

A book Proposal and Sample Chapters:

Letters to a Young Architect

Art, Culture, Technology, and Creativity

By John Lobell

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What is this book about?

We know that the arts are about far more than just entertainment—they also offer profound insights into the human heart, mind, and spirit, and thus illuminate our lives. We think of the connection to the after life offered by the Egyptians pyramids, the emergence of the individual in Greek sculpture, the depth of sadness in Rembrandt's self portraits, the profoundness of death heard in Mozart's Requiem, the strangeness of the unconsciousness revealed in Salvador Dali's paintings, and the exhilaration of our hearts soaring into the dome of Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum.

These and so many other works of art enthrall us, but they also leave us with a deeper understanding of and participation in culture, creativity, and the human spirit. Why does art affect us this way, and how does the artist make it happen?

Letters to a Young Architect is seemingly about being an architect, but it is much more. Architecture is the mother of the arts—the crystallization of a culture into form, and the architect creates that form. In understanding architecture and the creative processes of the architect, we come to understand art, creativity, spirituality, the technology of our time, and ultimately what it means to be a full human being.

Letters to a Young Architect presents architecture as a series of unfolding concentric spheres, beginning with a core of the mystery of existence, then a model of the cosmos, then the meanings of the institution the building serves, then the functions of the building, then its construction and engagement with technology, then the place of a building in the passages of one's life, and finally the patterns of one's activities in the building. *Letters to a Young Architect* presents architecture as all-encompassing, and ends by urging the young architect to have a boundless vision, and make not just a new architecture, but a new world.

Using the format of letters and modeled on *Letters to a Young Poet* by Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Architect* reveals a depth of wisdom about the human heart, mind, and spirit that gives it the potential to become the *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* of our time.

What is the format of this book?

Letters to a Young Architect is in the format of about 44 letters in seven categories, totaling about 48,000 words. The letters vary in length from about 500 to 2,100 words, with most between 1,000 and 1,400 words.

The letters are from John Lobell to a correspondent who is a young architect, out of school about seven years. The letters from the young architect are not shown (as is also the case with Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* and other "Letters to a Young ..." books), but are implied in Lobell's letters, which typically begin, "You write asking about ..."

What is in the book?

This book is in seven sections, plus a foreword and end notes.

CONTENTS

Foreword

1. What is Architecture?
2. The Education of an Architect
3. Traditions
4. Designing Buildings
5. Architecture and Culture
6. The Architect
7. How You Will Create the New Architecture

End Notes

FOREWORD

The foreword will set expectations for what the reader will encounter in the book and describe its importance to our understanding of art, culture, technology, and creativity.

1. WHAT IS ARCHITECTURE?

We would expect that our young architect would have his own understanding of architecture, but is he really sure? We often define architecture as shelter or space, but Lobell suggests something far more profound, that architecture can be seen as a series of concentric spheres, from a core of the mystery of existence, to a model of the cosmos, to the institution the building serves, to the functions of the building, to its construction, to the place of a building in one's life, and finally to the patterns of one's activities in the building. Thus architecture can be an all-encompassing model of the spirit of our existence.

2. THE EDUCATION OF AN ARCHITECT

We typically separate education into the liberal arts, which prepare us as whole human beings, and vocation, which prepares us to make a living. Lobell rejects this dichotomy, and proposes that an education for one of the creative arts, understood broadly, is the ideal education. He presents Nietzsche's metaphor of our evolution from camel to lion to child, and the Buddhist model of refuge in teacher, teaching, and community. The result of such an education can be a person of creative depth able to make important contributions to society.

3. TRADITIONS

Here Lobell explores the necessity of any art form to be in a tradition that the artist then extends, deepens, challenges, or rejects. He also explores Western culture in the context of other cultures, and asks if we, in our modern condition, are still in the Western tradition.

4. DESIGNING BUILDINGS

Here Lobell presents several methods of designing buildings:

- *Design from prototype*, which we see for example in the neo-classical buildings in Washington DC, which implies that we are historical creatures, rooted in a classical and European past.
- *Design from program*, which we see in modern architecture, which implies that the past has no relevance, that we are in the here-and-now of our technological age.
- *Design from structure*, which we see for example in glass office buildings, which is a materialist position.
- *Design from image*, which we see in postmodernism, which suggests that even nature chooses an image and fits functions into that image.
- And *design from archetype*, which we see in Louis Kahn's approach, which seeks eternal truths outside of time, and then manifests them within our culture.

Each of these approaches is not just a way to design a building, but also the taking of a position on who we are as human beings.

Then, in an exploration of creativity, Lobell shows that the act of creativity is an entering into the mind's deep logics to find solutions that are not accessible to every-day logic and that reveal the anatomy of spirit.

5. ARCHITECTURE AND CULTURE

In this series of letters, Lobell explores architecture's relationship to philosophy, showing the power of architecture as a means of understanding the world and of human beings and going beyond understanding to *embody* and provide direct *experience*.

He then goes on to explain what art is, and how architecture is both a form of art that addresses eternal issues, and a form that addresses issues particular to a time and culture.

6. THE ARCHITECT

In explaining what it means to be an architect, Lobell presents the nine essential things any artist must do:

1. Have good teachers
2. Have a mentor
3. Master your technique
4. Master and extend the tradition of your discipline
5. Express your soul
6. Work with others
7. Reach your audience
8. Be part of a movement
9. Have something to say

He then describes how an artist creates his unique style, not just as a signature look, but as a core of ideas that express a way of being. He uses Frank Lloyd Wright as an example of how this can be done.

7. HOW YOU WILL CREATE THE NEW ARCHITECTURE

In this last group of letters the young architect reveals that it is his ambition to create the new architecture, and Lobell explains how he can go about doing this by identifying and finding forms to express the key features defining our time, including:

- Our social and economic conditions.
- New technologies. Here Lobell explores some cutting edge technologies that could change how we make architecture, and indeed how we make everything, including generative genomics in which synthetic DNA will enable building to grow themselves.
- Space and time, which changed as we moved from Newton's space and time to Einstein's space-time, and are changing again as we plunge into quantum reality.
- And our notion of who we are, including our understanding of human consciousness.

Then in the last letter, Lobell reminds his correspondent of a quote from the architect Daniel Burnham: “Make no little plans.” With this quote, Lobell urges his correspondent to have no limitations to the buildings and even worlds that he will create.

END NOTES

There are a few things that might be added at the end of the book, as though by an editor, including:

- Sources for quotes in the letters
- Brief notes on the architects mentioned
- Brief notes on the buildings mentioned (perhaps with small illustrations)
- Perhaps a book list
- A note on gender: as of now Lobell is writing: “The architect, he....” He is open to following the usage guidelines of the publisher.

Who is the Audience for this book?

Working outward, the audience for this book is first of all architectural students and architects. But its aim goes far beyond that limited demographic to include all who are involved in or interested in the creative arts, a far broader readership.

This book has the potential to gain classic status and reach the readership of such works as:

- *Letters to a Young Poet*, by Rainer Maria Rilke
- *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, by Robert Pirsig
- *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, by Betty Edwards
- *Emotional Intelligence*, by Daniel Goleman
- *The Book of Tea*, by Kakuzo Okakura
- *Zen in the Art of Archery*, by Eugen Herrigel
- *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, by Richard Bach
- *Proust Was a Neuroscientist*, by Jonah Lehrer

Letters to a Young Architect also shares some features with the Basic Books series, *The Art of Mentoring: “Letters to a Young...”* However, *Letters to a Young Architect* has much greater creative and spiritual depth than these books.

Architecture is a powerful art because it straddles creativity and practicality. But recently, with the work of such architects as Frank Gehry, Santiago Calatrava, and Zaha Hadid gaining wide recognition, there is a hunger to go further and see the soaring artistic and spiritual possibilities of architecture. This book addresses that hunger.

This book is written to be accessible to an educated general audience. It explains all of the concepts introduced, and it avoids jargon. Most of the architects referred to are very well known, with Frank Lloyd Wright mentioned the most.

About John Lobell

John Lobell has a widely ranging mind, addressing how new technology changes structures of consciousness, which in turn leads to cultural paradigm shifts affecting every corner of our lives.

Lobell received his architecture degrees from the University of Pennsylvania, worked in prominent architectural offices, and has been a professor of architecture at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York for forty years. His interests include architecture, cultural theory, consciousness, mythology, Buddhism, history of science, information theory, and quantum theory.

Lobell is the author of the books:

- *Between Silence and Light: Spirit in the Architecture of Louis I. Kahn*. Shambhala, 1979. Reissued with new introduction, 2008.
- *The Little Green Book: A Guide to Self-Reliant Living in the '80s*. Shambhala, 1981.
- *Joseph Campbell, The Man and His Ideas*. Joseph Campbell Foundation, 1993.

He participated in writing the book, *Timeship: The Architecture of Immortality*, Images Publishing Group, 2009. He is also the author of numerous papers and articles, and has lectured and addressed conferences throughout the country.

Besides teaching, Lobell consults on high-profile projects and cutting edge technologies. He is the creator of GenerativeGenomics.com, a web site devoted to understanding rule-based systems as the means for fabrication in the future, and co-creator of CinemaDiscourse.com, a web site focused on movies as mythologically informed literature.

What are John Lobell's qualifications to write this book?

Lobell has studied with some of the major architects and spiritual masters of the 20th century. He has taught generations of students for over forty years, refining his ability to communicate profound ideas clearly.

ARCHITECTS ASSOCIATED WITH

- *Louis Kahn*. Next to Frank Lloyd Wright, Kahn is the most important American architect. Lobell was a student at Penn where Kahn taught, wrote an important book about Kahn, and has taught a course on Kahn for thirty years.
- *Robert Venturi*. Venturi is regarded as the father of postmodern architecture. Lobell studied with Venturi, has written seminal articles about him, and has taught a course about him for thirty years.
- *Edmund Bacon*. Bacon is one of the leading city planners of the 20th century. Lobell studied with him.
- *Frank Lloyd Wright*. Lobell has taught a course on Wright for thirty years.

ARCHITECTURAL OFFICES WORKED IN

- *Harrison and Abramovitz*. The architects of Rockefeller Center, Lincoln Center, and the United Nations. Lobell worked for them.
- *Ulrich Franzen*. Franzen was a leading figure in New York architecture in the 1960s and '70s. Lobell worked for him.

SPIRITUAL MASTERS STUDIED WITH

- *Joseph Campbell*. Lobell studied mythology with Campbell, wrote a book about him, and was a founding board member of the Joseph Campbell Foundation.
- *Chogyam Trungpa*. Lobell studied Buddhism with him.
- *Robert Thurman*. Lobell studied Buddhism with him.
- *The Dalai Lama*. Lobell attended a Kalachakra Initiation with him.
- *Michael Harner*. Lobell studied shamanism with him.
- *Cheng Man-Ch'ing*. Lobell studied Tai Chi in his studio.

TEACHING

Lobell has taught in all areas of architecture, including all periods in the history of architecture, making him familiar with the world's great buildings. He teaches courses on Louis Kahn, Robert Venturi, and Frank Lloyd Wright, as well as a course on new technologies and their impact on society.

BOOKS

John Lobell's book, *Between Silence and Light: Spirit in the Architecture of Louis I. Kahn*, has been in print for thirty years, and is known and respected in architecture circles throughout the world. It is the most important book on spirituality and architecture.

Lobell is also the author of *Joseph Campbell: The Man & His Ideas*, a book summarizing the ideas of the mythologist, Joseph Campbell, and *The Little Green Book*, a pioneering book on ecology and green living. He is a contributor to *Timeship: The Architecture of Immortality*. He is also the author of numerous articles.

Curriculum Vitae

JOHN LOBELL

Professor, Pratt Institute

Education

- Completed one semester for a Ph.D. in philosophy at The New School, 1967
- M. Arch., 1966: University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Fine Arts: Independent studies and thesis in architectural and cultural theory
- M. Arch. 1965: University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Fine Arts
- B.A. 1963; University of Pennsylvania

Continuing Education

Nanotechnology with Eric Drexler and Ralph Merkle. Computer science with Herb Tesser. Mythology with Joseph Campbell (founding board member, Joseph Campbell Foundation). Buddhism with the Dali Lama, Robert Thurman, Lobsang Sampton, and Chogyam Trungpa. Shamanism with Michael Harner. Tai Chi with Professor Cheng Man-Ch'ing.

Teaching Experience

Pratt Institute, School of Architecture, since 1969, Full Professor with tenure since 1980

Teaching has included design, history of architecture (survey courses, contemporary architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright, Kahn and Venturi), architectural theory, transportation and communication, city planning, impact of technology, computers and society.

Professional Experience, Architectural Offices

Ulrich Franzen and Associates, Architects, New York, 1967-69

Abraham W. Geller, Architect, New York, 1966-67

Harrison and Abramovitz, Architects, New York, 1966

Current Consulting and other Experience

Milgo-Bufkin, Brooklyn, N.Y., 1970-88, 1996-present

Architectural consultant; supervising of fabrication of large-scale sculptures for major

artists; corporate planning.

Timeship, 2000-present

Consultant. A biotech facility.

Joseph Campbell Foundation, 1900-1997

Member of the Advisory Board, editor of newsletter

Arts Magazine, Architectural Contributor, 1968-70

Publications: Books

Louis I. Kahn: Building As Philosophy (Working title), in process.

Joseph Campbell: The Man & His Ideas, Joseph Campbell Foundation, 1993.

The Little Green Book: A Guide to Self-Reliant Living in the '80s. Shambhala, 1981.

Between Silence and Light: Spirit in the Architecture of Louis I. Kahn, Shambhala, 1979.

Publications: articles (SELECTED)

“Quantum Theoretical Issues in Architecture” *Tarp*, Issue 2, Spring 2004.

“Campbell on Freud and Jung.” *Joseph Campbell Foundation Newsletter*, No. 1, Fall 1993.

“A Primer on Joseph Campbell.” *Whole Earth Review*, Summer 1988.

“Architecture and Structures of Consciousness,” *Pratt Journal of Architecture*, Vol II, 1988.

“Interview with John Hejduk,” with Mimi Lobell. *Pratt Journal of Architecture*, Vol I, 1985

“A Lucid Mystic.” *Smithsonian*, Jul. 1979. Article on Louis Kahn.

“Kahn and Venturi: An Architecture of Being-in-Context.” *Artforum*, Feb. 1978.

“Towards A Zero Energy Architecture.” *On Site On Energy*, Fall 1974

Numerous book reviews

Conferences and Papers

“Envisioning a Zero Energy Future” presented at the Oxford Roundtable, Oxford, Summer 2008.

“Quantum Issues in Architecture” presented at Universal Machines, Pratt, February

2005. (Co-organizer of the conference. Stephen Wolfram was the keynote speaker.)

“Art and the Malleability of Merleau-Ponty’s Body Subject” presented at Merleau-Ponty

symposium, Pratt, Spring 2005.

“How Culture Reveals Structures of Consciousness” Toward a Science of Consciousness

2004, Center for Consciousness Studies, University of Arizona, Tucson, April 2004.

Presentations at “A Parliament of the World’s Religions,” Chicago, August-September,

1993. Presentations at “A Mythological Toolbox,” a program presented by the Joseph Campbell Foundation at Esalen Institute, CA. March, 1993, 94, 95.

Participated in a conference, “Building a Free Media in the CIS,” Sochi, Russia.

American and Russian journalist, publishers, politicians, and academics.

Spring 1992.

“Design and the Powerful Logics of the Mind’s Deep Structures.” *DMG-DRS Journal*,

Design Research and Methods, Vol. 9, No. 3, Jul.-Sept. 1975.

“A Unified Theory of Transportation and Communication.” The International Symposium on Urban Housing and Transportation, Wayne State Univ.

Spring 1975.

Lectures

1967-present, lectures at over 25 schools of architecture, and various other venues.

Exhibitions

1967 Environment IV, Corridors, The Architectural League of New York.

Memberships, Professional/Academic Organizations

The Architectural League of New York, 1967-present

College Art Association, 1997

Modern Language Association, 1993-94

SAMPLE CHAPTERS

Letters to a Young Architect

Art, Culture, Technology, and Creativity

By John Lobell

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Letters to a Young Architect by John Lobell

Part 1: What is Architecture

1.1. The First Letter

Dear Colleague,

Your letter arrived just a few days ago. I want to thank you for the great confidence you have placed in me.

I too have greatly enjoyed our conversations during the times we spent together. When you accepted your new assignment, I became resigned to no longer having these conversations, but your letter suggests that we can continue them even at a distance.

Yes, I am sure that our correspondence can be beneficial to you, but I anticipate great benefits to myself as well.

In thinking about the prospect of this correspondence, it occurs to me that we should set some ground rules for ourselves. I believe that discussions of architecture were sophisticated during my days as a student. After all, the professors at my school included, among many, Louis Kahn and Robert Venturi, two of the great architects and theorists of the twentieth century. But the discussions of architecture then were always comprehensible. In the years since, some discussions have become infected by intellectual fashions and are incomprehensible. I am afraid is the case in the ways both of us present our ideas. So let's create a conceit, saying that you will be showing our letters to your parents, and that they should be able to understand them. We should write free of jargon in a way comprehensible to the intelligent layperson. I will try to hold you to this, and you should do the same for me.

Next, we should see architecture broadly. Think about what is involved when you design and construct a building. You are engaged with our culture and with the institution for

which you are designing. You are using building technologies, some ancient that connect us to the past, such as bricks, and some cutting edge that connect us to the future, such as thin film photovoltaics and carbon fiber composites. And you are working with clients, banks, engineers, and contractors.

In thinking about my own experiences, I realize that they might make me biased. So I will try to avoid that, and generalize about the experience of an architect in any time. I will try to write in tones respectful of today as well as of my teachers and also of the classics. Again, I will rely on you to keep both of us honest.

One evening in response to something I asked him, the iconoclastic public intellectual Paul Goodman said, "I do not write for audiences today. I write for Socrates and Plato and Spinoza." Well, I will try to write for you and me, but also with respect for Frank Gehry and Robert Venturi, and for Louis Kahn and Mies van der Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright, and for Modern architecture and Renaissance architecture and Roman architecture. And I will rely on you to keep both of us in touch with architecture today.

I suspect a deeper motive on your part in suggesting this correspondence, so if that is the case, I hope that you will eventually reveal it, or that I will discern it and hopefully address it in my letters. I suspect that I too have hidden motives, and when they become apparent to me, I will reveal them.

I was fortunate to have great teachers and excellent opportunities, but I still would have benefited when I was younger from such a correspondence as I feel we can have, and I hope it proves valuable to you.

With Best Wishes,

Letters to a Young Architect by John Lobell

Part 1: What is Architecture

1.2. What is Architecture?

Dear Colleague,

I open your letter with anticipation, and what do I see? You are asking what is architecture. You begin with the most difficult question, one that will, I think, be underlying much of our correspondence. But let me take a bold tact in addressing your question, one that could set the tone for what we will be doing.

Often definitions of architecture refer to shelter, space, or function. We could look another time at why each of these is inadequate for a definition, but let me suggest an approach that might provide insight and inspiration. Perhaps preliminarily we could think spatially, of concentric spheres, listing them here, and then let's see if they come up again later when we might address them in more depth.

At the center of our spherical metaphor is the mystery of existence. Here there are no words but perhaps a tonal feeling. A comfort or discomfort, a sense of fitting or of alienation. You might be struck by how a building meets the sky, by the curve of an arch, by the solidity of a wall. You experience the materiality of a building and wonder at the fact of existence.

The next layer is the building as a model of the cosmos, the way its builders experience their world and their place in it. The Indian sense of infinite reincarnations through a cosmos with no beginning and no end. The Middle Easterner cowering in guilt before a wrathful god. The Greek individual standing in the intensity of the sun in defiance of the inevitability of death. The European with an inner moral compass in the shadows of the forest. And today?

We often fall back into the belief that people in all places and times experience themselves and the world the way we do, but they didn't and they don't. We know this because of the many different religions, sciences, and arts we see throughout the world and throughout history. But we particularly see these differences in architecture and how it makes a place for humanness in so many different ways. Think of the interpenetration with the world and with god expressed in a Gothic cathedral contrasted with the human centeredness of a Renaissance villa. Or the rational assuredness of a glass box like Goodwin and Stone's original Museum of Modern Art building contrasted with the sweeping discordance of Frank Gehry's Bilbao Guggenheim Museum. Fifty-eight years apart, Goodwin and Stone's building manifests a very different world from that of Frank Gehry's.

Moving outward, the next layer is the institution the building serves. If the building is a museum, a school, an office, or a laboratory, what does it say about art, education, work, or science? The architect does not just implement the things the client asks for, but also seeks to understand the activities for which the building is being built, and to comment on the role of those activities in today's world. Designing for the institutions I mentioned above, indeed any institution, can be cause for long and deep thought: how do we understand art or education or work or science, what are their roles in our lives, and how does that understanding illuminate the human condition?

Then the functions of the building, how we enter it, circulate through it, use its various spaces. Are the spaces arraigned in a hierarchy, are they uniformly distributed, or are they clustered? Do we move from one space to the next, or is there a separate system of circulation? We sometimes call this problem solving, but how we solve problems also reflects our larger way of thinking.

Then construction: the structural systems, materials, mechanical, detailing of a building. Again, these choices have much to say. Recall how Mies van der Rohe used glass and steel, his fellow modernist, Le Corbusier, used concrete, and their rival from an earlier generation, Frank Lloyd Wright, used materials we call organic. These three were each taking a different position on the modern world.

And then the place of a building in your life. The place you were born, the home in which you spent your childhood, your school, your college, the places you worked. Your places of worship, of recreation. Libraries, bookstores and coffee shops. And the place you will die. Note that we are typically born in and die in hospitals. We usually judge these hospitals by criteria of function, but how do we feel about them as markers of these milestones in our lives?

And finally for the outer most layer, something subtle, the patterns of one's life in the building and the associations evoked by it. What is your experience over the course of a day, a week, or even the years that we might live or work in a building? What does it feel like to run your fingers across the coarse brick or smooth marble of the lobby of your office, to see the sun setting through different windows of your home as the season changes? What associations does the building and its various parts bring to you, what experiences did you have in the building, what memories does it evoke, and how is our experience of it effected by buildings in our past.

Perhaps our correspondence, as it unfolds, will tell us more about each of these layers. I think there is no simple description of architecture.

With Best Wishes,

Letters to a Young Architect by John Lobell

Part 2: The Education of an Architect

2.1. The Three Metamorphoses of the Spirit

Dear Colleague,

You write concerning your education. Was it adequate? You say you always felt rushed, never able to grasp things in sufficient depth. And now you feel that you still have much to learn. The thing about your education is that all the pieces may not fall into place until many years later, if ever. If you want to think about your education and its role in your work, you would do well to read what Friedrich Nietzsche says in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where he presents his parable of the camel, the lion, and the child. And the dragon. He writes:

Of the three metamorphoses of the spirit I tell you: how the spirit becomes a camel; and the camel, a lion; and the lion, finally, a child.

There is much that is difficult for the spirit, the strong, reverent spirit that would bear much: but the difficult and the most difficult are what its strength demands.

What is difficult? asks the spirit that would bear much, and kneels down like a camel wanting to be well loaded. What is most difficult, O heroes, asks the spirit that would bear much, that I may take it upon myself and exult in my strength? Is it not humbling oneself to wound one's haughtiness? Letting one's folly shine to mock one's wisdom?...

Or is it this: stepping into filthy waters when they are the waters of truth, and not repulsing cold frogs and hot toads?

Or is it this: loving those that despise us and offering a hand to the ghost that would frighten us?

All these most difficult things the spirit that would bear much takes upon itself: like the camel that, burdened, speeds into the desert, thus the spirit speeds into its desert.

In the loneliest desert, however, the second metamorphosis occurs: here the spirit becomes a lion who would conquer his freedom and be master in his own desert. Here he seeks out his last master: he wants to fight him and his last god; for ultimate victory he wants to fight with the great dragon.

Who is the great dragon whom the spirit will no longer call lord and god?" "Thou shalt" is the name of the great dragon. But the spirit of the lion says, "I will." "Thou shalt" lies in his way, sparkling like gold, an animal covered with scales; and on every scale shines a golden "thou shalt."

Values, thousands of years old, shine on these scales; and thus speaks the mightiest of all dragons: "All value has long been created, and I am all created value. Verily, there shall be no more 'I will.'" Thus speaks the dragon.

My brothers, why is there a need in the spirit for the lion? Why is not the beast of burden, which renounces and is reverent, enough?

To create new values—that even the lion cannot do; but the creation of freedom for oneself and a sacred "No" even to duty—for that, my brothers, the lion is needed. To assume the right to new values—that is the most terrifying assumption for a reverent spirit that would bear much. Verily, to him it is preying, and a matter for a beast of prey. He once loved "thou shalt" as most sacred: now he must find illusion and caprice even in the most sacred, that freedom from his love may become his prey: the lion is needed for such prey.

But say, my brothers, what can the child do that even the lion could not do? Why must the preying lion still become a child? The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred "Yes." For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred "Yes" is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers the world.

[from Nietzsche's *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, part I, Walter Kaufmann transl.]

That was a long excerpt, but worth quoting, as it describes the ideal education of an artist—or an architect. As a camel, you take on the load of our culture, both the general culture and the culture of architecture. You learn the traditions and master the techniques. These are long tasks, and you will often be impatient, asking, “Why do I need to do this? Why am I studying these old buildings? How long must I spend with these basics? Why should I work in an office on the tedious details of someone else’s buildings? I see colleagues, younger than myself, racing ahead, getting published, even putting up buildings.”

But you can never spend too much time on basics. Think of the accomplished concert pianist who does his scales daily, or the Tai Chi master who does the repetitive movements of the form every day. Upon mastering the basics, you will be prepared to do your own work, work coming from your vision. We see in those who break the rules and forge new forms, in Pablo Picasso, in Thelonious Monk, in Robert Venturi, that they were fully the masters of the traditions they smashed.

Eventually, you are prepared to run out into the desert and become a lion. If the load on the camel was heavy, you will become a potent lion, up to your next task, the slaying of a dragon. On every scale of that dragon is written “Thou Shalt,” all of the commandments, all of the traditions of our culture. Upon slaying this dragon, you reject the authority of all of that you have mastered, the values you have so assiduously acquired, creating your discipline anew. You are then as a child, a wheel rolling out of its own center.

Very few achieve this independence, working from their own center. I am disappointed in young architects who imitate their teachers. When will they acquire a voice of their own? When you acquire that voice, you will produce your own work, coming from your own center, that will have the power to stand. It is difficult, because at first only a few will understand what you are doing. We see again and again how the work of original artists is at first rejected. But as a real architect, a real artist, you will not be content with anything less.

With Best Wishes,

Letters to a Young Architect by John Lobell

Part 3: Traditions

3.1. Why Traditions?

Dear Colleague,

Regarding my letter on Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, in which I describe Dharma as the teaching or the tradition, you write asking why you must work within a tradition. Why can't you design something totally new, create a form that has never been before? It might be possible, but I can't think of any examples. Can you?

An architect, like any artist, always chooses a tradition, a form, a style, within which to work, and then seek to extend it, respond to it, or negate it. We swim in seas of traditions: of our culture, of architecture, of the style within which we are working, of the building type we are designing, of the structural system we are using.

Robert McKee, in his book on screenwriting, *Story*, writes:

A rule says, "You *must* do it *this* way." A principle says, "This works... and has through remembered time." The difference is crucial. Your work needn't be modeled after the "well-made" play; rather, it must be *well made* within the principles that shape our art. Anxious, inexperienced writers obey the rules. Rebellious, unschooled writers break rules. Artists master the form.

Even science, which you might think of as rooted in an objective reality, is built on traditions. Einstein's relativity is sometimes presented as a revolutionary break from classical physics, but in fact it is a continuation and refinement of Maxwell's field equations, but with a focus on a Columbo-like nagging question. What about the observer? What would a clock look like to an observer riding on a wave of light moving away from the clock at the speed of light? Why worry about that? But doing so led to alterations to Maxwell's field theory, not unlike those being pursued at the same time by

Henri Poincaré and Hendrik Lorentz. But Einstein's alterations were different—while Lorentz altered the dimensions of objects moving near the speed of light, Einstein chose to hold the speed of light constant for all observers, leading to his special relativity. He then asked if Maxwell had unified magnetism and electricity could he add gravity, leading to his theory of general relativity. So these developments, while monumentally important, were not revolutionary. They were developments within accepted field theory. It was not until quantum theory that classical physics was overthrown.

In painting we see how Picasso's Cubism grew out of Cezanne's focus on the solidity of the object in reaction to the Impressionists, who were concerned with light and who were inspired by Manet, who was reacting against the academy in his questioning of the relationship of the scene to the flat canvas and to the role of the viewer. In architecture we might describe Mies van der Rohe as incorporating the open plan of Frank Lloyd Wright into the neoclassicism of Karl Friedrich Schinkel and rendering it in the industrial materials of his day. Likewise we might describe Eero Saarinen in his TWA Flight Center at JFK Airport as rejecting Mies in a gesture made possible by Le Corbusier's chapel at Ronchamp, and Frank Gehry in his Bilbao Guggenheim as reaching back over the proceeding four decades and relating his building to TWA while ignoring Peter Eisenman. Art and architecture are always within traditions and always in dialogue. We might say, echoing the literary critic Harold Bloom, that there are no works of art or architecture, but only relationships between works. Each painting, each building calls up to us myriads of others and exists in relationship to them.

With Best Wishes,

Letters to a Young Architect by John Lobell

Part 3: Traditions

3.4. Modern Architecture

Dear Colleague,

You write asking about modern architecture. Yes, what was modern architecture? There are several understandings and in one of them we place its beginnings in the late eighteenth century.

In the eighteenth century, the European Enlightenment, building on Renaissance Humanism, began to forge a new human identity built not on faith and authority, but on reason. “Man is the measure of all things,” borrowed from the Greeks, became the slogan of the Renaissance. With Bacon and Galileo, and culminating in Newton, we saw the formation of the scientific method for extracting the secrets of Nature—observation by the senses, and reason, particularly through mathematics, by the mind.

In the mid eighteenth century the Abbé Laugier called for structural determinism in architecture, and in the late nineteenth century Viollet-le-Duc wrote, “In architecture there are two necessary ways of being true. It must be true according to the programme and true according to the methods of construction. To be true according to programme is to fulfill, exactly and simply, the conditions imposed by need; to be true according to the methods of construction is to employ the materials according to their qualities and properties ... purely artistic questions of symmetry and apparent form are only secondary conditions in the presence of our dominant principles.” [Curtis, p 27] Sounds like what I was taught in school.

What was the notion of Human Being that had emerged by the twentieth century? It was materialistic as seen in the work of many thinkers, but it can best be summarized by Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection that tells us we are natural animals and

the result of random accidents; Marx's scientific socialism that tells us we can understand and control society and even history; and Freud's model of our mental processes as analogous to mechanisms in which our motivations are not the lofty forwarding of the human enterprise, but the manifestations of biological urges under social constraints.

We, then, are natural creatures, understandable and controllable by the social sciences just as nature is by the physical sciences. Modern architecture saw itself as a part of that scientific enterprise, growing out of natural laws and serving social purposes. Reason is expressed in modern architecture through a clarity of function, and through materials and structure that are themselves the products of modern industrial technology, standardized production, and engineering calculations. In *The Man Without Qualities*, Robert Musil wrote, "Modern man is born in a hospital and dies in a hospital, so he should make his home like a clinic."

Modern architecture grew out of a new culture of industrialism and democracy, and it called for clarity, social responsibility, and a realization that we need to address cities and regional ecology as well as monuments. Yet we largely regard modern architecture as a failure. There are many masterpieces of modern architecture, but the overall environments that it has created are often loathed. Everywhere we find modern urban environments dreary. Recall that Warsaw and some other cities that were totally bombed out after World War II refused to rebuild with modern designs, insisting instead on recreating, sometimes brick for brick, the old destroyed buildings. These are the cities we visit with pleasure today, while new parts of European cities built with modern designs by socially conscientious people, are dismal. Where does the fault lie?

I will explain something that many have people have sensed, but none have articulated. We see in modernism, in all of the arts, a rejection of the past. In modern architecture there is a rejection of the classical orders just as in Cubism there is a rejection of traditional approaches to the figure. But we do not consider modern painting a failure the way we do modern architecture. The difference is that modern architecture did not realize that representations of the past contained not only overt referents, but also "unconsciousness" ones. To understand what I mean, let us look at the archetypal

principle underlying a common religions symbol, a dying and resurrecting god, born of a virgin and associated with a cross that I described in a previous letter. We immediately think of Christ in Christianity, but this archetype, which is symbolic of the possibility of our own death to worldly attachment and opportunity for spiritual rebirth, is also manifest as Osiris for the Egyptians, Adonis for the Greeks, and many other deities. In discarding this symbol, we need to be clear if we want to reject one particular historical manifestation and its cultural associations, or the underlying archetype and its unconscious associations of our potential for death and rebirth. We might want to reject the historical and keep the archetypal.

Much of modern art was aware of this problem. We see the desire to keep underlying meanings for example in Mondrian, who sought to abstract this symbol in the verticals and horizontals of his paintings, the vertical for life and the horizontal for death. The particular dated cultural references were eliminated while the underlying symbol was preserved. Kandinsky wrote a book about this approach in modern art. References to mythological symbols remain richly present in modern art. Surrealism is built on the archetypal symbols of the dream state. Picasso did numerous studies of the Minotaur. T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* is built on the Arthurian Romances and studies of ritual and sacrifice in James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*. Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* delve into classical, biblical, Celtic, and Norse myths as Joyce seeks to build a human in full, with the richness of cultural and spiritual referents. These modern artists were not seeking to keep past cultures alive, but rather were using mythological references to enter our modern personal and cultural unconscious. So modern architecture's failure was not in its rejection of the past, but in its rejection of the existence of the personal and cultural unconscious.

This rejection of the unconscious, unique to architecture among the modern arts, was its primary failure, and a great source of psychic impoverishment in our world today. Architecture in the twentieth century began with the richness of Frank Lloyd Wright's buildings, but with the European rationalists, it embraced an impoverished rationalist mentality. Now that architecture is breaking away from the hold of the rationalists,

architects like Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, and Tom Wright have set themselves free, “have shed all fear of the bounding serpent king,” and have let their buildings soar.

With Best Wishes,

Letters to a Young Architect by John Lobell

Part 4: Architectural Practice

4.4. Design from Archetype

Dear Colleague,

Much of modern architecture lacked a solidity, a depth, and because it cut itself off from the past, it was rootless. But if we again wish for rootedness, what kind of rootedness might we seek? Modern architecture had rightly rejected the Beaux Arts precisely because it celebrated and sought to preserve a past that no longer lived in us. So, what other alternatives are there?

Design from Archetype

Louis Kahn brought solidity and meaning into modern architecture by going back not to historical periods, but to archetypal *Beginnings* outside of time in a search for *Order* in a place he called *Volume Zero*, and manifested in *From* and *Design*.

Kahn's archetypal approach is like that of the mythologist, Joseph Campbell, who refers to "universal forms" and "local transformations." We see a similar approach by the psychologist Carl Jung in his concept of archetypes. In a previous letter I referred to an example of this approach found in religion, in which an archetype might be a dying and resurrecting god, born of a virgin and associated with a cross. In manifestation, it would be Christ for the Christians, but also Osiris for the Egyptians, Tammuz for the Babylonians, Orpheus and Dionysius for the Greeks, Buddha for the Indians, and Quetzalcoatl for the Mesoamericans. Thus the archetype, which Kahn calls *From*, is a pattern that stands outside time and culture, originating in *Volume Zero*, while the circumstantial, which Kahn calls *Design*, is the manifestation of the archetype within a given time and culture, taking on the cloak of that era. For Kahn, *Order* is the process whereby all things, including the buildings we design, come into being. Whereas the

Beaux Arts sought precedents in what already existed, Kahn's approach seeks the meanings of even new activities or institutions through understanding their Order.

Kahn begins the design of a building with the question, "What does this building want to be?" The answer gives him the Form, which is the archetypal nature of the building. Taking the example of a school, when Kahn asked, "What does this building want to be?" he is asking what is education. To find this is to find the Order of the architecture that will serve education. Thus an archetypal approach responds to deep and timeless human patterns.

There are two interesting implications to the question, "What does this building want to be?" One is that the building, even though it has not yet been built, or even designed, has some kind of existence. The other is that a building, even if built, can "want" something even though it is an inanimate thing.

In his last book, under a diagram of a seed split open to show the germ, Louis Sullivan wrote, "The germ is the real thing. Within its delicate mechanism lies the seat of identity, the function which is to find its true identity in form." We associate Sullivan and then Wright with "form follows function," but they did not mean by this what we usually think, that a building should accommodate the activities inside it. Instead, Sullivan means by function the existence will of the building, as when he states that the office building wants to be a tall and soaring thing. Form is the manifestation of this existence will.

Frank Lloyd Wright wrote: "Deeper than the truths of Philosophy or the laws of morality is the sense of honor. What is honor? Not the rules of a code—but the nature of honor. What would be the honor of a brick? That in the brick which makes the brick a brick." What Kahn calls "Form," Sullivan calls "function" and Wright calls "honor" is the existence will—that which makes the thing what it is. What Kahn calls "Design," Sullivan calls "form," the circumstantial expression of the existence will in a particular building. Sorry for the confusion. Obviously they never got together on this terminology.

Thus Order is the way something exists with integrity, clarity, and rootedness, fully expressing its inner nature. We might think of an acorn as “wanting to be” an oak tree. We know that the acorn has DNA inside it that contains the instruction code to make the oak tree, and we could say that “wanting to be” is a metaphor for the power of the DNA. But these architects speak of brick and steel, which have no DNA. Sullivan asks how can it be that steel, an inanimate substance, can have a will. He answers that by itself of course by itself it cannot. But it can in creative relationship with the architect.

Implications

I wrote in a previous letter that lack of a cultural unconsciousness was the principle failing of modern architecture. What would that mean? Here is a suggestion. In ourselves, the unconsciousness is the repository of, archetypes, memories, histories, drives—the principles that underlie our consciousness lives. In a culture the unconsciousness is likewise the repository of the archetypes, etc. that underlie the cultural forms, its arts, architecture, science, mathematics.

It was a major failing of modern architecture that it rejected any unconscious source, believing only in material causes. It is the acceptance of and reaching into these unconscious sources that gives the architecture of Louis Kahn its power, and makes him one of several exceptions among modern architects.

So you see that these different approaches to design are not just techniques for producing buildings, but profoundly different visions of human being. I look forward to how you design, as it will reveal deep things about you.

With Best Wishes,

Letters to a Young Architect by John Lobell

Part 4: Designing Buildings

4.5. Design and Deep Logics

Dear Colleague,

You write that the approaches to design that I described in my previous letter are all very well, but they do not address what actually happens when designing. It is late into the night. You are sitting at your desk with a large sheet of blank paper or a blank computer screen in front of you. Nothing is happening. What now? Panic? How can you stimulate your creativity?

We use terms like intuition when discussing creativity, and often leave it at that. But there are things you can do. It begins with understanding the creative design process.

Design is holistic. It is a process of putting together often numerous ideas or images whose connections are not in advance apparent to any describable method. It is for that reason that the most powerful logics known are used in the design process, that is the powerful logics of the deep structures of the mind which operate free of the limitations of space, time, and causality, and which have traditionally been responsible for most creative work in the arts and sciences.

From the dream state we learn of some of the mind's powers. I recall a dream in which I saw something that was both my grandfather and a leaf. It was not half one and half the other, it was not a translucent images of each overlaid on the other, and it was not alternately shifting between the two. It was simultaneously and clearly both. There is no way I can bring that image into my waking mind, but it was there in my dream. You might be tempted to reject this image as imagined because it is contrary to the laws of reality—that two things cannot occupy the same place at the same time. Yet in quantum theory this is totally possible, and quantum theory is now our theory of reality. The

weirdnesses of quantum theory are only weird to the linear classical logics of the surface mind. They are not at all weird to the deep mind.

Neurophysiologists keep looking for the location of creativity in the brain, sometimes locating it in the right brain or default network, but until more advances are made, it is more productive to understand creativity through what the mind does as evinced by the products of creativity than through the tracking of neurological activity.

When we refer to the powers of the creative process as intuition, we imply that these powers are vague, undefined, subjective, and of unreliable accuracy. These processes, however, are neither vague nor unreliable. They are perhaps difficult, but they can also be very precise, clear in their own way (that is clear in the ways the complex reality of the world are clear) and in fact form the basis for almost all conceptual developments in the sciences as well as in the arts. Architectural design training is training to use these processes.

Like all creativity, creativity in design is the shaking together of previously unconnected images and ideas. These images and ideas could not have been connected by, indeed could not have even been tracked by, linear classical logics. Think for example of designing a hospital in which there are thousands of variables, including hundreds of different requirements for patients, doctors, staff, visitors, and equipment. It was precisely for such problems that computer based “design methodologies” were developed in the 1960s. All of these design methodologies failed although it took some schools a decade to give up on them. Architectural offices never adopted them, since they simply didn’t work. The logics they used could not comprehend the complexities involved. At the time design methodologies were being developed in architecture, “systems analysis” a related approach, was being applied in a wide range of fields. It also failed in many of them. Computers are today millions of times more powerful than they were in the 1960s, yet they still cannot design a hospital, while a good architect can.

How do you access these deep logics in order to design? Another way to phrase the question would be: what kind of design process would be compatible with the logical powers the mind actually has?

The answer to this question turns out to be a description of the design process pretty much as it has been traditionally understood. It is an unconscious process, and any attempt to learn it consciously can only end in failure. A good analogy is that learning to design is like learning to ride a bicycle. You learned to ride a bicycle through weeks of trial and error during which nerves and muscles throughout your body preconsciously come into coordination so that they could accomplish a job so complex there is no way you could do it if you tried to keep conscious control over every part of it. For example, in going into a turn you coordinate visual, kinesthetic, and inner ear data to which the muscles controlling your limbs and balance are making instantaneous responses. And notice the terms in this description—visual, kinesthetic, inner ear data—are they really the components of bike riding, or are they just reductionist descriptions of a holistic activity? The only way you could have learned all of this was to let your body learn it through trial and error, including a lot of falling off the bicycle.

The same is true of design. In design, you bring a lot of data into your mind, much of it unquantifiable, and you allow that data to dip in and out of the deeper structures of your mind, each time coming up with new integrations. However, you cannot force these integrations. They typically take quiet time. This approach exists not just in the arts, but in the sciences as well. Think of Einstein, denied a university position and relegated to a patent office. He was away from the distraction of teaching and publishing papers, able to think through the problems that were bothering him, that others were ignoring. But this is not exceptional. Isaac Newton studied at Trinity College, Cambridge that closed shortly after he got his degree due to the Great Plague. Newton retreated to his home in Woolsthorpe and spent the next two years in relative isolation during which time he came up with the calculus, his theories of optics, and the law of gravity.

This suggests the usefulness of time, often measured in years, to be quiet and think. A luxury available to few but worth fighting for if you want to do something truly original.

Recall in my letter a while back I described the opportunity I had in graduate school to work on a Masters thesis in cultural theory for a year. No interruptions, just day after day of reading, thinking, writing, and brining together a new way to think about architecture. I sometimes wistfully wonder what I might have been able to do it I had spent two or three uninterrupted years. New ideas come from the opportunity to spend time conceiving them.

You can improve the chances of coming up with good integrations not by making them happen but by letting them happen. If you closely observe the workings of your mind you will find that you can feel the moments when the “clicks” take place, when disparate matrices come together. It happens after the relevant information or givens of the problem have been churning around in you mind, on paper, on the computer screen, and in your hands for some time. Your eyes and ears have access to different parts of the mind, and so also do your hands. In fact the hand probably has access to those areas of the mind most relevant to design, areas that cannot be reached by your eyes.

These processes are now being studied by psychologists, but they have no interest in creativity, a concept foreign to most. Instead, they measure the role of the unconscious in making decisions in the laboratory, how we choose between door number one and door number two. These studies confirm the existence deep unconscious processes, but do little to address their role in creativity.

There are people who are not capable of these processes. They may have other gifts, but not design. We must recognize the threat they pose and not let them define architecture, and other creative disciplines in the image of their limited capabilities.

I should add one more thing. This creative process of letting things come up from the mind’s deep logics is different from your everyday work as an architect, which can require intense concentration, focused wresting with problems, long hours, and sometimes lack of sleep. Both are necessary.

With Best Wishes,

Letters to a Young Architect by John Lobell

Part 5: Architecture and Culture

5.1. Building as Philosophy

Dear Colleague,

You write about philosophers who have developed an interest in architecture. Indeed, we do see cases of philosophers and theorists entering architecture, usually into architecture schools. As we have discussed throughout this correspondence, architecture is rich in cultural significance, and therefore it is not surprising that it should attract philosophers. How should we see the relationship of architecture and philosophy?

Let's start by describing philosophy? Perhaps as an attempt to understand the nature of the world and of human being through intellectual means. But is not understanding the world and Human Being also a role of the arts, including architecture? Certainly that has been my contention throughout this correspondence. Indeed, some architects are put off by the claim of the humanities to a privileged role for the written word in that enterprise, since the arts, and particularly architecture, go beyond philosophical *understanding* to also *embody* and provide direct *experience*.

The Greek Parthenon both depicts and also embodies the Greek Humanist notion of the differentiation of the human from the world and the individual from society, and standing before it, the Greeks experienced that differentiation. And Mies's Seagram Building both depicts and embodies the industrialized world, and entering the building we experience industrial materials and the world of the organization man. It is important to understand that in the creation of experience, the arts do not illustrate verbal philosophy, but stand on their own as its parallel and equal.

We can imagine the morning Michelangelo's sculpture of David was drawn from his studio into Florence's Piazza della Signoria. Yes, the David brought together the Biblical figure and patron of the city with ancient Greece through parallels in style. But beyond that there must have been an immediate recognition; the realization, "Yes, that's it! That's what I have been trying to imagine but did not until now have the imagery." Michelangelo did not produce a lecture or an essay. Nor did he produce a "sculpted word" to illustrate a verbal treatise. Rather he produced a sculpture that had the power to directly affect. He produced an embodiment of the Renaissance that had been emerging, but had not been fully imaged before that moment, and that provided an opportunity for direct experience. It is in this sense that building, like sculpture, can be philosophy.

I know that Le Corbusier is one of your favorite architects, and since Frank Lloyd Wright is one of mine, I will use their work to show how architecture can present two contrasting experiences of the human place in the world. Corbu takes the Humanist position—the Greek, Renaissance, Enlightenment, and sometimes modern position that Human Being is the central and highest thing in the cosmos, standing above nature and god. Wright takes the Organic position that we associate with the East, that Human Being is a part of nature and spirit is in all things.

In Humanist architecture, particularly in Greek and neoclassical traditions, the building stands apart from nature. Symmetry allows us to comprehend all of the building as a totality even though we can see only a part of it at one time. The column, with its base, shaft and capital, is related to the human body with its feet, legs and torso, and head. Even though the building is far larger than we, we feel in harmony with it because it shares our proportions. Palladio's Villa Rotonda is an example of a Humanist building. It dominates its landscape; its bilateral symmetry makes it completely knowable from any angle; its classical order shares our proportions. And its central domed space marks the place where the human can stand at the 0 point of Cartesian XYZ coordinates. [elaborate if I have not done this earlier]

The Villa Savoye, Corbu's iconic weekend house outside Paris, is differentiated from and dominates the landscape. It is not symmetrical on four sides, but it does present frontal

symmetry and from any angle we sense its overall form. It stands on its pilotis (Corbu's columns) as we stand on our legs, and Corbu's later Modular was his updating of classical proportions to create buildings with which we feel in harmony.

In Organic architecture on the other hand, the building is integrated with nature. We see this integration in some Chinese paintings where we often do not at first realize that there are buildings or even people in the scene—they blend so thoroughly into the natural setting. An example of this in architecture is the Katsura Imperial Villa in Japan with its asymmetrical modularity; use of wood, bamboo, and rush; its (controlled) spontaneity, and its meandering into the site.

At Fallingwater, the weekend house he built outside of Pittsburgh for the Kaufman family, Wright integrates his building into the landscape, placing it not on the top of the hill, dominating it, but on the side of the hill with a stream running under it. Stones taken from the site and quarried nearby further connect the house to the land. Our experience of the house is different depending on how we approach and move through it, and his use of glass provides an uninterrupted visual flow between the inside and the outside. There is no center for us to occupy; we are exiled to wander an unfixed path as part of nature.

So here are two of the most important architects of the twentieth century taking very different positions on Human Being, Corbu contending that it stands apart from and above nature, and Wright contending that it is a part of nature, contrasting positions that are explored in modern philosophy and are very current as we debate our ecological relationship with the planet. And, while both of these architects wrote a great deal, in these cases they make their points through their buildings.

You might wonder why I use the phrase “building as philosophy” rather than “architecture as philosophy.” Here I side with Louis Kahn who said: “Art cannot be Art unless it is a work and not something abstract, out in the blue somewhere.” He also said: “Architecture has no presence.” By this he meant that that architecture is an abstraction, and that only buildings have presence. The means architects have to manifest their art is buildings. For some architects today the building's structure, materials, detailing, etc. are

impediments to be overcome in the pursuit of philosophical statement and sculptural effect. For Kahn, as for Wright, Mies, Piano, Rogers, Gehry, and others, structure, materials, and detailing are not impediments but the very vocabulary of architecture and the means by which they engage the world.

As an architect, you do not manifest a pure, abstract being-in-the-world. There is only being in this world, at this time, in these cultural and physical circumstances, using these materials and construction techniques to make this building on this site for this client. The fact that you make buildings ties you to concreteness.

With Best Wishes,

Letters to a Young Architect by John Lobell

Part 6: The Architect

6.4. How an Architect Creates His Style

Dear Colleague,

You write asking how an architect goes about finding his style.

Of course by style you mean not just the signature look of an architect's buildings—wavy titanium or sharp angles—but the core ideas from which they come. You know from some of our previous correspondence, by core ideas I do not just mean intellectual constructs, but a way of being in the world and your way of presenting it in architecture. And beyond even that, what you are calling your style is, for an architect, his identity.

I will tell you how you how an architect finds his style. These are secrets that architects know, but do not tell, as they are too difficult to talk about. When asked by the architectural historian Vincent Scully about the influence of the Shingle Style on his early houses, Frank Lloyd Wright responded, “Son, architecture began when I started putting those houses out on the prairie.” And Louis Kahn, when asked about the influence of Wright's Larkin building on his Medical Towers, responded, “The Larkin building? I don't think I know that building.” But Wright's Prairie Style houses came out of the Shingle Style, particularly the houses of Bruce Price, and while Kahn talked about Corbu, who had little direct influence on his work, he never mentioned Wright, who had a great influence on him.

What is going on here?

I discussed earlier how all architecture, indeed all art, is within traditions that the artist deepens, challenges, redefines, or defies. Architects are influenced by those who came before them. Architects devour the past, some the distant past, such as Rome, and some their immediate predecessors and their contemporaries. Most architects have shelves of books, and even if they only look at the pictures, they look at them very carefully.

The weak designer will find a strong predecessor architect and work within the frame of that architect as though following a doctrine. And this weak designer will choose the mature architecture of his predecessor to follow, which is easy, since the work is already done. But since the architecture is mature, there is little he can do with it, and he never develops an original vision of his own.

The strong designer also chooses a strong predecessor, but he will look at this predecessor's immature work, work that is still open to paths not followed. The strong designer then misreads the predecessor, swerves from him, and in so doing establishes his own independent voice.

The strong designer is conflicted by his debt to his predecessor, and will attempt to disguise that indebtedness. The son must deny the father to make room for his own place in the sun. This was true for the younger modern architects who, if they had embraced the older Wright, would have had to admit that there was nothing left for them to do; he had done it all. To make a space for themselves they declared him the greatest nineteenth century architect, leaving the twentieth century for themselves. Then they warned their students against him, and banned him from speaking at the schools they controlled.

How will you arrive at your initial seminal work, work that lays down the basic themes you will explore and continually deepen for the rest of your career? An original idea comes about as follows: you see what is out there, our social and cultural circumstances, new technologies, our notion of space and time, and our sense of who we are. How are others approaching these, what is missing? What is happening in your field, in other fields, where is the energy? You think about all of this. Which approaches are valid, which are not, which are fads, which are different ways of saying the same thing. What

architects or architectures of the past might be pertinent to this moment? What are other architects doing? Which of them do you respect? What are they failing to see?

Then you say, ok, this, this, and this seem to be valid, and seem to be important. They are all valid, but there does not seem to be anything in common among them. Indeed, some of them seem to contradict each other, so how could they all be valid? The answer is some might not be valid, some seemingly different things might actually be the same when you look at them more, and when you have identified the important ones, they may all be parts of a larger order, a larger truth.

How do you find that larger order? Start by becoming very familiar with these images and ideas. Understand them deeply, realize that they may mean things different from the way they are commonly understood. Then let them mull around in your unconscious. There is no prescription for this mulling—recall that I discussed this in my letter on the mind's deep logics. Give yourself time, it might be months, to let your unconscious creative powers work on the material. You might review your sketches and models, reread your notes, and you might doze off while working. If one of the pieces does not seem right, go back and look at it again. Maybe you have not understood it correctly. Maybe no one has.

If you are lucky, the pieces will eventually snap together. Click. Eureka! A new realization, something no one ever imagined before. Something that comprehends all of the pieces and puts them into a higher context, one that orders and makes sense of it all in a way that nothing did before. Or you may just tap into the energy.

One who can tap into the energy can do all of the above without being analytical about it. He feels what is happening in his world, and a response, a body of work, springs into his mind waiting to be realized.

This then will become the bases of your seminal work. It will be important because it will engage, understand, and present the seemingly disparate and unrelated material others struggle with, and it will render all you have been struggling with into a unified whole.

Sullivan spoke of an organic architecture growing out of the essence of the building, but then put a well proportioned façade on the front and sides of his Wainwright Building while leaving the unseen back in plain brick. Wright objected, and in his Price Tower he let the façade grow from the inside out so that all sides of the building were in a similar vocabulary with variations for the differences in the structure, the internal functions, and the sun. This was truly an organic architecture.

Individuation takes place and your own vision emerges. Recall Nietzsche's lion morphing into a child. You now see problems in the work of architects you had admired. They did not go far enough. They were not doing what they had claimed to be doing. Their approaches now seem dated, and you realize that our time calls for something else. Your work, which was once secondary, moves to the fore and stands on its own.

Does this sound intimidating? I hope so. Will you receive scorn for asserting a new direction in architecture? Perhaps. Will your friends support you? A few. But it is the only way to create your own architecture from your own vision.

With Best Wishes,

Letters to a Young Architect by John Lobell

7. How You Will Create the New Architecture

7.9. The Last Letter: The Edges of the Universe

Dear Colleague,

So now it is apparent what our correspondence has been about. For you, it has been about how you will create the new architecture. I have outlined for you some of the things I think you should consider, and I wish you well in this endeavor. I look forward to your new work.

And for me? Often we think we understand things, but we really don't until we can clearly explain them to others. It is now a lot clearer to me what architecture is. Thank you.

* * *

I had a book of the Arabian Nights. In it was an illustration of a youth looking across a bay at a city on a hill, filled with domed buildings. To this day, that image is magical to me. Exciting buildings are now going up all over the world, more outside of the United States than in it. Dubai, China, Malaysia. If we have the courage, we can build magical buildings, cities and more.

I watch the opening of *Star Trek: Voyager*. A long plume of luminous gas arches diagonally across the screen, and as the camera pans we see Voyager plunge through a jet from a sun that then fills the screen and passes over us. It then plows through blue mists, stirring them up in its wake, and exists. Voyager then arches over an ice moon of a large, Jupiter-like planet, a tiny rock moon hanging nearby, and pillars of creation with white spikes in the background. Then Voyager approaches a Saturn-like planet, and passes through the plane of its rings, made up of ice chunks. Ridding over the rings, it races its

reflection. Finally it pulls away from the solar system as the sun emerges from an eclipse, passing an earth-like planet and jumping into warp drive toward a bright nebula.

Our large earth telescopes, orbital telescopes, solar system flybys and computer enhancements give us magnificent views of our solar system and our universe. But short of the hyperdrives and wormholes of science fiction, we are trapped in our little solar system. We are able to look out over the vast expanses of our known universe, now bordered only by the distance from which light can reach us since its beginning, but it would take years to reach planets in our solar system, decades to reach nearby stars, thousands of years to reach nearby galaxies, and hundreds of millions of years to reach many interesting places in the universe. Depressing? Someone once said to me, “I reject the idea that these places are inaccessible. Anywhere our imagination can go, we can eventually go.”

Lao Tzu in The Tao Te Ching writes:

Do you think you can take over the universe and improve it?

I do not believe it can be done.

The universe is sacred.

You cannot improve it.

If you try to change it, you will ruin it.

If you try to hold it, you will lose it.

We no longer need accept that modesty. We will indeed take over the universe and improve it. We can now write in DNA code creating new life as easily as we can write in English or C++. We will soon turn off the genetic causes of aging. We will download ourselves onto backup drives. We will surround our sun with a Dyson sphere, and eventually move to the center of our galaxy to create a controlled chain reaction of supernovas to generate the energy for serious computational activity.

Ray Kurzweil writes:

The explosive nature of exponential growth means it may only take a quarter of a millennium to go from sending messages on horseback to saturating the matter

and energy in our solar system with sublimely intelligent processes. The ongoing expansion of our future superintelligence will then require moving out into the rest of the universe, where we may engineer new universes.

Kurzweil is not speaking metaphorically. He has carefully mapped technological growth over the past hundred years, and he closely monitors technological developments. He is predicting a merging of human and machine intelligence. He is predicting the continued acceleration of technological growth to the point where intelligence, human and machine combined, encompasses the earth, then the solar system, and then the galaxy. He does not stop there, envisioning this projection of intelligence outward into the universe, grappling with the limitations of the speed of light. But Kurzweil envisions even overcoming that:

Whether our civilization infuses the rest of the universe with its creativity and intelligence quickly or slowly depends on its [the speed of light] immutability. In any event the “dumb” matter and mechanisms of the universe will be transformed into exquisitely sublime forms of intelligence, which will constitute the sixth epoch in the evolution of patterns of information.

This is the ultimate destiny of the Singularity and of the universe.

Arrogant? Of course. But recall that in a previous letter I described the necessity for an architect of a strong ego. Let's add to that, arrogance. While brick is still a noble material, and you will often use it, you might also want to start thinking about what materials you will use to build space ladders and then Dyson spheres. Le Corbusier remarked that those of his time were building cities for an age that had long passed. Don't let that happen to you. At the turn of the twentieth century, the architect Daniel Burnham wrote:

“Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men's blood and probably will not themselves be realized.”

We are again in a time when can think that way. Think that way.

With Best Wishes,