



Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology

Vol. 17 • No. 3

ISBN 1083-9194

www.arch.ksu.edu/seamon/EAP.html

Fall • 2006

This issue of *EAP* completes our 17th year. We enclose a renewal form and would appreciate responses as soon as possible so there will be fewer reminders to send in the first 2007 issue.

This *EAP* includes regular features as well as a review by psychotherapist and sculptor Shierry Weber Nicholsen and an essay by place specialist Silke Schilling. As readers know, we regularly cover the work of architect Christopher Alexander, and Nicholsen offers a commentary of the first, second, and fourth volumes of his *Nature of Order*.

A major aim of Alexander is to facilitate architecture and environmental design that evoke a powerful sense of place. Schilling, in her essay, uses an approach drawing on Goethean science as a means to explore the vibrant sense of place of one long-existing community—the market town of Totnes in southwestern England.

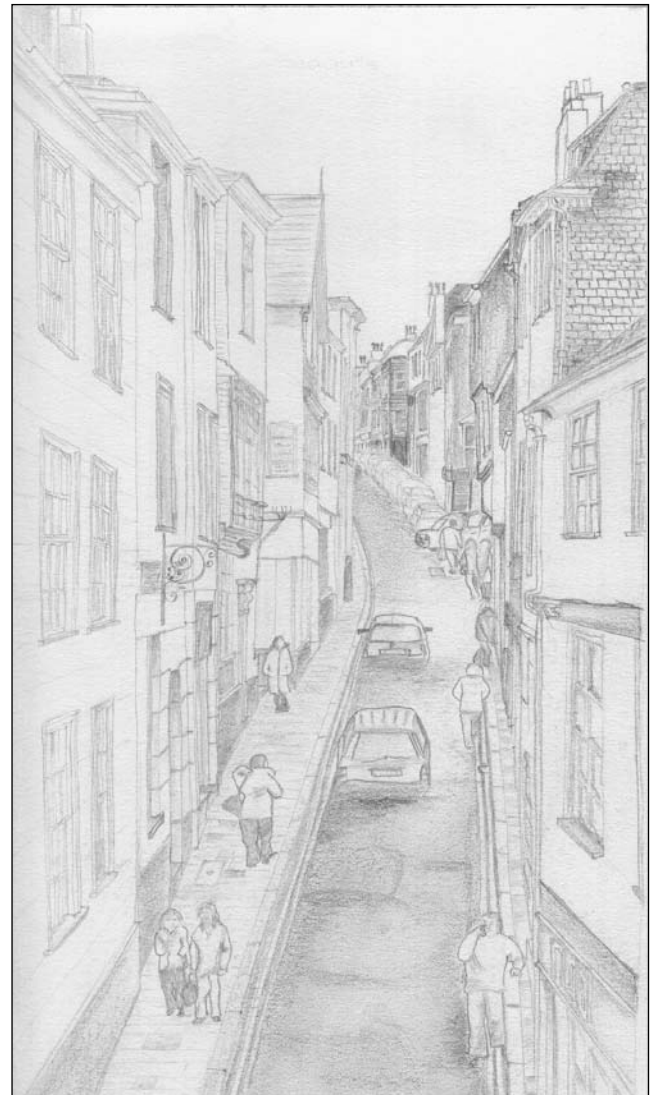
We are again running short of material for upcoming issues of *EAP*, and ask readers to consider possible submissions, whether essays, reviews, drawings, designs, items of interest, or anything else. We particularly encourage students to submit, since so often a “youthful” point of view arrives at fresh understandings and perspectives that uncover new terrain.

Human Science Conference

The 2007 **International Human Science Research Conference** will be held in Italy at the University of Trento, Rovereto Branch, 13-16 June 2007. The theme is “New Frontiers of Phenomenology: Beyond Postmodernism in Empirical Research.” The deadline for abstracts is January 31, 2007. For details, go to: <http://www.unitn.it/events/ihsr07> Professor Massimiliano Tarozi of the University of Trento is the chair of the organizing committee:

massimiliano.tarozi@unitn.it. The fall newsletter for the IRHS conference will shortly be available at: <http://www.seattleu.edu/artsci/psychology/ihsr.asp>.

Below: Silke Schilling's pencil drawing of a typical day on High Street, Totnes, Devon, England—see her essay, p. 8. In her method of place reading, drawing, painting, and photographing are an integral means for identifying and describing environmental and place experience.



Items of Interest

EAP Editor **David Seamon** recently received the 2006 Service Award from the Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA) for his contributions to the field of environmental design. He received the award in May at EDRA's annual meeting in Atlanta. In nominating Seamon for the award, philosopher Ingrid Stefanovic wrote that he has "inspired students, academics, and practitioners around the world to think differently about the parameters of environmental design and the contributions that phenomenology can make to this important field."

University of Cincinnati's School of Architecture and Interior Design offers a two year **Theory and Research** program, which leads to a master of science in Architecture. A central focus of the program is "research in place," which emphasizes "understanding places in their rich complexity; philosophical and phenomenological foundations in understanding environments; and theory and research approaches in interior design, architecture, and urban design." 513-556-6426; www.said.uc.edu.

News from Readers

Australian philosopher **Jeff Malpas** sends the following: "Over the last few months, I have been engaged in discussions with colleagues at the National Museum of Australia with the aim of developing a cooperative arrangement whereby they would assist in developing and maintaining an improved web site for the Place Network in line with the decisions we took at the Senses of Place Conference [see *EAP*, spring 06].

"The aim is to create a location on the web for discussion, research and debate about place in all of its manifestations. This site would use the community of interest model, which is collaborative, participatory and interactive, inviting members to provide content. This web site would provide a venue for discussing and exchanging ideas relating to place research in all of its manifestations." For further information or to be added to the Place Network list serve, contact Professor Malpas at Jeff.Malpas@utas.edu.au.

Citations Received

Eran Ben-Joseph, 2005. *The Code of the City: Standards and the Hidden Language of Place Making*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

"[Planning and design] standards are the source of how communities are designed and built. They define how places *can* and *can't* be developed, and how controls shape the physical space where we live and work. It is the aim of this book to help unmask and explain this relationship, for though standards will continue to exert their influence on the shaping of our towns and cities, we must not allow them to prevent excellence and innovation in our quest for better places."

Charles Belfoure, 2005. *Monuments to Money: The Architecture of American Banks*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

This architect exams "how and why the classically inspired structures built in late 18th century America, embodying strength and trust, evolved into the essentially anonymous bank buildings of today."

Ingrid Birkeland, 2005. *Making Place, Making Self: Travel, Subjectivity and Sexual Difference*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

This book is said to "explore new understandings of place and place-making in late modernity, covering key themes of place and space, tourism and mobility, sexual difference and subjectivity." The volume draws "on an interweaving of post-Lacanian versions of feminist psycho-analytical thinking with phenomenological and existential thinking."

Bill Bywater and Craig Holdrege, eds., 2005. *Goethe's Delicate Empiricism* [special issue of *Janus Head*, vol. 8, no. 1; available in hard copy or on-line at <http://www.janushead.org/8-1/index.cfm>].

An important collection of articles examining Goethean science and the way the approach extends "the reach of a phenomenological sensibility to the natural sciences." Contributions include Bill Bywater's "Goethe: A Science Which Does Not Eat the Other," John Cameron's "Place, Goethe and Phenomenology: A Theoretical Journey," Craig Holdrege's "Doing Goethean Science," Brent Dean Robbin's "New Organs of Perception: Goethean Science as a Cultural Therapeutics," David Seamon's "Goethean Science as a Phenomenology of Nature," Dennis L. Sepper's "Goethe and the Poetics of Science," Eva-Maria Simms' "Goethe, Husserl, and the Crisis of the European Sciences," and Daniel Wahl's "'Zarte Empirie': Goethean Science as a Way of Knowing."

Some Characteristics of the “Embodied Mind”

- ◆ Concepts of the self, and who we are as persons, are tightly linked to tactile-kinesthetic activity.
- ◆ Embodiment is more than physiological and/or brain activity, and is constituted by recurring patterns of kinesthetic, proprioceptive action that provide much of people’s felt, subjective experience.
- ◆ Perception is not something that only occurs through specific sensory apparatus (e.g., eyeballs and the visual system) in conjunction with particular brain areas, but is a kinesthetic activity that includes all aspects of the body in action. Perception is tightly linked to subjunctive thought processes whereby objects are perceived by imagining how they may be physically manipulated.
- ◆ Many abstract concepts are partly embodied because they arise from embodied experience and continue to remain rooted in systematic patterns of bodily action.
- ◆ Cognitive processes are not located exclusively inside a person’s skin as computations upon mental representations (e.g., propositions, productions, mental images, connectionist networks). Cognitive processes are partly constituted by physical and bodily movements and manipulations of objects in real-world environments. Cognitive mechanisms have evolved to operate in conjunction with environmental structures. Thus, cognitive processes are composed of both internal processes and bodily manipulation of external objects outside the skin.
- ◆ Emotion, consciousness, and language evolved, and continue to exist in many ways, as extensions of animate motion.

—from Raymond Gibbs, Jr., *Embodiment and Cognitive Science*, 2006, pp. 12-13.

shaped by embodied action.” An important book for the phenomenology of embodiment as indicated by some of Gibbs’ major conclusions included in the sidebar, left.

Bill Hillier, 2005. *Between Social Physics and Phenomenology: Explorations towards an Urban Synthesis? Proceedings, Fifth Space Syntax Symposium*, Delft, the Netherlands, 13-17 June.

An intriguing but flawed effort to combine insights from social physics and phenomenology “into a single theoretical model of the city as a human-physical system,” and thus providing “a unified paradigm within which the scientific and humanistic dimensions of cities can be studied within the same framework.” Hillier argues that “we cannot have a theory of the city which does not bring the concerns of social physicists and phenomenologists into a single theoretical framework, and that the closest thing we have to this is the theoretical framework of space syntax itself” (pp. 8-9).

Mizuko Ito, Daisuke Okabe, & Misa Matsuda, 2005. *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Essays commenting “on the emergence, incorporation, and domestication of mobile communications in a wide range of [Japanese] social practices and institutions.” The book “describes a mobile universe in which networked relations are a pervasive and persistent fixture of everyday life.”

Susan R. Jones, Vasti Torees, & Jan Arminio, 2006. *Negotiating the Complexities of Qualitative Research in Higher Education: Fundamental Elements and Issues*. NY: Routledge.

These educators hope to “improve the methodological goodness of qualitative work.” Useful chapters on contrasting conceptual perspectives, methods, and research questions. Also chapters on qualitative “sampling” and the meaning of trustworthiness and validity qualitatively. Includes a discussion of phenomenological research and methods.

Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr., 2006. *Embodiment and Cognitive Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.

This psychologist examines “how people’s subjective, felt experiences of their bodies in action provide part of the fundamental grounding for human cognition and language.... We must not assume cognition to be purely internal, symbolic, computational, and disembodied, but seek out the gross and detailed ways in which language and thought are inextricably

Sally Lewis [and others], 2005. *Front to Back: A Design Agenda for Urban Housing*. London: Architectural Press.

This collection of commentaries and specific designs interprets housing “as places to live rather than individual buildings.” Projects are evaluated in terms of place-making themes like “providing frequent and convenient access,” “defining public and private space,” “orienting active building ‘fronts’ to the public realm,” “encouraging unity and variety,” and so

forth. Disappointing in that there are few references to the larger literature on urban and residential design.

Joanna Lombard, 2005. *The Architecture of Duany Plater-Zyberk and Company*. NY: Rizzoli.

A useful overview of the architectural designs of two founders of New Urbanism: "Over the course of time, the buildings [Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk] have designed have gone from being largely in the private domain to being almost all in the public realm: architecture with a conscience. The recent work shown in this book includes a mission church... done entirely pro bono, subsidized housing complexes..., and the town hall for hurricane-battered Florida City. If the New Urbanism was criticized initially as being too elitist, the path of DPZ's work disproves that view today."

Richard Muir, 1999. *Approaches to Landscape*. London: MacMillan Press.

This landscape historian aims to "identify, introduce and explore the different approaches to landscape. Chapter headings include: "structure and scenery approach;" "landscapes of the mind;" "landscape, politics, and power;" "evaluation of landscape;" "symbolic landscapes;" "aesthetic approach to landscape;" and "landscape and place." Puzzlingly, other than the reference to Edward Relf and Yi-Fu Tuan, there is no direct discussion of a phenomenological approach to landscape (e.g., Christian Norberg-Schulz).

Louis P. Nelson, ed., 2006. *American Sanctuary: Understanding Sacred Spaces*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press.

Edited by an architectural historian, the chapters of this book are said to demonstrate "that Americans continue to construct a vast array of sacred spaces, spaces central to our identity, spaces with complex meanings that become apparent only when we examine rigorously the beliefs and practices that are the essence of the sacred." Topics include Connecticut meetinghouses; changes in 19th-century evangelical church architecture; contemporary Catholic church architecture; the urban practice of Jewish sacred space; the impact of globaliza-

tion on traditional sacred spaces; and spiritual aspects of African-American yard art.

Juval Portugali, 2006. Complexity Theory as a Link between Space and Place. *Environment and Planning A*, 38:647-664.

This geographer argues that "complexity theories have the potential to bridge the geographies of space and place and, by implication, the two cultures of science."

Sophia Psarra, 2005. Spatial Culture, Way-Finding and the Educational Message: The Impact of Layout on the Spatial, Social and Educational Experiences of Visitors to Museums and Galleries, pp. 78-94 in Suzanne MacLeod, ed., *Reshaping Museum Space, Architecture, Design, Exhibitions*. NY: Routledge.

Drawing partly on the theory and methods of space syntax, this essay examines "the power of space to influence the visitors' experience in museums and galleries." The aim is to "draw attention to the relationship between the architecture and the ways in which visitors circulate, locate the collections and grasps the exhibition content." Two older and two newer museums are studied: London's Natural History Museum and Glasgow's Kelvingrove Museum; Edinburgh's Museum of Scotland and Glasgow's Burrell Museum.

R. Kevin Seasoltz, 2005. *A Sense of the Sacred: Theological Foundations of Christian Architecture and Art*. NY: Continuum.

Written by a Roman Catholic liturgical scholar, this book is "a history of Christian art and architecture precisely by being, at the same time, a survey of the history of Christian theology and liturgy." Excellent chapters on what Seasoltz calls "cultural shifts" (from primal culture through Native-American and African-American cultures to modern and postmodern cultures) to the response of churches to these cultural shifts. Chapter titles include "Romanesque and Gothic Architecture and Art" (chap. 5), "Architectural and Liturgical Reforms in the 20th Century" (chap. 8), and "Sacred Art from 1900 to the Present" (chap. 11).

Making as a Process of Creating Aliveness: Christopher Alexander's *The Nature of Order*

Shierry Weber NicholSEN

Christopher Alexander is an architect who, since the 1960s, is very well known and controversial. His four-volume *The Nature of Order: An Essay on the Art of Building and the Nature of the Universe* is his masterwork, some 20 years in preparation (1)

As its subtitle indicates, *Order* goes far beyond architecture. It is so articulate about the process of building and making and the characteristics of meaningful form or structure in any human-made or naturally created thing, that it is well worth the reading time—over 2,000 pages—and money—75 dollars per volume.

Order has invaluable things to say about the nature of the universe and its connection with the process of creating. The volumes are illustrated with photographs of heart-piercingly wonderful artifacts, art works, and buildings from many cultures and eras, and equally satisfying photographs of natural phenomena. In this review, I introduce some of Alexander's key formulations and comment on how they resonate with my own experience as a sculptor.

The notion of *aliveness*—that something has life and *feels alive*—is the keystone of Alexander's work. A work that has aliveness, he says, is like a living being; it has something akin to selfhood. A work, a being in this sense, may be understood as a "field of centers." *Center* is a pivotal concept for Alexander and refers to a concentrated locus of aliveness or selfhood. A "field of centers" is a system in which the different interrelated centers intensify one another's aliveness.

In the first volume of *The Nature of Order*, entitled *The Phenomenon of Life*, Alexander identifies 15 qualities that add to the aliveness of structures of any kind. These 15 qualities, or properties, as he calls them, are not "rules" to be followed so much as empirical formulations of the characteristics of works that seem particularly alive.

Alexander's discussion of these 15 properties is one of the most immediately engaging and rewarding parts of *the Nature of Order*. The concepts are easily grasped, and the illustrations are apt and beautiful. Some examples of these 15 properties are:

- *roughness*, the wabi sabi quality of imperfection, illustrated by the way the stripes on a zebra are not perfectly parallel and complete;
- *boundaries*, illustrated by the numerous hairlines and other boundaries that form such an important part of the pattern of an Oriental carpet;
- *deep interlock*, illustrated by the geometric patterns of the tile of a mosque;
- *non-separateness*, illustrated by a photo of a water's edge;
- *gradients*, different levels of scale in the same piece, illustrated by a Persian carpet.

For me as a sculptor, it is easy to see how such properties contribute to a piece of sculpture. More so, the notion of a field of centers and the specific properties that Alexander identifies are helpful for understanding what makes a particular piece of carving work. As a work on the nature of art and beauty, *The Nature of Order* is unusual because it is written by a practicing artist and because it devotes attention to the process of art-making as well as to finished works of art.

Alexander has always attacked dead, mechanical buildings and artifacts and the worldview that justifies and produces them. This criticism is understandable given his emphasis on aliveness, which cannot be created or enhanced by sticking individual pieces together. To be made more alive, the various aspects of a work must be worked on in their relationship to one another so that the interdependent aspects intensify one another's aliveness: "Extension, enhancement, and deepening of the

whole are the crux and target of all living process” (vol. 2, p. 251).

Alexander’s second volume is called *The Process of Creating Life*, a title that refers to both the process of biological development and also to the process of creating aliveness in works of art or buildings. The key concept here is what Alexander refers to as *unfolding wholeness*. That is to say, one works with an eye to the deepening wholeness of the thing (i.e., increasing intensity of the interdependent field of centers), and one does that by working with the wholeness as it unfolds.

Alexander talks here about “structure-preserving transformation.” In other words, the elaboration from the initial idea (embryonic germ) retains the initial “center” as it intensifies and elaborates that initial center. The initial idea is only the first step; you look at what you have after the first step and see how you can move a little bit farther toward wholeness. Then you look again after the second step and see what you have and how you can make it more alive, and so on: “Possibly the most basic and necessary feature of any living process is that it goes gradually. We cannot create unfolded living structure by drawing it as if it had unfolded and then building it by different means. It really must unfold in real time” (vol. 2, p. 230-31).

And what does all this say about the nature of the universe? The possibility of making a work more alive implies that space/matter, the substance of the universe, has the potential for aliveness. Like the Buddhist notion of the plenum, which can give rise to all things, the *Luminous Ground* (Alexander’s title for volume 4), is space/matter that is alive or potentially alive. The creation of form is what makes space/matter more alive.

Thus the work itself—not only the living biological creature but also the work of art or the building—is not only a being in itself but also a place where space/matter has become more alive. As a being with aliveness, the work has the quality of selfhood and, in this sense, is the mirror of the human self who is in relation to it.

I’ve presented these ideas in very condensed form, but Alexander’s depiction of the sense of selfhood is compelling. His ideas speak to a question that is relevant for all artists—What is the relationship between the mind of the maker and the

made, non-human thing? How shall we characterize the kinship with the work of art that both maker and viewer experience? Alexander would define that kinship as a commonality of aliveness/selfhood.

Volume 4, *The Luminous Ground*, elaborates these ideas of aliveness and self-hood that appears in space/matter and link the human self with the universe, including works of art. Two parts of this final volume were especially interesting to me. First, I appreciated a long section on color, illustrated primarily by paintings from my own favorite colorists, Matisse and Bonnard, as well as others. Alexander’s point here is that the universe we know is colored! (And though we don’t talk much about it, all carvings are also colored). It is not so much individual colors in isolation that feel alive, Alexander says, as the unity of color produced by the mutual intensification of colors in, for instance, a painting, yielding what he calls “subdued brilliance.”

Another important theme in volume 4 is contained in Alexander’s phrase “making a gift to God.” While we may not all want to use the term “God,” I think we can recognize what he is talking about. What Alexander means has to do with lack of egotism in the work: One strives to make the work more and more itself, a being with aliveness, thus contributing to the work of creation, rather than to make an object that will reflect well on the maker—i.e., an object that bears the traces of its maker’s egotism. Alexander describes experiences where there was a clear choice between, on one hand, making something perfect or beautiful or, on the other hand, making it as a gift to God—i.e., more fully alive.

This is a choice I know from my own sculpting experiences. The form in which I currently work is stone-carving. Although Alexander rarely speaks of sculpture per se, the way he talks about the act of making certainly speaks directly to my own carving experience. Particularly apt is his comment that, in making something, he looks for the places that seem dead and then tries to find the “latent centers” and bring them out. He also speaks of narrowing his eyes and looking for the “gray spots of disunity” to see what needs to happen to bring the parts into coherent relationship with the whole.

When I am carving and the piece has taken shape, I too find myself looking for the dead areas. I

tend to talk to myself and say things like, “That’s too flat,” or “That’s too lumpy,” trying to put into words what feels bothersome about a particular portion of the work. Then I try to imagine how it might be different—for example, less flat or less lumpy. That means noticing something that is already present implicitly but needs to be enhanced to bring the area into relationship with the rest—a movement, a curve, a bending toward, a connecting with.

I think that the common notion of “seeing what is in the stone” means something like this process. It is not, at least for me, seeing instantaneously something that one might make but, rather, a process of being guided by the stone in that the deadness feels bad to me (and presumably bad for the stone as well). I find that I almost sense the stone as a body and can feel its constricted or flabby places that can then be pared or released.

Working with stone does seem a matter of “unfolding wholeness”—in the sense that you are committed to what you have done and can only shape the stone from there. Revision of the piece doesn’t ever mean starting from scratch but rather “making it more alive”—i.e., enriching the interrelationships in the whole.

And what about the question of when a particular carving is finished? When is it a thing in itself standing apart as a being separate from me? Alexander says the created thing won’t feel like a separate being until it’s become to some degree alive. Which isn’t to say that the next time I look at my carving I won’t notice dead spots I wasn’t aware of before, or whole perspectives where I can see that a slight revision would create more life. In this way continues the process of looking anew with each step but in such a way that one is always strengthening and elaborating what is already begun.

Alexander’s formulations have evolved in this way over the 20 and more years he has been working on *The Nature of Order*. I am grateful for his perseverance in writing with such detail and depth about the process of creating aliveness.

Note

1. The four volumes are published by the Center for Environmental Structure, Berkeley, California. I do not discuss volume 3 here because it had not yet been published when I first wrote this review. That volume is Alexander’s effort to pre-

sent a viable architecture for our modern time; much of 20th-century architecture he considers dead and deadening rather than alive and enlivening.

Shierry Weber NicholSEN is a Seattle psychotherapist in private practice. Her *Love of Nature and the End of the World* (MIT Press, 2002) was reviewed in the spring 2003 *EAP*.

“Love must enter in”

In order to make buildings by unfolding—hence by structure-preserving transformations—it is necessary, truly, to pay attention to the wholeness of the world. This “paying attention to the wholeness” is essentially synonymous with love of life.

After all, the wholeness—that wholeness which exists around us at a given place and time—is indeed the *whole-ness*. Paying attention to the whole-ness means that a person is paying attention to the whole, to everything: to the life of water, other people, the thirst of a stranger, the stars in the black sky.

It means paying attention to the emptiness of the desert, to the passion of an old woman sitting on her doorstep, to one’s own passion, to the passions of the people all around, to the running of the water on the ground, to a banana skin on the ground, to the laughter of children, to the smells of dinner being cooked. It means loving the glistening white plaster on the wall, the subtle evening light. It means taking in the whole, enjoying it, seeing it all, bathing in it, *loving* it.

Of course, love in this sense does not enter in when nature blindly carries through its structure-preserving transformations. But *for a person*, doing a structure-preserving transformation means paying attention to all this, grasping it fully, taking it all in—loving it—and then extending it. For a person to become part of that wholeness, to extend it, love does—must—enter in.

—*The Nature of Order*, vol. 2, pp. 103-04.

A Goethean Study of Totnes' Town Center

Silke Schilling

Originally trained as a civil engineer, Schilling lives in Berlin and is a freelance consultant who focuses on holistic place reading and design. One of her research interests is a Goethean approach to place and place making, especially the question of how places can be healed.

She recently completed the master's program in holistic science at Schumacher College, which is located a short distance outside of Totnes, Devon, the English market town she investigates below. Her master's thesis focused on a place reading of two dramatically different environments—Siena, Italy, specifically, its Campo and Fonte Nuova, a well and communal laundry; and New York City, specifically, Times Square and 12-16 Grove Street, Greenwich Village.

The much-abbreviated essay presented here is part of a longer paper that Schilling wrote during her pre-masters study at Schumacher. *EAP* readers interested in her thesis or the longer version of the present essay should contact Schilling at: commonsense4cities@yahoo.co.uk. For more about Schilling's place research and consulting, go to: www.elementalplace.com.

All photographs are drawn from the collection of the Totnes Image Bank and are used with permission.
© 2006 Silke Schilling.

Southwestern England and Devon in particular have a unique character that distinguishes them from other English counties. One of Devon's most unique places is the market town of Totnes (pop. 8,200), whose easy-going atmosphere, historic buildings, and situation on the River Dart contribute to the town's special character (Barber 1996; Lane 1998).

I first became interested in Totnes' town center when, in 2004, a group of residents ran a campaign called 'Design Our Space' which was about a local council's plan to develop a site close to High Street, the town's main thoroughfare. The council was seeking to unite different functions such as more affordable housing and parking. Some Totnes' residents, however, did not entirely agree with the council and were given six months to develop alternatives.

Through this group, I became interested in Totnes' main street, which I immediately liked: interesting buildings and lots of people taking advantage of cafés, pubs, restaurants, book

stores, clothing shops, and the like.

As a civil engineer from Berlin, I had been involved in administrative approaches to roads as well as in the design and management of making designs come into place. Administrators usually ground their decisions in surveys, mapping, and economics. But what experiences do people have who walk, ride, and drive on High Street? How does one see the street, the buildings, the shops, and the people? What do we experience as the users? Do places evoke something that should be





considered in the design process?

In exploring these questions in regard to Totnes' town center, the method I used was Goethe's way of science—a holistic-intuitive method for a direct, thorough, and accurate assessment of phenomena that includes feelings as well as the full spectrum of sense perception (Bortoft 1996; Seamon & Zajonc 1998).

Most often, the Goethean method has been used to explore qualities of natural phenomena such as plants, animals, and landscapes (Colquhoun & Ewald 2002; Seamon & Zajonc 1998; Wemelsfelder 2001). Here, I use the approach for an assessment of the built environment (Day & Parnell 2003; Ferris 2004). I suggest that Goethe's participative, intuitive approach reveals something that goes beyond the conventional way of mapping and evaluating a cityscape [sidebar, p. 15].

First Impression

I begin my study on a Friday morning in the beginning of December. The sky is a bright blue. I start my walk at a roundabout connecting the city center with roads beyond. A considerable part of any motorized traffic arriving in and leaving Totnes has to pass through the roundabout, including public transport. Noise from the roundabout wells into Fore Street almost as far as the East Gate, which divides the town center into Fore and High Streets. This noise seems to affect my underlying feelings for my surroundings [see sidebar, p. 13].

Moving up Fore Street away from the roundabout, I feel squeezed to the edge of the pavement and to the walls of the buildings on the side where

I walk. There is a certain sense of coldness. Words that come to mind include "noise," "stench," "black," "cars," "buses," "lorries," "faceless entities," "buzzing," "screeching," "deafening," "scary." Despite the same intensity of ongoing activity as I walk farther up the street, an arch and arcades along Fore Street give me more a feeling of security.

Activity & Noise

I ascend the slight slope of Fore Street. Cars are everywhere: moving, accelerating, and parking. People are passing on both

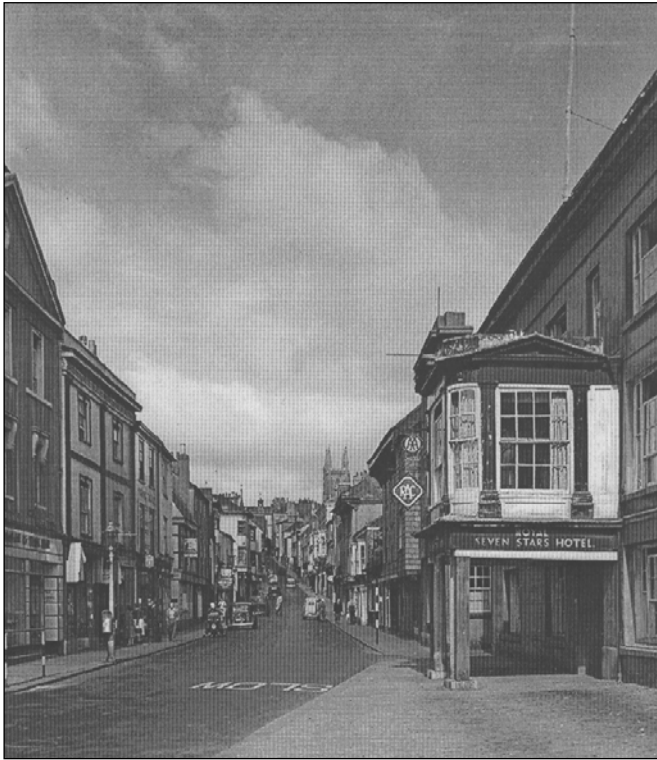
sides on the narrow sidewalks. Parents with prams try to avoid colliding with other pedestrians. In front of a cash machine, customers line up. Most doors of stores are open. Christmas colors are everywhere. People crowd into shops and onto the pavement, between parking and slowly moving cars. I feel caught between noise and activity.

Two- and three-storied buildings face both sides of the street. Their ground floor usually hosts a business—banks and bookstores, shops for sweets, vegetables, clothing, shoes, stationery, craft, art, drugs, organics, and fine food. Again there are cars and lorries. Stale smells emanate from the pavement and vehicle exhausts. This seems to be the rush hour for deliveries. I wonder where all the cars are going. Not all seem to stop and park. They just work their way through the most clogged artery of the town.

I see a woman I know and we chat. Other people stand in small groups and exchange a few words. I feel a sense of warmth. I ask my friend how long she has lived in Totnes. She says she came 17 years ago to study but then never left. It was "love at first sight."

She is one of many "outsiders" who make up a remarkable part of Totnes' population. She pushes her shopping cart over the curb because there is no space on the narrow pavement. A van approaches and the driver pays little attention, almost squeezing the cart between curb and van. Passers-by slide between us and the curb. It is difficult to continue conversation and we part.

I continue my walk. On the right side of the street, I find an island of calm in the flow of pe-



destrians. A gap between the buildings gives space for light, a small garden, one or two trees, and a patch of lawn. The name on the entrance door reads Presbytery. The low stone wall winds around two benches, the first I have seen so far.

I next approach King William, a hotel and pub. Then comes a flower shop with pots neatly piled on the pavement. I pass a corner with a bookshop. Here, the pavement offers slightly more space. There is a small green courtyard, surrounded by a low brick wall where one can easily sit. I rest on a bench shaded by overhanging conifers. Another tree stands leafless, a laurel grows at its foot. I look at a building on the other side of the street—a very old, half-timbered house, slightly lopsided.

Moving onto High Street

I pass through the East Gate arch, a structure that bridges the street and is also known as the clock tower, though it is not a tower in the typical sense. At the East Gate, the thoroughfare becomes High Street. Here, my earlier sense of oppression diffuses, replaced by a feeling of coziness. The street under the archway is even narrower; the sidewalk to the right practically does not exist. But the street feels much better from now on. I pass the language school. The placement of buildings is irregular, stairs lead up into stores, and columns border the pavement unevenly.

On the right side of the street, the churchyard of Saint Mary Church opens, built from large blocks of red sandstone, surrounded by grey stone tiled pathways, lawn, and people in conversation. High Street is much wider in front of the church, and double-parked cars occupy the space. In front of the entrance to Woolworth's, a cardboard Father Christmas advertises latest editions of Hollywood blockbusters on DVD.

I enter the market square. Friday and Saturday are market days in Totnes, and shoppers move among the colorful stalls displaying antiques, clothes, vegetables, and much more. Above the square, the box-shaped Civic Hall sits heavily against the sky. I pass by and walk along arcades to the intersection with Charles Road. Looking up, I notice the high vaulting of the Barrel House across from which is a news agent, antique dealer, and grocer.

A Shift in Mood

Beyond this intersection, I sense a sudden shift in feeling. The street narrows and then bends. I am now on "The Narrows." In the curve and beyond there are still small businesses but in between are interspersed private residences. The street becomes increasingly quiet and peaceful. The endless stream of traffic has faded as vehicles sporadically distribute themselves along two streets branching off from the Narrows at an intersection marked by a shop named "Indian Connection."

Continuing along the Narrows, I arrive at Rotherfold Square, an open space surrounded by ancient, two-storey houses. Beyond is the main traffic road—Western Bypass—which directs traffic around Totnes' center. My walk ends. As I return, I realize there is a remarkable number of small streets, thoroughways and footpaths branching off the main street, leading to pleasant spaces filled with backyard lawns and gardens full of flowers.

I stop at a tea salon and observe more closely the surrounding buildings. While I was walking, there was little opportunity to pause and look. The intensity of business and activity captured most of my attention. I now notice that the red-brick buildings housing the Arcturus bookshop and the King William Hotel are very old and handsome.

I leave the tea salon and walk to my bus stop. I notice that traffic has decreased. I look at my watch and am surprised it is now afternoon. Three

hours have passed but it seems only half that. I hear the shrieking of seagulls. A man playing a harmonica passes. The bus approaches and I get on. A military helicopter appears above and annihilates all other noise until the bus door closes behind me.

Impressions on Other Days

I continue to study Totnes' town center regularly. On one visit, a dazzling sunbeam catches me by surprise, and a sudden opening appears to the left. A five-step stone staircase leads to a tiny yard surrounded by a pale yellow wall. Grass pushes through the cobbles. On the far side an old, rickety bicycle leans against a leafless tree next to a high wooden gate leading to Gallery House, No. 10. A serious-looking man in a suit standing beneath the little slated roof over the house entrance stares at me.

From the direction of the square, I hear people shouting. I cannot make out if the noise is angry or happy, so I cross the street to find out. I sit on a bench next to an elevated flowerbed. A theatre group of young people with black and white painted faces leap about the pavement, but few passersby appear to notice.

A young couple takes turns standing behind a camera on a tripod, recording the actors. The unintelligible mix of running and shouting slowly turns into distinguishable phrases. I decide the troupe must be presenting a modern interpretation of some Shakespeare play.

A Friday morning. On bicycle I explore the lanes that lay behind the front row of houses on High Street. The pattern of the labyrinth on the east side of the street follows no recognizable logic. Several times I find myself at a dead end. Laundry on sagging lines restricts the view into balcony windows at the back of High Street's houses.

Eventually I find an alley that leads parallel from the Guildhall to the footpath of Saint Mary Church. I open a wrought-iron gate, and winding walls form the boundaries of a tiny alley. I cycle downhill on the steep incline.

At the corner of Fore Street and Station Road two men in black brassy suits smile, and one says, "behave." I realize they are policemen and that I am riding in the wrong direction on a one-way street. I smile and turn around. The street is relatively quiet, apart from the noise of a truck rattling over the

cobblestones. A large dog sits next to the bearded driver. The scent of incense wafts from the door of a crystal shop.

Imagining the Past

On an early Sunday morning, High Street is quiet at Station Road. A couple tightly wrapped in their coats strolls by the United Free Church. Two beggars sit on the bare pavement near the entrance to Somerfield supermarket. Street lights illuminate the buildings and shine on the cobblestones. Here the past seems to have been preserved, giving a hint of how the street might have looked like some four hundred years ago.

I let my thoughts wander. Before my eyes the street lights change their appearance, turning into gas lanterns, then they vanish entirely.

A night watchman with a torch in his hand stands at the corner. I hear a horse-drawn carriage coming from the East Gate. The wealthy merchant snoring in the backseat has just left a well-attended advent dinner given by the Mayor at the Guildhall.

The carriage had been waiting for him under the East Gate, when he staggered down the small stairs under the arch that descends from the footpath to the Guildhall toward High Street. His wife also in the carriage is feeling slightly nauseous. She is pregnant in the third month and would rather not have left her bed tonight.

The driver stops briefly at the corner, yielding to two obscure figures heading toward the open door of a pub. A beggar emerges a short way up the street. He grabs the horse's headgear, hoping to be given a penny. The driver demands that he let go, and the carriage continues its way towards the river.

A few hundred yards farther down Fore Street is the merchant's mansion where he lives and works. In the back is a herb garden, a stable, a chicken shed, an orchard, and a run for pigs. The merchant and his wife enter their home, while I continue my walk down to the river.

In the early morning, the buildings fade into mist, the cobbles disappear. Eventually there is not even a path anymore. I stand between high grass stalks, surrounded by shrubbery and pines. The light of the full moon is reflected off the waters of the river that has not yet been named. I slowly pivot and see the dark forest covering the



hill. Owls scream. I hear a faint howl gradually becoming stronger, coming toward me. I complete my turn and see that I am only a few hundred yards away from the river, yet I cannot reach it. The underbrush is a barricade. In the far distance, above the woods beyond the river, a grey streak dawns on the horizon.

More Imaginings

A Thursday night. A neighbor drops a friend and me at the traffic light where Western Bypass and Plymouth Road meet. We hurry to escape the cueing automobiles and enter Plymouth Road leading to the Narrows. The street is empty, illuminated by the entrance lights of houses. My friend says everything looks strange. She senses we may get lost. I have been near here some time ago and know we are not far from our destination. I take time out for imaging the past.

A goose runs across the soggy street toward the absolute darkness behind us, followed by a bare-footed little girl in a knee-long shabby dress, her shoulders covered with a thin brownish woolen scarf. She manages to catch the lead trailing from the goose's neck and scolds the bird for running away. Other people hurry past. Several carriages urge the passers-by to give way.

It has been raining the last few days, and the mud is churned up. We lift the hem of our wide skirts above the brim of our galoshes and walk cautiously to the corner where the cobblestones begin. Trying to avoid sinking into the mud, I can hardly breathe, my corset bound tight.

From the corner the walking becomes easier. We follow walkers ahead around the curve, and there we can see we have reached familiar ground. High Street stretches before our eyes a long way down to the river, illuminated by gas lanterns, coach lights, and candles behind windows. People turn their heads to see from where the violin and piano sounds arise.

We enter the corner house. Servants relieve us of our galoshes and gowns. We ascend the staircase and enter the ballroom.

A Shift in Conversation

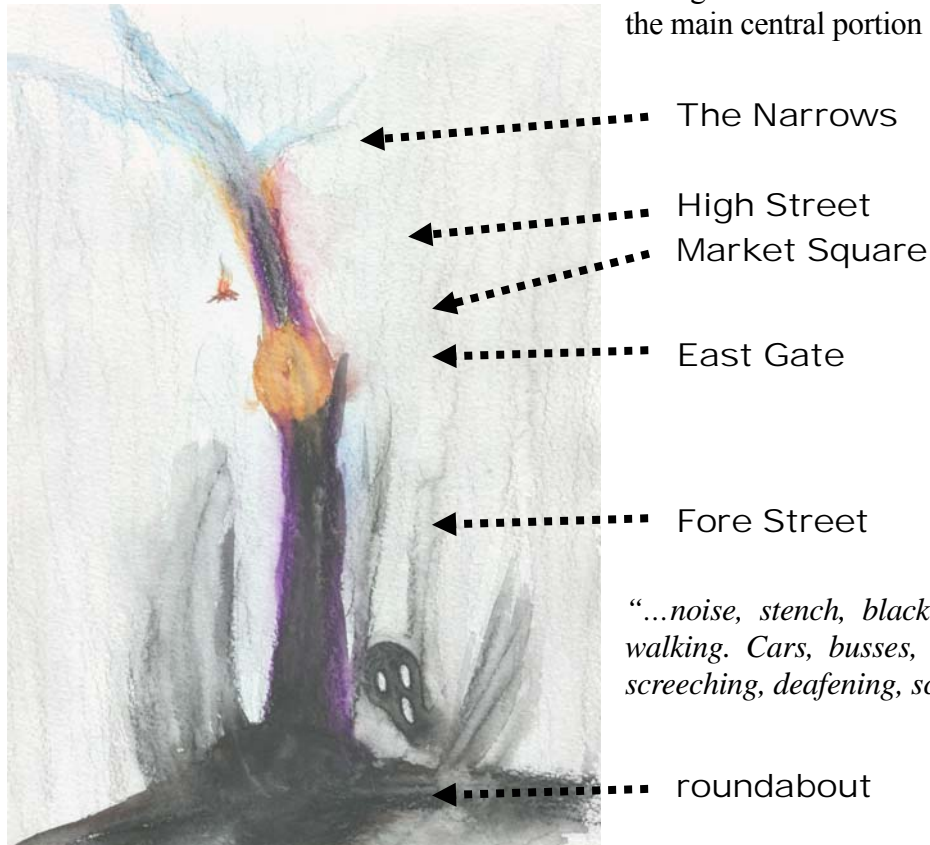
High Street goes on telling stories forever, and this seems one of my central findings—that *human activity is what makes a street*. At some point I came to give less attention to gathering these “street stories” and instead gave more attention to particular locales and things that I tried to understand better through drawing. These drawings became part of a communication with Totnes’ town center and part of the stories the place has to tell.

For example, one drawing [see page 1] presents a typical day on High Street, while the drawing, upper left, I made while sitting in High Street’s Bistro 67 on several occasions. I was struck by the way the facades of the Totnes Museum and an adjacent building interlock so closely. I realized that not only the facades do so, but also often the insides of the buildings. Many of the structures on High Street and Fore Street are so closely connected that one cannot say which walls or even rooms belong to what building. In short, borders are very fluid in Totnes.

Making a First Impression

The watercolor painting below, originally in color, was Schilling's effort through an artistic means to describe her first impression of Totnes' town center. As indicated by the arrows below, six place "parts" emphasized themselves: a roundabout, Fore Street, East Gate, Market Square, High Street, and the Narrows.

Color-wise, the lower portion of the town center is expressed largely in black (with some purple running along the upper edges of Fore Street nearest East Gate). East Gate becomes a kind of yellow-red "hub," with "wisps" of yellow and yellow-purple projecting from East Gate along High Street and then becoming light blue through the Narrows. Throughout Fore and High Streets, the main central portion for vehicles remains black.



"...noise, stench, black. No room for me. No room for walking. Cars, busses, lorries, faceless entities. Buzzing, screeching, deafening, scary."

Commerce vs. Transportation

One important conclusion of this study is that Totnes' High Street should be a place for pedestrians. Particularly annoying are the vehicles that use High Street as a short cut, even though officially the thoroughfare is for local access only. Instead of using the modern bypass provided, many drivers use High Street as a connection between Paignton and Kingsbridge—a route that may not even save them time, some critics say.

Over the three years I have been a regular visitor and resident in the area, I have learned that the effort to make High Street a pedestrian thoroughfare has been a recurring topic of concern on the part of residents, businesspeople, and council members. On one hand, there is considerable agreement that a pedestrian-only High Street would make users' experience more convenient and

comfortable. On the other hand, there is fear that local business might be adversely affected.

A central dilemma here is the conflict between car dependency and business size. Local businesspeople with their smaller stores often selling local products go hand in hand with pedestrians—users who typically have the time to browse, appreciate, converse, and haggle. The potential result is familiarity, trust, communication, diversity, and sustainability. The exact opposite of local shops and lively pedestrian street life is car dependency and corporate chains. Their mutual relationship is premised on such characteristics as speed, lack of time, globalization, product uniformity, buyer-seller anonymity, and producer-user separation.

My conclusion here is that a pedestrian-based town center—a comfortable street that invites users to look and linger—strengthens local businesses that in turn strengthen the town center.

High Street & Trade

As I just said, pedestrians and businesses are crucial to High Street's continuing success. In the broadest sense, High Street is about trade. Unlike modern commerce, Totnes' central market emanates a kind of veracity in that the market does not disguise its purpose. Market sellers are not employees of a company and do not trade on behalf of somebody else. They are entirely responsible for their commercial exchanges, so conversation and haggling are possible. In this way, commerce regains its socially connecting function—there is offered through place a relational situation that makes commercial exchange much more than simple buying and selling.

Shopping in a corporate chain like Woolworth's or Boots most typically involves anonymity. The regional shopping mall and High Street's market are colorful in different ways, but I would argue that the market offers and requires a greater degree of honesty and rightness. The local trader is a person many of the shoppers know, so they are better able to trust the quality of the product. In contrast, mall shoppers are typically not familiar with mall employees. There is much greater dependence on imposed regulations that guarantee the quality of products and services sold.

The features that make Totnes' town center unique are the diverse and concentrated presence of local businesses that allow for personal contact and "fair deals." This local presence distinguishes Totnes considerably from other small towns in the area, where corporate chains dominate the market. Local business presence is a quality that all communities should strive to preserve and further develop. The presence of many businesses potentially guarantees that each of those businesses will more likely flourish. Each business needs others nearby so that would-be shoppers have a wide range of shopping possibilities.

A Hopeful Vision

I've come to realize that the stories that I have watched and taken part in are about what Totnes as a place is and what it might become if the needs of people and place were better taken into account.

Totnes' High Street is a living center. The street is architecture, buildings and human movement in fluid change but, even more, the street is a fluid assembly of stories of the people who use the space, involved in an endless variety of possibilities.

The street has its own life. It changes historically, seasonally, weekly, and daily. People have constantly shaped and been shaped by the space since the first inhabitants came here in the late first millennium A.D. High Street is as old as the town itself, and it has been the living centre of Totnes from the early beginning.

At one point, Fore Street was a muddy path connecting people to the river as long as the town kept itself within its walls. Over the centuries, Totnes' population grew, and people extended thoroughfares and replaced buildings worn out or devastated by fires. New structures were almost always characterized by the fashionable style of the time, and not every building can be called a "spiritual" success. The variety in built structures, however, is similar to the variety of peoples' characters and ways of being. The fact that "everything has a place" can tell us a story about truth and deception. We can decide what we make of the situation and, if we want, we can change it.

I conclude with my hopeful vision of what High Street might eventually become.

The tarmac has been removed and curbs have vanished. For ease of movement, flagstones, rather than cobblestones, now cover the whole street between the walls of buildings. Without sidewalks, the street seems much wider now, offering more space for pedestrians and cyclists. I secure my bike in one of the bicycle parking facilities in a side alley. The green bicycle next to mine carries the inscription Devon Bike. If tourists spend their holidays in Devon without a car, they can borrow these bicycles for free from a local office funded by Devon hoteliers and the South-Hams Council.

I walk by the Lord Nelson Pub, a soulful old building snugly sitting between its neighbors, one of which is covered by scaffolding. Workers install wooden mullioned windows that mimic the old style but have double-glazing. The artificial tar slates of the pub's façade are gone.

Encountering an acquaintance, we stop to chat. We continue to talk and shift to a conveniently placed bench between two fruit trees at the entrance to the yard of St. Mary's Church. The

acquaintance has just come over from the nearby town of Paignton on the commuter shuttle. Since this service was established two years ago, the number of commuters has doubled, and far less cars clog Totnes' bypass.

The flagstones leave an open patch of earth around the tree trunks, which are surrounded by grass and dandelions. An elderly couple sits next to us watching a robin that peers down from an apple tree. A horse carriage laden with cardboard boxes hurries by since deliveries must be made before 10 a.m. The Somerfield supermarket has changed its appearance, getting light from a central glazed atrium beneath which several tropical water plant containers are situated—a sewage treatment facility not recognizable as such.

On my way back downhill, I take a quick look into the window of Bistro 67. A man in his forties sits at a table, a three-year-old, red haired girl on his lap. They laugh. He tries to eat a cheese baguette—a difficult feat, since his daughter is turning around and around, rocking back and forth on his legs. I smile. I have seen them before.

References

- Barber, Chris, 1996. *The Great Little Totnes Book*, Obelisk Publications, Totnes.
- Bortoft, Henry, 1996. *The Wholeness of Nature: Goethe's Way of Science*, Floris Books Edinburgh.
- Colquhoun, Margaret & Ewald, Axel, 2002. *New Eyes for Plants: A Workbook for Observing and Drawing Plants*, Hawthorn Press, Gloucestershire.
- Day, Christopher Day & Parnell, Rosie, 2003. *Consensus Design, Socially Inclusive Process*, Architectural Press, London.
- Ferris, Sean, 2004. *Goethean Observation of a Modern City Square*, unpublished essay.
- Lane, John, 1998. *In Praise of Devon: A Guide to its People, Places and Character*, Green Books, Dartington.
- Seamon, David & Zajonc, Arthur, eds., 1998. *Goethe's Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Nature*, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY.
- Wemelsfelder, Francoise, 2001. *Assessing the 'Whole Animal'*, Animal Biology Division, Scottish Agricultural College, Edinburgh.

Figures

- Page 8: High Street looking toward East Gate, before 1877. Buildings on the left burned sometime later; Saint Mary Church occupies their place today.
- Page 9: Fore Street and Station Road, around 1900.
- Page 10: Entrance to Fore Street, viewed from the Plains, around 1950.

What would change?

I consider cities to be natural phenomena, and a qualitative, descriptive approach to places should be valid. I wondered if a phenomenological assessment of the city could be complementary, or even an alternative to, the conventional, hierarchical planning process and to the way we evaluate and design our built environment, mostly in terms of economics and regulations, especially zoning and building codes.

What would change if the architect or urban planner used the chance to see a place with his or her own eyes and in depth? Or to talk with a community personally rather than to rely on aggregate surveys or land profiles? There is a huge difference between the objective appearance of a map or design versus its actual manifestation and experience as an everyday place for ordinary people....

I wondered if I could go to a place and read its parts in the particular way I am able to because of my unique talents and education? In terms of who I am and what I see and experience, can I learn what the whole is about?

—from Silke Schilling, “The Haunted City: Ms. Marvel’s Holistic Investigations,” master’s thesis, Schumacher College, Dartington, Devon, UK, 2005, pp. 24-25.