ARCHITECTONICS AND STYLE

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DEFINING ARCHITECTONICS

Originally, the word "architectonic" pertained to architecture, specifically the construction of buildings. It evolved from the Greek *architecton*, which means "master craftsman" or someone who controls workers and directs them in a building project. As Richard McKeon has noted, Aristotle uses the term *architecton* to describe a master craftsman "who knows the matter and makes the product" (McKeon, 1987, p. 3). However, in 1781 Immanual Kant famously appropriates the term in *Critique of Pure Reason* as a metaphor, distinguishing between "technical unity" and "architectonic unity." A unity achieved *architectonically* "originates from an idea" (Kant, 1985, p. 655). However, unity achieved without architectonics, one merely conforming technically to the requirements of a form, is more limited. In this sense, *architectonics* began to appear after the late eighteenth century in English to describe architectural or artistic elements in accordance with a single design that harmonize.

In 1919, Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin responded to this Kantian concept in the first words of his first published essay, "Art and Answerability":

> A whole is called "mechanical" when its constituent elements
> are united only in space and time by some external connec-
> tion and are not imbued with internal unity of meaning. The
> parts of such a whole are contiguous and touch each other,
> but in themselves they remain alien to each other. (1990, p.
> 1)

Because Bakhtin's brief essay appeared in a provincial Russian journal, his interest in architectonics received no notice until his work began to be collected and translated after his death in 1975. Even then, critics responded more strongly to his studies of the novel. His early philosophical reactions to Kant have only received some attention in recent years because scholars want to understand the role architectonics has played in helping Bakhtin to develop dialogism. But some scholars have also been interested in architectonics as a resource for composition studies.

PARTS AND THE WHOLE

As a concept, architectonics can help composition scholars understand the relationship between parts and the whole. However, with *coherence* we already have a good term that does that. Joseph Williams defines *coherence* as "a sense of the whole" (2010, p. 71): "Think of coherence as seeing what all the sentences in a piece of writing add up to, the way all the pieces in a puzzle add up to the picture on the box" (Williams, 2010, p. 72).

Architectonics goes further, however. As Bakhtin suggests, architectonic unity implies a greater sense of the whole than merely the whole of the topic. It implies an understanding of the writer's personal relation to the topic under consideration. Just as architects consider mass and the forces of gravity that push and pull on a building, architectonics as a metaphor implies the invisible social forces, primarily in language, that surround and define us. These forces push and pull us, and we are attracted to them or repelled away from them. We become defined by what we like and don't like (as any teenager knows). As individuals living in the world and as writers, we take a stand about what we like and what we don't like, arranging the items of the world in our own minds and creating our own identity by our relation to those items. In the process, we construct a personal understanding of the relationship of parts to the whole. These wholes are another word for *meaning*.

A simple example occurs in my classrooms when I ask my students to choose their own topics for writing projects. If students choose their own topics, they struggle to form architectonic wholes as they struggle to understand their topic. One essential aspect of this *architectonic* whole is the struggle itself; the other essential aspect is their own involvement in the topic. What does the topic mean to them? Without that self-awareness, the unity formed is merely mechanical, as Bakhtin calls it, or technical, as Kant describes it. With that self-awareness, however, students stand in a better position to see the relationship of parts to the whole. As a teacher, I can guide my students to that self-awareness or help them in a more practical way see relationships in the material that they have chosen. Joél Paré articulates the significance of the personal in architectonics well: "In contrast to traditional writing, architectonic writing requires the writer to understand her relationship with the subject and to become personally engaged when writing about it in order to compose an architectonically sound and thus effective text" (2007, p. 48). I would only add here, as I have elsewhere, that "Knowledge of individual parts, portions of information without a clear relationship one to the other and to the entire text, provides no true understanding" (Greer, 2001, p. 58).

Architectonics and Style

This aspect of the personal in writing is the key to understanding the relationship between architectonics and style. But this emphasis on the personal is not typically associated with style. Instead, that traditional emphasis is usually on clarity.

Williams, for example, defines style as the ability to write clearly: "it is good to write clearly" (2010, p. 2). Aristotle also feels that "the virtue of style is to be clear" (1991, p. 218). Good style, Aristotle believes, uses metaphor to make persuasion vivid by communicating "actuality" (1991, p. 238): "putting before their eyes as it has happened" (1991, p. 165). We often talk about "personal style" in subjects such as fashion or music, and in literary studies we observe personal styles of authors, but we don't always have a language to describe the significance of the personal in composition studies, unless we consider theorists like Peter Elbow and Robert Zoellner who have discussed ways to find "voice."

Joy Ritchie gives us a starting point to understand the relationship between architectonics and style when she writes, "Only as they struggle to endow the words of others with their own intentions do writers progress beyond the level of functionary or bureaucrat to develop their own style and voice" (1998, p. 135). Here she is elaborating on a point that Bakhtin explores in many of his writings, particularly "Discourse in the Novel." "Personal" does not mean merely recounting narratives about our lives or even articulating likes, dislikes, or opinions (as many first-year writers believe). The "personal" manifests itself architectonically in the intonations we give to quotations and to words of others that we embed in our own writing. As we struggle to make sense about how we feel about something, as we fit that alien language into our own creation, we create a personal, *architectonic*, style. Bakhtinan scholars Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson describe this process in *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*:

> Different forms and styles of reporting speech might usefully be regarded as different ways of "hearing" another's words. When we use indirect discourse, we do not just apply a grammatical rule, we must necessarily analyze and respond to the reported utterance and show our dialogic relation to it. (1990, p. 167)

That dialogic relation depends upon the "other." Writers need two things to create *intonation*, which is the essence of an architectonic understanding of style: (1) an understanding of their own, personal relationship to reported speech and

the topic under consideration, and (2) an understanding of their relation to the "other" in their discourse. Michael Holquist explains in *Dialogism*:

> Intonation clearly registers the other's presence, creating
> a kind of portrait in sound of the addressee to whom the
> speaker imagines he or she is speaking. A common illustra-
> tion of this tendency is found when we hear someone talking
> on the telephone to another person whose identity we do not
> know, but whose relation to the speaker we can guess from
> his or her speech patterns. Intonation is a material expression
> of the shaping role the other plays in the speech production
> of any individual self … we always pass judgment on whatev-
> er information is contained in what we say…. " (1990, p. 61)

When we see judgment, we find intonation. Our goal as writers is to master intonation so that the attitudes we express about reported speech accurately reflect not only our relation to the topic but to every part raised in relation to that topic. When we have full control over these elements, then the parts relate harmoniously—architectonically—to the whole, and we will express an effective style.

An Example of Good Style

Let's review an example of a text that seems to express a harmonious style, as we have defined it. I choose the professional writer Gore Vidal, who, in 1993, won the National Book Award for his collection of essays titled *United States: Essays 1952-1992*. In "Novelists and Critics of the 1940s," we can see a textbook example of harmonious style. Architectonics gives us a vocabulary to name what is happening in the text.

The purpose of Vidal's essay is to criticize critics for their shallow understanding of contemporary literature. This topic alone, however, does not provide the essay with its essential unity, although every aspect of the essay illuminates that topic, even when—at the end of the essay—Vidal begins to drift into metaphysical speculations on the reasons for such shallow literary criticism. His ability to achieve this virtuoso sense of a "whole" arises from his own extremely clear relationship to the material. Such a strong perspective, something students rarely achieve, allows him to use humor like a sword. "Bookish men" have a "long historic record of bad guesses" about literary works (Vidal, 1993, p. 10); affirmative and safe novels give "warm comfort" (Vidal,

1993, p. 11); and critics who follow the crowds ignore contemporary writers to focus on safer, canonical writers "contemplated on the safe green campus of some secluded school" (Vidal, 1993, p. 14). Vidal's snarky humor amuses as it slices, a humor made possible by (1) a clear sense of the whole (he knows what he wants to say); and (2) a clear relation to his material.

As for his sense of the "other," the intonation he articulates with his reported speech adds to his topic and reaffirms his personal relationship to that topic. Clearly, he is judging! Consider the lurking sense of the "other" in this jab at a nineteenth century critic in *Blackwood's Magazine* who in 1817 thought little of Samuel Coleridge:

> Mr. Coleridge conceives himself to be a far greater man than
> the public is likely to admit; and we wish to waken him
> from what seems to us a most ludicrous delusion. He seems
> to believe that every tongue is wagging in his praise … The
> truth is that Mr. Coleridge is but an obscure name in English
> literature. (1993, p. 11)

The intonation in this "reported speech" is double-voiced, a complex relationship to the "other" made possible by Vidal's own, clear perspective on the topic. On one hand, he is including the critic's comments in a list of three critics who all spoke ignorantly but with integrity about nineteenth century authors who then became canonical; therefore, the mere presence of this quotation damns it. Yet, Vidal scores points for wit by seeming to agree with the critic's attacks on Coleridge's "preciosity and obscurantism" (when, in fact, he clearly feels the opposite). We know Vidal's true feelings because the bulk of the "obscurity" falls on the 1813 critic, of course, not Coleridge. This complex intonation is exactly the sort of thing readers admire when they admire Vidal's style—and architectonics can help us see and then articulate what he is doing.

Surplus of Vision

Another, related concept contributing to good style is "surplus of vision," and before we leave Gore Vidal, I want to address it. Because of the typical emphasis in composition studies on voice (ever since the Dartmouth Conference in 1966 and throughout the 1970s), I feel the trope of vision (*sapheneia*) has been somewhat overlooked when examining style. A special kind of vision with implications for style forms when we create an architectonic, personal relation to a topic. This special vision is the result of a self-conscious understanding that

we exist in a particular and unique place and time. The gift of architectonic awareness is what Bakhtin calls a "surplus of vision," defined for our purposes as the ability of an author to see more than the reader can see. As individuals, we experience a partial vision of the world. Another person, however, can sometimes see more than we can see because he or she stands in a different place and time. Bakhtin describes our poor limitations in this way:

> He does not see the agonizing tension of his own muscles,
> does not see the entire, plastically consummated postures
> of his own body, or the expression of suffering on his own
> face. He does not see the clear blue sky against background
> of which his suffering outward image is delineated for me.
> (1990, p. 25)

On the other hand, someone else—an outsider—can see these things because he or she has a "surplus of vision." Editors can always see errors and weaknesses because they are not as close to the text as the writers: they have "surplus of vision." The best style will arise from a writer who struggles with his architectonic relationship to his topic and then uses that perspective to see more than his reader can see. Let's return to Vidal's essay for signs that he has this "surplus of vision."

Signs of it exist in the reader that Vidal assumes for this essay, "Novelists and Critics of the 1940s," which appeared in 1953 in *New World Writing #3*. This book was a paperback anthology series featuring literary criticism that Vidal had helped to found several years earlier. The assumed reader of this article is educated traditionally, like Vidal himself, and would have known major figures of the literary canon (George Eliot, Samuel Coleridge, Charlotte Bronte) and contemporary literary critics (Edmund Wilson, Malcolm Crowley, Lionel Trilling of the 1940s and 1950s). This reader could have understood Vidal as he attacks contemporary critics by showing the disparity between the way we currently value such classics as *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot and the way reviewers panned it when the novel was first published:

> We do not believe any good end is to be effected by fictions
> which fill the mind with details of imaginary vice and distress
> and crime or which teach it instead of endeavoring after ful-
> fillment of simple and ordinary duty to aim at the assurance
> of superiority by creating for itself fanciful and incompre-
> hensible perplexities. Rather we believe that the effect of such

fictions tends to render those who fall under their influence
unfit for practical exertion by intruding on minds which
ought to be guarded from impurity the unnecessary knowl-
edge of evil. (as quoted in Vidal, 1993, p. 10-11)

By including this quotation, Vidal expresses a surplus of vision that sees
more than the contemporary reviewer could (presumably because that 1817
reviewer was narrowly constrained by a cultural bias), and Vidal expresses a
surplus of vision to his own reader with his long and profound view on cultural
limitations. He gives this long view to his reader almost as a gift, supremely
confident in his assertions. That confidence is a key part of his style.

An Example of Weak Style

Now, let's examine a piece of student writing where almost all of these
aspects of architectonics are missing. This is a paragraph from a famous text, a
student essay that appears in "Inventing the University" by David Bartholomae.
It is a placement essay written during a freshman orientation in response to
this prompt: "Describe a time when you did something you felt to be creative.
Then, on the basis of the incident you have described, go on to draw some
general conclusions about 'creativity.'" Here's the first paragraph of what that
student wrote:

In the past time I thought that an incident was creative when
I had to make a clay model of the earth, but not of the clas-
sical or your everyday model of the earth which consists of
the two cores, the mantle and the crust. I thought of these
things in a dimension of which it would be unique but easy
to comprehend. Of course, your materials to work with were
basic and limited at the same time, but thought help to put
this limit into a right attitude or frame of mind to work with
the clay. (Bartholmae, 1985, p. 624)

Bartholomae explains this essay's weaknesses in terms of limited writer
agency. This student, he believes, "doesn't have the knowledge that would make
the discourse more than a set of conventional rituals and gestures" (1985, p.
625). The assumption that underpins Bartholomae's position is that discourses
can inhabit and control individuals. He takes that position largely from Roland

Barthes and concludes, "A writer does not write … but is, himself, written by the language available to him" (1985, p. 631).

From a Bakhtinian perspective, Bartholomae is entirely correct when he argues that in this paragraph we can see the student struggling with language and losing. Bartholomae concludes that the student has not been inhabited by the discourses that create an "insider position of privilege" (1985, p. 645). I would differ with Bartholomae's analysis, based upon Bakhtin's concept of architectonics, in this way: Yes, we struggle with language to form architectonic wholes of meaning, but we must win that battle and not lose it to a discourse. We must make the discourse our own.

Like Lev Vgotsky, Bakhtin believes in inner speech. We appropriate elements of discourse to create intonation, accepting some and rejecting others. This acceptance and rejection can pertain to any discourse, including a dominant discourse. We are not appropriated; we gain mastery. One sign of this mastery is surplus of vision; another is intonation. We take from discourses the parts that we need to form a whole of meaning, and we communicate that clarity to our readers and listeners by telling them things they cannot see or understand themselves, given our difference in time and space.

Let's reconsider this paragraph in terms of architectonics and style in three ways:

1. **Lack of a Sense of the Whole**. No clear sense of the whole exists in this student paragraph—which makes it impossible to communicate a clear meaning. The prompt has provided no clear audience, so the student stumbles in his syntax with language. Without a clear audience in mind, the writer doesn't know how to form a whole for that audience, resulting in phrases such as "was creative was" and "but thought help to put." The concept of "creativity" does not guide all three sentences. It appears at the beginning of the first sentence ("an incident was creative"), but creativity as a topic is only implied in the other two sentences, leaving the reader to wonder about the sense of the whole. The author loses any chance of communicating meaning without that sense of the whole.

2. **Lack of personal relation to the topic**. The nonstandard word order reveals that the reader isn't communicating with anyone specifically and only weakly communicating with himself. This topic is not personal to the student. As a result, he has no strong perspective.

3. **Lack of "surplus of vision."** The author doesn't have information to communicate that the reader doesn't already know, although the reference to "mantle and crust" is promising. He doesn't follow through, however, and discussing materials that are "basic and limited at the same time" fails to advance the discussion. This lack of confident assertion is a lack of surplus of vision.

Conclusion

Before we can be persuaded that something is true, we need to feel that we have all the facts before us. F. H. Bradley, in his 1907 essay "On Truth and Copying" explains:

> Truth is not satisfied until we have all the facts, and un-
> til we understand perfectly what we have. And we do not
> understand perfectly the given material until we have it all
> together harmoniously [the italics are mine], in such a way,
> that is, that we are not impelled to strive for another and a
> better way of holding it together. Truth is not satisfied, in
> other words, until it is all-containing and one. (as quoted in
> Magee, 2008, p. 61)

Here, Bradley summarizes key ideas related to architectonics and style. A strong style needs to impart an understanding of a whole, and the parts of that whole must work together *harmoniously.* That harmony occurs when writers relate personally to that sense of the whole and communicate a clear perspective based upon this personal relationship. Of course the sense of the whole itself is only possible because the writer believes she has a "surplus of vision" and wants to communicate it.

The actual mechanism by which a student can obtain surplus of vision and architectonic harmony resembles some form of proximal development, as described by Lev Vygotsky. First the student must be good at one thing before she can be good at other things, including style. The teacher must lead the student through a series of steps to first see a sense of the whole, and then relate to it, and then relate to the parts with intonation, and then revise to insure a surplus of vision. Sociocultural theorists would call these steps a form of scaffolding in which the student develops greater and greater stylistic competence.

One composition scholar in this collection who describes this movement towards stylistic competence is Tom Pace in "Language Instruction at St. Paul's Grammar School and Today's Stylistic Classroom." In his article, he offers an intriguing discussion of a pedagogical approach that aligns with architectonics well. Built on Erasmus's stylistic textbook *De Copia*, and following precepts articulated by Cicero, this approach attempts to fuse wisdom with eloquence. Whether that stylistic competence is created with the traditional exercises associated with the *progymnasmata* and *declamatio*, or modern versions built on templates from *They Say/I Say*, Pace describes a methodology that demands self-awareness for the purpose of public expression. His emphasis on exercises

that look at issues from multiple perspectives could almost certainly create the surplus of vision discussed by Bakhtin, and the emphasis on public expression is worthy of further exploration in terms of architectonics.

Whichever exercises are used, at each step in the process, the student should stand in the position of authority or competence, creating a history of success. This success will help develop a degree of self-awareness about his or her place in time and space. Style is the registration in writing of this architectonic understanding.

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