

A Personal Narrative:
The Essence of Architecture

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The personal world of an architect is filled with creativity, wonder and passion. Architects find themselves in awe of perfect function and form. They marvel at complexity becoming simplistic while remaining dignified. They hold the credibility of life as a commitment to satisfying people's needs and expectations, their own being inclusive. They reach for more than life could ever return to them, and there is an implicit nature about their existence that suggests anything can be accomplished, that "planet life" can be conquered and utopia will unfold before their hands. Architects await the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities and potential, to allow their inner workings to be expressed in the spirit of architecture. They merge the empirical and the theoretical. They fantasize about great pyramids, temples, and cathedrals whose environments speak as if inspired by unknown compelling forces. And they hope to establish themselves on the face of the Earth through their life's work.

Architecture is and involves the source of human poetics. This is because environment defines, or at least affects, all human thinking and all scientific, aesthetic, moral, and social behavior. By composing, civilizing, structuring the environment, the architect facilitates the progress of human development. He makes man more efficient, more effective. He provides man with a source and sense of beauty; providing lines of harmony, of symmetry, of romance and of reality which converge into suggestions, visions, and concepts of future.

The architect is vital. Architecture is basic to all human endeavor. Scientists are the architects of phenomena. Poets are the architects of language. In the same way the architect designs, controls, and establishes the environment. These sensitivities are the roots of the architectural manifestation. They are the binding unification that has endured millennium upon millennium. And yet, few architects actualize their greatest dreams and glorious fantasies. Few are renown for their works, though the special exuberance and spirit to dream lives on.

Those architects, whose opportunity has yet to be met, make up the "working class" architect. They are the architects who respect the splendor of renown, but are comfortable with the realization that architects are not only perceivers of great design but also manifestors of great talent that allow for great designs and structured aims to be actualized. Architects are not the narrow stereotype that others may perceive. They are integral participants in humanity, acting in a variety of capacities to see that the human condition improves. Human condition in this sense means anything a human being may come in contact with or be effected by, be it the built environment, education and

understanding, politics, society, culture, and other areas. These committed architects involve themselves with social responsibility and express social conscience. They are the embodiment of a new world perception and they act with all their insight and introspection to prove that circumstance can change, making success inevitable. We must hold respect for these individuals as they are giving and caring to society, or they can not truly be considered credible architects.

This proposal, this thesis of belief, is the underlying synthesis of this narrative. Through this particular endeavor you will see into the life of particular architects and, hopefully, understand the dimension of their work and engagement with the tasks of daily activities to render success to each element of undertaking. An achievable account of the architect's life and practice may allow your respect to flourish and, in particular, will allow you to avoid the tendency to stereotype with limitations and vague interpretations.

Throughout this narrative of architects' obligation to their profession and to their life, you will have the opportunity to sense what success and failure might measure. You will learn who and what are involved with developing the initiation of a new future, be it the project or a vision. You will discover who are the practitioners that can unfold the implementation and who is at the control of overall intention and ideal direction. You will recognize how experience of the past plays into the attainment of objectives and limits the frustration, the indecision, and the obstacles common to the grand scheme of design and actualization. The belief of this thesis is that one could come away from such a presentation and know that there is much more to an architect, more than strict fascination with design, more to building structures, more than managing construction, a greater capacity than expectations of fame and fortune. This is no mockery of architects who attain more or less, but reflects the inner workings and thought processes that architects are compelled to live and become.

The man or woman who will be the architect of the future must prepare him or herself to accept greater social responsibilities. R. Buckminster Fuller admonishes that "politics cannot resolve our problems" (Heyer, 1966). He further believes that the solutions to those problems will come not from politicians but from the designers, the engineers, the architects, the technicians of the future. There is no question that architects should heed this admonition. One approach in preparing one's self for this responsibility is by becoming one of the aristos: the best in a given, in this case, architectural situation. To accomplish this feat, the architect must form his mind in three areas: (1) he must increase his acquisition of knowledge and prepare the self to learn and explore diverse subject

matter; (2) he must develop toward self-actualization; and (3) he must increase his threshold of understanding. Forming these three areas will improve the architect's design and decision potential because it will give his life greater fullness and increase the awareness and accuracy of his perceptions. This improvement is vital and commanding. Moreover, increasing the design and decision potential, the rational, will help the architect to accept the solitude of his own personal search.

It is not only essential, but imperative that the architect make a commitment to become the aristos. The primary reason is because he must expand design potential to include unexpected realms of obligation. If he is not prepared to face those unexpected realms, he will fail. As Louis Kahn suggests, "We are born with a sense of what to do, but a sense of how to do it we are not born with. Experience primes the 'what and the how'" (Heyer, 1966). The architect, then, must feed himself diverse experience to prepare himself for the unexpected obligations that Buckminster Fuller foresees.

In addition, it is important for the architect to tap the inspirational and motivational levels that might otherwise remain shrouded in their being. Attaining the aristos is a method of accentuating these personas. It means what Abraham Maslow called "self-actualization"; that is, working toward being problem-centered instead of self-centered, being autonomous and independent, while being interdependent, having democratic values and ideals, resisting conformity to culture, and transcending the environment rather than simply coping with it. The self-actualized individual can better understand the concept of inspiration that Kahn describes:

The inspiration to learn we sense from the record of how we were made which involved all the laws of the Universe and fills us with a sense of wonder which in turn wants to play back the processes of order to learn to create our own instruments of expression; the reason to live is to express. The inspiration to express are the Motivations of Art. (Heyer, 1966)

This "inspiration to learn" is a deep and primeval urge that acts as a copula to engage the architect's design with a higher sense of universal intention and purpose. In an age of change and tentativeness, it is quite essential for the architect to permeate cultural fashion or stereotype and contribute on a less ephemeral plane of Art. Of course, without attaining the aristos, without striving to be the best in the architectural, or the technical, or the environmental, or political situation, the architect cannot possibly function on the Artistic Plane. We no longer live in a world of simple dichotomies like Art vs Science. Today the

design potential of the architect must integrate both art and science, or it will not be responsive. Therefore, the architect must learn to assimilate diverse kinds of information and implement them all as a practitioner of the architectural profession.

The architect's search for this attainment is a lonely, arduous journey. It is a matter of action. We are all resigned to be students, but the architect is resigned to self-directed study as the imposing necessity dictates. Others will stand indifferent, to paraphrase LeCorbusier (Jardot, 1955), but only the architect will see and act with his whole being drawn into that action. It sounds heroic, but it is not. The future architect will be Johansen's lonely, creative, reasoning architect. The position will be lonely because the architect must live through the design and foresee objectives first and alone. He must, as Johansen further suggests, "prelive all possible experiences....he pre-lives so that others may see in his buildings, in his methods, a way of life. It is a huge responsibility" (Heyer, 1966). It is a responsibility that involves exerting LeCorbusierian intellectual and creative potential. It is also lonely because society will resist this achieved potential, will try to minimize the architect's instincts by negating them with nomothetic expectations.

The attainment of self-actualization, of the aristo, will help the architect in this quest. He will better be able to express the synoptic qualities of his work, which reflects all disciplines and functions for the whole of society. He will better be able to accept the obsolescence inherent in his work: everything is relative. And this above all else is a matter of frustration that can only be resolved through the aristos, through growth from the smallest self to the greatest self. The architect must form his mind, then, to eliminate excess and remedy deficiency (Fowles, 1970), he must aim at being no less than the best in a given situation. Once he has accomplished this, once this becomes integral to his daily being, he will have knowledge, understanding, and wisdom to pursue the challenges of the future.

While the architect sub-consciously attends to his commitment to becoming the aristos, the daily practical matters of the working environment of the architect are there to challenge his manifest learnings. Events and issues unfold and the actions taken by the architect demonstrate success and failure. Neither success nor failure can modify the architect's spirit as success proves only sufficiency, and failure simply stimulates resolve. There is no reversion to attainment levels due to failure. There is no growth to ego over success, as ego diminishes attainment. There is no "Me". What remains is to expand the beauty of knowing, of seeing, and of perceiving the realities of life and future in reality's

disclosure. What begins as a yearning cry for learning and knowledge, dissolves into the silence of wisdom.

As you can now see, there exists a philosophical base to an architect's perseverance and awareness. It is imperative because the future architect must prepare himself to meet the unexpected and ever-expanding realms of obligation that society will inevitably bestow upon him. With this philosophical groundwork established, the architect may embark upon a journey of learnedness with each step of new activities along the course of architecture.

Diverging from the philosophical inner workings of the architect, practical matters and the experience of an architect at work, initiating processes, managing tasks, and resolving problems during the progression of the architectural project becomes essential to a fuller understanding of the architectural profession. Detailed comprehension of the world of architects and architecture are well beyond the scope of this writing. However, what can be said, is that architects and architecture integrate, utilize, and exchange information, ideas, and theories of diverse fields of study beyond the construction industry and beyond design principles. An architect is a generalist, boundless in his search to congeal ideas, inspiration, and expression into design and methodologies. Architects will always affirm their love for the unlimited draw of resources and fields of endeavor by which they are able to extract value and, thereby, expand their skills and build a wholeness to their efforts. There are few fields of endeavor for which the architectural profession is not obliged. There is no limit to the intrigue and integration of useful material and insight from diverse fields. Enough can not be said about this aspect of architecture and what it means to knowing the person behind the architecture. The architect remains in solitude with the full sense and understanding of this given value.

The architectural business is kin to survival. As the economy fluxuates, so to does the architect's sustenance. The ebb and flow of the celebrated dollar can mean demise to a prosperous and energetic business. An architect must be keen marketer and business manager. He must adequately and enthusiastically demonstrate to potential clients that he is primed and understanding of the proposed project needs and circumstances. Predesign-marketing and presentation are essential to the success of an architectural business. An architect's first and foremost responsibility to survival is in reaching the client and establishing contracts for the planning and design of a project. On the other side, the owner, or the owner's representatives, must interpret a consulting architect's formal presentation and decide who will integrate the owner's needs in the most amicable way.

This decision is complex and is never easy. There are times when the most suited firm may not turn out the expected results and, in-turn, prohibits or diminishes the projects objectives and maximum results. Choosing the appropriate architect for the cited work is challenging because architects are skilled at presenting and are normally very convincing about their firm's abilities and capabilities.

When the architectural firm is decided upon, the parameters of their work are established and negotiated proposals are developed. Contracts for specific and general services are written and legally authorized. An Owner-Architect Agreement is initiated. The architectural firm is over the first and primary exigency to the entailing sequence of events in the evolution of a project.

With this major certainty behind them, the owner and the consulting architect begin the predesign project planning and administrative work necessary to beginning actual design. It is critical to establish clarity, certainty, and order regarding such matters as feasibility of the projects objectives, concise scheduling of the design process and construction deadlines, certitude of programming requirements, and enlightenment to barriers in actualizing the project. There is significant work involved with generating confident information to build project strategy and order and, thereby, proliferating a positive direction and outcome to the design and construction. Once again, limiting this activity and responsible action for assuring success will limit the design potential and the overall success of the project. Experience has shown that perfunctory efforts at this critical stage of a project can be devastating to the long term objectives.

The schedule of project events is used for the consulting architect to measure and proportion fees used in each phase of work. The schedule is a standard to the practice of architecture and defines the major objective landmarks in a project's development. These demarcations provide short term direction and goals leading to the full scope of work. The following identify project objectives:

- Predesign and Programming
- Site Analysis
- Schematic Design (Preliminary)
- Design Development (Basic)
- Construction Documents (Final)
- Bidding/Negotiation
- Contract Administration
- Post-Construction

Each phase of this schedule unfolds specific processes and considerations necessary to assure a measured result at each interval of progress.

The instruments are in place to begin the appropriate design process. The program requirements now interpreted and verified are set down in rather abstract terms. Various types of methods are used to illustrate the architect's interpretation of the program in drawing form. Square footage, proximity, and adjacencies studies, order and hierarchy analyses, orientation and form considerations are just a few of the initial elements of interpretation that are composed and presented in very loose and abstracted method strictly for conformity purposes. At this stage of development an architect is molding and modeling the program requirements. If the architect does not have the fortitude and insight to assimilate program information and at the same time, feel the responsibility and the inspiration to overlay and synthesize his vision into the design, then it could be surmised that architecture is not truly being expressed. In other words, a well established and/or renown architect will not hesitate for even a moment to impose or superimpose his philosophy of design upon the actual program requirements. Philosophical forbearance is not what is expected. Architects imposing their philosophy upon the design, demonstrate enthusiasm and intrigue. These two qualities are essential to achieving responsive architecture, and can be categorized as inspiration. Louis Kahn suggests, "Inspiration is where the desire *to be/to express* meets the possible" (Louis I. Kahn from Latour, 1991). This type of interaction is most critical to meaningful architecture.

Too often, designs flounder in the absence of energetic and captivated designers. Designers must sculpt and mold the information. They disregard and reject ideas they have established prematurely. Respect and sincere consideration of the project requirements still must remain vital over self-expression. An internal and psychological battle may emerge between self-expectations and project expectations, but the skilled designer can and will satisfy both criteria with sophistication and elegance. There is a very thin line of acceptance to under developing the proper program requirements for the sake of the architect/designers philosophical vision. These two elements must work in harmony or one will become subordinate to the other. This harmony will not lead to an intuitively composite design conclusion. Louis Kahn offers, that, "Only a work of Architecture has presence," and "In this drive to express, you make a distinction between existence and presence" (Latour, 1991). Existence is equivilant to the need of the program elements, but conveying presence to these elements is what emerges from allowing the nature of these

elements to be expressed through design. This is where an architect's philosophy, or action of what will be, becomes intuitive and integral to design.

Prior to the design evolving beyond this point, the architect must assure that the solution is on the correct path with regard to non-aesthetic criterion such as, the budget, site conditions, environmental and structural aspects, before proceeding further in the development of the architecture. So, as much as the architect wishes to express the inner consciousness of his philosophy upon the project, there are many factors melding the design. There are many constraints to restrain the practice of architecture from being whimsical and fleeting. An architect is a manager of many impending pressures and currents of thought and expectations during the formidable stages of a design. The design is analogous to a pliant and lifeless protoplasm at this point. It is being added to and subtracted from to mold and effectuate its essence. If an improper constituency of elements are combined, if unnecessary elements are included which cloud the essence, and if vital elements are not instilled, the catalytic breath of life for this protoplasm (the design) will not be stimulated. It can not become, it can only be. Yet many designs do not become and despite this pre-existence, they progress. They are lifeless and unbecoming, they are unmeaningful, they are not architecture. The purpose of this metaphor is to make those who are interested aware that a design does not evolve itself. In fact, the architect is the giver of life to the design. Through enthusiasm and intrigue, diligence and dedication, the protoplasm lives on and becomes.

When the design has acquired the breath of life, then and only then, will it stand alone and unfold, speak its essence. The architect is no longer alone, as the design itself wants to be. Now, in cooperation with the architect, the design, the project evolves in a prolific direction and a mastery of impending elements is imaginable.

It is appropriate that the design is able to stand alone at this point because from this point on the design, the project, will be continuously manipulated to properly integrate systems like mechanical, electrical, and structural. If the design was not abounding, then manipulation of any sort would work to destroy or lessen the architectural poetics, the design essence, that a comprehensive design includes. It would be like forcing a skeletal system upon the protoplasm prior to the establishment of its essence. The skeletal system becomes the essence that may not be the objective. Architects must know when the design is self-sustaining so that all the peripheral elements to the design can be implemented, established and integrated amid the progressing design. A design may live, but its existence may be short lived, if the essentials for life are not quickly enveloped by

the design. The design must extol intelligence and exude intelligence. Intelligence is given to the design by synthesizing and composing the design with matrices, networks, and systems vital to a project's scrutiny of success. These elements of practical content allow the design to become a building and magnify the integral intelligence to the architecture.

Architects, designers assisting the architect, drafters, specification writers, cost estimators, field and site investigators, engineers, specialty consultants, owner and owner representatives, building code officials and compliance boards must have a line of communication that is effective and efficient. The architect is responsible for this communication. Great amounts of information are gathered and integrated into the project design and design construction documents. Much of this information must be cross referenced and coordinated among the interested parties. It is the architect's responsibility to see that the best information is incorporated and the rest expelled. Also, the architect must maintain a progression of this information across the differing practitioners of the project, assuring the integration of this information, initiating cross checking procedures, and affirming that the original design lives on, is becoming, is relevant and concordant with the essence of its initial manifestation. This very short version of the architect's role and responsibility illustrates the high demand of the architect's attention and the opportunity for error. The correctness and quality eminently lies upon the architect's shoulders. In this regard, the experience of the past, knowing what to avoid, and knowing how to confront deficiency are key in moving forward with a positive and persistent pace to produce design and construction documents that will prove successful in the long run.

Experience has demonstrated that not all architects are capable of handling the multitude of demands placed upon them at this stage of project development. If too many of the project practitioners (the team) are inexperienced, unmotivated, or apathetic, then a project showing much success early on can become defunct in the later stages of development. Often, the results of this lack of coordination, cooperation, and consideration is not realized until the project is under construction. By this time, irreconcilable damage is done. Remedying deficiency will occur at great cost to the project's budget and the architect's reputation.

The team members play their specific parts in the progress of the project's processes. At times, team members cross the threshold of their own abilities, understanding, or specialization to reach a culminating success. But, mere humans with varying abilities and experience levels are at the controls of this massive ship upon the driving seas of

information. And more often, the winds of deadline and requirement deluge the ship and chart an unsympathetic course. The only hope for survival is in the training, preparation, and know how of handling the particular situation at hand. The stronger the team members are at these survival tactics, the more they are rehearsed, the more these players have skirted the serpent of time, the more likely survival becomes. The ship may or may not round the “cape of no return” with glasses raised and sails blazing toward the “land of opportunity”.

Realistically, not every team member has the the same aspirations. Some may be motivated by less profound objectives. Some members may not see this project as their number one priority or do not even comprehend their function of a part to the whole. Often, construction documents are offered for bid with less than satisfactory completion and with errors that some team members realize can not be corrected in due time of the bid deadline. They may or may not see the magnitude of their silence at this juncture as being extremely injurious to the project’s outcome. This can create various levels of havoc during the bidding process, issuing addendums and satisfying the multitude of questions that may be raised because of such deficiencies. Most of the time, unless the bidding deadline is extended and these errors are properly eliminated, deficiencies can not sufficiently and effectively be remedied to protect the owner’s interest. Thus, the project proceeds, the construction ensues, and the problems mount from the onset. The check book becomes the contractor’s best friend, it becomes the architect’s only friend. The owner becomes loyal to no one.

The situation that is developing in the above description immediately subjects all parties in the construction process to negative and uncooperative tensions. The architect has an obligation to alleviate unmanageable or disruptive problems in the document preparation phase. The architect’s reputation is at stake for lack of insightfulness regardless of the conditions imposed upon him. There is no inconspicuous way or suitable opportunity for an architect to retract the faults that have occurred and in so doing, regain credibility and respect during this project. To compound the circumstances, nearly all projects have conditions which develop that no one could foresee in the normal course of design and document preparation. These unforeseen, yet understandable, changes and financially expense deficiencies among the blatant errors and deficiencies accumulate and constitute an additionally negative impression of the architect’s abilities and capabilities. Architects can not build prosperous businesses and attract repeat customers with this type of detrimental aura of opinion overshadowing their image.

In view of these things, the architect has no alternatives, he must shape his mind to assimilate diverse information, he must increase his awareness in all discipline. He must sharpen his perceptions to a precise acuteness, he must fight against stereotype, superficiality, and cultural conformity. He must increase the threshold of his understanding in mundane matters as well as in universal matters. He must work to become the aristos, the best in any given situation.

Architects in general are far from being the formidable, renown design geniuses that many perceive in their rather limited understanding of the profession and of the character which constitutes an architect. At the same time, the perception, or stereotype, that architects are merely drafters and creators of pretty pictures of buildings is far from the truth. The average architect has some difficulty in shaking the entrapment of these narrow perceptions that taint the profession with misconceptions and superficiality. In many ways, all architects are responsible for dispelling these notions and must succeed in presenting a true coloring of the occupation, the intrinsic nature of the character make up and the vulnerability in making critical and extensive types of judgments and decisions that are at the heart of the profession. If capable architects do not continue to view this educating of the public as essential to an architect's commitment, then the profession will be unrealistically exposed and prejudiced by the incapable representatives to the profession. Being an architect involves tremendous creativity, but more importantly, it involves social responsibility. It should be the goal of every thinking architect to express this social conscience. Architects must feel compelled to continually challenge themselves and other architects, to strive in efforts to bring the architectural profession into a new and valued public vision; a viable field, a cognizant field, prepared to significantly impact the future of society.

There is a belief that the intrinsic characteristics of an architect and his innate ability to solve imposing problems can go well beyond the boundaries of architecture. There is hope and expectation that architects now and in the future will not be narrowly roled by public opinion and stereotype since their capabilities are remarkably more resourceful. Architects are fundamentally primed to confront dilemma, contemplate uncertainty, comprehend enigma, and most of all, are uncommonly disposed to dispelling conflict and managing crisis. With the right concentration of character development, with a commitment to universal matters, with belief that architecture is only the beginning, architects can lead future society in serendipitous directions, lead to circumvent social indecision and political deadlock, lead with sensibility, judiciousness, logic, and order

where others have failed in self-righteousness. Architects are capable in this way because of the diverse elements of their disposition and makeup. This sounds heroic, and it unquestionably is. However, hope of future order for all of humankind lies in the recognition that chaos is manageable, that sensitivity to our true nature can be regained, that prosperity of the civilization relies on the effectual contribution and extension of each person's role as a human and as a professional practitioner with expertise to share and integrate in new and meaningful ways. There can be no more permeation of the "Me". No longer will political agenda be tolerated, money will not be the means for offering exclusive opportunity. Cynics will dispell these thoughts with unbelief, but the reality of life on Earth will eventually caution them. To paraphrase Gyorgy Doczi (1981), "Our knowledge has lead us to take apart, analyze and differentiate, wisdom will synthesize, integrate, envision relationship, bring about wholeness and unity". The architects of the future will be there, as will other purposeful professions to actualize the renewing concept of conjunctive discern to a life previously filled with disjunctive descent.

In speaking of "The Human Place" (the world), John Lobell (1979) points out that, "What Louis Kahn called Order, Lao Tzu called the Tao, Heidegger called Being. For Heidegger, Being is the ground through which all things are. The human calling is to watch over Being and act as shepherd for Being. Heidegger felt that we have neglected this calling and that we have become cut off from Being, a condition that dates back to ancient Greece." Additionally, Lobell urges, with the words of Kahn, "we are concerned with the measurable and have neglected Order." As Lao Tzu would say, "We are concerned with the ten thousand things and have neglected the Tao." Philosophers and architects alike point to the same demise in humanity and culture. John Lobell succinctly illustrates this narrative's intent:

Heidegger saw two disastrous consequences in our abandonment of our calling. One is that Being itself has become, in Nietzsche's phrase, "a haze". It has suffered from our neglect, and we no longer have a sense that it exist. The other is that we ourselves have become lost. We wonder through life overwhelmed by the myriad details of the material world, but we have no sense of what stands beyond that world and what our place might be in a larger scheme of things.

The human place at the Treasury of the Shadow is tenuous. To maintain it, the scientist must act out of intouchness with nature, the physician must seek wholness, the craftsman must be at one

with the material, the poet must speak Being, and the architect must seek Order.

Architecture in stone began with Imhotep, the ancient Egyptian architect of the first pyramid, inventor of civilization, high priest, and later, god of healing. It is interesting that the Egyptians saw their first architect also as healer. The bringing of wholeness to the culture and to the person were seen as one. The titles of architects have varied over history: in Egypt, a priest-healer; in Gothic France, a chief artisan; in Renaissance Italy, an artist-engineer. But the role remains the same; to watch over Being, to search for Order, and to renew culture through the manifestation of Spirit in form. (1979)

The essence of architecture is difficult to grasp and cup into one's hand as if to adequately understand. Many reject architects and seek to dispel the greatness of their challenge. To look around and see from where we came is the critical purpose to thinking humans. Yet, it is from where we have come that we must decide to interpret and determine the course of the future. When one looks back through time, through ages of time, the common thread of architecture is there to show homage to our long course of existence. We must seek to learn what architecture means so that thinking humans of the future will recognize the same homage to our existence.

The Essence Of Architecture

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