

It was a modern laboratory that contained the latest equipment for creating complex materials, and was involved in producing nanostructures that went far beyond merely the practice of combining elements to make compounds, or mixing metals to make alloys. The fabrication of such microscopic devices is one of the fastest growing technologies available.

The managers of this particular lab were involved in a very curious project. Part of the force behind their work was to develop new technology and the methodologies to use them. More specifically, however, they were driven to produce a device that would perfectly transmit certain types of light. Their slogan was, “No wavelength left behind”.

I was but a mere technician, working to implement their designs. I was not a theoretician, but I had a very good practical sense about what we were making. I had to test the fabricated devices, as well, to see if they were truly transmitting information as they should.

The designers had many reasons for the various layers that they prescribed: the boundaries had to be just so, the post supports had to be strong enough and thick enough to pass the proper currents, and there must be the proper amounts of isolation in one place and contact in another. These were all documented in the paperwork associated with validating the performance of the device. They were so numerous because every potential problem that could be foreseen was addressed, and so layers upon layers of different atomic combinations were used. These were all deposited in perfect alignment, to create a three-dimensional superstructure. This lattice was to be the ultimate in passing on the knowledge of the ages.

The many layers were intended to manage all of the rules and to control every wavelength at all times. My suspicion was that they actually worked to reduce the transmission for all. Rules had become more important than relationships. As I studied the complicated arrangement I was helping to build, I began to see that no light at all would pass through. The protection of one wavelength at the sacrifice of many others did not seem to be a good plan.

I realized eventually that the designers did not really know what they were doing. They were caught up in the look of the arrangement – and the resulting superstructure dominated the “landscape”. It was an impressive assembly that did not, however, deliver what was promised. Its many physical features became its only glory. Its creation in a pristine environment meant that it was not representative of reality, and there was no consideration of practical operation or application.

Those who had received one of the completed units and were required to use it were in real trouble. They were going to have to work blind, and fulfill the full load of requirements that they would have had to accomplish if they had all of the radiance of the sun. The structures that had been designed to be supports had become impediments. And the users would have to find a way to snake around the structure to perform the functions of their jobs.

The purpose of the work had gone off the track of its original objective. I remembered the old days and the old ways – a simple opening to allow light through was sufficient for us. And in the end, I could only hope that the structure would essentially fall in on itself. Then the way would be clear again to see.