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Vol. 24, No. 2, Spring 2013 (includes "items of interest," and works related, and tributes, to Henri Bortoft).

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# Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology

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## Henri Bortoft (1938–2012)

We devote much of this issue to physicist, philosopher, and science educator **Henri Bortoft**, who died on December 29, 2012, at his home in England. He was 73 years old. Throughout the years, we have covered Bortoft's work in *EAP* because it speaks to a particular mode of environmental encounter that might be called a "phenomenology of the natural world." His best known writing is the influential *Wholeness of Nature*, published in 1996. His last work, released shortly before his death, is *Taking Appearance Seriously* (see *EAP*, winter 2013).

In the early 1960s, Bortoft worked with British philosopher **J. G. Bennett** on the development of "systematics"—a method of encountering and understanding whereby one might explore the various aspects of a phenomenon through the qualitative significance of number. Doing his doctoral research, Bortoft worked with British physicist **David Bohm** to consider the relationship between quantum mechanics and an understanding of wholeness.

In later professional life, Bortoft was invited by biologist **Brian Goodwin** to teach in the innovative graduate program in holistic science at Schumacher College, in Totnes, UK. There and elsewhere, many students were deeply touched by Bortoft's singular instructional style whereby he introduced the phenomenological approach phenomenologically.

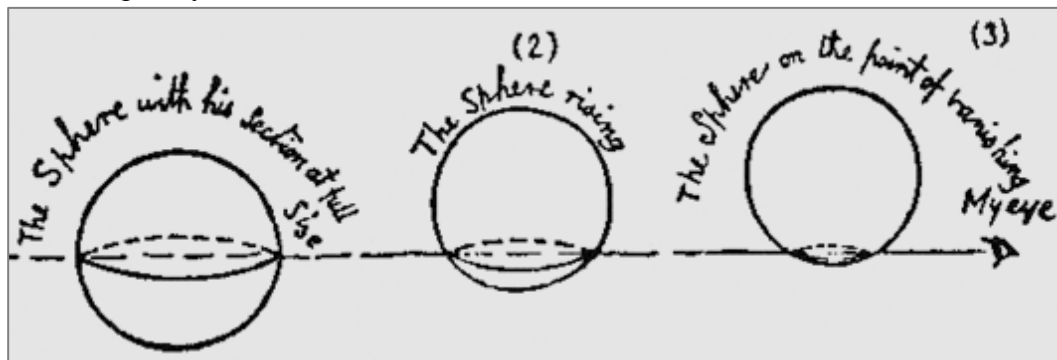
Bortoft's work is central to *EAP* because he presents an empathetic way of encountering phenomena whereby they "reveal" themselves in an accurate and comprehensive way. One of his most important models for seeing and understanding was Goethe's

way of science, which Bortoft recast as a "phenomenology and hermeneutics of nature." He would regularly repeat Goethe's dictum, "One instance is often worth a thousand, bearing all within itself."

In this issue of *EAP*, we include two tributes—the first by *EAP* Editor **David Seamon**, who studied with Bortoft in the early 1970s; the second, by philosopher **Ingrid Leman Stefanovic**, who has discussed Bortoft's work in articles and books. We also reprint two of Bortoft's writings: first, a portion of his 1971 article on authentic wholeness; and, second, a 2011 article Bortoft wrote for the *Journal of Holistic Science*, published by Schumacher College and Earthscan. We thank his widow, **Jackie Bortoft**, for allowing us to include this work here.

Also in this issue is an update from Torontoian **Robert Fabian**, who describes his recent citizen involvement with development along downtown Toronto's Yonge Street. We end with a cartoon envisioned by designer **J. Kevin Byrne**.

Below: A drawing from **Edwin Abbott Abbott's** 1884 *Flatland*—one of Henri Bortoft's favorite examples to illustrate that the world we take for granted may have unsuspected, new aspects. "Flatland" refers to an imaginary world of two dimensions inhabited by various geometric creatures like squares and hexagons. An important part of the story is the appearance of a "Sphere" from the realm of three dimensions, who the Flatlanders can only understand as a point and expanding and contracting circles. See Bortoft's account, p. 13.



## Donors, 2013

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## Items of Interest

The 44<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the **Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA)** will be held in Providence, Rhode Island, May 29–June 1, 2013. *EAP* is sponsoring one symposium, “Conceptual Issues in Place Research: Concerns, Prospects, and Points of Contention.” Presenters include **Maria Lewicka**, Faculty of Psychology, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland (“Being or Becoming: What Do Relations between People and Places Tell Us about the Meaning of Place?”); and *EAP* Editor **David Seamon** (“Place as Human-Immersion-in-World: How to Describe the Lived Wholeness of Place Phenomenologically without Breaking it into Arbitrary or Reductive Parts?”). [www.edra.org/](http://www.edra.org/).

The 32<sup>nd</sup> annual **International Human Science Research Conference** will be held August 13–16, 2013, at Aalborg University, in Aalborg, Denmark. Psychotherapist **Linda Finlay** and *EAP* Editor **David Seamon** are organizing a symposium, “Engaging Relational Encounters: Silences, Clients, Places and Art Works.” Besides Seamon and Finlay, presenters include philosopher **Robert Mugerauer** and psychologist **Eva Simms**. [www.ihsrca.aau.dk/](http://www.ihsrca.aau.dk/)

## Citations Received

**Iris Aravot & Eran Neuman, eds., 2011. ArchiPhen: Some Approaches and Interpretations of Phenomenology in Architecture.**

This volume includes 18 conference presentations from the first “Architecture and Phenomenology” conference in Haifa, Israel, in May, 2007. Contributors include: **Iris Aravot; Jim Baek; Benoit Jacquet; Eran Neuman; and Nili Portugali.**

**Ingrid Leman Stefanovic & Stephen Bede Scharper, eds., 2012. The Natural City: Re-Envisioning the Built Environment. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press.**

Edited by a philosopher and anthropologist, this volume is “an interdisciplinary collection of essays that merges architectural theory and urban design with philosophy, religion, humanism, and environmental policy to present an alternative vision of urban life.” Contributors include **W.S.K. Cameron** (“Can Cities Be Both Natural and Successful?”); **Bruce Foltz** (“Nature and City in the Greek East”); **Ken Maly** (“Biocracy in the City: A Contemporary Buddhist Practice”); **Trish Glazebrook** (“Ecofeminist ‘Cityzenry’”); **David Seamon** (“Seeing and Animating the City”); **Robert Mugerauer** (“The City: A Legacy of Organism-Environment Interaction at Every Scale”); and **Sarah King and Ingrid Leman Stefanovic** (“Children and Nature in the City”).

**Phillip Vannini, ed., 2009. The Cultures of Alternative Mobilities. Burlington: Ashgate.**

This volume’s 16 chapters, edited by an anthropologist, focus on current mobility experiences. Essay titles include: “The Sociability of the Railway Journey” (**D. Bissell**); “The Cultural Geography of Flight” (**L. Budd**); “The Making of Mundane Bus Journeys” (**J. Jain**); “Mobility in Later Life” (**L. Levin**).

**Jeremy C. Wells & Elizabeth D. Baldwin, 2012. “Historic Preservation, Significance, and Age Value: A Comparative Phenomenology of Historic Charleston and the Nearby New-Urbanist Community of I’On.” Journal of Environmental Psychology, vol. 32, pp. 384–400.**

Using interviews and photo elicitation techniques, this study concludes that residents of historic Charleston and the nearby New-Urbanist community of I’On “value their environments in remarkably similar ways. Surprisingly, elements that evoke a strong sense of attachment tend to be landscape features such as gates, fountains, trees, and gardens rather than buildings. The informants valued the ‘mystery’ that they felt was part of the landscape and which consisted of layered elements such as fences, gates, and paths, such that these features (including buildings) had to be discovered. Lastly the informants strongly valued landscapes that showed ‘people care’ through regular maintenance. The essential difference in people’s experience and valuation of the new environment (I’On) and the old environment (historic Charleston) is the older environment’s ability to instill creative fantasies in the minds of the informants based on a hypothetical past of their own creation. The informants in I’On did not share these kinds of meanings.”

# Henri Bortoft (1938–2012)

## Encountering the Whole

David Seamon

In 1972–73, I was a graduate student living in England and had the unexpected opportunity to participate in a seminar on “The Hermeneutics of Science” taught by Henri Bortoft.

This learning experience had a profound impact on how I understood myself personally and professionally. Through both the style and content of his teaching, Henri demonstrated that there was another way of understanding that was more open and intensive than the arbitrary, piecemeal mode of knowing presupposed by conventional undergraduate and graduate education.

Henri’s primary teaching vehicle was Goethean science, which he introduced through a series of do-it-yourself perceptual exercises laid out by Goethe in his *Theory of Colors* (1810). I still have the notes in which I copied the key questions that Henri had us keep in mind as we looked at and attempted to see color phenomena:

- What do I see?
- What is happening?
- What is this saying?
- How is this coming to be?
- What belongs together?
- What remains apart?
- How does this belong together with itself?
- Is it itself?
- Can I read this in itself?

Henri played a major role in directing my future academic life: an interest in phenomenology and the particular mode of phenomenological understanding offered by Goethe’s unique approach to looking and seeing. In the 1980s and early 1990s, Henri would write a series of essays on the nature of authentic wholeness. These essays would eventually become the chapters of his extraordinarily creative *The Wholeness of Nature*, published in 1996.

To me, this book is one of the great, unheralded works of our time—perhaps arriving too soon for many people to understand. But I believe firmly that

this work is a harbinger of a new way of engaging with the world that will grow in intensity and significance as the 21<sup>st</sup> century unfolds.

As we typically are, we don’t fully encounter the world or the things, places, and living beings in it. Henri taught a way of seeing that graciously meets with the “Other.” In allowing the Other to become more and more present and dimensioned, this method of knowing not only deepens our sensibilities but facilitates an emotional bond of wonderment and concern. We see more and, though that understanding, may better care for our world.

One of Henri’s earliest portraits of this mode of seeing and learning is his 1971 essay, “The Whole: Counterfeit and Authentic,” published in British philosopher J. G. Bennett’s quarterly journal, *Systematics* [see pp. 6–11]. There, Henri wrote:

We cannot know the whole in the way in which we know things because we cannot recognize the whole as a thing. If the whole were available to be recognized in the same way as we recognize the things that surround us, then the whole would be counted among these things as one of them. So we could point and say ‘here is this’ and ‘there is that’ and ‘that’s the whole over there’.

If we could do this, we would know the whole in the same way we know its parts, for the whole itself would simply be numbered among its parts, so that the whole would be outside its parts in just the same way that each part is outside all the other parts...

But the whole comes into presence *within* its parts, so we cannot encounter the whole in the same way we encounter the parts. Thus we cannot know the whole in the way we know things and recognize ourselves knowing things. So we should not think of the whole as if it were a thing..., for in so doing, we effectively deny the whole inasmuch as we are making as if to externalize that which can presence only within the things that are external with respect to our awareness of them (vol. 9, no. 2, p. 56).

In her apocryphal 1969 novel, *The Four-Gated City*, British-African writer Doris Lessing defined love as the “delicate but total acknowledgement of what is.” This description encapsulates the heart of Henri’s masterful work.

*David Seamon is the Editor of EAP.*

# Henri Bortoft

## Philosophy as Lived

Ingrid Leman Stefanovic

**M**ore than a decade ago, while an Associate Chair in Philosophy at the University of Toronto, I encountered in the elevator a colleague who had just returned from teaching his first class in our introductory, first-year course. He proudly declared that he had managed to “chase away a good third of the class.” He explained that he only wanted to retain students determined to be philosophy specialists.

My jaw dropped as he left the elevator. In my Associate-Chair capacity of what was then the largest philosophy department in North America, I still hoped our professional aim was to attract and *retain* students in our programs. But, beyond those administrative musings, I was appalled that my colleague envisioned philosophy as a discipline only for “specialists.” My view is that philosophical questions are important to everyone, whether or not one chooses dedication to academic study. In fact, to be human is to naturally reflect upon philosophical questions.

This colleague retired shortly thereafter but many philosophers still think as he did, and many journals—even those focusing on interdisciplinary environmental ethics—provide opportunities for philosophers to debate exclusively among themselves. Few academics possess the talent to communicate beyond the discipline in a way that preserves the academic integrity of ideas while making them accessible to a broader audience.

**H**enri Bortoft was the very opposite of my philosophy colleague. He was the quintessential teacher, able to straddle physics, philosophy and the study of the environment. Brilliantly adept at taking complex philosophical ideas about hermeneutics and holism and translating them, without loss, to non-philosophers, he was able to make these ideas legible and exciting. This talent is especially important in the environmental field, where issues such as pollution, climate change, declining biodiversity,

ecological health risks and loss of sense of place are increasingly prevalent and where academics have a responsibility to contribute, beyond the comfort of their discipline, to solutions to these problems.

My first encounter with Bortoft’s writings was his 1985 article, “Counterfeit and Authentic Wholes: Finding a Means for Dwelling in Nature” [1]. To my mind, this article remains one of the best introductions to hermeneutics, phenomenology, and holism.

Within philosophical circles, there have been important critiques of holism. For instance, in *The Case for Animal Rights*, ethicist Tom Regan claims that environmental holism is necessarily “eco-fascism” because individuals, such as animals, are sacrificed to an omnipotent whole, such as an ecosystem [2]. Bortoft, however, demonstrates that authentic holistic thinking has nothing to do with creating a dominant “super-part” to rule over individual components sacrificed for the good of the whole. On the contrary, by brilliantly contrasting the image of a hologram with an ordinary photographic plate, he shows how the “whole” is properly reflected in the “parts.” He writes:

If the hologram plate is broken into fragments and one fragment is illuminated, it is found that the same three-dimensional optical reconstruction of the original object is produced. There is nothing missing: the only difference is that the reconstruction is less well defined.... The entire picture is wholly present in each part of the plate, so that it would not be true in this case to say that the whole is made up of parts... On the contrary, because the whole is in some way reflected in the parts, it is to be encountered by going further into the parts instead of by standing back from them [3].

What a lucid example to show how holistic thinking is more than merely additive! Bortoft suggests a different kind of understanding that preserves the interaction and relation between whole and parts. He then makes links to hermeneutics and to the act of grasping meaning in a text. He speaks of a fundamen-

tal distinction between the whole and the totality. When we read a text, for example,

we do not have to store up what is read until it is all collected together, whereupon we suddenly see the meaning all at once, in an instant... We reach the meaning of the sentence through reading the words, yet the meaning of the words in that sentence is determined by the meaning of the sentence as a whole.... We can say that meaning is hologrammatical [4].

**W**hy do these ideas matter to the study of environment? They are important, first, because we realize how describing holistic phenomena, such as a sense of place, means more than only describing its component parts or even compiling an inventory of these component parts. To think holistically is to think in an essentially non-reductionist, non-calculative manner. It is to move beyond the study of delimited *things*, uncovering the ontological condition of the possibility of the meaning that is revealed in the relation *between* things, in the essence of the individual things themselves, and in the taken-for-granted context and interpretive horizon within which things appear in the first place.

The challenges of such holistic thinking are huge: If Bortoft is right (as I think that he is), then thinking holistically about problems of urban planning or global climate change means developing new research approaches and study methods. This new way of thinking means that, in addition to complex engineering or Newtonian scientific models, we need to draw on a wider range of sources. Besides climate change science, for instance, we need to reflect on climate ethics and critically evaluate value systems sustaining particular calculative worldviews.

From Bortoft's perspective, we need to rethink the way we do science in the first place. In this connection, he turned to Goethe's method of "delicate empiricism" for guidance. In *The Wholeness of Nature*, Bortoft explains how we must move beyond the "organizing idea" of "naïve empiricism" or "factism" which assumes that facts are "independent of an ideational element" [5]. Drawing from Goethe's "whole way of seeing" the unity of the phenomenon, he introduces a new way of scientific thinking to supplement mainstream science—an approach that points toward a "radical change in our awareness of the relationship between nature and ourselves" [6].

*The Wholeness of Nature* is a powerful book that speaks for itself, and I invite readers to read this important work that can dramatically shift one's understanding of understanding. Also significant is his recently published *Taking Appearance Seriously: The Dynamic Way of Seeing in Goethe and European Thought*, which continues to reflect upon phenomenology, hermeneutics, and a new vision of science. Here we read how "phenomenology seems to take the ground away from under our feet, whilst at the same time, gives us the sense of being where we have always been—only now recognizing it as if for the first time" [7]. Interestingly, this description of phenomenology actually captures the essence of Bortoft's own reflections, which make us aware, as if for the first time, of so much of what we take for granted about our relation to the natural world.

**H**enri Bortoft has left a significant legacy that enriches the phenomenological literature and reflects a profound and unique understanding of the meaning of holism. He is a thinker whose writings will continue to have impact for a long time to come. His was a life well lived and his accomplishments deserve to be preserved and celebrated.

## Notes

1. H. Bortoft, "Counterfeit and Authentic Wholes: Finding a Means for Dwelling in Nature," in D. Seamon & R. Mugerauer, eds., *Dwelling, Place and Environment*, Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1985, pp. 281–302; the article was reprinted in D. Seamon & A. Zajonc, eds., *Goethe's Way of Science*, Albany, NY: State Univ. of New York Press, 1998, pp. 277–98. Though in slightly different form, the article also appears as part I of Bortoft's *The Wholeness of Nature: Goethe's Way toward a Science of Conscious Participation in Nature*, Hudson, NY: Lindesfarne Press, 1996, pp. 1–16.
2. T. Reagan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2004.
3. Bortoft, "Counterfeit and Authentic Wholes," in *Dwelling, Place and Environment*, p. 282–84.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 284–85.
5. H. Bortoft, *The Wholeness of Nature*, p. 144.
6. *Ibid.*
7. H. Bortoft, *Taking Appearance Seriously*, Edinburgh, UK: Floris Books, 2012, p. 17.

*Stefanovic is a Professor of Philosophy and former Director of the Centre for Environment at the University of Toronto. Her most recent book is The Natural City (Univ. of Toronto Press, 2012), co-edited with Stephen Bede Scharper (see p. 2).*

# The Whole: Counterfeit and Authentic (selected passages)

Henri Bortoft

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*This text originally appeared as "The Whole: Counterfeit and Authentic," published in Systematics, vol. 9, no. 2 (September 1971), pp. 43–73. The sections reprinted here are from pp. 54–57 and pp. 59–64. In the early 1980s, EAP Editor David Seamon asked Bortoft to revise this 1971 article for a volume he was editing with philosopher Robert Mugerauer. This revision included Bortoft's first discussion of Goethean science and was published as "Counterfeit and Authentic Wholes: Finding Means for Dwelling in Nature," in D. Seamon and R. Mugerauer, eds., Dwelling, Place and Environment (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1985), pp. 281–302. We thank Jackie Bortoft and Ben Bennett for permission to republish portions of the original article here.*

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The way the whole emerges is by coming into presence within parts. The whole comes to presence part-ially because it is within parts, and it is by im-part-ation, by coming into presence *within* parts, that the whole can be whole. The whole is imparted in that it is present within parts, which thus become its parts and cease to be just bits and pieces. It is by impartation as a coming into presence within its parts that the whole holds to its essence.

The whole cannot come out without ceasing to be whole and becoming all and everything, falling into the plural totality of identity in difference. For then the whole would become the object (ob-ject: that which is thrown out) which is the collection of objects, and so cease to be authentically whole. Thus it is essential that the whole comes into presence within parts, so that the whole *presences within* its parts.

This tells us something fundamental about the whole in a way that shows us the significance of the parts. If the whole presences within its parts, then a part is a place for the presencing of the whole. If a part is to be an arena in which the whole can be present, it cannot be any old thing. Parts are not bits and pieces because a part is only a part if it is such that it can bear the whole.

There is a useful ambivalence here: 'to bear' in the sense of 'to pass through' and 'to carry': and 'to bear' in the sense of 'to suffer', where this is taken in the sense of 'to undergo'. By itself the part

is nothing, not even a part. But the whole cannot be whole without the part. The part becomes significant itself through becoming a bearer of the whole.

A part is special, not accidental because it must be such as to let the whole come into presence. This speciality of the part is particularly important because it shows us the way to the whole. It clearly indicates that the way to the whole is into and through the parts. The whole is nowhere to be encountered except in the midst of the parts. It is not to be encountered by stepping back to take an overview, for it is not over and above the parts, as if it were some superior overarching part. The whole is to be encountered by stepping right into the parts. This is how we enter into the nesting of the whole and thus move into the whole as we pass through the parts.

This dual movement, into the whole through the parts, is demonstrated clearly in the experiences of speaking and reading, listening, and writing. We can see that, in each case, there is a dual movement: We move through the parts to enter into and under the whole that presences within the parts. When we understand, both movements come together. When we do not understand, we merely pass along the parts.

For example, let us consider the interpretation of a difficult text. At first encounter, we just pass along the parts, reading the words without understanding. To come to understand the text, we have to enter into it, and this we do in the first place by sounding out the words. We enter into the text as the medium of mean-

ing through the words themselves, not by referring the words to some other external text placed in a superior position of authority in interpretation. We put ourselves into the text in a way that makes us available to meaning.

This hermeneutic approach is the antithesis of an analysis that stands back to look upon the text as an object to be separated into parts. Analyzing into parts is a way of refusing to enter the parts. Entering into the parts is an approach into a work that is working, and not a retreat to an object of analytical knowledge. The whole is nowhere to be encountered except in the midst of the parts; it is here that meaning is to be encountered as a transforming presence. It is not to be encountered by stepping back to take an overview, for it is not over and above the parts like some superior over-arching part. The whole is to be encountered only by stepping right into the parts.

Everything we encounter in the world can be said to be either one thing or another, either this or that, either before or after, and so on. Wherever we look, there are different things to be distinguished from one another: this book here, that pen there, the table underneath, and so on. Glancing about, we recognize a multitude of different things, side by side, laid out in mutual self-distinction. Each is outside each other, and thus all are separate each from every other.

But in recognizing the things about us in this way we, too, by this recognition, are separate from and outside each of the things we recognize. Thus we find ourselves in recognition laid out side by side, together with and separate from, the things we recognize.

This is the familiar spectator awareness. In the moment of recognizing a thing, we stand outside of that thing and, in the moment of so standing outside of that thing, we turn outside into an 'I' that knows the thing, for there cannot be an 'outside' without the distinction of something being outside of some other thing.

Thus the 'I' of 'I know' arises in the knowing of something in the moment of recognition of the thing known. By virtue of its origin, the 'I' that knows is outside of what it knows. Also, by virtue

of this same origin, the 'I' that knows is outside of itself, for it can know itself in self-awareness.

Awareness is occupied with things. It is in the knowing of things that the 'I' of 'I know' becomes self-aware, and hence it is in this knowing that we find ourselves in the world. Looked at from the side of things, which is where we stand in self-awareness, the whole is absent. The whole is absent to awareness because it is not a thing among other things.

It is for this reason that the whole is easily forgotten, after which its presence is unsuspected. What stands before us is the parts, and it is in standing before the parts that we recognize ourselves. But the whole does not stand before us; we are not its spectator. Since the whole comes into presence within its parts and not outside of them, the whole is quite un-thinglike or un-partlike (think of the difference between the meaning of a sentence vs. the meaning of a word in that sentence). Thus, from the side of awareness, the whole is a no-thing.

To awareness, no-thing is nothing. This must be so, since awareness is awareness of *something*. But it is here that we have a choice, and it is a fateful choice. Since no-thing and nothing cannot be distinguished within awareness, the whole that is no-thing can be taken as a mere nothing, in which case it vanishes in the forgetfulness of awareness. When this happens, we are left with a world of things alone and the apparent task of putting them together to make a whole.

This taking of the whole that is no-thing to be mere nothing is the origin of nihilism. We can say that the essence of nihilism is that it takes nothing to be nothing and, having already prepared the ground for this, we can see immediately the deep truth of this apparent triviality.

It is a startling consequence of the origin of nihilism in the forgetful vanishing of the whole into mere nothing, that all efforts at integration and synthesis are inherently nihilistic. This must be so, since the attempt to build the whole from the side of separate things reinforces the forgetful vanishing of the whole. Such efforts disregard the authentic whole. But it is in just this way that the counterfeit wholes of science, technology, and the whole of contemporary culture are produced.



The other side of the choice is to take the whole to be no-thing but not nothing. This is difficult for awareness, which cannot distinguish no-thing from nothing. Yet we have an illustration immediately at hand with the experience of reading. We do not take the meaning of a sentence to be a word. The meaning of a sentence is no-word. But evidently this is not the same as nothing, for if it were we could never read!

The whole presences within parts. From the standpoint of the awareness that grasps the external parts, however, the whole is an absence. But it can be an *active absence* inasmuch as we do not try to be aware of the whole as if we could grasp it like a part, but instead let ourselves be open to be moved by the whole.

Inasmuch as we do not try to be actively aware of the whole, so equally we will not be self-aware. Our active awareness will be taken up with the parts, and we will be aware of ourselves there with the parts. But we will not be aware of ourselves being moved by an active absence, not aware in the sense of the self-awareness of the 'I' of 'I know'.

The first step into the wholesome encounter comes when 'I' is absent, or occupied with things, so that the whole that is an absence with respect to awareness comes into presence. We do not notice this peculiar non-aware sensitivity to the active absence. We do not notice it because we are identified with the 'I' of awareness, and hence we are dependent upon things and think that presence is merely a matter of location of manifestation. But this sensitivity to the active absence accompanies the ordinary awareness that eclipses it, and this sensitivity can be developed.

There are many hermeneutic illustrations of the active absence—for example, watching a play, playing a game, reading, writing, and speaking—that are similar to the case of the actor playing his part in the play. These experiences can each demonstrate the reversal that comes in turning from subjective awareness into the wholesome encounter. This turning around, from grasping to being grasped, from awareness of an object to letting an absence be active, from 'I' to the whole, is a reversal that is the first practical consequence of choosing the path that

assents to the whole as no-thing and not mere nothing.

It is just because of this very reversal that the whole must be invisible to the scientific approach as currently conceived. The paradigm for modern scientific method is Kant's "appointed judge who compels the witnesses to answer questions which he has himself formulated."

Science believes itself to be objective, but it is in essence subjective because the witness is compelled to answer questions that *the scientist himself has formulated*. The direction is from the scientist as origin to an object of enquiry that reflects back what the scientist takes to be an answer.

In this way, the scientist believes that he comes to know the unknown. He never notices the delusion that consists in his trying to go from the known to the unknown, and thus attempting to treat the unknown as if it were a kind of known. He never notices this because he believes he hears the voice of 'nature' speaking, not realizing that it is the transposed echo of his own voice. The scientist certainly gives 'nature' the last word, but only after he himself has had the first word.

Thus modern science can only approach the whole as if it were a thing among things. It must try to grasp the whole as its object for interrogation. Trapped in subjective awareness, it cannot understand that the authentic direction of discovery is from the unknown to the known, because this direction is not open to the awareness that holds onto things. This direction becomes possible only with the turning around that lets the whole—which is absent with respect to awareness—be active.

So it is that science today is, by virtue of the method that is its hallmark, left with a broken world of things that it must thus seek to reassemble. Science has great need for the whole, but by virtue of its own nature, it must exclude the whole. Thus science must build counterfeits by introducing connections, interactions, and relations into the world of things. All such attempts ultimately fail because they are based in ignorance on the condition that is left when the whole has vanished into mere nothing.

The consequences of the whole as mere nothing are illustrated in the attempts of science to establish connections. The essence of connection is separation because, when a connection is made to

overcome a separation, the ground of the connection is *to overcome a separation*. Thus establishing the connection essentially affirms the separation.

It is no accident that the mathematical method is so useful in the attempt to build counterfeits for the whole. The core of modern mathematics is the axiomatic method, which means starting with a set (the ideal representative of nihilism) and defining operations upon the members of that set to produce patterns of relationships.

It is this axiomatic method that has now become the very archetype of method in our meta-physical-scientific-technological civilization, and as such it has become ubiquitous. For example, management attempts to organize and develop business and industrial structures by introducing connections between supposedly separate elements that have been pre-defined.

Consequently, we should not imagine that the subjectivity of science, the loss of the whole, and the endeavor to provide counterfeits in ignorance of this loss are limited to physics or chemistry. On the contrary, this is a foundational condition of all forms of thinking currently available to Western peoples, including ‘new’ forms of thought such as systems thinking and structural thinking—which are not new in any way whatsoever.

**I**t is not a matter of finding new concepts for the whole. For where there is a concept, there is an idea; and where there is an idea, there is an object of thought that represents something from which it is quite separate. Hence, there is separation and awareness, and the whole is lost.

The encounter with the whole cannot be understood conceptually. We need a non-conceptual thinking of the whole, and this means that we would not easily be able to recognize it as thinking. This is because such thinking would be non-metaphysical, and all thinking of knowledge in science and technology is fundamentally metaphysical (Heidegger: “metaphysics is only the ontology of knowledge”). It is not a matter of giving up metaphysics in a futile attempt to retreat, but of going through metaphysics and beyond to a thinking which is quite other. It is what begins to happen with the turning around into the whole.

The turning around into the whole begins with the development of a sensitivity to the active absence, the development of an openness that lets the whole come to be, not as an object that stands over against us in localized manifestation, but as a presence that emerges globally so that we find ourselves everywhere within it. It is as if we become the object for the whole that can never be our object.

This possibility seems strange because this is how the entry into the wholesome encounter seems from the side of the awareness of things. It is just because there is no place for the whole among the things as objects of awareness that the inversion that the wholesome encounter constitutes with respect to awareness seems so unthinkable.

**W**e can help to mitigate this strangeness by exploring a practical case where the way into the wholesome encounter seems to be blocked. An excellent opportunity is provided by the sense of having failed to understand something through becoming overcome by detail. When this happens we say that we “can’t see the wood for the trees.” This saying has the advantage that it is literally as well as figuratively true.

Let us first explore the literal case. Standing in a wood, surrounded by individual trees, we tell ourselves that we can’t see the wood for the trees. This carries the implication that it is possible to see the wood, but something is getting in the way, namely the trees. Consequently we must introduce a distance between ourselves and the trees by changing our position and walking out of the wood.

Crossing the boundary from inside to outside constitutes a standing back from the wood, but we still fail to see anything but trees. If we could climb a convenient hill or hire a helicopter, we could perhaps find a position from which to observe the totality of the trees enclosed within their own tree boundary. From such a vantage point, we would seem to be able to see all of the trees taken together, although we would not see all of each individual tree. We would have an object before us that we could see and know that we were seeing. We could then point and say “There’s the wood,” and we could do this because we are separated from the totality of trees, standing over against them as a collected unit.

But what is this collected unit but the totality of trees! We would still see nothing but trees, just the same as when we were inside the wood and complained that the trees impaired our vision of the wood itself. The only difference is that from our vantage point outside the wood, we would be able to see the totality of the trees and not just a few.

This view, however, would be achieved with considerable loss in richness of concrete detail. The totality over against which we stood would be a poorer object to see compared to what could be seen inside the wood, but it would be no more than more of the same trees. The attempt to encounter the wood by distancing from it results in seeing it as no more than the set of objects called trees, so that “wood” is no more than a class name. This is the nihilistic external wood. We might even call it the axiomatic or mathematical wood—let the wood  $W$  be a set of trees,  $T_1, T_2, T_3 \dots T_n$ . But it is not the living wood.

Let us consider what happens if we move back toward the wood. What happens when we cross the boundary to enter into the wood? The only difference is that we would be surrounded by trees instead of having them collected together in a unit standing over against us in one direction only. There would be no fundamental change in what is seen (although there would be an increased richness of detail) because we would continue to see individual trees before us as separate, countable objects.

In this sense, there is no fundamental difference between being inside or outside the wood. This distinction does not mark a discontinuity in experience, but merely a relative transposition of orientation. Since there is no perceptual change when we are inside, it is the same as being outside, and vice versa. So it really does look as if “wood” is no more than a class name.

**B**ut this is all no more than how it is for the observer awareness, which grasps things as objects for the self-reflective ‘I’ to claim to see and know. This indifference between inside and outside is characteristic of the awareness of things, and it fades away as we enter into the wholesome encounter. It is important to stress that, for the observer awareness of things, there is no difference between being inside or outside of the wood because,

upon entering a wood, we all sense that there is a difference but may not notice that this sense does not come immediately from what we can see and know.

Rather, the sense of difference between inside and outside comes from the active absence, which is the way through which we begin to participate in the presence of the wood. There is an entry into the wood that sacrifices self-centered awareness and instead lets the wood be. To the degree that this happens, we find ourselves being met by the wood—not just individual trees in their places, but the sense of a ubiquitous presence coming toward us.

This is so different to seeing the trees that we can begin to sense that ‘wood’ does have a significance in itself, not as an object but as that which presences through the trees. The first encounter is like bursting through a bubble into a living presence that implodes upon us and is ‘there’ but nowhere, often seeming to be more real than we are to ourselves.

This is how we begin to participate in a presence sensed as an active absence that is distinctly different from the standing-back awareness of individual trees as things. This is how we begin to enter into ‘the within’ of the wood, which is quite distinct from the inside that is the same as the outside. The within of the wood is more immediate than the inside of the wood because the inside is already outside.

The sensitivity to the wood as an active absence is unfortunately often lost through degeneration into sentimentality, ‘nice’ feelings, and silly remarks about how lovely everything is. It is by this degeneration that the subjective awareness slyly tries to grasp for itself what can never belong to it.

This is possibly the reason why we look upon such experiences as pleasing but merely subjective and not to be taken seriously—an ironic situation because this sensitivity is in fact the beginning of truly objective experience, as distinct from the subjectively “objective” experience of the awareness and knowledge of things. A further reason for doubting the authenticity of such experiences is that the perception cannot be verified in the way in which it can with the awareness of things, and it is just this thing-based verifiability that constitutes our familiar, but nihilistic, criterion for reality.

**I**mportantly for our purposes here, the turning around into the wood can go further than the development of a sensitivity to the active absence. It

may not often do so but is always possible. There are discrete stages of the turning around, each of which is a quite different mode of encounter with the whole, and each of which is stepped into through a discontinuity.

The first authentic stage of the wholesome encounter is the becoming sensitive to the active absence, but it is inherent to this stage that it is not easily recognized for what it is.

This stage reaches its limit with the sense of implosion—of an invisible presence coming toward us. This stage goes no further, but it is just at this point that a discontinuity can occur and a further stage of the wholesome encounter can be entered, a stage that is a deeper turning around into the whole marked by an instantaneous reversal from the experience of seeing to the experience of being seen. It is quite distinct and unmistakable: it is not a matter of ‘as if we were being seen’ but the actual experience of being seen.

In this mode of sensitivity, the wood is no longer an active absence. Rather, we now encounter the wood face-to-face, but in a way that is inside-out with respect to our awareness of the things around us. We experience ourselves being looked at, being watched from every direction at once, so that the wood implodes upon us, and we experience ourselves being seen by the whole wood.

It is when this happens that we can truly say we are within the wood, and that the wood is the living whole and not just the totality of the set of trees. We cannot go out to the whole to know it because we would have to go in every way all at once. But the whole can come to us because every direction can implode upon us.

This is the radical reversal that marks the second stage of the turning around into the whole. So we can never see the wood, only the trees. The wood is invisible to our seeing, but we can be seen by the wood and experience ourselves being seen by the wood. It is in this respect that we can encounter the wood, which sees us through the trees. In this way, we find that seeing is far more than only a property of the subjective human being.

**T**he wholesome encounter brings about a radical transformation in our attitude to the natural environment and the biosphere. Standing

in the arrogance of subjective awareness, we approach nature as dumb and stupid, as something that needs to be re-arranged, harnessed, and put to good use by us, whom we imagine to be the possessors and sole bearers of intelligence.

But the turning around into the whole demonstrates that nature should be entered into watchfully with care. It shows that watchfulness is essential in that nature is a living presence that can communicate with us if we can turn around into the right condition for being spoken to and hearing ourselves being spoken to.

### **Bortoft on phenomenology**

[Phenomenology] refers to... a movement of thinking in which the position of attention is shifted from *what* appears (downstream) into the *occurring* of what occurs (upstream). In particular, it is concerned with the happening of appearing—with *appearance* (read verbally)—so that phenomenology is concerned with what appears in its appearing....

Clearly, there cannot be any separation between the happening of appearing and what appears—i.e., there could not be ‘appearing’ without ‘something’ appearing. But our attention is usually drawn to *what* appears to such an extent that we miss the happening of appearing. In fact, although it clearly makes no sense to try to think of *appearance* without something thus appearing, we almost invariably do think of *what* appears without noticing its *appearance*.

As we explore the shift in attention that this requires, to catch what appears in the appearing, we find ourselves in a position where familiar patterns of thought that we take for granted no longer apply. When we focus in the usual way on what appears, it seems just natural to say ‘it appears’. But when our attention shifts upstream into what appears in its appearing, then it becomes awkward to say ‘it appears’ because the very form of this leads us to think of an ‘it’ that ‘appears’. This encourages us to think of ‘it’ as being there already, and then appearing.

But this gets it back to front, by imagining ‘it’ as if it had already appeared before it ‘appears’! We would do better to say ‘appears it’. This may be bad grammar, but it is better philosophically because now ‘it’ emerges *for the first time* in its appearing, and so this avoids the mistake of separating ‘it’ from ‘appearing’ as if appearing is something that happens to ‘it’ subsequently.

This further implies that appearing is contingent to ‘it’, in the sense of being something that sometimes happens to it but need not necessarily do so. Directing our attention into the movement of thinking in this way, enables us to see clearly the difference between ‘it appears’ and ‘appears it’, and to recognize that the self-contradictory character of the former encourages us to get everything the wrong way round.

—from *Taking Appearance Seriously* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 2012), pp. 95–96

# The Transformative Potential of Paradox

Henri Bortoft

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The practical value of paradox is that it can be a doorway to new perceptions. To think of paradox as a sign of failure or as only an intellectual puzzle greatly underestimates its real significance. Through paradox, our coarse perceptions and understandings can be transformed into something finer and more subtle.

I was first introduced to this possibility in the 1960s by the philosopher J. G. Bennett, for whom the attempt to hold opposites together—that is, not oscillating from one to the other—was a key to the transformation of psychological life to a greater degree of freedom in which real choice and action (instead of just reaction) becomes possible. Bennett argued that we must try to hold ‘yes’ and ‘no’ together simultaneously (for example, like and dislike, agreement and disagreement, and so forth) [1].

Bennett believed that paradox was not only significant psychologically but was also important in philosophical work, where it could lead to a less coarse and more subtle form of understanding. He pointed out that the basis of Jacob Boehme's *Realdialectik* was his insight that “In yes and no all things consist”—which should certainly not be reduced to “all things consist of yes and no.” Bennett thought that this was the real basis of Hegel's dialectic, and it is interesting that, in his lectures on the history of philosophy, Hegel says that Boehme is the true founder of modern philosophy, not Descartes. This made a deep impression on me at the time, and it has greatly influenced my own work and understanding ever since. I will try to provide some explication of why.

One point that often strikes me is the importance of the distinction between passivity and receptivity, and how often they are conflated. Ac-

tive and passive are clearly opposites, and we might therefore be tempted to think in exclusive terms, as if either we are active or we are passive. But being receptive is neither passive nor active in this either/or sense. Rather, it is *both* active and passive at the same time. Receptivity is a paradoxical state: When we are receptive, we are “actively passive” and “passively active.” It is a more subtle or finer state than being active or passive. Yet these are both “ingredients” in the state of receptivity but in a way that unites and transforms them. This active/passive situation is a brilliant example of what Hegel means by *Aufhebung*, a term that really has no ready equivalent in English. If it were not for the fact that we can have this experience of opposites together, we would never believe it [2].

Understanding how the either/or of being active/passive can be transformed into being receptive is crucial for understanding Goethe's way of science [3]. His practical way of proceeding is designed to bring a person into a state of receptivity, so that it becomes possible for the phenomenon to show itself and “be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself” [4]. But it's not just in Goethe's way of science that the “paradoxical” state of receptivity is found. We see it also in the encounter with meaning in hermeneutics where, as Simon Glendinning explains, “You have to let the text you are reading teach you how to read it.”

In the moment of understanding, there is a hermeneutic reversal where meaning *becomes* us (not *becomes us*)—i.e., we are *becomed* by the meaning. This is the deeper dimension of phenomenology in which the phenomenon is not only something that appears but appears *as appearing*. If we are not receptive, we can only

encounter the phenomenon as what appears, and not as the appearance of what appears [5].

The philosopher Mauro Carbone, commenting on the later philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, drew attention to the need to go beyond the “grasp” of the concept (in German the word for concept, *Begriff*, carries with it the meaning “grasp”) to the gesture of welcoming that receives something and is more in tune with the Latin meaning of “concept” (*concipio*—to be pregnant; to create a space for something). Empiricism construes the concept as passive, while idealism construes it as active.

Paradox is inevitable because, as Bergson pointed out, “the human intellect feels at home among inanimate objects, more especially among solids” so that “our concepts have been formed on the model of solids; our logic is pre-eminently, the logic of solids.” The key characteristic of the “world of bodies” is separateness, which means that it is the world of independent entities self-enclosed and external to one another. It is the quantitative world because, as Aristotle argued, quantity is that which has parts external to one another. I like the image that the Oxford philosopher J. L. Austin gave of the situation when he said that the mind is basically at home in the world of medium-size dry goods.

This is a very limited domain, and it is when we try to fit things into this restricted framework that we find ourselves confronted by paradox. This does not mean that paradox is “impossible,” “mystical,” or just “tiresome” (the British response). What it means is that our thinking is too restricted, and the form that the paradox takes will quite possibly give us some clue as to the way in which thinking needs to be transformed.

**B**efore mentioning my own experience with the idea of “the one and the many,” I want to highlight my favorite illustration: Edwin Abbott’s *Flatland* and the mysterious case of the sphere [6]. Abbott’s story concerns a society of creatures entirely confined to a two-dimensional surface, and what happens to one of them—a square—when one day a sphere from the world of three dimensions appears in his two-dimensional world. The sphere passes through Flatland, but what the hapless square experiences is that a point sud-

denly appears out of nowhere, turns into a circle of expanding diameter, reaches a maximum size, and then begins to shrink back to a point and vanishes. He is very puzzled, and when he says aloud to himself “What is this?” the sphere, who is not supposed to communicate with Flatlanders, announces, “I am a sphere.”

Of course, this information doesn’t help the befuddled square at all. When the sphere tells the square that he must go “up,” the Flatlander has no such concept and can only try to make sense of “up” in terms of his own familiar, but limited, experience. “Do you mean go ‘north’?” he asks the sphere, drawing on his knowledge of two-dimensional mapping with a compass.

After struggling to get the square to understand the paradox of “go up, yet not north,” the sphere loses patience and casts the unprepared square out of Flatland into the sphere’s world of three dimensions. This shock is too much for the square and “blows his mind.” He is eventually sent to an asylum where he joins other “insane” Flatlanders muttering about a “higher dimension” that every sane Flatlander knows doesn’t exist.

**I**n the world of bodies, “one” and “many” are mutually exclusive—either something is one (and not many) or many (and not one). This is the Flatland version of “the one and the many.” But there is another dimension of the one and the many that seems paradoxical because it is one and many *at the same time*. If, instead of *either one or many*, we hold both together, we can come to the experience of an intuitive perception in which we see intensively instead of extensively. We see intuitively in another dimension, which is the *intensive* dimension of “multiplicity in unity” instead of the *extensive* dimension of many separate ones.

For example, when a hologram is broken into parts, each part projects the same image as the whole hologram, though with less clarity. There is not one and another one, but one and the other of the one. “Multiplicity in unity” means that there can be multiplicity within unity without fragmenting the unity because each is the very same one and not another one [7]. The hologram and other examples—e.g., vegetative propagation—can become “templates for thinking” intensively as well as extensively [8]. By visualizing these examples, one can practice shifting from the extensive to the intensive dimension of the “the one and the many” and back again.

I emphasize this intuitive practice of seeing what appears paradoxical to “the logic of solid bodies” be-

cause the possibility is largely overlooked in educational practices today. Examples of the need for this kind of thinking abound. The intensive dimension of “the one and the many” is essential for understanding Goethe’s notion of plant metamorphosis “by which one and the same organ presents itself to us in manifold forms” [9]. Similarly, we find that in the unity of organic nature the diversity *is* the unity.

**T**his paradoxical form of “the one and the many” is also found in the philosophy of hermeneutics, which is concerned with the phenomenon of understanding written and artistic works—paintings, music, theater, and so forth. Here also we find a kind of intensive distinction, which seems to be characteristic of the phenomenon of something coming into expression—e.g., a work and its presentation, expressive language, and interpretation. Whatever the expressive medium, we find what Gadamer refers to as “a distinction that is not really a distinction at all.” In other words, there is a paradoxical distinction that is difficult to grasp, so one instead readily falls into dualism. What kind of distinction is a distinction that is not a distinction? It is an *intensive* distinction that takes the form of *neither* one nor two and at the same time *both* one and two. We need to think in a way that does not separate into two but at the same time does not collapse into one.

We can develop this capacity by philosophical work, but it’s a bit like trying to walk along a tight-rope—most of the time we fall off on one side or the other. For example, in the case of language and meaning, we either “separate into two” and think of the meaning as already formed. Or we assume meaning to be a function of words—i.e., we “collapse into one”—and think of meaning as simply being produced by the words. Both misrepresent the lived experience of expression, which is pre-separation and for which the distinction between language and meaning is intensive. When we do glimpse this intuitively, it seems so simple—and then we fall off the tightrope again.

A key point to realize is that lived experience—i.e. experience *as lived*—always seems paradoxical to the way in which we think of experience after it has been lived—which is the basis for the “common sense” description of experience that seems so “ob-

vious” but misleads us. A very clear example of this is seen in the phenomenon of expressive behavior, where we usually either fall into mind-body dualism or reductionist behaviorism. Wittgenstein shows us the intensive distinction that enables behavior itself to be expressive without any need for meaning to be added extensively.

**W**hen it comes to science, paradox is to be expected. Think of light in the special theory of relativity. It is a consequence of the universal constancy of the measured speed of light that light itself is not subject to the space-time separation characteristic of material bodies. If, for example, we consider the distant star Betelgeuse, some 240 light years from us, for light there is no separation between the star and our eye. Light itself *is before separation*, and it is a consequence of the null-interval that the universe for light is an intensive point including all within itself.

To the logic of solid bodies, for which separability is a defining characteristic, such non-separability is highly paradoxical. But imagine a being of light. For such a light-being, the world of bodies would be impossible to imagine, and the idea of separability would be highly paradoxical. If we say, therefore, that the behavior of light is paradoxical, we should not imagine that this paradoxicality is somehow intrinsic to light itself.

In whatever form it takes, non-separability will always seem paradoxical *to us* in the world of bodies where separability is the major taken-for-granted quality. In quantum mechanics, the superposition of states indicates that paths separable for us (e.g., for the photon in an interferometer) are non-separable for the photon. The behavior of a single indivisible photon seems paradoxical to us, but it is not paradoxical to the photon.

## Notes

1. J. G. Bennett, *The Dramatic Universe*, four volumes. London: Stoddard and Watkins, 1956–1966.
2. H. Bortoft, *Taking Appearance Seriously*, Edinburgh: Floris Books, 2012, p. 26, p. 181.
3. See H. Bortoft, *The Wholeness of Nature*, Hudson, NY: Lindesfarne Press, 1996.
4. M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, NY: Harper Row, 1962, p. 58.
5. Bortoft 2012, ch. 4.
6. E. A. Abbott, *Flatland*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010 [originally 1884].
7. Bortoft, 2012, ch. 3.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.

# Making Toronto's Yonge Street Great Further Urban Design Experience

Robert Fabian

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About a year ago, I reported on my initial experience with urban design in downtown Toronto [1]. A developer proposed twin 58-story condominium towers ten meters from the study window of my condominium. This was downtown Toronto in the midst of a condo boom that's continuing. My early reaction was strongly negative, but I recognized that a NIMBY ("Not In My Back Yard") response was unlikely to carry much weight. I turned to urban design and reported on my early experience.

More than a year has passed. Much has changed and the towers have yet to be either approved or withdrawn. I feel that I've gained a much better appreciation for the local planning process. It may be unwise to generalize from one major North American city in the midst of an almost unprecedented condo building boom, but some of the insights gained may be of value elsewhere. It's that hope which informs this essay.

A bit about the Toronto planning situation may help set the stage. In the early 2000s, Ontario decided to confront urban sprawl and published *Places to Grow* in 2006, a document it has continued to update [2]. A greenbelt was established around Toronto. New development was discouraged in established neighborhoods and outside the greenbelt but encouraged along major transportation corridors.

In practice, this document has stimulated condominium development along these major corridors, including Yonge Street. A race has begun to construct as many downtown condos as possible, particularly the construction of "glass brutalism"—

dense, relatively inexpensive, high-rise structures offering attractive views, at least initially until some newer construction visually interferes.

It was just such "glass brutalism" development



*"Glass brutalism" on Toronto's Yonge Street, two blocks from similar proposed towers that would be ten meters away from the author's study window. Photo: Robert Fabian.*





A typical block on Yonge Street. The nineteenth-century buildings are protected by heritage legislation but only to a limited lot depth. Photo: Robert Fabian.

proposed for outside my window. Centrally located on Toronto's busy Yonge Street between the main downtown "epicenters," the two towers would literally be on top of the main north-south Toronto subway line. The developer's argument was clear, and strong. I hoped to identify forces that could be arrayed to moderate this rampant commercialism and to bring some contextual sensitivity to the design.

## A Missing Vision

Toronto does have an *Official Plan*, but it's very broad brush. The city also has *Tall Buildings* guidelines, but their initial version left my portion of the city "blank." I've been told that this was a political compromise allowing the other guidelines to be adopted—a plausible explanation. As I became more involved with the situation, I learned that updated versions of both the *Official Plan* and the *Tall Buildings* guidelines were in development. As a result of the condo towers proposed outside my window, there was official recognition for the need of a master plan specifically addressing my part of the city. A *North Downtown Yonge Street Planning Framework* is also under development.

All these plans and guidelines are colored by the Ontario Municipal Board, which has considerable power to overturn any of the city's planning decisions. This board is a quasi-legal body whose decisions cannot be appealed, except on the narrowest of grounds. The board only recognizes "experts" as having opinions that warrant serious consideration. Developers have a big edge in this regard because they employ the vast majority of the individuals whom the OMB recognizes as "experts."

Against this pro-development bias, how are alternate concerns given

voice? The city did run something they called a "charette," which I attended. Unfortunately, this event was a pale imitation of an intense, several-day interactive design process. The charette lasted less than a day. Attendees were given the opportunity to describe our views on pre-defined topics. The first feedback came months later and consisted of "them" telling "us" what they heard. There was no sense of an interactive, incremental, or iterative design process [3].

Our local Councilor did initiate two working groups, one to consider the *North Downtown Yonge Street Planning Framework*; the other to consider the development proposed outside my study window. I was a member of both working groups. What I notice is that non-experts have what I would call a "contextual problem." We don't have the established expertise to be allowed to argue from our best understanding of the context.

What's missing was a "vision" for our Toronto district—specifically, for North Downtown's stretch of Yonge Street. This thoroughfare was the first street in Ontario and Canada's longest—some 1,800 km. Yonge was Toronto's main commercial street by the late nineteenth century, and there are many remaining buildings from that era. It was Toronto's parade street and where

Toronto went to celebrate. Retail functions along “our” section of the street, however, have fallen on hard times.

Less than two kilometers long, the section of Yonge Street I’m concerned with should aspire to what urban designer Allan Jacobs refers to as “Great Street status” [4]. This stretch of street already has a clearly recognized southern anchor—Dundas Square, which is Toronto’s Times Square [5]. The street’s southern portion running from Dundas Square was a focal point of this year’s “Celebrate Yonge!” [6] and the northern end is naturally anchored where Yorkville Street meets Yonge [7].

If developers’ enthusiasm for building on and adjacent to Yonge Street could be properly harnessed, we should be able to move the street in a good direction. To that end, the local neighborhood associations developed a “vision” for our stretch of Yonge Street. This has the great advantage that non-experts can reach supportable conclusions about what makes sense for the street, and what doesn’t. It’s no longer a game in which only expert opinion counts. Explicate the context and non-experts can meaningfully enter the game. Our “Vision” has five major elements, each of which I discuss in turn.

## 1. Making a “Great Street”

Yonge Street has the history and environmental possibilities to become a “great street.” Drawing especially on Allan Jacobs’ ideas, we want to see the following place features enhanced by all new construction:

- Pedestrians can walk with leisure, and users are present in sufficient numbers for safety but with enough space that one can walk at a comfortable pace.
- The street “walls” are well defined; buildings don’t loom over the street but do provide a definition of comfortable containment.
- At both ends, this section of Yonge has anchor “places” providing a recognizable starting point and terminus that both work as “places” for people.
- The street engages the eye through a rich variety of textures, patterns, and shapes.
- The building designs are complementary; they “work” with each other without rote duplication.
- The buildings are constructed of high-quality materials and incorporate a high degree of craftsmanship.
- Through the use of trees, plantings, and so forth, there is a “green” presence along the street and at the entrances to

side streets.

- There is a rich retail and recreational diversity incorporating different kinds of shops and public spaces.
- The street features “great details”—for example, an unusual entry way, striking windows, or handsome benches. Great features stand out and contribute to a distinctive environmental ambience.
- There are recognized “places” along the street and adjacent to the street. These places are destinations and locations where pedestrians want to spend time.

## 2. Appropriate Design

The design of new construction is perhaps the greatest challenge for our stretch of Yonge Street. Inappropriate new construction significantly reduces the street’s potential and may have a serious ripple effect across other downtown neighborhoods. Construction is not only about profit but should also enhance the built environment for its residents and users.

One way to identify appropriate design elements is through “patterns” as described in architect Christopher Alexander’s *Pattern Language* [8]. By “patterns,” I mean positive design elements contributing to the life and ambience of Yonge Street. One approach is that new construction draw on positive patterns already found along the street, though these patterns should be supplemented with new patterns, provided they enhance the “language” of “great” design along the street. Whether drawing on existing or new patterns, new buildings should be harmonious with what already exists and extend the design language in positively distinguishing ways.

## 3. Enhanced Public Realm

The public realm along my stretch of Yonge Street includes the street itself as well as side streets and parallel alleys, or “laneways” as we call them in Canada. There are a few small, linear parks above some of the Yonge Street subway, and there is hope for a major park just off Yonge Street at 11 Wellesley West. It is the street, side streets, and laneways, however, that are the most critically important elements in the public realm.

A key issue is that the foot traffic on Yonge continues to increase, and there are many more pedestrians than motorists. This pedestrian volume is sure to increase even more as thousands of new condo units require access to the street. To deal with these additional

users, we need to recognize Yonge as a place for pedestrians and cyclists as well as for motorists. Because of the added foot traffic, more of the street needs to be accessible to pedestrians. During this past summer's "Celebrate Yonge!" one traffic lane of the street was opened to pedestrians, and this successful shift demonstrates that at least one vehicle lane could be given over to pedestrians.

But raw space is not the most important factor. Along too much of Yonge, there is little green presence. The adjacent neighborhood association demonstrated what's possible with their Bay Street bioswale project, comprised of handsome planted "troughs" that capture and clean surface runoff. If sidewalks were widened, a portion of the new space could be devoted to a bioswale running along our stretch of Yonge.

The laneways on either side of Yonge Street are currently unattractive and under-utilized. Several cities—Melbourne is one striking example [9]—have retrofitted their laneways to provide interesting and inviting pedestrian-friendly retail environments. Improving Yonge's laneways would enhance the retail environment and contribute to an invigorated public realm.

## 4. Innovative Retail

Yonge Street's retail functions have been troubled for some time. There are relatively few long-standing businesses and, instead, many "opportunistic" retail outlets—cash stores, beauty parlors, tattoo emporiums, sex shops, and so forth. On the other hand, pedestrian volume is high and continues to increase as new residents occupy condominiums. Street violence is low. Yonge Street is *the* central pedestrian corridor in downtown Toronto and should support a better mix of retail.

Several undermining economic factors are at work. Real-estate land values have reached unsustainable levels—an acre of land on or near Yonge Street now fetches 50 million dollars or more. To keep pace, rents and property taxes increase. At the same time, traditional retail businesses are challenged by the internet, global brands, and big-box discount pricing. Providing ever more expensive space for large-scale retail is unlikely to generate strong, vibrant retail.

If no special provisions are made for Yonge Street, there is little reason to be optimistic about its retail future. This poses a fundamental challenge because vibrant, successful retail must be an essential element in an attractive, walkable Yonge Street. Though there is considerable developer interest in the street, most specialize in condominiums and have little experience in including space that can house the kind of retail necessary to make Yonge commercially successful.

New York City faced a similar challenge on its "Upper West Side Neighborhood Retail Streets." In June, 2012, city officials established revised zoning restrictions relating to new construction and building expansion on the neighborhood's retail streets. This approach might provide a model for retail development on Yonge, which is already recognized as a "special character street." Possibilities



One block of the 2012 summer event, "Celebrate Yonge!" Photo: Robert Fabian.

include:

- A maximum store-front width, at least for a significant fraction of any new or rehabilitated buildings;
- A minimum store-window exposure, including minimum vertical and horizontal dimensions;
- A minimum percentage of retail space to accommodate bars and eateries and including kitchen-ventilation systems (which, in high-rise buildings, are often difficult to retrofit).

Relatively narrow store fronts attract the eye and invite pedestrians to advance along the street. Large windows encourage window displays that engage the eye and animate the street. Restaurant accommodation is to preserve Yonge as an attractive dining district. Also useful would be financial incentives that encourage retail innovation, at least until our stretch of Yonge comes to be recognized as a “pedestrian retail destination.”

Yonge Street will not draw much automobile traffic to its retail functions because parking is difficult and expensive. Instead, the street should become one of the important pedestrian destination for Toronto retail. Three financial provisions that might help this happen are, first, requiring that a portion of new or enhanced retail be reserved for start-up or new retail ventures; second, placing these ventures in less costly locations—e.g., along laneways or in special-kiosk retail areas; and, third, offering subsidies to freeze rents and taxes at pre-new-development levels.

## 5. Necessary Limits

“Necessary limits” refer to stipulations relating to building height and residential protections. If a new building steps back from the Yonge Street property line no more than 10 meters, it should not be allowed to rise more than 50 meters above the building’s podium, which should be limited to three stories or fourteen meters. For buildings with deeper step back, heights could be greater. Most broadly, new-building height should be limited to five times the step back, plus the fourteen-meter podium height. This requirement would, in most instances, place a twenty-story limit on buildings that step back only ten meters and a 35-story limit on buildings that step back 20 meters. The goal would be providing enough height to make some new devel-

opment profitable but respect the street experience of residents and pedestrians.

Especially important in regard to residential neighbors is requiring a minimal horizontal separation between new buildings and the windows of any existing residential units. The city already recognizes the importance of a 25-meter separation between residential towers, and a horizontal separation of at least 12.5 meters would be appropriate and require a setback of 6.25 meters on either side of the logical line separating the old from the new. That marker would be the property line if the two properties were immediately adjacent, or the center of any laneway separating the two properties.

## Making Progress

The Yonge Street vision I’ve laid out here has made significant headway. The neighborhood associations on both sides of our stretch of Yonge Street have endorsed the vision, which appears with few alterations in the draft version of the forthcoming *North Downtown Yonge Street Planning Framework*. Partly because of our vision statement, a review panel of experts concluded that a redesign was necessary for the condominium proposed near my study window. At this point, the Ontario Municipal Board has not delivered their review of the Yonge Street document, but the signs all point to a distinctly better building outside my window. The current proposal is for a 52-story tower and a 22-story tower rather than the original twin 58-story structures. Just as importantly, Toronto is closer to a design and planning vision that moves Yonge Street in the right direction.

This process has taken more than a year and is still incomplete. It is troubling that getting this far required a considerable amount of dedicated work for which too few local residents have time. Fortunately, there are several of us who are retired or semi-retired. We have the leisure to attend meetings and draft position papers. This advocacy process, however, should not depend on unpaid volunteers. Even if the resources were not available to mount a full charette, that’s hardly the only evaluative and envisioning instrument that the city and province might provide.

## A Better Planning Process

In advocating for a better Yonge Street, I have found that one promising approach is “Open Space Technology,” which lays out the elements, processes, and stages whereby a committed group of individuals can explore and find solutions for a particular problem—in the present case, providing a proposal for a better Yonge Street [10]. Groups as small as a dozen or larger than one thousand have successfully undertaken an Open Space Technology conference. There is, however, one critical pre-condition in that sponsors must be prepared to accept whatever emerges from their work. This approach to problem-solving is different from charettes, which have the “virtue” that planners and architects are in control. There is ongoing dialogue between charette participants and experts, but the latter ultimately make final decisions. Open Space Technology conferences are driven by the passion and commitment of those who choose to participate. The “experts” do not have the last word.

I’m not arguing here for an Open Space Technology conference *per se*. Rather, I’m arguing that we need alternatives to traditional planning. I find strong parallels with the planning process for systems (my professional work before retirement). Traditionally, systems were planned by experts—i.e., system analysts—who develop extensive requirements and specifications that are then agreed to by users. The programmers would then proceed to build a system incorporating those requirements and specifications. All too often the result is much less than optimal because the system confronts the “uncertainty principle for systems” [11].

What’s required is an iterative, incremental approach. As the stakeholders begin to see the emerging system, they develop a much better understanding of what the system should do and how that doing can be actualized. The same dynamic seems to be at work in urban planning.

Actually, the situation is worse in urban planning. The stakeholders often can’t really understand what should be in the plan before they see what’s being proposed for the plan. That’s a central element in the justification for a conventional charette. There is a growing body of social-science research that exam-

ines alternative interactive, iterative approaches [12]. Open Space Technology is not the only alternative, but it does seem particularly appropriate to the urban planning process—specifically, to the process of developing a vision for a city district like our stretch of Yonge Street.

Getting the plan right is challenging, and uncertainty is still possible. Our built forms require flexibility so that incremental adjustments can be made in practice [13]. One of my concerns is that the engineering and the ownership structure of our new condo towers will make any incremental improvements and additions extremely difficult. Professionals and citizens have found creative ways to repurpose many older buildings but will the same be possible for the new condo towers? An answer is far from certain.

My learning process began in May, 2011—the month the developer announced his intention to construct the condo towers outside my window. I’ve come a considerable distance. I almost understand how planning works and doesn’t work in downtown Toronto. I can see traces of my handiwork in the planning now proposed for my stretch of Yonge Street. For me, that’s an attractive start.

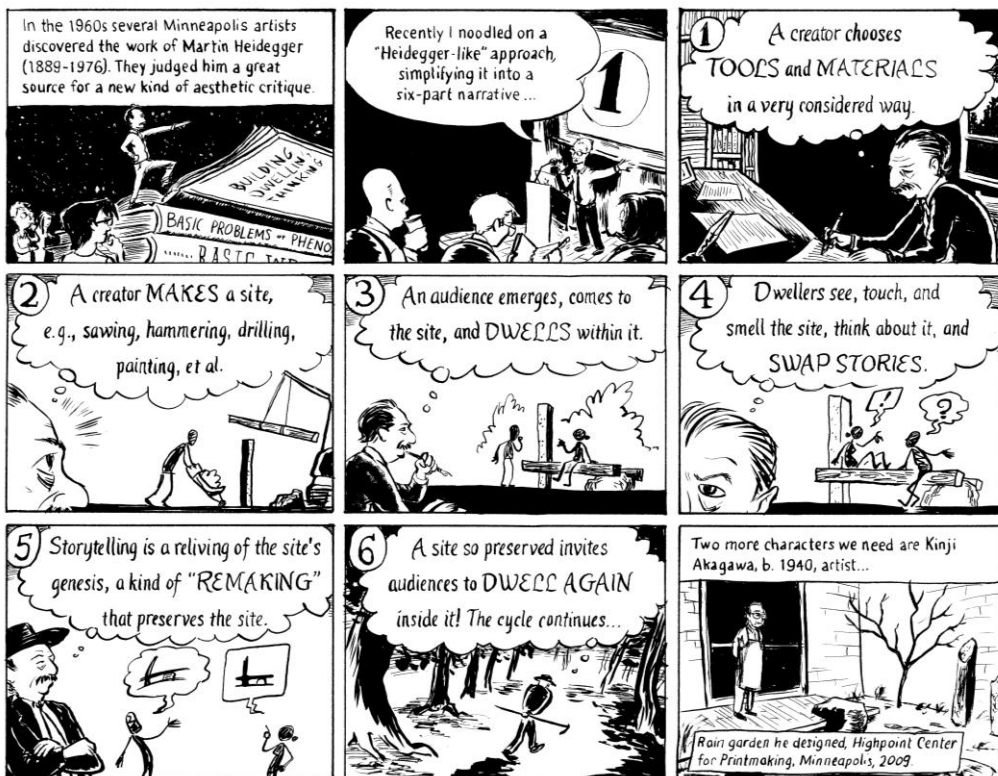
## Notes

1. R. Fabian, “Discovering Urban Design,” *Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2011), pp. 4–6.
2. [www.placestogrow.ca](http://www.placestogrow.ca).
3. On the charette process, see the National Charette Institute website at: [www.charetteinstitute.org/](http://www.charetteinstitute.org/)
4. A. Jacobs, *Great Streets*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993.
5. [www.ydsquare.ca/web/](http://www.ydsquare.ca/web/)
6. [www.celebrateyonge.com/](http://www.celebrateyonge.com/)
7. [www.bloor-yorkville.com/](http://www.bloor-yorkville.com/)
8. C. Alexander, S. Ishikawa, & M. Silverstein, *A Pattern Language*, NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977.
9. On Melbourne’s remarkable efforts to revitalize the downtown through enlivening laneways, see: <http://www.streetfilms.org/melbourne/>.
10. For a useful overview, go to: [http://www.openspaceworld.com/users\\_guide.htm](http://www.openspaceworld.com/users_guide.htm).
11. I first used the term in 1998: “It is impossible to know both the changes a new system will bring and the functions the system needs to perform.” <http://fabian.ca/modest/modest.html>.
12. P. Holman, T. Devane, & S. Cody, *The Change Handbook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn., San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2007.
13. See Stewart Brand’s *How Buildings Learn*, NY: Penguin, 1995.

# A Virtual Conversation

J. Kevin Byrne with Annie Mok

*Byrne is a Professor of Visualization at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. Mok is an illustrator and cartoonist. Byrne writes: "EAP readers might like a look at a 'comic art' interpretation that brings together philosopher Martin Heidegger, environmental sculptor Kinji Akagawa, designer Herbert Bayer, the Dalai Lama, and me in a virtual conversation on a hilltop in Aspen, Colorado. This cartoon ends a bit like a 'Star Trek' episode in which characters on the spaceship Enterprise's 'holodeck' are set to a 'permanent loop' inside the ship's computer flash drive. Like that episode, I tried to give this cartoon a slight feeling of dénouement...."* [kbyrne@mcad.edu](mailto:kbyrne@mcad.edu); <http://anniemakesstories.com>. Images and text © 2011, 2013, J. Kevin Byrne. For more on Byrne's work, go to: [www.mmaritists.org/article.do?rid=284362](http://www.mmaritists.org/article.do?rid=284362).



..and Herbert Bayer, 1900-1985, designer. Both were born abroad and emigrated to the U.S., being acclaimed for great art and design.

Bayer at an earthworks park he designed near Seattle, 1982.

Connections...for 35 years I have been a colleague of - and collaborator with - Kinji Akagawa.

We worked together to, for example, create multi-language typography for his urban seating and bird bath along Minneapolis's Nicollet Mall.

Akagawa himself met - and served as a print-making protégé to - Mr. Bayer in 1965 at L.A.'s famed Tamarind Lithography Workshop.

Akagawa was one of the Minneapolis artists who championed Heidegger's approach to aesthetic criticism, so let's apply the six-part lesson to a work by Bayer, a mentor to Akagawa.

The phenomenological critique or "lesson" that I focus on is Bayer's Anderson Park, an environmental earthworks site he designed in Aspen, Colorado.

1 Materials that Bayer selected...

2 Workers at Anderson Park used a wide range of tools to make the site...

3 Bayer was a revered designer, so both clients and later, audiences flocked to his sites. Some, like Walter Paepcke of Chicago's Container Corporation, met with Bayer before, during, and after his efforts.

Your grass mound's shape is perfect, but I feel it needs to be bigger. If the Aspen folks were to ask you to do more someday, what would be your approach?

my work will of course respect nature, but an artist ought not to imitate nature, but instead create a spiritual world side-by-side with nature. both natural and man-made environments can co-exist if their boundaries are understood.

3 I became an audience for the site when I attended the Aspen Design Conference there the year it opened, 1974.

I was in grad school and several of us were literally "dwellers," since we camped nearby.

4 Heidegger might have urged us to elevate our sensing and thinking. With brains on overdrive, buzzing from conference lectures, we went to the site to explore and eat our box lunches.

My sandwich needs more mustard.

Bayer's swales are lovely. I wonder what happens here after a huge rainstorm?

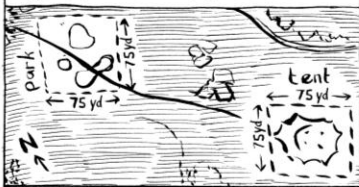
5 "Reliving" the site was tricky for me that week, so I didn't do that until a year later: I used the interval to study my slides of the site and research its development.

I learned that Bayer's first earthwork design, on a smaller site, had been installed there.

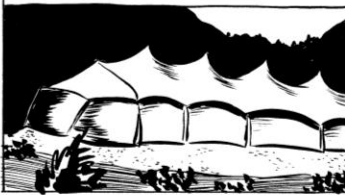
This meant that Anderson Park was a remaking - and enlarging - of itself.

⑥ Today we can "dwell inside" the site anytime with Google Earth or Bing! software. While doing so recently I noticed relationships between Anderson Park and Bayer's other environmental design nearby.

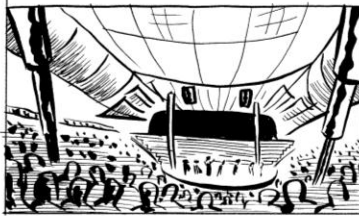
I also noticed that the square footage of the two sites match up almost exactly! Had Bayer ever written on this, I wondered?



... Notably the Aspen Institute's events tent. The mounds and swales echo the tent's roof...



...by concavity, convexity, and visual counterpoint.



it is difficult to separate my sculptures and environmental designs because they are so closely related.

i always see outdoor sculpture in relation to its immediate environment.



Anderson Park continues to invite audiences to dwell there. The Dalai Lama led a meditation group at the site one crisp morning in July 2008.



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# Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology

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## Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology

Published three times a year, **EAP** is a forum and clearing house for research and design that incorporate a qualitative approach to environmental and architectural experience.

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- Sense of place;
- Architectural and landscape meaning;
- Changing conceptions of space, place, and nature;
- Home, dwelling, and journey;
- The nature of environmental and architectural experience;
- Environmental design as place making;
- The practice of a *lived* environmental ethic.

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