

# From Architectonics to Polytechtonics:

## Rhetoric, Communication, and Information



**G. Thomas Goodnight<sup>i</sup>**

*University of Southern California  
Los Angeles, California*

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### Speaking and Building

From time to time, rhetoric becomes informed by the conceit of architecture both in its theory and its practice. Built objects and constructed words pulse through these conjoined traditions, extending from the classical world through the Renaissance to modernity. The powerful figure--engaging the architectural is engaging the rhetorical--appeared for millennia to the well-trained eye as common sense. Designed construction was an ancient art learned by adaptation of materials to locality through proper conventions that served the purposes of building shelters fit for dwelling, making conduits for travel, or constructing monuments for the display of memory. So, too, classical rhetoric is often understood as an art of discovering durable proofs, arranged and deployed in support, to recall the memories and inform the sensibilities of an audience brought to together for common purpose. Aristotle's teleological system of rhetoric held that the natural world offers processes of development that could be imitated for the sake of productive public outcomes. This is true whether one works in speech or stone. The logics of such proper constructions became fitted out widely as *technai* or liberal arts. The influence of these ways of making renders each *techné* a

possible conceit to account for making poems, histories, speeches as ways of making or doing with words. The reverse is true as well.

Architecture appears not infrequently as a master conceit. Across time, its practices rhetorically gesture toward topics of location, design, arrangement, convention, memory, ecological niche, and materiality. Conceits, however, do move in and out of influence. Transience as well as variety characterize the history of rhetoric because conceits change. After all, a conceit is a figure of unlikely, but generative, comparison. They work at symbolic junctures where fiction and reality, mimesis and wit, and convention and innovation meet. Such figures park communication on a flexible border where figure and ground dance together. Generative comparisons appear at performance spaces where actuality and ideals flux back and forth between possibility and necessity. This paper opens and intensifies inquiry into the contingent, hybrid, contested and dispersed embodiments of contemporary rhetorics--produced in the guises of architectonic and polytectonic communication.

Initially, this paper unfolds three moments at which rhetoric and architecture have conjoined: two where architecture as practice is secured by rhetorical theory, and a third where architecture itself becomes a defining metaphor for rhetoric as communication. In the last, modern moment, Richard McKeon finds rhetoric to be assembled into the communication arts (McKeon 1987). These arts inform social conventions and change through reflective practices that bring together new collaborative possibilities across otherwise distinctive special and public audiences. In its modern incarnation, rhetoric as communication performs as an architectonic conceit insofar as it underscores meaningful interactions that contextualize globally situated, state-of-the-art practices that are taught, criticized, and improved across pluralistic societies.

I push the architectural conceit into and against a new historical moment, our moment. Of course, the accelerating digital revolutions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, too, promote the centrality of communication—but the conceit shifts from interaction to messaging. Communication appears to become regarded most fundamentally as structures or processes of information, and only incidentally as a feature of human interaction. Thus, communicative practices become shifted from the horizon of achievements of personal, professional and public life to the inescapable assemblies of technical, state, and private message drivers that promote ever-accelerating information simulation and leveraged network circulation. Presently, then, in the worlds of human interaction and platformed message exchange, the modern

communication arts and information technology initiatives struggle as they feed, substitute, and oppose one another. I contend that rhetoric as architectonics and as polytechnics frame, contest, and blend the necessities and possibilities of contemporary communication.

Architectonics identifies rhetoric with a *techné*, a way of making in which lessons learned in making discourse can be extended productively to building human spaces. The conceit has a long history. Vitruvius, a contemporary of Cicero, articulated a *techné* in his *De Architectura Libri Decem (Ten Books on Architecture)* (Vitruvius 1914). This work defined the practical art up to the Renaissance. Vitruvius, in turn, influenced Alberti, an Italian polymath who introduced principles of design into the coloration of urban landscapes (Alberti 1988). Richard McKeon elevated architecture to architectonics by re-writing the conceit into a major key for the modern reach of globalization (McKeon 1987). As Donald Cushman and Philip Tompkins note, McKeon argues that the present rhetorical moment must be understood broadly in terms of the communication arts (Cushman and Tompkins, 1980). These arts offer productive principles for working practices of meaningful exchange, agreement, and diversity across pluralistic societies in a global world. In its modern garb, rhetoric offers special arts that cultivate communication practices that achieve prudential action thereby sustaining deep pluralism. Such informed practices cannot be secured by formal meta-disciplines such as mathematics or philosophy, but, like rhetoric, communication requires continual attention to the cultivation of expression, probability, and judgment before specialized and general audiences.

Polytechnics refers to communication that appears in the relation between performance and the control structures of an information society. Information instruments and networks promote individual access and simulated sociality while at the same time they feed large gathering and data extraction systems of message surveillance and security. Whereas architectonics embraces communication primarily as meaningful interaction and exchange within and across personal, professional, and public life, polytechnics simulates such embrace at a distance and seizes communication as a congeries of evolving information tools that secure adaptive, scalable, expandable, mobile, mediated, networks of message-making. A polytechnic rhetoric converts language action to multiple signals, codes, and calculating mechanisms that promote ambiguous discursive, perceptual and symbolic equivalencies through substitution, conversion, transversal

equation, shadow replacements, resemblance and simulation. Rhetoric achieves influence in such dress (1) by schematically arranging the illusions of expanded access, easy connection, social engagement, and the joys of DIY (do-it-yourself) local control, on the one hand, while on the other hand (2) topically feeding private, state, and global information-security and surveillance systems that underwrite a control society (Beniger 1986). Inquiry into each conceit should enable appreciation and critique of the mixed articulations of contemporary rhetorics as communication and as information.

## **The Ancient Dwelling**

Vitruvius (80? to 15 BCE) draws a clear relationship between speaker and architect. He was “indebted to Cicero for his demand for a knowledge of practice,” and rhetoric supplied him with his model. “The orator, like the architect, requires knowledge both theoretical practical, as well as natural talent, an ‘inborn capacity’ for the task” cultivated by a liberal education (Frith, 2004, 41). Upon inspection, the relationship goes much deeper to underscore the nature of dwelling itself. Vitruvius explains, using a narrative about the origins of social life whose main topics, however varied, go back to Protagoras:

[T]he men of old were born like the wild beasts, in woods, caves, and groves, and lived on savage fare. As time went on, the thickly crowded trees in a certain place, tossed by storms and winds, and rubbing their branches against one another, caught fire, and so the inhabitants of the place were put to flight, being terrified by the furious flame.

In time, he goes on, fear recedes and mutual address arises at a sight of domesticated warmth.

After it subsided, they drew near, and observing that they were very comfortable standing before the warm fire, they put on logs and, while thus keeping it alive, brought up other people to it, showing them by signs how much comfort they got from it. In that gathering of men, at a time when utterance of sound was purely individual, from daily habits they fixed upon articulate words just as these had happened to come; then, from indicating by name things in common use, the result was that in this chance way they began to talk, and thus originated conversation with one another (Vitruvius 1914, 38).

Unlike in classical Greece, fire is not figured here as a Promethean gift, but as a collective moment prompting a common language. As sociality warmed, gatherings “gave rise to the coming together of men, to the deliberative assembly, and to social intercourse. They began in that first assembly to construct shelters,” Vitruvius says.

Some made them of green boughs; others dug caves on mountainsides, and some, in imitation of the nests of swallows and the way they built, made places of refuge out of mud and twigs. Next, by observing the shelters of others and adding new details to their own inceptions, they constructed better and better kinds of huts as time went on (Vitruvius 1914, 38-39).

From these dwellings, customs evolved, and the entwined practical arts of architecture and rhetoric emerged.

Attention to the art was self-developing. Rhetoric subtends the borders between the human world and *terra incognita*. The conceit propels rhetoric to become a social and material cultural force. Just as the orator must study the range of available knowledge, so the architect must establish range so that materials may be designed to purposes that adapt properly structures to environment, custom, and convention. Thus, it was not so much fire *per se*, but the discovery of a practical art, informed by conventionalized practices adapted to local materials, environments, and ecologies, that got progress going on its way:

Then, taking courage and looking forward from the standpoint of higher ideas born of the multiplication of the arts, they gave up huts and began to build houses with foundations, having brick or stone walls, and roofs of timber and tiles; next, observation and application led them from fluctuating and indefinite conceptions to definite rules of symmetry. Perceiving that nature had been lavish in the bestowal of timber and bountiful in stores of building material, they treated this like careful nurses, and thus developing the refinements of life, embellished them with luxuries (Vitruvius 1914, 40-41).

The move from scarcity to luxury suggests a surplus above meeting basic necessity has been developed, thus signaling security as a benefit of the arts. As words enter to guide the social development of the practical projects, so rhetoric as *techné* becomes integral to the productive arts and the rise of productive arts contribute to rhetoric.

## Quattrocento Italy and Civic Pride

Among the most influential thinkers of architecture and related arts is Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472 CE). Known chiefly as an architect, he is remembered as a polymath author, artist, poet, priest, linguist, philosopher, and cryptographer. Classical rhetoric influenced his cultural turn. In Rome, Alberti investigated and brought into contemporary relations through design the ancient sites, ruins, and objects of art. His observations on architecture were published in his 1452 book *De Re Aedificatoria* (*On the Art of Building*). Alberti took his predecessor Vitruvius's text as both a model and a challenge, dividing his own into ten books. His "very title was a deliberate challenge to the ancient author across a millennium and a half" (Rykwert 1988, xi). His work adapted Vitruvius to comport with his own experiences with materials, knowledge of locality, geometry of construction, and urban environment.

Like Vitruvius, too, Alberti recounts the origins of architecture, though the two accounts differ starkly. For Alberti, the first people started from a position of safety. As a result, "not wishing to have all their household and private affairs conducted in the same place...men began to consider how to build" (Alberti, 1452/1988, 8). The great architect like the great orator is rare because it takes talent and learning to bring together imagination and craft for the public. The orator and architect make an aesthetic contribution as well. Alberti also structured modern treatises on painting and sculpture, bringing "an exacting analysis of the pictorial image from the point of view of the spectator, discriminating between what was represented and how much as an orator had to distinguish what to say from how to say it" (McHam 2008, 526). His rendition of the art "applies a generally Ciceronian attitude," Carl Goldstein finds, "urging the painter, as Cicero and Quintilian had urged the orator, to master the liberal arts, even while, in good rhetorical fashion, himself disclaiming eloquence" (1991, 642). Most generally, he "used the categories and processes from rhetoric to frame his discussion of architecture, formulate a coherent aesthetic, and delineate the appropriate place and importance of architecture in Renaissance society" (Morin 2002, viii).

When Alberti holds that good work serves good ends he is extending a classical Roman view (Bertazzo, 2008). Just as the language of the orator spans specialized systems of knowledge, so the practical art of architecture requires experience with a variety of learning. Conceptually, rhetorical principles of address are useful in the directed release of talent into shaping materials, building

design, coloring city spaces while recalling and improving ancient models. Such activities constitute human agency fit for the times. Thus, an orator or an architect alike rise above the vicissitudes of subsistence struggles and grow “in charge of his own destiny, able to resist adversity with the aid of the humanities” (Bertazzo 2008, 164). Further, just as language can extend from classical to vernacular structures and use, so color and shape move from the formal, classical style to its contemporary vernacular splendors (Grayson, 1998). Rhetoric enabled Alberti to supervise “a broad programme of building, urban redevelopment and restoration of ancient buildings ” (Bertazzo 2008, 164-165).

Alberti introduced architecture into what would become its early modern variations and experiments. His views remain influential. In fact, those presently practicing architecture and coloration return to Alberti for fresh inspiration (Jones & Livne-Tarandach, 2008; Parker & Hildebrandt, 1993). Rather than follow out how rhetoric informs architecture, however, I now make a turn to show how the conceit veers from one practice and becomes reconfigured to serve as a metaphor for rhetoric in its changing manifestation as a practical art.

## **Architectonic Rhetoric**

During the Cold War, Richard McKeon identified his own contemporary transformation of rhetoric as *techné*, following the “Ciceronian tradition [in which] arts are sciences; things known are things made; and processes of knowing are processes of making and doing” (McKeon 1975, 730). Rhetoric was conceptualized as communication, a theory of building state-of-the art practices of meaningful, reciprocal exchange among professionals and citizens on a global basis. The art of rhetoric is used “to secure agreement in the reformulation and revolution of statements of questions and of principles, and in the establishment of communications and of communities” (McKeon 1978, 208-209). McKeon was involved in framing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In this context, rhetoric as an architectonic art is uniquely valuable. Unlike theoretical knowledge or empirical measurement, rhetoric directly addresses the arts of making the case with particular goals in view. “Architectonic arts treat ends which order the ends of subordinate arts” (McKeon 1987, 3). Similar to the architecture conceit, an architectonics puts together theory and practice, the laws of composition, proportion, and design together with the conventions, habits, skills and materials of practice. Thus arise “architectons, or

master craftsmen, [who] direct the work of craftsmen, and architectonic arts [which] order and relate...arts, sciences, and actions” (McKeon 1981, 431).

What were the exigencies that led McKeon to take this line? In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, rhetoric associated with oratory had led a vibrant life, but in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the equation of principles and practices fell on hard times. A well-disciplined academy left rhetorical studies all but fugitive, even while disciplines such as social psychology ransacked its theories and traditions for material. Similarly, the mass media devoured rhetoric and turned the art into cycles of mass war-time propaganda and peace-time consumer advertising. McKeon trumped the relationships among empiricism, logical-positivism, and disciplinary hierarchies to reimagine a renewed, pragmatic (communicative problem solving) role for rhetoric. His idea was to re-identify rhetoric as communication. David Depew points out that McKeon in reading Aristotle was responding to a conversation of his times about rhetoric as a practice and a way of making (Depew 2010). He saw a similarity between his time and certain earlier ones. Just as the Roman Republic and the Renaissance had prompted new rhetorics, he contended, so modern pluralistic urban living appeared to invite a new rhetoric. In modernity, rhetoric appears in the garb of communication. Indeed, if one examines the terms eloquence and communication over Google n-gram one sees that eloquence falls from general use over time while communication rises until their relative position in textual citations is reversed. Eloquence disappears from the high modern lexicon. Communication ascends to occupy its formerly held heights.

In architectonics, rhetoric achieves the form and function of communication. This discipline imports cultural moments from ancient Rome and Renaissance Italy, yet at the same time pursues its own global possibilities in a modern world--whose existence and spread depends essentially upon communication. The patterns, conventions, materials, and theories of rhetoric as a productive art are rendered into practices that take form as communication of groups, nations, institutions, and cosmopolitan collectivities come into spaces that require for cooperative and contested action means of communication by which interactions can be compared, appreciated, understood, and advanced (McKeon 1968). Modern rhetoric thus appears to build in the architectural as a master conceit at a very basic level. As communication, rhetorics build processes of exchange, development, and legitimation. The continuities and revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are global, McKeon writes:



The growth of science and communication, the increase of knowledge and *the formation of world community*, have begun to lay out the field of systematic organization both as a system of operation and an ongoing development and inquiry technology. It is a field which provides grounding for the intersubjectivity of communications of person and groups and for the objectivity of conclusions of inquiry and action. (McKeon 1987, 23, my italic.)

Rhetoric as communication under McKeon's definition links to processes of personal, institutional, and public development and change (McKeon 1952). Interestingly, so complete is rhetoric's transformation that its traditional discourses become little noticed, if not nearly forgotten, among a wide swath of the humanities and social sciences, while communication is a term that continues to rise in ascendancy (McKeon 1957). Gerard Hauser and Donald Cushman synthesize and extend McKeon's views, persuasively in my judgment, into a promise in which communication becomes a route of inquiry in and into a globalizing, pluralistic world (Hauser and Cushman 1973). Robert Craig maps communication as its own modern field of inquiry (Craig 1999).

## **Polytectonics and Rhetoric**

The question I wish to raise is what becomes of communication and architectonics in an age characterized by digital material exchange, networks of assembly, and global circulations? Polytectonics is a rhetorical conceit extended from the idea that in natural language words substitute for one another as equivalencies. In this context, information (1,0) becomes the mechanism of automating equivalencies par excellence; such substitutions appear ready-detachable from sites of production and locations of performance. Words mediated digitally produce a novel *techné* of equivalence as analog gestures become converted to platformed messaging and information processing. Crucially, polytectonics depends upon systematic trajectories intertwining individual and networked inducements to participate, protect, use, habitualize, and enjoy the informationalizing of communication.

As in traditional rhetoric, the art remains hidden. Inducements appear as discovery. "Surfing" is a conceit for participatory play on and across digital platforms—hypertextualizing an endless summer. Thus, rhetoric shifts from an architectonics producing communicative dwellings to rhizomic wanderings. Place evaporates into mobility, itself a lure into matrix envelopment. DIY explorations of the Internet yield fresh riots of

experience—all captured, stored, and flattened into an information desert, subject to detachment, recoding, and measurement by nomad. Nomad is a perspective that has been held by critics to be a complement of rhizome. It is that, but it is also much more. The nomad perspective does transform the world into a flat, desert information milieu-space (Cresswell 1997; Deleuze & Guattari 1986). Characterized by its “variability, the polyvocality of directions,” smooth nomad spaces are appropriated, however, “as a means of communication in the service of striated space,” which is “defined by the requirements of long-distance vision: constancy of orientation, invariance of distance through an interchange of inertial points of reference, interlinkage by immersion into an ambient milieu, and constitution of a central perspective” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 382, 385, 494). Surfing is one thing; mechanisms of communication control quite another. Nomad becomes the state, market, and global institutions that share data and produce multiple, surveillance oriented, detached apparatuses that reduce globally the variety of ‘privacy-assured’ communications to clouds. I contend that rhizome and nomad are complementary but opposite sides of our present polytectonic rhetoric and rhetorical situation.

Although McKeon wanted architectonics to be a means of interpretation as well as of discovery, his vision of the latter was always more strongly marked than his grasp of the former. Polytectonics recovers rhetoric as the means of discovery or, as Cicero called it, invention, where more or less self-serving inventional rules convert the massed hunter-gatherer message behaviors of internet communities into the vast businesses of data platforms, analytics, and spam. The price of admission is startling. No longer do the horizons of communication reside within contended goals of forming genuine community or reaching understanding among members of a pluralistic society. However varied, communication activities might appear as rhizomatic but communication as nomadic is strictly reduced to an information plane; there is no communication that is not information. Network fragments or kaleidescapes appear open and safe to us, if a few rules are selected and put into place. The platforms and aps are not as they appear, however. The polytecs of private and state security apparatuses go beyond the boundaries of consumer and citizen to reduce communication to information subject to infinite acquisition, storage, remix, and surveillance.

A polytectonics of communicative equivalence opens the prospects for unstable, trust-absent, authority-disguised dual-faced circulatory rhetorics. The controllers and the controlled both are induced to participate, but each remains closed to the other; there is

little to no recourse to an accessible architectonics. P olytechnics is self-styled as a disruptive *techné*. The dual relationship between networked users and controllers is defined more by its oppositional dynamic than by coherent interaction. The urban landscape appears to be flourishing with rhizomes of message making such as mobile apparatuses, app-studded tablets, blipped feelings—all these offering DIY networks of pleasure, connection, and consumption with security assured by fictions of presence. Consumption itself becomes a politics of the supplement (Strait & Goodnight 2012). The internet surfer—re-incarnated presently into a hip mobile phone user—discovers personal transient release across this rhizomic landscape that invites nomadic “types” of self, identity and sociality (D’Andrea 2006, 95).

So influential is this relationship that readers of Deleuze and Guattari draw equivalences between nomadic activity and “rhizomic multiplicities” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 371). They do not recognize the critical difference. “Today we all want to be nomads,” John Noyes explains. “We travel like nomads, we shop and surf the Internet like nomads, our technologies of communication release us from locality, and, when we use them, we defy the physical worlds that tie us to territory” (Noyes 2004, 159). The pleasure is harrowing: “Mobility casts subjectivity between the ideal freedom of the disembodied wanderer and the refugee” (Noyes 2004, 160). For some, nomadic life promises a return to more primitive pleasures. “The lack of boundaries both in hunting and gathering and in electronic societies leads to many striking parallels” (Meyrowitz 1985, 315). Nomad societies are the most egalitarian, it is alleged, with no loyalty to territory, little sense of place, activities, and behaviors because they “are not tightly fixed to specific physical settings.” “Our advanced technological stage allows us to hunt and gather information rather than food” (Meyrowitz 1985, 317). Indeed, diaspora and community change place in such cosmopolitan worlds of post-hegemony and post-sovereign drift. Surfing for news, views, and games, exchange outside the dreary halls of our dormitories, randomly attending to the next link, wink, tweet, or crinkle of information. There are no boundaries here. Rosi Braidotti explains that such beliefs are powerful drivers but participation is not underwritten with emancipatory guarantees. The “dislocation of the subject opens up space where new modes of data intake can be implanted, and hence new sensorial, perceptual, conceptual and ethical insights,” he says and continues:

But there are costs to going rhizomic:

The tactic of sensorial decontextualization is not deprived of violence. ...[H]igh security enclosed space[s]

reproduce exactly the same conditions of traumatic displacement. In the case of the contemporary digital arts culture... the touch of cruelty is set to the task of enlarging the range of what embodied, embedded and technologically enhanced subjects are capable of becoming. ...Breaking open the doors of perception through sensorial intervention leads to the desegregation of bodily capacities by decoding sedimented knowledge to which the subject is used. The result is as addictive as any legally prescribed drug (Braidotti 2006, 232).

“Knowledge is no longer monumental and monolithic but differentiated,” one critic still concludes with joy (Chambers 1986, 193). Nomad is thus rendered in partnership with rhizome. This unreflective equivalence among critics appears to be one that is also accepted by the public, as both alike ignore the possibility that a nomadic perspective involves rhetoric in the discursive engineering of a global, security machine.

### **Polytectonics: Rhetoric as Nomada**

Conceptualize nomad as a rhetorical conceit, not an anthropological category. A key nomadic moment seized by Deleuze is that of a gaze onto a flat open landscape from which in synchronic fashion space spreads out, emptied in every direction. Rhetoric as rhizome travels, moves, and circulates across such surfaces. But the ‘nomad’ perspective of the ‘war machine’ features rhetoric as a flattened landscape without boundaries where words merely swirl, swell, and stir. In contrast to rhetoric conceived as a productive architectonic art characterized by “a vertical, hierarchical and centralized configuration,” polytectonic rhetoric consists of

horizontal, nonhierarchical formations with no center, ...no privileged locus of growth, ...and no stable patterns of interconnection among its elements, ...a network much like the internet, ...a proliferating multiplicity of terminals and circuits, in which any terminal may be connected to any other terminal, and with such rapidity that each terminal is virtually contiguous to every other terminal, no matter how far apart the various terminals may be in terms of actual spatial distance (Bogue 2007, 126-127).

Thus polytectonic rhetoric doubles materiality into a dynamic of flattening security and simulated vulnerability. From the point of view of its users, the internet and its technologies are free, open, and mobile. Once communication was grounded within life worlds

of actors, professionals and citizens; now these are simulated by the internet and naively popular--as if connections were still an open source endeavor. However, the telecom engineer-capitalists of a control society naturalize and program our communications much, much differently than we experience them. The security apparatus trumps sovereign and private experiences as framed by institutions such as the NSA. For commerce, free decentered mobility remains a useful illusion to extract data from the masses. From the nomad perspective, individual communications networks dissolve into matrixes that disclose ever wider information deserts. The grains of words swirl and swell into dunes whose patterns can be predicted, connections mapped, and densities uncovered. Communications-as-information can be scooped, measured, reinvented systematically as big data. In this polytectonic world, communication becomes mined and processed simultaneously as information asset and standing reserve of energy. Modern institutions may flourish as do postmodern entertainments, but nomad subordinates each and all to the networks of acquisition, storage, retrieval, and recall into the interlocking "mechanisms" of "modulation" for a global communication control society (Deleuze 1992, 3-7). Nomad as conceit bears greater resemblance to the self-repairing, hybrid hunting deep space satellite of an early Star Trek episode than to Genghis Khan's mogul horde.

Rhetorical inquiry is called to investigate this age divided against itself. The architectonics of communication remind us of how powerful rhetoric can become as it transforms itself into communication practices. As society moves from an industrial to an information economy, architectonic rhetorics appear to grow more tested, robust, inter-related, and important. New communication media lend an energy boost to modern communication. But the cost is high. Communication seems to be a prize to capture by institutions with control ambitions, however. Engineering sciences now bid to master the limits of the natural world with social engineering translating risk populations through communication mechanisms. Polytectonics prizes communication, too, but its views resemble only vaguely the conceit that McKeon imagined. The engineering of a knowledge economy subordinates communication to information, which in turn becomes scaled up into property. Rhetoric flourishes as topical inventional rules that categorize information as data and puts to purpose self-feeding mechanisms to sustain, expand, interconnect and use such formations. Thus, security enters into the rhetorical dynamics of defining order. Critique begins by pursuing such a rhetoric to its perfection, following new technologies to powerful

*technai* of a communication control order. Consider the following dystopic scenario as a possible development of polytectonics.

Polytectonic Rhetoric:  
Rhizome<control>Nomad

The global knowledge economy sustains and replicates the outcomes of the industrial revolution in a communications revolution. Wealth is built but economies fluctuate wildly. Fraud becomes rampant and rationalized as innovation. Regulatory boundaries are removed. Government is denounced as the enemy. Income inequality increases. So does debt. Economic gambling becomes lauded as risk-taking requisite to an ownership society. A global crash ensues. Social safety nets are shredded in the name of austerity. Subsistence needs are denied and life support curtailed. Just as human labor was alienated by industrial wage schemes, so the knowledge economy appropriates life world communication work to serve the interests of capital. Communication is converted to information, then hoarded as property. Piracy panics are posed to misdirect suspicions. The university turns from a center of learning into an information factory. Newly educated become widely unemployed. Students rise as a debtor class. Diaspora becomes a generational norm. Surplus value extracted from communicative work of the masses filters into elite pockets. Surveillance becomes ubiquitous through massive data exchange among private and state entities with extensions from the built environment into mobile flows. Income inequality is rationalized as the reward of entrepreneurship. Information marketing and data analytics unify to reify and expand social stratification. Security measures are justified by alarms over cyber warfare and identity theft. Prison infects the lower classes. Violence erupts but is hidden or limited to “mass” spectacle. Heroic first responders supplement police powers and quell public assembly. The war machine goes domestic. C3I (communication, command and control) becomes the dominant paradigm for risk containment and institutional management. Security ensembles overwrite the

war machine. “Privacy settings” and “free apps” inducements furnish limit cases of false consciousness. Neoliberal institutions blend, colonize, and control fantasy and life worlds. Filter bubbles refine control to co-opt individual cultural play. Polysemy becomes fugitive. Top media platforms commercialize message feasts, even as they build, crash, or disappear periodically. Digital technologies work feverishly to automate remaindered communicative labor. Global communications is celebrated. Scholars claim that new media stimulate democracy even while state cronyism increases and telecom consolidates its gains. Network triumphalism finds global spectacle. Communications research drives out communication inquiry.

This dystopian scenario furnishes a narrative in which rhetoric manifests itself increasingly as an information conceit. Utopian scenarios are available as well. These emphasize the freedom of the internet, reduction of gatekeepers, the marvel of information accesses, the potential of online communities to assemble groups spatially distant but vitally connected. In such scenarios, digital divides are correctable, net neutrality can be sustained, openness of the internet remains a cross-cultural global value. It is against these competing horizons that the hybrid practices of contemporary rhetoric need be subject to inquiry and the steaks appear to be growing.

Information does seem to meet some goals of architectonics by enhancing the speed, ease, and efficiency of communication as the era of architectonics conceived it. But the cost is a hidden dualism upon which the system is predicated. Information circulates and engineers (1) an increasingly individualized rhizomic life world that is (2) in tension with yet fed by the nomadic flattening of human “communication” into exchange infrastructures of capital and the state. The intake is reconstituted as “big data” that generates a spreading information desert. Polytechnic rhetoric fashions conceits that would eject interlocutors from the safety structures of dwelling and spin them among simulated dunes and drifts of signal-monitored, gaming netizens. Here logarithm hunting and ‘big data’ gathering become the necessary vehicles of collective competition and survival, with social relations, market regulations and sovereign constraints quickly minimized if not entirely discarded.

Architectonics and polytechtonics bear a conjunctive relationship in which new possibilities for civic engagement, social movement, and community development sometimes contest and bring to justice systems of excess. Should evidence suggest that the dystopic scenario or something like it is becoming the defining feature of 21<sup>st</sup> century, communication studies become problematic. The communication discipline is likely to grow in importance, but the cost may be that it may need become even more intensively than it currently supposes itself to be the object of its own critique. Minimally, rhetorical architectonics and polytechtonics need to be distinguished in order to furnish grounds for renewed social theory and to discover productive description and engagement.

### **Challenges to Critical Communication Inquiry**

There are three general conclusions to this paper.

(1) Critical inquiry needs to reopen the relationships between rhetoric and communication over time. Rhetorical inquiry without reference to communication remains blind. At the same time communication theory without rhetorical context remains partial. Communication theory and practice entwines with rhetorical acts and events to create rich legacies, complex presents, and alternative futures.

(2) Conceits offer windows into the complexities of rhetorical history. Architecture is a master conceit that renews itself from time to time, marking tradition, modernity, and postmodernity. Minor conceits are important as well. These offer alterior, alternative, or counter-border relations among fiction and reality, fantasy and material worlds. Independent and relational aspects of major and minor conceits deserve attention as these define a style, set in motion a dynamic, or become the identity of a historical event or moment.

(3) Architectonics and polytechtonics mark the 21<sup>st</sup> century as generating divided rhetorics. Modern institutions spread and extend influence through communication theory and practice, while cultural play and information structures spread and link up as harbingers of escape and a communication control society.

But a fourth conclusion suggests itself as well.

(4). These implications (1)-(3) suggest that critical inquiry needs to account for its own contradictions (Goodnight 1996).



Critics sometimes find the potential to celebrate polytectonic flows and to identify with the fiction of nomadic existence (Grossberg 1998). In reality, critics are like publics in that each has no separate space upon which dis-encamp from the cultural melee in which we are all implicated. While critics can insist upon equating rhizome and nomad, the security apparatus that fuses economic and state interest is still busy connecting scholarship with the 'war machine' to use Deleuze's terms, which has been transformed into the machinery of biopolitical security and surveillance. This error is common. Critics become playful and joy creates a surplus promoting change. With open source internet, perhaps such utopian possibilities were possible. Polytectonics now produces and anticipates filter effects thereby creating seams to anticipate and gin contagion. Our joys may neither be nor remain entirely our own. Cultural inquiry needs to now take into account the prospect that the mass audience has been re-programmed by search platforms to capture and reproduce audience participation in ever-thinning, adaptive polysemy. Many critics have celebrated rhizomes as postmodern structures of liberation. The romanticizing of nomadic life leads to flattened and suspect conclusions about hunter gatherer societies, but, even if this limit is ignored, the rhizome/nomad conceit itself is understood positing a fringe in which escape is possible and new social movements find hidden places to grow and expand. But nomad operations of the biopolitical security machine gobble up and digest such edges without much exertion, it seems. The net results are anomic outcomes as polytectonics join state and market machinery and deploy architectonics as a front for routinization of control (Tardanico 2012). Communication is information; information flattens and levels. Desert-like formations of communication-as-information are secured.

McKeon and Deleuze together remind us that rhetoric and the practical arts are brought together at different junctures in historical moments. The architectonic and polytectonic conceits lead to the discovery that rhetoric and communication are not givens, but rather relationships that are realized and fraught with limits and possibilities. Hauser and Cushman observe that the "history of the arts of communication is a history of transformations," and that such change continues in ambiguous ways (Hauser and Cushman 1973, 211). This paper began by comparing modern architectonics to polytectonics at a time when rhetoric has become caught up in the trade of global communications. Polytectonics flaunts itself as a pre-architectural conceit which features rhetoric basically as ingeniously invented

mobile, adaptive, survival adventure. Polytechtomics gathers and circulates messages transposed by codes and scales for information-deployed groupings--organisms, herds, populations or societies. Polytechtomic qualities of natural language equivalencies persist in generative relationship, over and against monotectonic artificial languages that program, capture, replicate and simulate the products of machined communications. This paper opens a space for appreciation and critique of contemporary globalizing rhetorics as the fate and fortunes of master and minor conceits play out over time.

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