



The Architecture Of Ceramic Vessel

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Abstract:

One of the most meaningful artistic endeavours within the modern ceramic movement is the investigation of our world through the use of vessel. From its utilitarian origins since prehistoric times, the vessel has undergone thousands of transformation through the hands of creative artists acquiring along the way, many layers of meaning which is the language of the pot. These are manifested through exploration of the concepts of space through analysis of the dichotomy between exterior or interior of a pot or one pot from the other and the message they convey. Today, the possibilities of clay as a vehicle for the exploration of ideas about contemporary society and culture are as rich and boundless as ever. "The Architecture of the Ceramic Vessel" offers clay artists and those interested in exploring its possibilities, an investigative interpretation of the language and architecture of the pot an indigenous Ghanaian pottery wear.

Key words: Articulation, In Space, Imagomundi, Expressive Space, Schemata.

1.Introduction

The Concept of Architecture makes it viable for use in the creation of diverse forms of ceramic vessels for different purposes, particularly, the ones which involve design and construction. However this concept has been limited to buildings, bridges and most concrete structures without considering the construction of ceramic wares, a situation which has the propensity to affect the technical requirement for the production of vessels some of which are delicate and of complex nature, and would require high degree of planning towards production and serving their purposes. According to Wikipedia (2012), architecture has to do with the planning, designing and constructing forms, space and ambience that reflect functional, technical, social, environmental, and aesthetic considerations. It requires the creative manipulation and coordination of material, technology, light and shadow.

The dichotomy between ceramic vessel and other architectural forms is the application of elements of ceramic art, upon which different degrees of emphasis have been placed at different times, are the shape of the object, its decoration by painting, carving and other methods, and the glazing found on most ceramics. Ceramic or Pottery vessels are generally built using three basic container forms. Although there are sculptural-style vessels that do not follow this pattern, nearly all pottery vessels do use the basic forms, either alone or in combination. When the basic forms are used together, the pot also has transitions from one shape to the next. Understanding these basic forms and transitional styles helps the potter create aesthetically pleasing pottery (Peterson, 2008)

The term "vessel" is seemingly useless; it no longer carries any definite meaning. Every hollow or concave object is referred to as a vessel. It even seems possible to stretch the application of the term to cover object which merely carry related image information.

According to online dictionary .com (2009), vessel is defined among other definitions as "a hollow or concave utensil, as a cup, bowl, pitcher, or vase, used for holding liquids or other contents". In support of this definition, the word "vessel" as a term is used in the scholarly professions of anthropology, archaeology and art history to focus attention on the messages they convey, it seems that a precedent has been set which allows us to distinguish, to some degree, a pot in general from the more particularized vessels.

The American Ceramics, (1985), gives the definition of the contemporary vessel as an object that presents the formal essence of the pot exaggerated to reveal a personal artistic vision uninhibited by pragmatic issues of function. Function to a greater extent is influenced by culture, and this is affirmed by Anderson, (2007), that, the practice of

building design and its resulting products; customary usage refers only to those designs and structures that are culturally significant.

What then is the aesthetic dynamism of the vessel? The aesthetic issues of functional pottery and the vessel are complex, subtle and difficult to articulate. A curious quality of ambivalence exists in much of pottery being produced today under the guise of how they are to be approached and thought about experience. What then are the relations between architectural space and the other ceramic vessel?

A typical revelation on architecture of ceramics is identified by McKenzie (2010) comment on Nicholas Rena's works, as monumental, eloquent ceramics and large vessels that provoke meditative silence, further more by using the archetypal forms of the jug and bowl. And that Rena alludes to ideas of giving and receiving and aims to re-invest the things we take for granted with the kind of power and sustenance we might gain from a religious experience Tessa Peters, (2010). Ceramic is a lively field which is taught and exhibited within the applied arts but has historically been attached to architecture. The situation now is that ceramic objects exist outside of any disciplining context. As a field it has become merely a curio or vestige. Certainly 'the vessel' as a theme in relation to architecture seems almost moribund. McKenzie (2010).

The architecture of ceramics is evidenced by McKenzie's (2012) observation of Rena's ceramic works as disciplined, "rigorous and uncompromising", and that "He chooses to work with a limited number of rules to bring each pairing of jug and bowl into harmonic relationship; the inside colour of one becomes the outside colour of its counterpart; the essentially opposing formal characteristics of the circular, tapering bowls and the gently rounded square shapes of the jugs are closely related at the rim. Each form, according to McKenzie (2012), displays his concern for perfection in the absolute precision of their making and in their meticulously smooth and sensuously coloured surfaces. The works are composed, calm and authoritative". Peters (2010). Rena's architectural grounding has materialised in this way.

Whiting (2009), commented on the structural prominence of ceramic ware by stating that, The great Cycladic, Minoan and Mycenaean exemplars, the superb pitchers of medieval Europe, the slipware of North Devon, the elegant cream ware ewers of Wedgwood – they all show how sculpturally expressive the jug can be. And that, such objects have also had an important symbolic, ceremonial and narrative significance. The jug, with this embedded cultural history, remains a powerful statement of the potter's credo. This research seeks to reveal the articulation of the Inner and Outer Space in the

architecture of ceramic vessel, this search is emphasized by McKenzie's comment on Rena, that the scale chosen by Rena makes his work exclusively both sculptural and ornamental.

These pots are more emblematic than utilitarian, just as some jugs in the past had a more decorative or ritualistic purpose. Like the teapot, the apparent simplicity of the jug belies the complex thinking and skill that goes into its making, the balance of the handle and the lip, the achieving of an overall fluidity of form is a real challenge, one that continues to test and intrigue modern studio potters. So, far from being an anachronism, the jug remains, technically and aesthetically, a conundrum and a touchstone.

The sculptural abstraction of Nicholas Rena shows how the vessel continues to evolve as an object "to interrogate, refine and re-invent". One might also add that this also describes an architectural process, in parallel, being reminded of Louis Kahn's praise for the pure form of an egg. McKenzie (2012).

2.Methodology

2.1.The Articulation Of Inner And Outer Space: Contextual Framework

The research method of this article invokes direct comparison between ceramics and architecture. A work of architecture always has an exterior and an interior space. The act of architecture consists partly of combining the two into a single ordered image. A pot, likewise, has an interior and outer space. Ceramic art also involves similar combining process - not quite the same of course, one does not usually climb inside one's pots. But the comparison should make it clear that, as a good work of architecture, internal spaces are not simply its outside spaces "reversed" or "inverted", neither should a pot be.

2.2.Image Of Space

Good art of all kinds produces images of space, not just in-space, but presenting to us concrete shapes which make space real to us, and bringing together their various emptiness, (a sort of void medium already existing "out there") an idea that somehow reflects the Education theory of space sources. i.e. reference which states that "all nature is based on two things - bodies and the emptiness in which these bodies have their place and in which they move". (Christian Norberg-Schulz; Existence, Space & Architecture, Studio Vista).

People often think of art as simple order of things inserted into this neutral medium to be looked at, and somehow "reveal" it whereas Piaget (2004) show that "our space consciousness is based upon operational schemata, that is experience with things". In summarizing this, he posits that "it is quite obvious that the perception of space involves a gradual construction and certainly does not exist ready-made at the outset of mental development" - Existence, Space and Architecture; by Christian Norberg Schulz. One basic aspect that cannot be overlooked is that from ancient times man has not only acted in space, but has also created space to express the structure of his world as real "imago-mundi" - which may be called creation expressive or artistic space.

The creation of expressive space has always been the task of specialized persons, builders, architects, planners and artists of all kinds. My contention is that, works of art are more serious and interesting than that, for every artist operates within a field or matrix of human responses which he layers out, encodes and then states in a set of terms which opens up an image of space that can be read as an articulated unit.

2.3.Inner And Outer Space

The term "articulation" means "joining together" differing parts to compose a functioning unit. In daily life we talk of "an articulated truck" or "an articulated skeleton". The functioning unity is the only reason for the separate parts existing at all. Without containing the trailer the motorized tractor has no valid identity and without the vertebrae, the distinctive shin-bone has no identity in relation to the subject articulation of inner and outer space. Unless the two parts differ and are seen and felt to differ in function, there can be no sense in "articulation". In the case of truck and skeleton for example, it is obvious that the kind of whole they compose of not only exist as a compound of parts but also as parts of lesser components. Altogether they add up to the working whole.

This concept can show us a way of looking at all artistic form and meaning. The lesser parts that contribute to the whole have subsidiary meanings. In this sense, wheels, springs, casings, motor link mechanism etc, add up to the skeleton. If the reading public will accept, as I do, that a work of ceramic art conveys meanings of its own unique kind, then we can see it as a similarly articulated structure of symbols, each of which has its own identity and role in the statement which the "whole" amounts to. The meaning - whole which strives to symbolize in the pot, arises in the user responding to the pot forms are transmitted as articulated statements. If it is all complex and profound, it

needs, like the truck and skeleton, to be broken down into simpler parts and expressed by their different qualities and arrangements which give meaning to the totality of the work of art.

2.4.Units Arrangements - Meaning In Ceramic Art

All human utterances seem to operate with agreed conceptual and semantic units without units between which they can hold, we can set up no arrangements and relations. In the case of spoken or written language, the units are words which we recognize as having different kinds of mental or somatic operations. "Standing for" has an important sense. It implies that the objects, in the case, words, or notes cease to be what they are at the simplest level- mere noise - and are agreed to mean far more than they physically are. They thus gather a first of meaning for speaker or players and hearers.

"Different" is also in important word. Differences are not casual and infinite; they are essential if we are to produce or construct any meaning. To set up one's scale of different units, is the first stage in conveying any ceramic meaning at all. How one then combines them gives him the elements of his code. Then, (rather in the way one sets up rules for calculus) one sets out his elements in arrangements by means of which they context each other.

The units have their own specific properties - such as roundness or angularity, particular density, curvature, opacity, transparency, mass, weight, - all implying relationships between each other; and the arrangement then implies a rhythmic unity that makes sense of them. They can only mean something, of course, to other human beings who have similar sets of memory - structures and human responses to them. In architecture, to pursue the potter/artist comparison, we respond to the size, weight, layout and texture of walls, to the varied shapes and proportions of pillars and frames, to masses in relation to our sense of touch; and to the suggestions a building gives of how far we need to go to reach that one, how it feels to "pass through" that door case or passage, how one space after another "opens out" and "sounds", and so on.

Most importantly, we are always made to feel that architecture always "arises", "towers", "soars", whereas we know that in reality all architecture has only colossal dropping weight. Its energies run downwards but its shapes persuade us that they rise athletically upwards - as our bodies do. For we perceive art with our bodies, not just with our calculating intelligentsia.

The architecture of ceramics (pottery) likewise works with implied energies like architecture ceramics uses physical codes to mark out shapes of linear flow, stepwise, interval and transition from volume to volume. This can consist of lines and linear surfaces, angular breaks in the surface, inside or outside as for example shoulders, flanges, flutings, cuts or steps. They can be ripples, finger striations, irregular undulations, lumps and hollows, applique lumps or actual holes. On the broad scale, they can be structural components of various sizes, added features such as handles or knobs; relative proportions of heights to widths. They can be differentiated volumes, and they can be glazed or painted ornamental features. It is from that we read the vessel's implicit energies.

Energy in static art can only be referred to by static arrangements of shapes acting as symbols. A fixed image cannot show energy actually at work though the potter may have witnessed it in the making. However violent the activity of surface handling reveals, and pronounced the traces of process under heat; we can only read them in the pot-as-object as traces of past agitation. But pots are far more than objects. They have that same symbolic value of meaning more than they are. It is no accident that without exception, what are usually called the decorations on ceramics consist of images of energy; the creeper in the act of "creeping", the lotus of unfolding, fluid flowing, heroes of the archetypal world in revelatory action, animals embodying vigour, pattern as origination archetype; even light as force materialized into enamelled colour. This is collaborated by Whiting (2007) that, the scale chosen by Rena makes his work exclusively both sculptural and ornamental. These pots are more emblematic than utilitarian, just as some jugs in the past had a more decorative or ritualistic purpose. Like the teapot, the apparent simplicity of the jug belies the complex thinking and skill that goes into its making, the balance of the handle and the lip, the achieving of an overall fluidity of form is a real challenge, one that continues to test and intrigue modern studio potters. So, far from being an anachronism, the jug remains, technically and aesthetically, a conundrum and a touchstone.

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It is not unreasonable then to think of the potter's body shapes as also coding energy-images in their own special symbolic ways. The spaces they generate, therefore, imply a

kind of four-dimensionality; implying time as well as static form; projecting verbs, not only nouns as things and adjectives as qualities. Unless we read their codes properly, we miss this particular point. It was probably a mistake in the long run to believe that pots could seem to embody energy only by exhibiting emphatic traces of process and vigorous human activity upon body and glaze. The artist's energies can best be thought of and crystallized into shapes which are precise yet are carefully arranged to give sequences of reading for the viewer's eye, so evoking kinetic, mobile responses.

3.Results

3.1.The Concept Of Space In Ceramics

"Exterior and Interior" spaces in ceramics come down to two very simple facts. Some pots are closed so you cannot see the interior and other pots are open so you can see the interior. Closed pots do not, therefore, reveal their inner spaces in the same way as open, so you can. This is a highly important difference which often gets overlooked. A closed pot has to "speak" about its inside space only through its outside surfaces, whereas an open pot may do that, but can also SHOW you inside surfaces which may add something different to what the outside surfaces "say".

The two do not necessarily repeat each other. The words "speak" and "say" are used for what the shapes of pots do because there are no other words that explicitly convey the meaning properly. For example the word "express" does not do what? Because it has become tarnished and worn out, and has lost precision. Expression conveys a vague grunt and splurge rather than intensity. "Speak" and "say" on the other hand imply meaning and structure in what a pot conveys. This does not imply that what a pot says can be clear, interesting and different from what and other pot says can be clear. This also implies that the artifact is somehow active.

To further explain this it requires a look at a brief survey of some of the possible modes of articulating inner and outer space neutral to the basic types of a vessel. It is perfectly possible to imply a contained space for both pot and architecture, a simple geometrical volume. One glance tells us "Cuboid", "Spherical", "Oval". The space is then immediately referred to its single category, already too familiar, and that is the limit of its interest. (The skin can also imply a set of joined or intercut geometrical volumes. This can be more interesting, but again fail to awaken little more than the mental act of referring the shapes to well-known categories).as discussed earlier a continuous pot-

surface is a spatial function of a linear idea, usually a function of evolution. That is whether the potter realizes or not. The invention and development of linear form figures scarcely features at all in our art systems today. This can be seen when comparing the blunt, single-phase slashes of contemporary action art with the subtly led shapes of other eras and places; European Medieval or Chinese Sung, for example.

The point being made is that, all lines have intrinsic kinetic value. They crystallize-or code the track of a lively and modulated movement in space, which also implies an enactment of time. Good linear art makes this obvious. Like melodies, lines, smooth or jagged, continuous or broken, can convey subtle feelings so long as they do not fall into pure geometry or disintegrate into more splurge of scatter. On a closed vessel, that line appears most clearly in profile. It is what the thrower feels in the act of throwing. Incidentally, as every thrower knows, it is the hardest part, and hence the most often neglected part, is where a shoulder turns over inwards and has to be sustained with the hand inside the pot. The leading line also marks the point where a finished pot comes closest to the viewer, and emerges most strongly into presence. Good ceramic contours are also distinguished by their strong conclusions at the top and bottom, both of which consummate the meaning of the line. It must be noted that pots are not just single profiles. Good profiles generate surfaces which offer multiple readings of time-line at variously slanted cross-sections around them. It is the variety in this that leads us to say of a pot that it has "life". It also helps to reveal not only the quality of its surface but its spatial volumes.

3.1.1. Volume

Volume implies shapes of space, which is actually unseen, but can be inferred from surfaces that are seen (source). One cannot say they are objects though they are unequivocally real. A common spherical volume is a simple instance which everyone can recognize. A good stand-up pot contains not only complex and symbolically suggestive units of single convex volume, but also subtle sequences of volume that change as one reads vertically up and down the pot's axis. This can never be described objectively but only pointed out for each person to intuit for themselves.



Plate 1: Volume

3.1.2. Decoration

Decoration applied to the surfaces of stand-up pots usually corresponds with and helps define the principal components or phases of the volume continuum. The line, of course, IS not the only space-time vehicle in ceramics; rhythmic spacing is also available.

Rhythm only appears when the elements and connections between them are properly established. The potter, like the architect, needs to determine and identify for the beholder what those elements are. In traditional architecture there were distinctive columns, arcades, mouldings, stepped projections and recesses, alternations of convex and concave forms convey a sense of proportion and rhythm. It is all important in ceramics to define them clearly because they are less obvious. With stand-up pots they usually appear on the exterior and are arranged vertically, helping to define that space which rides up against the surface or "skin". There may be flanges, angular shoulder or rims, sharp or subtle changes of direction in the contours, in particular, concavities which allow the outside space to impinge upon the contained volume and so help to set up the dialect of inner and outer spaces. This is also one of the roles of visible finger spirals if the potter develops them subtly.

Around the circumference of a pot, rhythmically spaced features can play off against the rest of its schemes; an example being five radii against a four-unit height. Gadroons, flutings, lip cuts and decorations, including painted partitions can all contribute to rhythmic counterpoints.



Plate 2: Decoration dichotomy

3.1.3. The Foot

One component that can play a unique part in articulating external space into spatial feeling of the skin is the foot. Some potters neglect it. (but)... It can lead the beholder's attention from the surface upon which the pot stands, which, after all, defines the ground of its external space, and upwards into the pot itself. A flared foot does this most obviously. It is always important to feel the foot as an intermediary between external space and the interior continuum of space which the pot defines. A foot that is developed into formal plinths, raises the vessel ceremoniously lightly, and may establish a stronger sense of outer than inner space. On some pots the foot may be obscure where it is much underplayed, that in itself can amount to a specific invitation to pick the vessel over to 'look at its foot, partly because the excavated interior of the foot-rim amounts to a kind of supplementary or concluding statement both of the external form and of the way it supports or connects with the thickness of the bottom to the body. This can be understood by both hand and eye.

A convex exterior skin, which both extends from its connecting foot and holds within itself implicit volumes, can contribute in an extraordinary way to pictorial imagery on the surface, metamorphosing the implied space of the pictorial image into a strange kind of curved and unconfined, imaginative and unworldly space. The whole decorated pot then becomes a work of art of its own kind and not just as a vessel with painting on it.

The fuller the pot's own content of space, the more magical the effect. Such work does something no other art form can.

Open vessels whose interiors are accessible to us operate differently because our posture in relation to them has to be different. If we are to "witness" their interiors, we need, quite simply, to be above them. They thus become intimate in a way that "stand-up" pot do not, offering themselves as surrogates for or revealing even more. The second way is much more difficult and interesting. Some vessels both display their interiors and stand up "over against" us. They thus propose a double reading that is more genuinely architectural. The main difference is, of course, that most architecture closes over one's head, and a major part of its development is as a canopy vault, domes, partitioning them with clay ornaments.

Some works of architecture have paid attention to their floors, and staircases and column footings that can articulate well spaces most beautifully. In ancient classical times baths seem to have done this too. We become fully aware of forms of architectural well-spaces when buildings are ruined. Accepting that we look down into vessel interiors, we can question: why not develop them as interior architecture as intensively as exteriors? The obvious consideration is that pots are usually meant to contain liquid or dry substance, so we cannot make them too rigid and prominent inside, certain smoothness or even spoon-shaping is conventional. Matching curves to utensils or habitual hand-use can, in fact, add to the expression of some interiors and actually invite the imagination inside. Some bowls have a whisk channel ringing the lower part of the bowl. This can give the visual impression of a second grade of depth because of the way our attention has to step beyond the slight upper flange that defines the extra concavity of the channel. This works as a kind of reverse image of the multiple volumes more usual in a closed vase, - a very important idea for developing further in the vase.

From experience, it is possible, with a clay body that will stand the variation in thickness, usually open, or refractory to make wide but upstanding pot whose interior volumes are different from those visible externally. The two kinds of volume-convex and concave - may nevertheless be articulated to constitute a total experience. Some potters seem to arrange for a sector of the inner, concave curvature to be visible above the lip of the outer surface for providing a continuity of reading as one move over from one position outside the pot to look down into it. In practice, this seems to have a fairly limited application partly because the part of the interior to be seen usually obscures other parts from sight, though not, of course, from touch.



Plate 3: Foot

3.1.4. The Lip

Here we come to a major articulating element, what is considered as the main formal bridge factor from one conceptual area to another; the lip. Most potters would accept that the lip is meant, by and large, for the hand, though, of course, some cut lips may have a striking visual effect as well. To shape a good lip is always felt to be a necessary conclusion to the process of throwing, though often not viewed as an actual bridge between inner and outer space. Many distinguished potters treat the lip as a simple edge with no three dimensional value.

To begin with, think of the lip which has no additional thickness between inner and outer space. One can take them between the fingers and thumb or between two hands if they are big. More developed works may invite one to explore the whole length of the lip-rim as a sequence of space and time. But a lip which is actually articulated with heavily angled surfaces or a shaped roll-over that can be gripped and may play a vital transitional part in linking the rhythms of open bowls. They give a measure of step over in the third dimension, from convex to concave.

Painted imagery articulating inner and outer space can produce a unique type of work of art with open vessel that have substantial depth. A painted surface-image in a basin, viewed from its lines, assumes a three dimensional nature in a special way. As one's viewpoint shifts, so the relationship among them also shifts, quite differently from when it is painted on an exterior. The images can exhibit a sort of "conic section" implicit in the overall shape of the vessel's body.

A second possibility is to paint an image onto the concave surface which extends its depth further into notional space. This implies the exterior shape only marginally. One can also paint the form of the lip so that it participates in the ornament painted in the interior or carries articulating imagery. Then subtler still, the potter can make the interior painting reflect the overall external shape by using forms and themes derived from it. Chinese and European tended to see inner and outer, concave and convex, as complementary painted designs on the two as quite distinct. But the most comprehensive articulation by painting and the subtlest coordination of convex, and personal analogy of feeling for the human body's interior. The question of the relationship between inner and outer space then takes on quite a new dimension.



Plate 4: Lips (a)



Plate 5: Lip (b)

3.1.5. The Open Vessel

A number of potters seem to think about the development of the open vessel as a single linear surface, a continuum of body. The piece thus become a sequence of ceramic events which hand and eye are expected to read as being connected to each other only through the continuous clay skin which refuses to precipitate any conclusive image of its spaces. This seems regressive, as it refuses the chance to articulate and relies on that neutral, conceptual notion of space mentioned earlier.

There are two ways of handling its inner concave space. One way is for pots to articulate inner concave spaces fully with exterior space, as a plate or shallow dish which accepts a primary viewpoint straight from above. The vessel effectively becomes a surface which admits a certain depth of space we ourselves occupy into its concave interior without rebutting us. It may then be treated virtually as an unusual concave picture-surface. On a

normal academic scale, this may make the dish a good wall-piece. But the pictorial image may invoke its own kind of coherent space which demands that the imagination reaches a further depth of concave reading. In each case the reverse or the underside may be almost irrelevant. If it is carefully constructed, it may be worth looking at for its own sake but this is not often articulated with the topside image. Concave surface comes when the inner and outer is painted with a continuous design which is modulated by the two inflections. This, the Japanese have done particularly well. The intention however, is not to obliterate the difference between convex and concave but to enlist that difference into the total image.



Plate 5: The Open Vessel

4. Conclusion

What then are the relations between architectural space and the other ceramic vessel (s)? The relations unveiled in the research are evidenced in the physical structure of the finished products. Architectural space certainly has to adapt itself to the needs of organic action as well as facilitating orientation through perception. Above all, architecture and the vessel are related to the space schemata of man's individual and public world. Obviously, man's schemata are created through interaction with architectural spaces and when these do not satisfy him, that is when this image becomes confused or too insatiable, he will have to change architectural space. For, as stated earlier on, it is by differences that articulation only gains its meaning as a function to exploit differences. Only so can it display any valid metaphysical idea of unity.

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