

Silke Schilling

**GOETHEAN PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO PLACE
– DEVELOPING AN INTEGRAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE BUILT
ENVIRONMENT**

Goethean science and art in place assessment and design

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Holistic Place Reading, Healing, Art and Design
Silke Schilling, Dipl.Ing., MSc

www.elementalplace.com ♦ mail@elementalplace.com



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GOETHEAN PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO PLACE – DEVELOPING AN INTEGRAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

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The paper explores the Goethean-phenomenological way of science, which unites science and art in holistic research. The experiential methodology of the German scientist and writer J.W. Goethe will be portrayed as complementary to conventional place assessment and as an entrance to the lesser-known territory of the human interior. The paper briefly introduces the key features of phenomenology as related to the Goethean approach, and the person and the scientific method of Goethe, exemplified on an actual case study of the Campo in Siena. Part of the exploration is the question of validity of subjective experience and how the Goethean methodology fulfils all criteria of 'good' science. It concludes with an overview on the actual effects with regard to place assessment, applicants' and researchers' ways of seeing, and prospects towards an integration of meaning and spirit/uality into research, design and individuals' lives.

PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Beyond Rational Perspectives of the Built Environment

Worldwide planning and design is generally carried out on the basis of geometry, statistics and economics, which is not necessarily wrong, however misses out on certain aspects. People live with these results. However, their daily life experiences can remain unreflected. It is suggested that planning and design need to be supported by researching the actual individual experiences of people through holistic-intuitive, qualitative methods of place assessment and including them into the design process. Human consciousness and behaviour affect the appearance and state of our environment, and those in turn affect our physical and mental health. Hence, good design and well being are closely related, and our consciousness and behaviour have an impact on ourselves.

Holistic Assessment and Design

In various cultures around the world, holistic-intuitive ways of place assessment and place making have been part of life for a long time. Today, the general interest in a more holistic approach to planning and design seems to be on the rise. A number of individuals as well as institutions and organisations, often with a concern for environmentally sound design, or an anthroposophical background have begun to acknowledge the meaning and value of design. Form, colour and the materials by which we are surrounded when learning, working, recovering or recuperating from illness can be considered highly influential on human physical, psychological and spiritual well being. The Chinese tradition of feng shui (the pattern of wind and water), the Taoist art and science of living in harmony with the environment) has become known across Europe during the last few decades, and in some areas of place design it has been applied very successfully. At the same time, the ancient art of geomancy, which basically means reading the signs straight from the earth, is being rediscovered. Among other techniques, it can re-open options for place healing, if used appropriately. Shamanic rituals - as rooted in indigenous cultures - of calling on the spirits of places, are yet to become more popular.

The Phenomenological Approach to Place

There are great differences between a geometric plan and the dynamics of life, between a blueprint and the in situ reality. The map is not the city: it just gives a flat image of a three-dimensional space that is vibrant with life, full of movement and



change, numerous visual and auditory impressions, smells, events, people, buildings, cars, trees. The situation constantly varies between day and night, as well as between the seasons. None of those can be exactly mirrored by numbers and statistics. An example: Imagine a four-lane road in a city and a holiday log house near a nature reserve, both at five o'clock in the morning. In the city, traffic starts; in the nature reserve, the morning birdsong begins. Noise measurements at both locations result equally in a value of 55dB (A). We consider the measurement with a technical device objective and independent. However, in what ways do we – the people living in the houses near the sources – register these sounds individually and immediately? Perhaps we call them both *loud*, but when we listen closely, there are more qualities in these different sounds. We might call the sounds of the streets a *noise* and the birdsong a *concert*. Direct perception tells us something other than the objective measurement. Neither is wrong, but the direct encounter from the perspective of the 'I' includes how we experience those sounds. We also call that subjective, though - as we can see - subjectivity seems justified. The subjective experience of many people put together then becomes an inter-subjective perspective. Inter-subjectivity is about consensus and the justification and truth of the full spectrum of human perception rather than views and opinions, or like and dislike.

Characteristics of Phenomenology as Related to the Goethean Method

We describe things and events that we feel are breathtaking, fantastic, wonderful and unbelievable with the adjective phenomenal. We call buildings and natural occurrences, as well as people with extraordinary or supernatural gifts, phenomena. In some ways phenomenology is about the extraordinary, but we are asked to see the unique in *all* things; the things of everyday life are each unique and full of wonder. Phenomena are all things, events, experiences which we humans experience, live, see, feel and notice in our everyday world, directly and unfiltered, everything we choose to pay attention to: with our own instruments of cognition, our five senses, our intuition, all of our body as a fantastic universal organ of perception – instruments which can gather far more information than we are usually aware of.

Phenomenology - as a *science of beginnings* - is the study of things and appearances, how they present themselves to our conscious experience, and the study of their meanings for us as humans. It is a way of seeing that makes our personal human experience, everything that is offered to our senses the basis for exploring phenomena, generating knowledge, making sense of them, and understanding their inherent meaning. Out of the sum total of experience, living, seeing, perceiving with our senses and intuition, the phenomenological approach strives to filter out the essential, the important issues, the *essence*, the core of what was sensed there and then. Equally important is the immediate, direct, experiential way we humans consciously realise phenomena. Meaning arises out of the encounter between phenomena and consciousness; without this relationship, things “make no sense”. Hence, it is not only an approach to philosophy and science, but also to the exploration of the whole spectrum of human experience.

Phenomenology is a qualitative method of inquiry and the core feature is the *description* of the qualities of the phenomena, not their evaluation based on the explanation of cause effect chains or purpose. The description is the path, not the result of the inquiry.

In the past two decades phenomenological methods have been developed and applied to fields such as physics, biology and chemistry, arts, ethics, philosophy, environment behaviour research, and architecture.

THE GOETHEAN WAY – THE ART OF SCIENCE

The German writer and scientist J.W. v. Goethe's way of science draws on holistic-intuitive and qualitative methods, which feature basic parallels to phenomenology as described above, although the term only came into use roughly a



century after his lifetime. His combined scientific and artistic approach as a path to understanding is, however, unique.

The Poet and the Scientist

J. W. v. Goethe (1749-1832) is widely known as the most important German poet. In Germany we learn about his poems and study his biography; we are told about his lovers, his friends, and the people he worked with. His plays – the most important being surely *Faust* – are continuously being freshly put on stage. About his other facets – his giant work and great insights in the scientific field – we learn very little. Some of us may be aware of his development of the theory of colour. Some might be familiar with the work of Rudolph Steiner – the founder of anthroposophy and the Steiner School – who extensively drew on Goethe's research. During his lifetime, the esteemed artist Goethe was not widely acknowledged as a scientist. One of the reasons might lie in his critique on Sir Isaac Newton (1643-1727) and his scientific methods and results, for example in the field of optics, light and colour. Goethe's research resulted in different outcomes; however Newton's science had already become mainstream. Consequently, the scientific establishment questioned Goethe's findings in other fields as well. Additionally, in the 18th-century the perception of science and art as a unity – still prevailing during the Renaissance and exemplified by the complete work of Leonardo da Vinci – had already faded.

Unity of Science and Art

Goethe worked extensively in the fields of botany, zoology, geology, and meteorology, as well as optics and theory of colour. He also did research in history, arts history and architecture. In addition, he was a supporter of the arts, even if sometimes a harsh critic. According to the wishes of his father, he graduated in law and received a doctorate. At an early age, he became teacher and adviser to the Duke of Weimar, and took a variety of leading positions in Weimar's administration. His work in science and art was done directly in the centre of his life. Beside his writing, he was interested in painting and music, however he considered poetry his best talent. Goethe clearly considered science and art a unity. His in-depth scientific study of phenomena was complemented by the use of art as a way of knowing - an entrance to intuitive knowledge of the qualities of phenomena, a doorway to the interior. He thus combined objective and subjective methods of research and gained a more holistic understanding. This, for instance, becomes apparent in his *Faust*, which features many scientific, and philosophical issues, as well as in his scientific scripts: those are distinguished by remarkably poetic language, complemented by many poems and numerous beautiful and exact drawings. Goethe is also said to have explored the qualities of space by playing music and dancing with outstretched hands along the walls and across the room.

Science and the Context

One of J.W. v. Goethe's most important contributions is widely seen to be his research in the field of epistemology itself. He put high emphasis on the philosophical, historical and societal background of the scientist; he contemplated ethics in science, exactitude and depth of scientific work, the influence of the context of the experiment, and illuminated the part of institutions. Goethe saw science as a process, which depends on the researcher's motives and attitude towards scientific work, previous experiences in life, society and community, and the larger context in general. Hence cognition is also a process of human society, never finished and static, never absolute and never objective. We see what we are; our point of view determines our view. Interestingly, new sciences such as quantum physics have come to similar conclusions about the relationship between the observer and the set up of the experiment, and the result of the observation of phenomena.



Pure Experience

Goethe was – in science as in art – an exact observer. He refused presumptions, hasty conclusions and theoretical edifices. He did not like hypotheses and subsequent search for proof of the same. He preferred an uninfluenced viewpoint, and looked at things from a young child's perspective that does not know anything and still has to learn and realize *everything* for the first time.

One of Goethe's special characteristics is the focus on remaining with the phenomenon throughout the whole process of a study. Pure experience - studying phenomena closely, exactly and in all their different facets, over and over again and in very personal direct contact, is the key to understanding the *pure phenomenon*. The *Ur-Phenomenon*¹ - the essential meaning - cannot be recognised in a single step, it appears in the course of going through a whole process. It then appears in its own context, those natural circumstances that are essential features of the phenomenon. The question of concepts, concomitant circumstances or ideal states that deliberately neglect natural conditions will be entirely avoided.

Concept and Theory

Goethe's distance from imposed concepts does not mean that he refused theories; he just had a more original perception of what a theory was. The word *theory* comes from Greek "theoria" which means 'to behold'. He made the *beholding* of the phenomena a central stage of their investigation; *beholding* means staying with the phenomenon in a direct encounter throughout the entire study, as well as holding it in mind, envisioning it. The outer object and the inner subject form an undividable unity. In fact there is no such thing as an object anymore; it is a subject. In that instance, the phenomenon becomes its own theory, one's experience of it becomes true theory, and those two are one and the same. This is what is meant by coming to a true understanding, to a theory that originates in the experience with the phenomenon rather than pre-forming a fast concept, a box of thought into which we try to squeeze the object of our investigation.

Developing Awareness

Goethe put strong demands on the training and education of the scientist's full range of perceptual skills. Naturally given powers are to be developed, both the outer senses and the intellect *and* the *inner*, the imaginative and intuitive skills. He considered working on one's own growth and change, and expanding consciousness a life-long process. On the other hand, understanding is an iterative process; thus he tended to re-search previously researched subjects at later stages of his life from a different perspective, which deepened his understanding and helped him abandon the outdated. He appreciated group work and co-operation, and considered criticism, discussion, and consensus useful and indispensable parts of scientific work.

THE ROUGH GUIDE TO THE GOETHEAN METHOD

The Goethean method as described below is the result of a number of outlines of different people – among others; the list includes Rudolf Steiner, Jochen Bockemühl, Christopher Day and Nigel Hoffman, as well as it embraces my own experiences and work with participants. Goethe himself certainly would not have advised us to use a step-by-step manual, however it is widely perceived that these steps roughly describe what he did, and how he came to his scientific insights. I would like to give an overview of the stages of a study and how, based on my experience, they relate to an encounter with a place. I would like to avoid the term

¹ The essence and the Ur-Phenomenon: Here, the essence is the attribute or the set of core features, which make a phenomenon what it fundamentally is. Essence is also the continuous being and existence as a process in time and in its multiple forms in different contexts. In metaphysics this essence is often synonymous with soul or spirit. Goethe coined the term ur-phenomenon (ur-: primordial, basic, elemental, origin, core, essence).



Goethean *observations*, as it is occasionally used. Even though the beginning of a study might be happening in an observer-mode, however we will soon become participants in an encounter with the phenomenon.

The description is illustrated by images taken from Goethean Studies in Siena, A study of the Piazza del Campo. The image of the plant is part of a study of the Hazelnut (stages in time).

First Impression

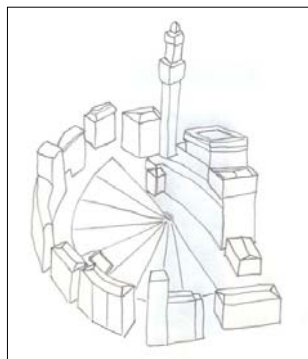
The first encounter with a phenomenon is often about a kind of gut feeling; sometimes it is called instinctive. It can be a mixture of instinct, superficial perception, and a first glimpse of an immediate intuitive knowledge. It is vague, but we might remember it later, and notice how close we were to the final result as it reveals itself over time. The first impression can strongly influence the further course of our relationship. In that, there is no real difference between meeting a place, a person or any other phenomenon.



The feeling that comes up in the first encounter with a phenomenon should be expressed in single words or short phrases that solely serve to describe, such as ‘warm’, ‘dark’, ‘happy’, or ‘blue’. Comparisons to what we already know from somewhere else, as well as any judgements are to be avoided; these would merely obstruct our openness for what the place has to share. Sometimes the phenomenon might call forth nouns such as ‘serenity’, ‘horror’, ‘wonder’ or others. Our impressions can also be expressed in a painting, a *Soul Mood Picture*, using colours that match the feelings that we have. I believe sometimes we might even have no words for what we feel; making an image makes them visible in a very direct way. The way I do it is just to open the palette and make my hand choose the colours, rather than my mind. The same happens with what actually appears on paper: the stroke with the brush is done before thinking about it.

Exact Sense Perception

The *Exact Sense Perception*, as the title suggests, makes use of *all* the senses, as there are sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. By using the complete spectrum of the senses we try to capture as much as we can the exterior details and facts, and we describe as much as possible what we get with all the senses. This is the stage where we go into the parts, gather information, and look primarily from the outside at the surface of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, this way of looking at the phenomenon is different from the approach we use in rational-analytical assessment: we might use quantitative methods such as counting and measuring, as well as verbal, and even technical descriptions up to a point. But to a far greater extent we pay attention to and describe the qualitative properties of the phenomenon, the visual aspects such as colour, shape, details, and the whole spectrum of auditory, olfactory, tactile and gustatory stimulation. The utmost importance lies in an accurate description of what we perceive with our senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch and even taste. It can be an important part of the sensual investigation to eat the fruit of a plant, to taste the leaves or a petal of a flower, to feel how it feels to the fingertips and to the tongue. As far as designed spaces, i.e. buildings, squares or streets are concerned, I give a description of the appearance, I can also measure length, width, height, and I look at numbers and forms of windows, and wall materials; I describe the properties as to the architectural period, colours, and so forth. I could sit down on the floor of a square, and touch the walls of a building. The description includes the conditions and composition of landscape, flora and fauna as far as possible, as well as conditions of light and shadow. At this stage, I sometimes find drawing maps and taking some photographs helpful. The appearance and behaviour of the people, and, if at all possible, their statements about how they feel in a particular place should become part of the study. I tend to describe my impressions mostly in written words. Occasionally, I also begin to do sketches. Since it is concerned primarily with the physical reality of phenomena, the *Exact Sense Perception* has a very grounding quality;





sometimes it might prove useful to return to it at later stages of the perceptual process that are of a different quality.

Exact Sensorial Imagination

We begin to enter a different, a participative mode of perception. We start to engage into a closer relationship with the phenomenon. Here we try to fathom the phenomenon in its fluidity, its coming-into-being, its history, existence and change over time. We recognise the phenomenon as a dynamic process rather than a static object, and as a centre in its wider field, which can have a variety of appearances. Nothing is static, and nothing merely exists on its own. Everything exists also in time, which means it might change; and everything exists in connection to the surrounding, which means its appearances can differ depending on the context. Hence we have to explore how the phenomenon looks like at different stages of its existence from birth to death and how transitions occur. We also have to pay attention to the context. For that, we begin to use our imagination. This is a process that requires and at the same time produces a deepening of a relationship with the phenomenon.



We visualise the full circles of life, which a phenomenon experiences; and we pay attention to the context and the cycles in which it is embedded. For example, a plant is not only the plant how we perceive it on the day of our observation. This is just its expression at a certain point in a particular moment and location. This plant is a being in time; it emerges from a bud, which has come out of a sprout out of pollen that came from a plant, and so forth. The plant is present in all the stages, and all the stages are present in one single plant, as they are in all plants.

In case of place or building we might imagine how phenomenon emerged in the past, how the place might have been when it was a landscape without human impact, what was the intention of the builders, the purpose of the object, and what was its factual use or different uses in different times, how the substance changed or was changed over time, in order to see the phenomenon as a whole. Another movement in time is the change depending on the time of the day, and over the seasons. I also gather images and experiences from people moving in the space, little stories from the history of the place. Research in archives or libraries, if available, can support this process; or it can work the other way round, and prove our imaginations right. I look at the place as a holon within a cityscape or a landscape, a centre within a greater continuum, and at the people as part of the living community of the earth.

The first half of our study is complete. Now we have all the information - many facts and facets of the phenomenon in both space and time: we have most of what we need. We also have begun to use our imagination. But the details are still parts, are bits of a puzzle. The information intake has to be digested; the mosaic has yet to form. We need to make the puzzle a picture, or rather let pieces fall into place; we need to let the phenomenon be the theory.

Seeing in Beholding

The Greek term 'theory' means 'to behold'. To make our experience true theory, to deeply understand, to make sense of the facts we hold the phenomenon in our mind 'as well as in the external world'. We envision it repeatedly, and we let our subconscious work. The study changes focus from exterior to interior and from appearance towards meaning. *Seeing in Beholding* can be interpreted as a contemplative inquiry.

In this stage we have stopped imposing our preconceptions on the phenomenon; we have ceased judging. We allow for absolute openness as to what the phenomenon itself reveals. We do not impose thought constructs, ideas, judgements or expectations. Preferably empty-minded, we enter the dimension of the phenomenon. We get closer and deepen the relationship with the phenomenon to an advanced stage. Returning to my previous comparison to meeting people: we started off by small talking and are now at a point of being friends when most of the



information on the person has been shared, and now we begin to be able to have deeper conversations, share joy and pain, become able to be quiet with each other. Most phenomena cannot talk verbally. Hence entering the dimension of the phenomenon means that we have to find an appropriate means of communication.



This can be again art as a different way of knowing that helps us enter the non-objective, intuitive mode of perception. Art can support us to ‘get the mind out of the way’. Any kind of artistic expression can do it: drawing, painting, poetry, music, dance or storytelling in order inspire the phenomenon with our artistic cognition, and to be inspired to call forth and to perceive the true nature of the phenomenon. Beside that I feel that it is also a way of expressing my reverence towards the phenomenon.

Seeing in Beholding is a process, not a stage with exactly defined beginning and end. It can take time. It takes patience and trust. We cannot force intuition into a certain speed. Meaning will reveal itself when the time is right. We have to accept what is given; the process and the result are unpredictable.

Becoming One with the Phenomenon

The openness we have built up over the previous stages can now allow for the change into the intuitive mode of consciousness, for going deeply into the phenomenon (rather than beyond), for deep insights about the archetypal nature of the phenomenon, its *Wesen* or essence, its potentials. We can experience a connection, a relationship *in* the phenomenon which Goethe called *das Gesetz* (the law). And we can experience the unity of and with the phenomenon, a unity that is not evident to sensory experience, feeling or thought, because it is beyond all of those.

The phenomenon reveals itself. The recognition of meaning can result in awe and wonder for the phenomenon. This moment, this flash of insight is hard to miss; you will know when you are there. It is the moment of knowing with your heart. It often goes along with a significant bodily sensation. Depending on the depth of the engagement, and the personal ability to let go of the influences of ones mind *Becoming One with the Phenomenon* can become truly a moment of connecting with the universe, a moment of knowing to the core that everything is interdependently connected, rather of merely believing it with our mind. It then does not make any difference if the partner of the revelation, the being that we connect with is a plant, a person or a place. In that stage lies the chance that the phrase *Being One*, the concept of *Oneness*, becomes a Reality far beyond words. The landscape, the city, the place can turn into a gate to the interior of our own soul and to the divine.



I am Il Campo of Siena.

I am the city.

I am you.

These are states beyond description. They need to be experienced. Until then these words remain words.

This outline of the Goethean method is not a fixed template. As to my own studies, I need to admit that I never manage to firmly stick to the guide. If you use it as your manual that is fine but you have to be aware that it might alter according to who you are, and what the phenomenon you study is and asks for. The process of holistic/intuitive/heart-centred cognition is unpredictable. But the Goethean way of science can make science as well as place assessment an adventure.

THE VALIDITY OF THE SUBJECTIVE

I have often been faced with the question if the results of these studies were valid in terms of that they can be proven. After several discussions I realized that we tried to prove those parts of the holistic approach which were results in the *qualitative-subjective* area in terms of their *quantitative-objective* validity. This, of course, did not work. It cannot be done, because this is a contradiction in terms, and it is an



attempt to reduce interiors to their surface appearances. Besides, it might be useful to point out that the possibility of objectivity itself can and has been doubted, partly because the subject who more or less arbitrarily chooses what to look at and how to look at it, can only see what their own and the level of their cultural background's collective consciousness allow them to see (Goethe, *Scientific Studies*; Bortoft, 1996; Wilber, 2000). It has been suggested that the holistic-intuitive approach is scientifically valid in that it conforms to the generally applied criteria of scientific inquiry. Those have been outlined, for instance, by Ken Wilber (Wilber, 2000). The following paragraph is based to his work.

The Criteria of 'Good' Science

Science cannot be defined by saying that it is exclusively based on empirical research through the senses and their extensions (i.e. measurements of certain devices). Mathematics, the basic tool of any 'hard' science, is an interior reality; not an exterior reality, but a tool to describe the exterior; it is a map, not the territory. Scientific knowledge is generally grounded in an attitude of honesty, in collaborative inquiry, and in evidence – i.e. experiments, which are supposed to be repeatable and, under the same conditions, generate the same results. There is no differentiation between the so-called hard sciences, i.e. physics or chemistry and the human sciences such as psychology or the cognitive sciences. Scientific inquiry is defined by three factors:

1. *A practical injunction or exemplar.* a subject comes up; a question is being asked. One way or another, we need to somehow engage with the subject: through experiment, injunction, or a social practice, to find out.

2. *An apprehension, illumination, or experience.* In the practical engagement with the world, a set of experiences will occur, that is, out of the contact with the subject of the inquiry, data are generated: physical data from physical experiences, mental data from mental experiences or spiritual data from spiritual experiences. All good science is based on data, or experiential evidence. (The meaning of *Datum* is *immediate experience*, as Wilber cites William James)

3. *Communal checking (Either rejection or confirmation)* The generated outcomes have to be reviewed, checked, and rejected or confirmed by other researchers, i.e. a group of peers, which performs or has performed the experiment/injunction under the same conditions as the original. In the case of the repeatability of the outcome the validity is confirmed, otherwise it is falsified.

In most cases, this method leads to reliable knowledge, at least temporarily.

The Goethean method includes the exterior/objective domain of phenomena (as in the Exact Sense Perception) but continues towards a qualitative-intuitive research (throughout all stages), which also includes the interior/subjective domain. In the search for truth, it so goes beyond the mere objective research, experience, and generation of data, i.e. evidence, as Bortoft (Bortoft, 1996) has extendedly examined and illuminated. Beyond that, Goethe himself was very firm on the subject of peer group verification of scientific knowledge.

The Interior Data

However, the point in question here remains the reliability, validity, and truth of the whole range of events and visions, which emerge on the interior plane during the contemplative part of the inquiry. As group studies have shown, those can be of quite a wide variety, in spite of the same conditions which all participants shared. On closer consideration there are, often but not always, common features as to their essential meaning.

'...whereas surfaces or exteriors can be seen, interiors must be interpreted.'
(Wilber, 1995, 2000)

On the subject of experiences within the interior domain, Ken Wilber suggests: if one immerses oneself into the practice of contemplative inquiry, sooner or later one arrives at the experience of events and visions within the interior domain: same conditions, same result. As meditators throughout cultures, religious traditions and



history have widely confirmed, after an extended practice of contemplation the experience of unity or oneness (whether the contemplated subject is a physical, mental or spiritual phenomenon) will occur, provided a similar level of consciousness development has been reached, that is the researchers share the same conditions in their experiments (Wilber, 2000).

As to the variety of apparently different images, events, and visions, researchers in the field of geomancy (geomancy being the interpretation of signs in the landscape; it looks into the deeper meaning of place) such as Marko Pogacnik suggest that the researcher can only see those layers of meaning in the phenomenon with which s/he resonates, that is, this layer already is present in her or his consciousness. So it can be explained that some people have visions about a past memory of, for instance, thirty years back in the history of the place, and others connect to a deeper meaning that was imprinted into the memory of the place some 3000 years back in time. Some connect to layers of trauma, some to more positive layers.

Both Wilber (2000) and Pogacnik (1996) address the subject of sincerity of participants in the acquisition and interpretation of knowledge. Not every participant is truthful in their statements about their experiences. There remains a slight risk that somebody is lying (for whatever personal or psychological reason). Occasionally the person is not even aware of this fact because s/he might also be a victim of self-deception. In that regard, the group work is of the essence. A way of checking the interior experiences can be the visions, images, or events themselves and how they make sense with regard to the phenomenon, the group experience, and the complete context of the holistic-intuitive study. The interior plane is a new territory for many participants, and group sharing can also serve to give reassurance as to that people are not fantasizing.

Symbolism in the Intuitive Perception of Place

The verification and interpretation of the group experience can be supported by symbols as one of the languages that the researcher can encounter in the interior communication with place. Obviously, those can speak of the imprinted memories, the Genius Loci, the spirit of place. They also can be an entrance to another dimension of the phenomenon and ourselves.



On symbolism I would like to give a brief summary drawn from René Guenon's extended research and study of the subject: symbols represent more or less completely or profoundly a truth that they stand for. The most common and conscious symbols might be words; it is said, 'In the beginning was the word'. Symbols are thought, expressed in forms, and there is a harmony between the sign and the signified. The subject of symbolism is a higher order of reality; the symbol is of a lower order than its subject. Symbolism is a means of raising ourselves to the knowledge of the divine truth. It can serve as a point of departure for meditation (Guenon, 1962).

As a brief example, I would like to mention here the symbols that emerged before my inner eye during the contemplative encounters with the Campo in Siena: the pearl, the shell and the pentagram, each of which in one way or another conforms to the simultaneously received insights on the Campo and Siena as a whole, and thus can be said to confirm those. They also led to a deeper understanding of the place.

EFFECTS ON PEOPLE, PLACE AND RESEARCHER

Working with the Goethean holistic-intuitive method has had effects on several levels:

1. Researcher and participants gain an in-depth understanding of the place which further deepens their relationship to the place, i.e. environment, landscape, or cityscape, and nature as whole.



2. Practicing a different way of perception can lead participants and researcher towards a new, deeper, wider, higher level of consciousness.

That means, we learn about ourselves as much as we learn about the subject of our study.

I have worked with people of a variety of backgrounds: students, ecologists, artists, community activists, psychologists, designers, and housewives. Generally, it can be noted that people involved in holistic-intuitive approaches to place (or any other phenomenon) report a change of perspective: the process of turning from an observer into a participant of an interactive communication with place is often deeply felt. Participants learn to pay more attention to the full range of their senses rather than primarily to the visual; and previously unconscious judgements that have been obstructing the vision begin to come to light. Studies mostly result in a higher awareness for the conditions and needs of places, a rising feeling of responsibility and commitment as well as a growing ability and desire to take the right action. As, for instance, architects have repeatedly reported (Alexander, 2002; Day, 2003), the key function of architects and planners might move from being experts of 'top-down' design towards being facilitators of consensus processes. Community members tend to take more care of a surrounding created with their participation. Community awareness can rise. Changing perspective changes people. Reverence towards place, nature and people and the built environment can arise. As for myself, along with many other people, working with the Goethean method opened a door from the rational domain into the intuitive, a doorway to personal growth and expansion of consciousness.

Places have more to transmit than we generally consciously notice. Places have memories, and Genius Loci: a place-specific essential meaning, spirit and soul. Some places turn out to be suitable to build on, while the situation of others might ask for reconsideration. Good design, which responds to the demands of place, nature, earth, and people, arises out of communication. It then is original, place-specific and diverse, enduring and probably environmentally sound, which may be more economic in the long term. The return of local differences and authenticity could perhaps reverse the trend towards global uniformity. Beyond the assessment of place, the Goethean method can also inform the design process.

The unexpected effects of a study of Potsdamer Platz

Berlin's new centre Potsdamer Platz, which also was the pre-world war II centre of Berlin, had in 1961 been made a dead zone, fenced by the two-layered wall area that divided East and West Berlin. The group of four people began the study under the general judgement that the new design it is not a very people-friendly solution; we wanted to know what the place is about, and what could be suggested to make it better. In the course of the study, the three participants and I arrived at a much more profound level of knowledge about this place and its depths of meaning. Our judgement had to be abandoned in favour of no judgement at all. Beyond a number of different layers, I experienced Potsdamer Platz as synonymous for the division of Berlin. The deeply felt rift between the two parts of the city and all its inhabitants went right through my whole being, a sensation felt in my body and soul, a heart-breaking misery. I then had a vision of Berlin as a whole, a being made of all its single places and people. For the first time in my life I felt a part of the Berlin city organism rather than a resident of merely my neighbourhood (the latter being a feeling that Berlin's people are almost famous for). The rift through my heart, body and soul, which was the rift that has been going through the city, began to heal and I realized how it had influenced the course of my life in this city and the country where I had grown up. I also realized that this rift must have gone through each single one of us. This experience led to reconciliation on several levels: with Potsdamer Platz, with Berlin, with its people, as well as with some aspects of myself.



CONCLUSION

After an extended practice of deep engagement with place, other doors have opened, for instance towards visionary arts and the study and development of healing designs. Additionally, places and the layers that I resonate with continue to teach me what they are and who we are as human beings. I would like to conclude this exploration with the words of Aldous Huxley from his PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY which describe best the option to find an entrance to a greater Reality through any place:

Every thing, event or thought is a point of intersection between creature and Creator, between a more or less distant manifestation of God and a ray, so to speak, of the unmanifest Godhead; every thing, event or thought can therefore be made the doorway through which a soul may pass out of time into eternity.

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