Goldsmith, Jeremy Treadwell, Sean Mallon, Karlo Mila, Moana Nepia, Bruce Moa, Semisi Potauaine, Tate LeFevre, Marianne George, Spencer Leineweber, Sa’iliemanu Lilomaiva-Doktor, Karamia Müller, Vaoiva Natapu-Ponton, Ramon Tiatia, Jan Rensel, Alan Howard.

## References

- Allen, Chadwick. 2012. *Trans-indigenous: Methodologies for Global Literary Studies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Berman, Antoine. 1992. *The Experience of the Foreign: Culture and Translation in Romantic Germany* (trans. S. Heyvaert). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

- Ka'ili, Tēvita. O. 2017. 'Pacific Patterns/Moana Philosophy' [Keynote, 4 June], *Interstices Under Construction Symposium*. Auckland: Auckland University of Technology. Retrieved 25 April 2022 from <https://vimeo.com/221972588>.
- Povinelli, Elizabeth. 2001. 'Radical Worlds: The Anthropology of Incommensurability and Inconceivability', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30: 319–34.
- Strathern, Marilyn. 2015. *Learning to See in Melanesia: Four Lectures Given in the Department of Social Anthropology, Cambridge University, 1993–2008*. Chicago, IL: Hau Books.
- West, Paige. 2016. Written report on our 2016 ASAO working session in February 2016.
- Wood, Houston. 2003. 'Cultural Studies for Oceania', *The Contemporary Pacific* 15(2): 340–74.
- . 2006. 'Three Competing Research Perspectives for Oceania', *The Contemporary Pacific* 18(1): 33–55.