ARCHITECTURE AS SOCIAL EXPRESSION IN WESTERN SAMOA: AXIOMS AND MODELS

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For the rural communities of Western Samoa architectural forms provide a means of expressing social organization, its conceptually static ideal, and its living, evolving configuration. Individual houses, family properties, and villages exist as defined spaces with acknowledged borders, created through the application of set canons. Yet, at the same time, these spatial constructs are open to interior, contextual modification in response to political, economic, and historic change. This paper investigates those axioms by which Samoan architectural space is organized, discusses previously proposed paradigms, and suggests models which more closely reflect how space is used by Samoans.

At one time the people of the Pacific islands of Samoa believed that the universe was composed of the sky (the abode of supernaturals), the space of living humans, and Pūmotu (the Samoan Hades). These large regions were separated one from another by boundaries which provided a basic structure, an exoskeleton. Within these boundaries were further divisions where relationships and their attendant growth could be implemented. As the heavens were perceived by early Samoans as being partitioned into subunits, so too were buildings (fale) and the villages which incorporated them (FIG. 1). For Samoan architectural forms, divisions within an outer structure provide an interior system organized in terms of set paradigms, which allow variation of form and behavior. In this way architectural space becomes a reproduction of the evolving relationships which make up Samoan society. "Every social space... once duly demarcated and oriented, implies a superimposition of certain relations upon networks of named places, of lieuxdits. This results in various kinds of
This paper is concerned with the structural organization of Samoan architecture, which provides the stage for social action. Although long acknowledged as one of the premier artistic accomplishments of Polynesia, there has been little research into Samoan architecture. Early works by investigators such as Peter Buck are primarily descriptive in nature. It was not until the 1980s that even brief consideration was given to Samoan vernacular architecture. A survey of rural house forms conducted by Roger Neich investigated the changing style of buildings within the context of the evolution of material culture. In his study of Samoan linguistics, Alessandro Duranti briefly considered interior space and the positioning of chiefs in formal council. However, it was the work of anthropologist Brad Shore (utilizing his own fieldwork and expanding on the studies of Margaret Mead) that first proposed a model for the organization of architectural space. Yet, although Shore indicated basic oppositions within both village and house arrangement, he was primarily concerned with the correlation of these dualisms with those found in Samoan political organization. Thus, his proposed representations were static and somewhat limited, reflecting the indigenous ideal rather than a flexible, working system. This essay is an attempt to go beyond Shore’s work and provide a dynamic model which more closely reflects how space is used, rather than a paradigm of how it might be conceived.

Although Samoans can verbally articulate some of the canons which govern their architecture, structure is also revealed through the embellishment of permanent physical forms and the more transient component of behavior. The physical formation of buildings and the actions associated with them suggest that structure is organized within a framework of linear hierarchies and complementary relationships. An opposed relationship like center-periphery infers differences of degree with no abrupt demarcation between them — a continuum. Such sets correspond in character to what Claude Lévi-Strauss terms “concentric dualisms.” Although I acknowledge the recent, legitimate criticisms of Lévi-Strauss’s work, his work does provide a vocabulary with which to discuss cultural manifestations in which dualisms play a role, such as Samoan architecture. However, while Lévi-Strauss focused on the endpoints in a concentric pairing, Samoan architecture also stresses the hierarchical nature of the contained space between. Consequently, Samoan architectural space is intrinsically dynamic.

In contrast to concentric pairings, inside vs. outside is an example of a “diametric dualism,” in that it suggests a distinct separation between spaces with a clearly defined border. This opposition is expressed in the disjunction between interior and exterior architectural space and the conceptual divisions between the extended families which form the basis of Samoan society. However, just as familial membership can be manipulated, physical boundaries can also be contextually blurred.

A basic structuring of Samoan architectural space affords the physical framing for the activities which take place there, a frame which reflects the conceptually unchanging aspects of society. It is in the effective breaking or negation of this frame, and a concurrent shift in emphasis to the open center, that social action occurs, resulting in the creation of new social-spatial relationships. However, the configuration must first be established if it is to be broken. The principles which help determine the framework are emphasized in Samoan spatial discourse through decoration, a focus on physical nodes or points of encounter, by an insistence on hierarchy, and in some forms of ceremonial action. These complementary constructs have varying levels of impact on all architectural arrangements: village, family compound, or individual structure.

VILLAGE BOUNDARIES

The physical bracketing of a village (ā'au) is defined by Samoans as those boundaries (either visual or conceptual) with the sea, the bush, or other villages. The borders are part of a discontinuous, diametric system which distinguishes between opposed groups. The sea and the bush are perceived as being other than human, and at times in opposition to human activity. Spirits are more likely to be encountered in the areas away from the village, and it is here that community graveyards are commonly found. The bush is where social control is weakest, marking as suspect any person who ventures there without obvious cause. Although the boundaries between the village and the sea or bush are readily apparent, those between communities are not always so. Rural villages are often
spaced far apart, but the buildings of two politically distinct communities may likewise be directly adjacent. Regardless of how visually indistinct the division appears, the exact boundary is known and strictly enforced. Its importance is underscored by those instances where the actual border is in dispute. In several recent cases the disagreement has erupted into violence, and deaths have been known to result. The antagonisms underlying such actions indicate long-opposed groups, and they promote the diametric dualism between those inside a social or physical space and those outside it. Such a distinction is reinforced by the older indigenous attitude toward village and family land.

Through the first half of the nineteenth century the transfer of real estate in Samoa and the shifting of boundaries was based on the concept of the ultimate inalienability of land. Malama Meleisea has concluded that

... gifts of land were a mechanism for incorporating an outsider or outside group into an 'aiga [extended family] and the na'u [village] to which it belonged. In the case of a chief who, as a result of misfortunes or war, wished to relocate himself and his 'aiga, the allocation of land to him in another na'u, with a tulaga maota [guest fale] and a place in the rank hierarchy, would require the consent of the tuila [village council]. Thereafter the exoccupiers would have perpetual obligation to the na'u, its laws and political organization. Transfer of land between Samoans always obliged the recipients of the land to accept the authority and common identity of the 'aiga and the na'u who bestowed it.7

Through the mechanisms of assimilating the individual into the group, the boundaries between villages, once established, would remain inviolate. During the period of early European contact, the concept that land could be transferred in perpetuity and thus lost to the descent group and village was foreign to Samoans. Years of colonization and modern circumstances have often negated this original view in practice, however, it still functions as a strong ideal when most rural Samoans speak of their community and family land.

VILLAGE INTERNAL STRUCTURE

As early as 1787 La Pérouse recorded from Tutuila a basic description of Samoan village arrangement which has been duplicated by many observers up to the present. “The houses were placed in a circle about three hundred yards in diameter, the centre of which formed a beautiful green, while the trees, with which it was shaded kept it delightfully cool.”9 The structures immediately surrounding this green were most likely the walled, prestigious guest houses belonging to the extended families of the community (FIG. 2). Fifty years later the missionary John Williams noted the same arrangement for an inland village on 'Upolu.10 Such descriptions suggest a great deal of consistency in the arrangement of village architecture. However, archaeological sites and modern communities display a much greater degree of pattern variability.

Modern Samoan villages are often highly variable in physical organization, exhibiting linearity in their arrangement rather than a strongly defined circular format. Gratten contends that there are actually two village forms: one with a central public meeting area and a second exhibiting a single aligned tract of houses facing the beach with the malae (village green) in front.11 However, I would suggest that the latter is actually a modification of the former, reflecting local topography and history. Most modern Samoan villages are coastal. Where the mountains are close to the sea the possibility of a completely central community space is eliminated by the narrowness of the coastal strand. If more room exists, the villages are often much more centralized in their configuration. A recent development is also the building of houses along the paths or roads leading inland, although guest fale are still primarily adjacent to the malae. These houses along the roads are spoken of as being away from the village. Despite recent changes, almost all Samoan rural communities today continue to exhibit some tendency to group land and structures around a central open area (FIG. 3).

The importance of centralized space in Samoan thought is revealed in the very name of the archipelago. Sa designates that which is forbidden, taboo, set apart, or sacred. Aho, among several meanings, indicates the center. Recently Shore has attempted to ascertain the concepts and perceptions underlying the centralized spatial orientation of the Samoan vil-
In this regard, he has postulated two overlapping divisional concepts. One is the contrasting of seaward (i tait) to inland (i mta), a distinction he equates with front and back. The other is the differentiation between center and periphery, between the controlled village core and those areas outside the boundaries of the community.

The village center, in its physical realization in the malae, or green, provides the social and political nucleus for the community. It is found throughout Polynesia, although not always as the physical center of the village. However, regardless of its location relative to the residential area, this space is used as the site for important religious and social activities. In Samoa the malae is often named, providing a link to important historical events and a means of village identity. This area is a junction point, in that it is the locus for all inter- and intravillage activities that entail the sociopolitical dialogue evident in events involving life crises. When in use for sacred or political interaction, the malae becomes forbidden territory, where behavior, and occasionally egress, is restricted.

The relevance of the malae as the essential village core is physically marked in two ways. One is the open nature of the space itself. Like the utilization of open spatial styles in the creation of guest fale, visual accessibility points to indigenous political and social forms. The unobstructed expanse is potentially subject to further division via creative human movement. The second designation of the malae as meaningful is found in the positioning of prestige architecture around its defining perimeter. The guest fale of important extended families are usually located here. Such guest houses are the largest structures in the community and are almost invariably open and unwalled. Churches are also commonly built adjacent to the malae, as are other important community structures. According to Mageo, the malae is a “spatial icon of the relationship between ‘arga’ [families] within the village,” and its assembly of architecture physically reflects the social space between families.33

As one moves away from the village “center,” the size and distinction of buildings wanes and the overt social significance of space is gradually lessened. Thus, according to Shore, “The ideal village is . . . conceived of as circular rather than linear, with the malae or sacred political ground as a center of dignified activity, a secondary ring of fale with the large guest or meeting houses closer to the center, and the smaller huts and cook houses radiating outward.”34 However, this analysis can be misleading, in that it is not the circular nature that is emphasized by Samoans but the distinction between center and periphery and the hierarchical nature of the space between. The malae as true village center is an ideal that is seldom realized, and in practice the expanding compilation of structures is open to modification. It is possible to find the lowly cook house of one family closer to the village center than the residence of another.

Rather than a series of hierarchical rings, one larger than the other, the variable nature of the positions of structures from one family compound to another suggest a different explanation. The malae functions as a focal point and intersection for an infinite number of independent lines which radiate out from it. If the malae is centralized, each independent line exhibits a hierarchical peak at the malae’s midpoint, with an ordered decline in building prestige as one moves away from the apex. In the physical manifestation of this concept, the important lines are those which radiate out from the village “center” and bisect family land. If the village green is positioned at the edge of the village (such as on the beach) the radiating lines exhibit high prominence at one end, low stature at the other, and a continuum between. Such an arrangement is actually a specialized case of the centralized organization and reveals how flexible a linear hierarchy can be in its actual spatial application (FIG. 4). The distinction between center and edge is structurally and verbally expressed by Samoans in the opposition of front and back, a
formulation that has ramifications for the arrangement of family compounds and individual houses, as well as villages.

PUBLIC ORIENTATION

In his analysis of the overall spatial orientation of the Samoan village, Shore emphasizes the oppositions of center and periphery and front and back. Margaret Mead (as well as Shore) equates front with the directional designation *i tal* (towards the sea), and back with *i ma* (inland). She states that the seating organization within chiefly meetings is always aligned with respect to these directions. According to Shore, the guest house “of each household group is positioned seaward of the compound’s other houses, and it is here that important guests are housed, important meetings are held, and ideally where the girls of the family are supposed to sleep under the watchful eye of the chief and his wife.” The opposition of front and back is (as we shall see) strongly evident in the villages, and is determined by family compound spatial organization. However, the linking of this complementary pair with the landward vs. seaward distinction is seldom evidenced in contemporary arrangements of architectural forms.

In his analysis of the spatial organization of the chiefly meeting, Duranti noted that he found no evidence that the front of a structure is the side facing the sea. This is supported by my own observations of numerous villages in Western Samoa. Many communities more closely reflect Shore’s representation of the conceptual village ideal, with the guest *fale* facing the central *malae*, than do his other statement that these prestigious structures are placed on the seaward side of the family compound. This is particularly true in villages where a public road cuts through or is adjacent to the *malae*. In the nineteenth century it was common for intercommunity footpaths to traverse this open area. But in those villages in which the government road is removed from the *malae*, I have noted that families often place their guest *fale* along the thoroughfare with the front of the structure facing it. Duranti confirms my observation. If a house is on the seaward side of the road its front would be orientated inland. In addition, this placement can result in the back of the structure facing toward the *malae*. Thus, in relation to the *malae*, the long axes of *fales* are oriented perpendicular to lines radiating out from the central point, with their prestigious fronts facing the village green. However, the long axes of houses adjacent to a road run parallel to the road, with their prestigious fronts facing it. The combination of a separate public road and a *malae* in a single village results in a more complex spatial pattern than either alone.

The construction of prestigious architecture facing the public road suggests a different conceptual structure than the *i tal* *i ma* dualism postulated by Shore. At the same time, the distinction between front and back is not abandoned; it is still present in the concentric, complementary relationship between private and public. With the recent (post-Independence) development of extra-*malae* vehicular roadways has come a change in the way visitors first experience a village. Instead of coming into the traditional community center, in many cases they enter what at one time would have been the periphery. Here lie the less prestigious, privately orientated rear areas of family village land, where visitors would have been discouraged from going. Without a change in orientation the important discursive statements which are directed towards a dialogue with the larger society and engendered in the guest *fale* would have been diluted or missed entirely by travelers. However, an architectural shift in focus from the *malae* to the road by those families with land adjacent to it would solve this problem and result in visitors first encountering the more distinguished and appropriate buildings. Shore notes the recent development of the road as a major locus of behavioral control but misses the element of public presentation as evidenced in the architectural arrangement. The application of community rules to the road precinct (as well as the *malae*) reinforces it as a venue for public statements and interaction. In contemporary villages, then, the structural distinction between front and back is retained, but it is manipulated in regard to public orientation rather than geographic location. The public orientation of the road establishes a focal line within the village in addition to the *malae* centerpoint. The spatial manipulation in regard to both these focal points occurs within individual family compounds but ultimately affects the entire village organization, providing contextual variability within the larger conceptual structure.

COMPOUND STRUCTURE

Just as villages are socially and physically separated by conceptually strong boundaries, so too are the extended families which make up the individual community. Each descent group owns one or more areas of land within the village proper. Footpaths provide access, linking the public and private areas in the community. Such trails result in junction points where the tracks cross property boundaries. However, the greater number of routes skirt individual compounds, providing a visual acknowledgement and reinforcement of the division between distinct familial spaces. Such divisions may also be visually designated through the use of low stone walls or landscape elements. According to Stair, temples or "spirit houses" were divided off from the general community
by being surrounded by a low fence. The residences of important chiefs were likewise segregated from those of commoners in order to afford their owners special protection. Today few overt markers designate property lines, but often a row of small foliage or a low stone wall can be seen. Providing an overt physical disjunction between properties, walls and other physical forms are primarily embellishments of generally acknowledged and accepted boundaries. They do not create the involved spaces, but emphasize the existence of already-formulated areas.

Some residential compounds may be small, with only common residences and other modest houses erected by ordinary family members. This is particularly true of acreage situated away from the metæ. However, the principal lineage property possesses a guest fale, one or more residences, cook houses, and assorted outbuildings. These various structures are arranged with a distinct front-to-back orientation and a subsequent public-vs.-private emphasis. Shore writes, “Low rank or subordination in general is linguistically associated with the ‘back.’” To serve one’s chief is to(ta)tan [possess the quality of being in back], while the wife of the ali is called his faletana (literally, ‘back house’). The support character of the back is represented by the common structures which are placed there: the cook house, toilet, etc. Each of these is fundamental to the working of the household, while at the same time it is associated with heavy work or dirt.

In contrast to the humble support buildings which are located at the back, the more prestigious structures are to the front of the property. If a guest fale is to be found in the compound, it will be placed forward, nearest to the metæ or the public road. Such a house functions as a visual and conceptual junction point for family and community. Here is where the local and dispersed descent-group members convene at times of life crises. Thus the house itself signifies family unity. Here is also where the family contacts the greater society through the accommodation of visitors and the staging of public ceremonies. The open, walled spatial style of the guest fale connotes perceived traditional values as well as long-established social and political forms. Behind the guest fale are positioned the residence structures. This is true whether the houses are of indigenous Samoan open style, of enclosed Western style, or a mixture of both.

If there is no guest fale, residences will often be built towards the front of the compound. Commonly in these circumstances, fully enclosed houses or those fabricated by a Western-style contractor will be placed in the prestigious anterior location. Such fale palagi are linked to the ideas of family wealth and access to outside resources. Behind the enclosed houses sit the more lowly open residences. The placement of the most prestigious style of structures in the most distinguished spatial location reinforces each as a sign of social position. The integration of a linear status hierarchy of space (front to back) with a dualistic stylistic distinction (Western vs. indigenous) results in two general building patterns (FIG. 5). Like the conceptual model for the Samoan village which takes its format from the concentric dualism of center and periphery, these hierarchical patterns are paradigms which are only imperfectly expressed in reality. However, the general orientation does remain as an important organizational strategy for the placement of architecture and its internal arrangement.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Prestige Location</th>
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<td>Guest fale</td>
<td>open, closed</td>
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<tr>
<td>to</td>
<td>to</td>
<td>Residence</td>
<td>open, closed</td>
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<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>back</td>
<td>Outbuildings</td>
<td>open, closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>high front</td>
<td>Residence 1</td>
<td>closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to</td>
<td>to</td>
<td>Residence 2</td>
<td>open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>back</td>
<td>Outbuildings</td>
<td>open, closed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 5.** Spatial hierarchy and style.

**ARCHITECTURAL BOUNDARIES**

Elsewhere I have shown how the fabrication process marks as significant those physical members which bracket the spatial form of the fale. This is true regardless of the stylistic form of the building. Much of the emphasized framework consists of those components which provide both the visual and physical boundary between the interior space of the house and the exterior region. This distinction is recognized linguistically through the use of architectural terms to incorporate and identify members of the extended family from potentially opposed outsiders. In addition, decorative embellishment and ritually modeled behaviors point to the importance of the house boundary in its declaration and preservation of the discontinuous diachronic dualism of inside and outside.

Several forms of ornament are applied to individual fale (both inside and out) either as permanent additions or temporary decorations. For example, flower gardens are usually planted around the outer perimeter of houses rather than in isolated patches away from structures. They are also used to embellish and define the external confines of graves. In addition, temporary decorations for festive events are made from flora and situated around the house perimeter (FIG. 6). Ornaments include palm fronds, which are braided around the support posts of an open fale, and laurels, which are strung along the...
In the early nineteenth century small sections of white  
tapa cloth were attached just under the eaves during religious  
ceremonies. Williams writes these "were designed to inti­  
mate that a sacred ceremony was then being observed within,  
and that no person must enter the house upon pain of death."  
According to most observers, the majority of spiritual prac­  
tices centered around the household gods, and there was little  
to distinguish village religious structures, where they even  
existed. There was thus a need to indicate the contextually  
unique nature of the family  
 when sacred ceremonies were  
occurring within it. The pieces of textile, and the actions  
taken if the border they marked was violated, indicated the  
significant nature of the inside vs. outside dyad and the  
sacredness of the interior space. Like the permanent gardens,  
these temporary embellishments emphasized the contained  
nature of the house by marking its boundary. Today the  
permanent enhancement of sections of the  
's interior serves  
a similar structural and visual function.

Everyday interior decorations include photographs, calendars,  
and documents such as school diplomas. In spatially  
open  
these permanent decorative elements are placed at  
the peripheral roof line, where the support posts are attached  
to the eaves. Such high positioning lends emphasis to the  
shape of the space as defined by the boundary. Although  
enclosed houses (unlike open  
) provide a myriad of surfaces below the eaves on which to attach ornamental elements, the interior walls are generally left bare. Instead, decorations are placed just below ceiling level, as in the  
Samoan-style  
. Such positioning results in a horizontal, perimeter-defining band surrounding an open centralized space.

**CENTRALIZED SPACE**

The importance of maintaining an unobstructed central space is seen in the arrangement of any furniture or storage chests within the indigenous Samoan-style  
. These objects are always placed around the perimeter of the house, giving visual evidence to the boundary which exists there. In addition, this organization is requisite on a practical level. At meal times, formal meetings, and even during informal visits this arrangement positions participants in a peripheral formation. Families also sleep together on mats, and this necessitates an unobstructed area. The space does not dictate the social activity, and the social activity does not dictate the space. Rather, both exist in an interwoven system whose parts reinforce one another; space and border are shaped by the activities which take place there, and in turn they facilitate the behavior. This patterning of marked boundary and open central space in unwalled  
 can also be found in enclosed Western-style houses.

Fully enclosed, Western-style houses usually possess a single main room which is entered via the front door. It is here that all the domestic activities (besides cooking) take place, and that the family sleeps. If any smaller apartments are constructed, the floor plan is such that they connect directly to the central space (FIG. 7). There is a general absence of hallways in this design. The smaller, auxiliary rooms do not normally function as bedrooms except for important guests. Instead, these spaces are utilized as storage areas, a larger version of the wooden chests found in almost every home. Like the positioning of furniture in open  
, the perimeter placement of auxiliary rooms gives structural emphasis to the main space, establishing the boundary between the interior and the exterior. The existence of such a boundary is acknowledged in the behaviors evidenced when people cross the limit and so enter into the center.

While behavior, physical structure, and decorative embellishment suggest a diametric opposition between the open space within a house and that outside, a distinction is also drawn between lower and upper interior space. Like the mythical dome of the heavens, the arched roof of an indigenous-style guest  
is divided into layers. In the house the boundaries of these layers are defined by the cross beams and collar beams which rise up in sequence to create the superstructure for the roof (FIG. 8). A similar layering effect is exhibited in a class of archaeological remains found throughout Samoa. These are irregular shaped, large platforms (one to 14 layers high) commonly faced with stone which surrounds a core of rock or earthen fill. In his analysis of these so-called "star mounds," Herdrich has noted their position on ridges.
and other naturally raised geographic features. He has suggested that this placement was chosen so as to establish the mounds as close as possible to the heavens and the gods. If this were correct, the structures would have functioned as points of contact with the supernatural. The guest fale associated with prestigious titles in a village are also elevated through raised stone foundations or the collar beams in the roof's superstructure. The highest of these houses is that of the senior high chief, whose title also claims the closest genealogical link to Tagaloa as the first ancestor. Through its height and proximity to the heavens, the house may have symbolized the more abstract ancestral link. Its upper reaches functioned as a junction between the gods and humans, while the open space below provided the forum for the establishment of human social relationships.

**HOUSE INTERNAL STRUCTURE**

The roof of the indigenous-style Samoan fale is divided into three vertical sections, both structurally and verbally. It is composed of a center (itu), which is built first, and two ends (tale), which follow in sequence. The center section contains the various cross members of the superstructure. In contrast, the support members of the ends parallel the roof and are in direct contact with it along its entire surface, resulting in an open half dome (FIG. 9). The three parts of the roof are most obvious in the Samoan long house (faleafolau), with its elongated center section, but the distinction remains in the oval faletele, where the middle form has been truncated. However, the structural and visual divisions are almost totally lost in houses constructed with Western technology, whether enclosed or open. Enclosed Western houses with gable roofs have cross beams which extend the entire length of the room, providing a continuous field. Even in saddle- or hip-roofed structures there is little to distinguish the ends from the center except the change in rafter direction. The distinction is totally lost when a drop ceiling is employed, something that is more common in guest fale than in open residences. Even where a tripartite roof division is structurally absent, the single-room, lower space is described by Samoans as possessing two end sections and a middle. However, such internal divisions are only visually evident when the areas are in use. This is particularly true when designated ritual behavior is involved.

According to Mead, there are two basic formats for Samoan ceremonial events. The first "has its types in the fano or formal gathering; the other in the malaga, or formal meeting between two or more groups." Of these, the fano is most closely linked to the actual structure of the house. The most appropriate location for a fano, or any indoor ceremony, is the guest fale. "Any house, however, is capable of being used in an elite fashion as regards its internal seating arrangements, and the wall-less architecture insures that all proceedings within these Samoan structures are open to public observance." The division of internal architectural space which takes place in the fano and is marked through positioning can be used as a general model for all such interactions. The organization of this placement is tied to both rank and status. If the nukae represents village relationships, such an icon is re-created in the fano, or
council — with one major exception. While the placement of structures around the village center is static for extended periods of time, the positioning within the chiefly meeting is open to manipulation within the context of each convening. Accordingly, the spatial organization of the meeting fale is likewise pliable within set conceptual parameters.

The seating arrangement in a fono follows a basic pattern. According to Mead:

For all ceremonial meetings there must be a correspondence between the members of the group and their position . . . the social relationship is boudt forth in a seating plan with a definite symbolic value, and the seating plan is always conceived as a circle in which each segment has a definite value and each is essential to the complete ceremony.90

The utilization of such a seating plan establishes a distinction between center and periphery. The conceptualization of a true circle also suggests the equivalent status of the individual matai in their role as the heads of autonomous families. However, the circular form is overlaid by hierarchical considerations which more accurately reflect the physical structuring of the house.

In guest houses the center posts of the tala (rounded house ends) are reserved for the two highest ranking chiefs. These two participants are usually ali’i (of ten called high chiefs), but in certain circumstances the positions can be filled by those holding lower-status orator titles (tulafale). For example, in Fagamalo on Savai’i there are no ali’i, so both spaces are occupied by talking chiefs. In general, the ranking high chiefs do not actively participate in the discussions, leaving the presentation of their views to their associated orators. The lesser ali’i (where applicable) seat themselves to either side of the ranking high chief(s). Although theoretically fixed, this placement of individuals is open to manipulation in order to make political statements. For example, Duranti cites a village where it was common for the high chief to sit more to the side than the middle of the tala during chiefly meetings.90 As rank is linked to location, the ali’i was overtly lowering his position more in par with his fellow chiefs. Since position also determines participation, the high chief was able to step out of the aloof role which his status normally dictated. In other,
The focus on the center of the end space (instead of the corners) as the most prestigious location corresponds to the center-periphery dualism at work in the organization of the village at large. At the same time, the placement of left-right focal points suggests oppositions, while the flanking of the central figures with others of decreasing rank provides a linear arrangement. An integration of the two (oppositions and linear hierarchy) results in a central open space with defined borders. Such an arrangement is clearly seen in the formal seating positions within rectangular meeting fale and in large meetings which take place on the village green. The implementation of linear hierarchy and paired oppositions is not just expressed in the positioning of left and right within the meeting, but also in the distinction between front and back.

The separation of front and back is acted out in the center section of the house (the ito) and corresponds to that found within the family compound; the front is equated with public prestige while the back plays a lowly support function. Elinor Ochs, in her study of language development in children, noted with the making and distribution of kava, a support function. Elnor Ochs, in her study of language development in children, noted that this spatial contrast between anterior and posterior has a linguistic counterpart. She found that she had difficulties getting the children to speak in the informal K-pronunciation of kava, a support function. Elnor Ochs, in her study of language development in children, noted that this spatial contrast between anterior and posterior has a linguistic counterpart. She found that she had difficulties getting the children to speak in the informal K-pronunciation when she was interviewing at the front of the fale. “The placing of my mat in the front of the house and my sitting on it defined me as a relatively high-ranking person and defined the social event as formal.” The problem was solved simply by locating herself at the rear of the fale. During a fono the anterior of the house is reserved for the tala/tale (talking chiefs). They are arranged in the front (like the ali’i at the ends) with the most prestigious individuals at the center. When debating topics or presenting formal speeches, the orators do not move into the open interior but remain in their assigned locations. The stasis works to retain the established peripheral border. The posterior of the fale is occupied by those charged with the making and distribution of kava, a support function. Here the tanupon (ceremonial maiden) or the nanaita (titled chief’s son) is placed at the center with their helpers flanking them. The signification of status and rank hierarchy which is embodied in the spatial arrangement of any formal assembly is reinforced through the actions taken in the kava ceremony, where the most prestigious are served first, and in the public roll-call of village ceremonial titles. The linear nature of the hierarchy and the verbal and behavioral stress placed by Samoans on oppositional placement suggest that the interpretation of an ideal, circularized fono, as suggested by Mead and more fully elaborated by Shore, is inaccurate.

**INTERPRETIVE MODELS**

Shore has diagramed the general seating plan for a kava ceremony in a way that stresses a set of intersecting axes of status and rank (FIG. 10). Although he rightly points out the opposition between ranking high chiefs, and that between the orators and the kava servers, the diagrammatic placement within a circular form imposes this shape on the relationships. Yet, the spatial organization exhibited in actual meetings and ceremonies is much more flexible. In addition, the crossing lines in the center of Shore’s diagram disguise the center-periphery distinction at work within the larger space. Duranti suggests three different ideal seating plans, each dependent on the shape of the building: rectangular (Western), long (falefale), and circular (falealea). The need for multiple ideals, however, can be eliminated if the hierarchical arrangement of the space and its focal points are considered preeminent, rather than its shape.

The arrangement of space within the Samoan house is determined less by an attempt to duplicate an ideal circular shape than by an accommodation of several concepts, i.e., the integration of a linear hierarchy with paired oppositions. Samoans speaking about ceremonial seating within the house describe the two ends as a unit, and they describe the distinction between front and back. The term applied to the two ends (tala) also can be used to indicate relative position (i talia). As such, it does not define an area but one location vis-à-vis another. More importantly, the word indicating the center section of the house (itu) is also the expression for side. It is not the open interior of the area that is being emphasized. Rather,
it is the border at the edge. The two words, itu and tala, are also applied to the rectangular house, although the structural and spatial divisions found in an indigenous-style guest fale are lacking. Such an application makes clear that the terminology is not dependent on shape. Neither itu nor tala requires a circle for expression, while “side” clearly implies a linear form. The result is a clear demarcation between the ends and the sides, suggesting a more rectangular shape.

In her analysis of the ceremonial seating arrangement within the Tongan house, Adrienne Kaeppler has postulated that spatial organization is based on complementary oppositions which find expression in a rectangular model.9 Back noted that when large Samoan falefalea (long houses) are used for meetings, only the central itu is occupied not the rounded tala.9 The linearity of the idiom of hierarchy within the seating arrangement, the establishment of opposite focal points, and the structural and verbal distinction between the ends and the center edges support a rectangular interpretation. However, several factors counter such an exegesis for Samoan architecture.

The seating arrangement in both Western-style guest houses and the falefalea exhibit a rectangular format, while that within the oval falelele takes on the rounded shape. In addition, Duranti has noted that individuals who are seated at the point where the rounded end sections meet the center may be viewed as at the end of either the tala or the itu.9 The individual sees himself as part of the more prestigious end, while others may assume his position is that of the lower-ranking side. In any case the seating is equivocal in nature, suggesting a less clear demarcation than a rigid, rectangular form affords. Given these contradictions, I propose a model which incorporates Samoan ideas of positioning and hierarchy, while at the same time responding to the structure of the actual space of the fale.

Within the Samoan guest house there are two sets of opposite focal points. One consists of the center ends, usually marked by specific house posts. The other is composed of the center points of the front and back of the structure. Space is organized along linear hierarchies which utilize these four focal points as centrally located apogees of prestige. As one moves away from these peaks in either direction, the status of locations lessens. At the same time, the two house ends are more prominent than the center points of either the front or back. The resulting set of relationships can be diagramed as vectors flowing from positions of high prestige to those of low prestige (FIG. 11). Since it is irrelevant whether the hierarchy is displayed along a straight line or a curve, such an arrangement is responsive to the spatial configuration of the individual house. A border is created (regardless of shape), result-
a central prestige apogee corresponds to the hierarchical organization of the village as a whole with its centralized malae.

CONCLUSION

The principle which largely orders the exoskeleton of Samoan physical spaces is the dyad of inside vs. outside. The village, the relationships of the community with other mata, with the bush, and with the sea are subsumed under this opposition. The boundaries of the family compound are also a means of retaining such a vital distinction. For the house, the exterior border is marked by means of structure, decoration and behavior. At the same time, the fale functions as a linguistic metaphor for the dualism of inside and outside vis-à-vis the family and village. Within this relatively fixed outer shell, the interior is also ordered. However, in contrast to a strongly discontinuous diametric dualism, the primary organizational norms are more varied.

The predominant organizing principles for the interiors of Samoan architecture and architecturally defined spaces are an integration of distinct focal points, concentric dualisms, and linear hierarchies. The focal points are linked together in opposed pairs along the periphery (left-right, front-back) and are expressed in the static positioning of individuals or groups. Along with the fixed points (or areas), concentric dualisms are also utilized in organizing Samoan architectural space. These concepts afford a continuum of change rather than stark demarcations, allowing for the expression of hierarchy within the bordered space. The family compound is arranged with the most prestigious structures (either in use or style) to the front, the common residential houses coming next, and the lowly support buildings at the rear. This progression corresponds to the dualism of public and private, with the anterior of the property facing the public road or malae. In villages following the older format where the thoroughfare transects the malae, compounds are orientated with the front towards this open area. Such an arrangement allows for a strong manifestation of the center-periphery dualism which is evident to some degree in almost all rural communities. The continuous nature of these concentric relationships also allows for variability of expression within a given space, making it responsive to geographic differences and historical change. Yet this is a variability which is itself permanent over the lifetime of the architectural forms.

As an essentially permanent form, the house provides a basic boundary between the inside and the outside. The indigenous-style Samoan fale is a visually unified open expanse spanned by a tripartite roof. A strong segmentation of the roof is generally lacking in houses built utilizing Western carpentry techniques. Yet, conceptually, the fale’s interior is divided into a center and two ends regardless of the building style. The segments are used to verbally mark focal points which are the seating positions of important personages. As one moves from such crests of prestige, the importance of the position wanes, resulting in a linear hierarchy whose highest point is the center. Accordingly, there results a peripheral, linear organization which is adaptable to the physical spatial configuration of the house itself. The schematic array is both structured yet flexible. Within the iconic configuration of the nono, once the spatial structure is established, it remains fixed. For those events in which social relationships are being manipulated, the physical space itself mirrors and symbolizes those changes.

Both continuity and adaptation are accommodated within the ordering of Samoan architectural space. Buildings and the units they define are given a theoretically fixed external configuration and a flexible interior by the application of linear hierarchies, diametric and concentric dualisms, and fixed focal points. Yet for a period of years the resulting spaces are constant, limiting their expression of ongoing change, while at the same time promoting unity and facilitating cohesion. Further divisions are created within a narrow temporal framework through the medium of behavior, which allows for an immediate reflection of social, political and economic modification. The physical periphery of Samoan architecture thus reflects society in its static form, suggesting a basic paradigm, while long-term adjustments in spatial arrangement would reflect a shifting of that model. The seating array in a formal setting acts as a manifestation of the conceptual icon of village organization while defining the central space where that icon undergoes change. It is in the penetration or destruction of the open center, the abrogation of framework canons, and the manipulation of spatial relationships that Samoan society is continually re-formed, reinventing itself to fulfill the needs of its members.
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4. A. Duranti, _The Samuan Fono: A Swinging Linguistic Study_ (Canberra: Dept. of Linguistic Research, School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1984).
6. C. Lévi-Strauss, _Structural Anthropology_ (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1963) and _Structural Anthropology, Vol. 2_ (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976; reprinted in Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980). In general, the simplistic, rigid nature of many French Structuralist formulations has been called into question. In addition, Lévi-Strauss has been criticized for the _a priori_ assumption of a matrix of binary oppositions, and thus the imposition of a dualistic interpretation in spite of evidence to the contrary. At the same time, I would argue that analysis of specific data can lead to the discovery of complex conceptual structures which include binary components.
15. Shore, _Sala'ile'a_, p. 49.
17. J.B. Stair, _Old Samoan or, Fibonacci and Jesuits from the Pacific Ocean_ (London: Religious Tract Society, 1897), p. 50.
20. Shore, _Sala'ile'a_, p. 50.
22. Ibid., pp. 41–46.
27. Mead, _Social Organization_, p. 53.
32. Shore, _Sala'ile'a_, p. 86.
33. This last is a by-product of the choice of lines between opposed groups to indicate that positioning. As the distinction between the boundary seating area and the center was not under consideration by Shore vis-à-vis the diagram, this is not a criticism. I am unable to formulate a representation myself which incorporates both sets of data without obscuring one or the other.
34. Duranti, _The Samuan Fono_, p. 52.
38. Ibid., p. 56.

All photos by author unless otherwise noted.