

THE END OF PLACE AS WE KNOW IT? ATTEMPTS AT CONCEPTUALIZATION

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Abstract: This article is an attempt to join in the ongoing in recent years debate on the conceptualization of place in times of global changes, which on the one hand have freed the place from its limitation and confinement, and on the other hand have weakened its basic function of social creation of meanings, of sense of community, of existential security, of ingraining in and of trust. In the situation of the increasingly more frequent appropriation of the places by corporations, means of transportation and information, the ideal of place, although it departs from its primary physicality moving to the sphere of imagination effectively fuelled by the marketing industry, still remains the fundamental environment of most people's everyday life. I believe that a challenge of our times is a revision of various circles' attitudes towards negligence of everyday culture, whose significant part seems to be the place – a live tissue of social relationships and collective identities. However, some architects and sociologists underline unanimously that there is interdependence between designing the urban environment and social production of place. From the sociological point of view place is more than just the urban form. The places have to be conceived as the collection of variously interrelated spaces (physically and virtually), enabling different activities. In the times of globalization, the places do not disappear from the surface of the earth, but they rather undergo the reconfiguration process that consists in developing the exchange with the other places. The selection of the issues in the text, of which the author is fully aware, does not exhaust the discussed problems, although they are not chosen at random.

Key words: Place, *Non-place*, Social space, Social production of place

Introduction

Along with the development of contemporary mechanisms that uproot the former centers of trust, identity, and safety, place is no longer the bearer of tightly structured social ties that were once organized in a given time and space. Although one cannot advance the thesis that place is disappearing in its materiality as an area of praxis and engagement, this does, however, change fundamentally the perspective from which place is viewed. James Slevin (2008) writes that the background is globalization. Presence

or the firm localization of activity, dominated societies before modernity. The advent of modernity has increasingly led to the detachment of immediate relations from place. Giddens (2008: 13) observed that the place of action is not only structured by that which is present; the "visible character" of the place where action takes place hides the relations at a distance that determine its character.

The macrosociological orientation of urban sociology demonstrates that a system of political, economic, and social factors inherent to the development of contemporary capitalism are responsible for shaping civilization, especially that of large cities and their inhabitants [Majer 2009: 250]. Simultaneously,

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as is indicated by anthropological study, urban society, just like any other type of social life, comprises a variety of aspects (home, neighborhood, recreation) and associations, like any other form, that develop in firmly localized daily lives. Ulf Hannerz refers to this in writing that people brush up against each others' backs, while grabbing each other with their gazes [Hannerz 2006]. Even in the place of Richard Florida the *continuum* of closeness intertwines with today's dominating global nature of cities. And with this, Florida creates the same conditions for being rooted as for being mobile. Possibly, he continues, place is more significant than ever as a anthropological category since, for at least some of the world's people, it is linked inextricably with the possibility of choosing a particular space in which to live (Should I stay or should I go now?) [Florida 2008: 80].

There are many who seem to believe that technologically programmed modernity offers richer possibilities for interpersonal contacts; they contend that interaction, rather than place, is the essence of urban life. However, this is only part of the truth. The perception of the issue of shaping place through the prism of designing influential spaces is proof of the misunderstanding of its essence. The incongruity of conflicting views regarding the functioning of space leads to the disintegration of the city. This is seen on a small scale in interpersonal relations. People always live in relation to others and with others (with someone, by someone, next to someone). Place is where interactive order is created, fortified, and transformed; it is a socially defined space that is also built through links with other places and people. Thus, there is no place that exists in its own authentic reality waiting to be discovered. In attempting to answer the question of what place is today and what conceptualizations are linked to it, I would like to underscore the multiplicity of meaning and the loss of the homogeneity of place that have resulted from radical social, cultural, and economic change. Until recently, the environment of human life was structured as a existential space that was linked firmly with place as the center of values, the immediate vicinity, and *imago mundi*. Place has also always been the fundamental element of topological

stability and continuity. Postmodernity changes this in placing a strong emphasis on the possibility of reinterpreting the concept of place while disregarding its regulatory function within social lives and the constructed environment. The possibility of internalizing social relations within an unlimited space confers on place new functions and meanings.

Topophilia

Thanks to its semantic capaciousness, the word place is not only ingrained in colloquial speech, it is also a useful means for expressing various content and the door key to a limitless number of "processes that shape existential and esthetic cultural experience" [Rewers 2004: 161]. Those who strive to "humanize" space have concentrated their efforts on demonstrating that place is simultaneously something more and something different. This has also decimated the misconception that place belongs to a category that is relatively easy to disassociate from the world of people and things. Based on many disciplines, this is explained as the multiplicity of approaches to the issue of place and its exploitation. It is at the borders of disciplines, but also within them, that we encounter the fundamental dispute.

Independently of the changes that the concept of place has undergone, one must conclude that, in light of the doctrinal crisis facing urban planning and architecture, this concept has acquired particular significance. In commercialized urban space, only place is capable of returning equilibrium to urban spaces that are dismembered, chaotic, and devoid of values. Theoreticians, critics, and practitioners from many disciplines draw attention to this issue. Some perceive this as a passing academic fad, while others view it as a broad field of research into the human environment and human behavior. In describing the main themes and orientations of geographic urban studies, Iwona Sagan emphasizes that the "intense development of behavioral orientation influenced the progressive erosion of the scientism model and the increasingly widespread belief among researchers that limiting the techniques applied in urban studies to just quantitative methods will leave a vast

range of social problems outside of the field of scientific analysis" [Sagan 2008; Jałowicki 1982]. Shifting the focus to qualitative parameters of the urban environment strengthened the humanistic orientation, which, in geography, replaced the concept of space with that of place [Ibidem]. *Place and Placeness* [1976] by Edward Relph, is a seminal work on the experimental feeling of place. Relph argues that however "shapeless" and "intangible" place may be, it is essentially the fundamental and the safest point from which to view social reality [Relph 1976: 38]. Within this proposed concept, Relph noted the necessity of opening up the analysis of social spaces¹, to which place undoubtedly belongs, to a variety of perspectives and spatial orders.

This thesis was also developed and expanded upon by the American geographer Yi-Fu Tuan in his book entitled *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, in which he discusses spatial culture in the context of various peoples and societies. He presents these issues against a background of different mechanisms of social structure and social consciousness. From this perspective, Tuan's contribution to the development of thought concerning "cultural space" is exceptional, and, in the opinion of Aleksander Wallis, it is particularly pertinent in light of the current crisis of traditional social spaces. Creating them is no longer possible, but it is also not known what values to introduce to these places². The humanist perspectives Tuan embraces imparted places with the character of "humanized spaces" with a range of inherent questions about how people understand and recognize them and how they impart them with meaning. He divides space into public places (sacred places, monuments, squares, parks) and fields of care (houses, gardens, market places, cafes). Tuan's fields of care are "better" in that they encompass an exceptional richness of experience in contacts with people and places. Stepping outside of dogmatic and mechanical analysis of place and space, and employing methodology founded on description and narration in equal measure with other tools for investigating the world, provides an original perspective, and one that is important in terms of research inquiries, of the relationships between people, and the space surrounding them³.

Critics point out that Tuan's approach to the issue of place is too essentialistic, and that the categories in which he analyses the relation of people to place are unjustifiably universal, as if they were to be applied always, everywhere, and to everyone. Even if there are elements of universalism, Baldwin et al. [2004] maintain that the differences speak volumes.

Many years before Tuan, Florian Znaniecki applied a humanist methodological directive to his research of human spatial experience. The author of *Socjologicznych podstaw ekologii ludzkiej* [Sociological foundations of human ecology], demonstrates that human subjects "never experience any common, objective, or low-quality (...) space" [Znaniecki 1938]. Thus, we have a principle that states that a designated place is, from the point of view of the cultural researcher, an accumulation of various spatial values and the foundations of convictions that are associated with them. In Znaniecki's analysis, all social facts, in contrast to natural ones, are those of individual people, their life experiences, and their daily practices. "Nobody's" reality does not exist [Znaniecki 1938; Starosta 112-114; Piotrowski 1966].

Rewers writes that "the essential differences between Znaniecki and Tuan are that the former examines spatial values as elements of certain social systems and collective experiences, while the second seeks their roots first in the intimate experiences of the human body. In Znaniecki's analyses, spatial values that are established communally permit creating an unlimited number of configurations. Linked as they are to the dynamics of social life, they are open to whatever can or does happen. While Tuan traces cultural differences in the organization of place, he always returns to the universal order and hierarchy of values drawn from the placement of the human body in the world" [Rewers 2005: 165]. This thought, which does not derive directly from Znaniecki, will be studied further by subsequent researchers of place seeking new justifications for the multiplicity of meanings inherent in its social creation.

In addition to topophilia, the concept of perception remains key to the understanding of place. Studies of how people perceive and value place are important to an understanding of the

spatial behavior of individuals and social groups [Jałowicki and Szczepański 2002]. *The Image of the City* (1960)⁴, written by the American urban planner Kevin Lynch, is notable. The concept of the "image of the city" put forward by the author is an attempt to depart from the simplified, one-sided view of the relations that link people to the urban environments they inhabit. Fascinated with the urban landscape, Lynch seeks out the universal elements that provide structure to spatial perception. Based on studies and analyses as well as field work⁵, he identifies five elements, namely paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks, that, when appropriately accented, render the city comprehensible and legible to its residents. Lynch proves that comprehensive, generalized mental maps of the city that inhabitants retain in their memories give them a sense of emotional safety [Lynch 1960: 4]. Not all of his theses earned acceptance and recognition among academic and urban planning circles; for example, the contention that an urban space is essential and is of the utmost importance met with criticism for being conceptually one-sided. While no one has refuted the cogency of Lynch's argument (it seems obvious that people should not have difficulty finding their way from place to place), some of the other elements of his concept, those which have escaped social qualification, continue to be debated. These include aspects that were too subjectively defined to have become universal patterns within legible city forms. Although Lynch's idea was never recognized within the moral standards of the idealistic tradition, it has quietly slipped into the designs of people who shape city landscapes [Jencks 1987: 438]. The architect Aldo von Eyck, one of the representatives of the idealistic movement said that whatever space and time mean, place and occasion are more important. In the human imagination, space is place, and time is occasion⁶. In order to achieve such agreement, one must concede that relations are as important as systems. This was what is missing from Lynch's conception.

While sociological theory and practice do not refrain from analyzing spatial and material factors and the associated behaviors of inhabitants, they strive primarily to identify the socio-cultural characteristics and membership in specific social groups that influence peoples'

perceptions of the environments they inhabit [Turowski 1979]. From a cultural standpoint, place is that which is significant for particular individuals and communities, and as such is bound by a system of knowledge, ideas, values, and rules of behavior, thanks to which identification and social integration happen. Aleksander Wallis refers to such places as social spaces [1990].

In his subsequent work (e.g., *Good City Form*, 1984) Lynch corrects this error and instills meaning in factors that are responsible for the quality of place, identification with place, and temporal shifts in perception. He postulates that in order to identify precisely the aim of urban planning it is necessary to pose the question of what and who is it for. The answers provide subsequent urban planning concepts and directions for the development of place with human activities, experiences, imagination, and the meanings attributed to them. According to Lynch, the only source of information on this subject is a dialogue with the people in a place [Lynch 1984].

Christian Norberg-Schulz, the Norwegian architect and architectural theorist, advances some interesting conceptions of place. Inspired by the idea of Lynch's image of the city, he contends simultaneously that it was not correctly understood. He contends that instead of recognizing the true humanism of his work, Lynch is often thought of as a romantic who is tries stubbornly to save humans and return the piazza to them [Norberg-Schulz 1971: 15]. Referring to Aristotelian topos, a dynamic field with many directions and properties, he perceives in place a permanence that is the prerequisite for identifying the structure of the environment. The loss of space is the loss of identity, a sense of community, and participation. Place needs distinct borders; it is the "interior" as opposed to the "exterior".

In the psychological conceptions of David Canter [1977], unlike in Tuan and Norberg-Schulz, place is conceived as a psychological geographic entity, or a socio-physical unit, the elements of which are communicated socially. It comprises the three fundamental spatial interdependencies of space: physical, conceptual, and behavioral [Lenartowicz 2008; Bańka 2002]. All three describe the psychological validity of the category of space.

Canter assumes that the individual, who draws knowledge from direct and indirect observations of people and places, learns to impart them with significance. His conception of place thus draws near to the choice of potentials of James J. Gibson, according to whom the physico-spatial environment is also the cultural environment. Because culture “sets” the world view, it influences the choice of potentials [see: Hall]. In this approach, there are distinct links between knowledge of the community and cultural codes. The community itself is the place where they are created, the field for discourse, and the source of information. The intangible characteristics of place are significant here since even a well-organized space does not automatically become a place [Lenartowicz 2008].

Christopher Alexander, the author of numerous books about design that are imbued with humanist reflection⁷, has contributed substantially to the development of the conception of place with a humanist coefficient. The philosophical and sociological generalizations of the principles developed permit reading a given work in terms of the overall view of the process of shaping residential communities. This is aided by numerous references to other disciplines: linguistics; cognitive psychology; biology; genetics. The idea of patterns thus refers to a wide spectrum of issues, dependencies, combinations, and multivariate complexity. Lenartowicz writes that “the language of patterns is not based on a longing for the past. Historical examples are only used to highlight certain lost values, primarily those of an individual’s daily life as a generator of forms. The language of patterns is introduced from the beauty of culturally designated forms and a defined process that will create a type of renewable form in traditional culture, but it will do this from the beginning without simulation by taking into consideration current cultural circumstances” [Lenartowicz 2009: XVIII]. Alexander continues to seek order in the surroundings of humans. He finds it in the colors and geometry of nature itself, and in traditional, unselfconscious cultures that create forms based on the principle of homeostasis, or self-organizing mechanisms despite progressing transformations in reality. People are unable to preserve their spiritual roots and ties with the

past if the physical world in which they live does not maintain these relations [Alexander 2008: 143]. This same author writes that it is essential to create spatial continuity through which people must pass as they make their way to a given place. In Alexander’s analysis, place means something more than form; each place is unique in its individuality and in terms of its quality and content. Reaching the essence of “nameless qualities”, such as life, entirety, comfort, or freedom requires renewing this in one’s self. This is an important step in the development of the humanist approach to urban planning and designing city environments.

In all of these concepts, place has lost its status as a hermetically closed area and has become an element of a larger whole while attaining a new existential dimension. From a neutral and objective segment of physical space, place has become a space of particular human engagement. The opening up of place to movement and change underscores its continuity with other constructed spaces that are often built on the principles of “temporary patterns”, rather than the dualistically conceived division of interior and exterior. In such designs, the structure of the constructed environment takes on indivisible forms that remain the vital marker of place [Jarvis 2007: 29–31].

We have arrived at the point in which “neither place nor the people living in them are first in relation to the other and the essences of both are mutually existent and forming. This is why the solution must continually oscillate between living experience and the historically shaped content of a given space. Place does not exist without its inhabitants, and habitation is possible thanks to place” [Buczyńska-Garewicz 2006: 6]. Their experiences and the way they are recorded, because of the inner wealth which they embody, requires referring to various levels of experience and understandings of their nature [Ibidem].

In the language of the phenomenologists, place is “the segment of the surrounding world in which people are C, that is to say in which they co-exist” [Buczyńska-Garewicz 2006:6]. It loses its status as a hermetically closed area in place of the greater whole, thus gaining a new existential dimension. From a neutral and impartial segment of physical space, it becomes a place of human activity, experience, and

commitment, without being first in relation to people. The essence of place and people is that they are mutually defining. Experiencing place, and then describing this (because of the inner wealth it embodies) refer to different levels of experience and different understandings of its essence [Ibid].

Martin Heidegger's phenomenological philosophy reveals this perspective. Place appears in it as a theoretical construct that refers to the individual dimension of the experience of time and space. Going beyond geographical coordinates provides an understanding of the phenomenon hidden in the layers of emotion and spirit. Through their presence in one's life (Heidegger's "things at hand"), objects designate a relativistic place. Because of this, place is close. Heidegger recognized the relationship of people to place in terms of spiritual relationships that result from the subjectivity and immediacy of experience. The notion of "experienced space" must be separated here from the "experience" that is associated with a space. Reducing an experienced space to its physicality is also incapable of reflecting the wealth of content that here hidden in place. There are city-places such as Venice, Rome, Warsaw, Cracow, and Gdańsk, where the meanings conveyed are inseparable from spiritual, holistic, intentional beings. Venice, for example, is a place which cannot be understood from its physicality or through mental experience. This city, observes Buczyńska-Garewicz, is an entity that cannot be reduced to these two categories. As a distinct quality, is determined by its content associated with the coexistence of people and things. Only such a place belongs to the world in which people ARE. Thus, place acquires meaning because of the existence in it of people and in being human, but also because of their own names. "Life continues in individual places with their own meanings. Mecca is the only one, just as Rome is the only one" [Buczyńska-Garewicz 2006: 28]. Is everyone capable of making their place a building, a temple, a park? *Genius loci*⁸ plays an important role in the harmonious tuning of space and related experiences.

We take as much from a place as we can, and we keep as much of this as we are ready to. This depends now only on us if we open up to a place or not, if we miss the content it provides,

or if we remain blind to its presence in our lives [Ibidem].

Remember that a particular way of being in a space is defined as residence. In a metaphorical sense, the green-shuttered house that Gaston Bachelard refers to corresponds to the archetypical values inherent to feelings of safety, intimacy, and order. This dream of a "house" encompasses all the images served up by reality; however, the real little house is immediately adapted to that of the archaic dream. This fundamental dream is what we refer to as the oneiric house [Bachelard 1975: 305]. Residing in this house also exceeds the physical and delivers experiences linked to the internalization of its meaning.

The rooted and the mobile

According to Tsugio Makimoto and David Manners, in the "nomadic era" place loses its power of permanence and certain shelter and comes to be more reminiscent of a motel or stopping point, as Meaghan Morris (1988) proposes [Urry 2007: 252]. The metaphor of motel lends movement and speed and continual rotation. Urry develops this concept in sociology of mobilities, the foundation of which lies in the global society. In his opinion, mobility, and not community, plays the primary role in building unstable, placeless relationships. This underscores the significance, from the standpoint of the transformation of place, of time in conferring new forms of belonging to place. Societies that are "rich in time", contends Richard Sennett, build open spaces that are cosmopolitan and full of possibilities. Places marked by drudgery are left behind and sidelined by clock time, as was seen in Eastern Europe prior to 1989 [Urry 2009]. Time does not necessarily bring change, and places are not necessarily static and unchanging. Rather, they resemble a collection of varied spaces where ranges of relational networks and flows coalesce to merge and split. Each such place can be viewed as a singular link between proximity, that is characterized by dense contemporary interaction, and rapidly dissipating webs and networks that spread out physically in vast virtual and imaginary space [Urry 2009: 194].

Proximity and extensive networks make a variety of internal and external activities possible, but the source of these is place. Objects are also of significant importance to this construction; thanks to their presence within a space it can be transformed into place.

Global competition among cities and places has resulted in many of them losing their identity. Proof of this can be seen in theme parks and the use of franchising. Rewers writes, “facades constructed of self-images that belong to various nations clearly show how a local space loses its ontological roots in a specific place where it is undermined by trans-located rules for creating a 'national facade'” [Rewers 2007: 72]. “Then what is, we ask ourselves, the ontological status of place when it reaches us only through images and cannot be a center of physical activity?” [Rewers 2004: 167]. J. Nicholas Entrikin addresses this issue in his book *The Betweenness of Place* [1991]. The spaces *between* open themselves to happenings, they link different orders (internal-external), and they reveal new relations with the natural environment. Technology, in this instance, provides the impulse that stimulates the opening up of a place to the contemporary realization of shaping spatial forms.

As Paul Virilio argues, perpetually changing information creates a new kind of spatial continuum. The concept of place as a static, anchored whole is not viable. Some researchers contend that instead of studying people in their homes or places, they should be studied in movement, while traveling. Under the influence of the connections and flows of people, money, images, and goods, our conceptions of place are richer. We consider their familiarity in wider contexts. We see them as points or spaces where global influences intersect. Many European streets provide examples of the hybridization and syncretism of place shaped by the imposition of many cultures.

What we have here is a dynamic process that shapes identity in countless ways through stimulating, and sometimes even growing, exchanges with other places. The danger appears to lie in the construction of narratives based on mythogenesis, which minimizes the actual fates and histories of people. This is the primary place of mass consumption. In the

contemporary world, the quintessence of the created world is Disneyland [Sircus: 2001: 30], which is a work of fantasy and a symbol of postmodernism, and a product of the imagination with both psychological and sociological significance. According to Jan Sircus, such places are neither good nor bad just because they are real or not; sometimes such places build history, and sometimes history is the basis for creating such places, as is the case with Disneyland [Sircus 2001].

If places are becoming increasingly similar, then the reward for standing out is becoming increasingly substantial. Places, like other products, undergo processes of invention. They are the creative products of architects and artists. In some instances, new architecture preserves the original narration, and interprets the past in a contemporary fashion. Or, it can be a bold proposition that imparts the old story with new elements. Where certain shopping centers destroy the feeling of place by replicating universal patterns and insulating consumers from the external world, many others are designed with references to the traditions of a given place that makes identity legible. One example is West Edmonton Mall with its fragments of Old Orleans that are based on a simulation of the boulevards of Paris. This is a whole artificially created feeling of “being in another place” [Ibidem]. People like places that have been created over a span of whole centuries, and those that have been created *ad hoc*. The most important aspects are the aim and the story, just as in films. The places of others become our places.

Paradoxically, *non-place* becomes a helpful metaphor in illustrating urban reality. The more willingly we use it, the more frequently do we encounter a reality that is organized anonymously. It is here that superficial and commercialized interactions dominate, more durable bonds are eroded, and territorial and cultural boundaries are blurred. Marc Augé advances the thesis that non-places are the real image of our times, and that their explosion and advancement into increasingly expanding areas of our lives are causing profound changes in human consciousness. The differences between places steeped in history and interpersonal relations and non-places is that no organic social life is possible in the latter

[Augé 2000]. Wordless communication, however, dominates. Just next door, global tourists move through countless “empty meeting places” of modernity such as airport terminals, bus and train stations, highways, gas stations, and docks. They are countless global refugees [Urry 2007: 225]. “Fenced cities”, which is one way of describing airports, are specifically non-interactive and they are anonymous in the way big cities are [Ibidem: 253]⁹. They are, nevertheless, important points along the way to the colonization of places in which references to culture, tradition, society, and nature are recorded. Such *places* pose questions regarding the “redundancy of interaction”, as this contradicts the specifics of place, which are based on providing a space where social relations are shaped. Zygmunt Bauman contends that never before in the history of the world have such “kind-of-places” occupied such vast amounts of space [Bauman 2006: 159]. People frequent these public places, but in contrast to the Heideggerian interpretation of home, rootedness, and being, they do not create a situation in which they are present together. This is equitable with a long-distance truck driver on the highway; he or she is present in an enclosed space, but he or she is not at home in it. Contemporary forms of mobility, such as computers, cellular telephones, roads, airports, etc. change radically the dialect of rootedness. The nostalgic idea of life intertwined with geographic closeness is, in some sense, moving into the background.

One common feature of space and place is that they are created by people. “The relationship of space and place can be compared to the relationship of time and events” [Franke 2008: 28]. Navigating a space in order to get to a given place provides an opportunity to relax for a moment. Franke asks whether or not passing through an empty, charmless space always carries with it a longing to arrive at a place. In answer to this, anxiety appears in places that have been appropriated by transport corporations (airports, highways), retail businesses, developers, etc. Some places exist only through plays on words, and they function in global circulation only as consumer goods. These are places from the imagination that

have been saturated successfully by the marketing industry. As Augé writes these are stereotypical notions or imaginary places, banal utopias. The myth of place that has been released into social circulation is becoming a non-place as it is detached from its original surroundings and landscapes. The landscape outside of the car window is augmented by additional information promoting its advantages and places that are worth remembering. Sometimes, the pleasure drawn from the consciousness of being close to a given place is sufficient. It can happen that an initially abstract space becomes something close and familiar.

Thus, place and non-place are like two opposing poles. The first can never be erased from memory, while the second will never fill it completely. Both are as ambiguous and multi-layered as a manuscript written on a piece of writing material from which a previous text has been removed. While the characters of more and more places become open, incongruous, relational, and internally diverse, the image of coherent and rooted places lose meaning. This means that, in principle, the conception of place as a closed area becomes useless. Doreen Massey portrays place as a “product of interconnecting flows – of routes rather than roots” [Cresswell 2004: 53].¹⁰

David Harvey [1996] asserts that, to a certain degree, all places are open. And while the advantages of conceptualizing place as open and incongruous appear to be interesting from a contemporary perspective, it would be an exaggeration to conclude that this is the only way they can be interpreted. Under certain circumstances, the conceptualization of place as closed and internally homogeneous can provide better analytical and/or political advantages. Equally as good can be the range of places that exhibit varied degrees of openness and closeness, continuity and discontinuity, and internal homogeneity and heterogeneity. Overall, places possess many aspects and meanings for people, organizations, and institutions, and they are constructed and experienced as material artifacts, networks of social interaction, and products of the dialectical games of various actors who participate in social processes [Harvey 1996: 316].

“So place for Harvey, is a conditional form of ‘permanence’ in the flow of space and time. Although using a completely different language this recalls Tuan’s observations that ‘if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place’ [Tuan 1977: 6].” But Harvey is more interested in the political world than Tuan and the pause that comes with place allows not so much a sense of existential belonging but an opportunity to mark particular boundaries and constitute particular forms of local government and social power. Harvey’s attention is focused on the ‘political economy of place construction under capitalism’ [Cresswell 2004: 57].

Social production of space in a mobile world

Space that is produced socially as a product of social relations “extended” in space takes several material and social forms. This means that the traditional way of thinking of place gives way to a process-centered and dynamic approach. Places are produced by multiply repeated actions. The development of a wide range of types of global mobility, both external and internal, means the end of the named place and the beginning of the undefined place [Hudson 2001]. From the sociological point of view, two facts determine the human world: the social character of humans, and the way in which humans encounter the world via symbols. Both determine what social reality means to a human being. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann show how important in that reality subjective meanings are, which result from the internal character of the reality of everyday life. This is the world that arises in people’s thoughts and actions, and thanks to these thoughts and actions it exists as a real world [Berger, Luckmann 1983]. The privileged position of everyday life, among many other realities produces one that is apparent, in general, around the “here” of my body, and the “now” of my present. It is not possible, therefore, to separate it either from spatial or temporal structure. Spatial structure appears in the form of placing facts, events, social

interaction, and whole human biographies. Henri Lefebvre’s way of thinking of the production of space is worth considering here. The concept he proposes, that of social space, refers to abstract constructs that are subsequently imposed on physical space¹².

In research into daily practices, which present the opposition “place” and “space,” spatial actions predominate, writes Michel de Certeau. This is attested to by verbal descriptions of places, street narratives, domestic tales (“you see”, “the door’s there”, “where you turn”, etc.). Place is a dynamic category, changing, constructed, and reconstructed in everyday practices. In this sense, it becomes more an event than a closed and limited whole.

Is place really losing its privileged position in favor of the fluidity and despacialization of social relations? In premodern conditions, time and space are linked by the intermediary of place; now no place is privileged. Modern organization assumes the coordination of human activities without the necessity of considering the specifics of place and a physical common presence in it [Giddens 2001]. In a world of mobility, production of place has less and less in common with one existential space. In the view of Manuel Castells, this new way of organizing social and economic life, defined by him in terms of categories of space of flows, leads to the new phenomena of simultaneous fragmentation and integration. The role of place appears to be central here, for it increases opportunities to construct cultural, political, and physical “bridges” between physical and virtual space [Castells 2007]. The author maintains that the overwhelming majority of people in traditional and in advanced societies live in places, and thus perceive their spaces as based on places. Place is a locale, the form, function, and meaning of which are contained within the borders of immediate physical proximity [2007: 423]. People live in places, but the structural domination of a global logic of flows alters their meaning and dynamic. Not all places are socially interactive and rich in terms of space. Castells quotes Allan B. Jacob’s research which, in the book *Great Streets* (1983), describes differences in urban quality,

comparing Barcelona with Irvine (a suburban area in southern California). Irvine is a particular place in which the space of experience shrinks inward to the degree that flows take up a greater and greater amount of time and space [2007: 424]. The connections between simultaneous globalization and localization are complex and dynamic. They spread somewhere between fear of loss of domination and terror of loss of identity. Simmel's question whether the individual leads his/her life in proximity with or in alienation from the objective cultural process of his/her times remains full of tensions and contradictions¹³. Escobar draws attention to this aspect of the problem mentioned above when he writes that it is crucial to learn to see cultural, ecological, and economic practices based on place as important sources of alternative visions and strategies for the reconstruction of local and regional worlds. It does not matter to what degree they may be produced by "globality". It is socially necessary to think of forms that can protect places, or, to be more precise, protect specific constructions of place and possibly necessary reorganizations of place, as a projection that can be realized [Escobar 2001: 165-166, in Cresswell 2004: 85].

It is necessary to remember, write Allan Richard Pred (geographer) and Douglas S. Massey (sociologist), that places are not shoes or cars which remain in factories as finished products ("Places are never 'finished' but always 'becoming'") [Pred 1984: 279, in Cresswell 2004: 35]. Places are constantly being produced in the course of everyday, routine practices, through multiply repeated customs, and the renewal of seemingly prosaic actions in the course of the day. The contemporary fascination with the process of flow and mobility in a globalized world marks the end of named place and the beginning of undefined place.

Geraldine Pratt, a Canadian geographer, describes the contemporary paradoxes of mobility and identity via the example of the lives of immigrant workers in Vancouver. Even minimal control over a fragment of space by means of objects, which are signs of identity, is an attempt to define self in place [Cresswell 2004; Dant 2007]. The reconstruction of home

is, thus, possible in the shape of the reintegration of known routine actions which can be reproduced at will. Many link this conception of a mobile home more with "the road" than with "roots". In making oneself at home, decorative artifacts, for example, are useful. In this process of hurried "rooting", there is a sensible lack of linear progression and hierarchy of episodes of time, experienced in sequence and, as it were, "closed", and it does not form a sequence in which one home completely replaces the previous one, but it is rather a matter of an accumulation of worlds or time-space continua, whereby each new addition makes for a reconfiguration of the mutual links between the remaining [Edensor 2004: 87]. This is an ideal situation for "new tribes", or in other words, according to Michael Maffesoli, communities that develop around shared interests that cross class borders and those of geography, age and culture etc. In the era of new media and mediated communication, cities no longer need places like the agora, porticoes, the patio etc. The emphasis on space weakens and is not an end in itself, argues Maffesoli. However, he continues, the challenge of contemporaneity is an acceptance of many "villages" that give a feeling of rootedness and belonging.

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The contemporary conceptualization of place in urban planning and architecture refer to the face of the city on the road, in motion. They go beyond an imaging of place as an isolated and static area. Places are defined rather as points situated in proximity to the paths of urban circulation. The transformation they undergo is today a matter of the merger of places with transit spaces, and the inscription of them in a broader process of the erasure of divisions between the inner and the outer, the part and the whole [Hillier 1996; Nyka 2006]. We can recognize as a particular prototype of contemporary transit places the seats placed along Las Ramblas in Barcelona. In this context a particular function is fulfilled by places such as museums, theaters, and galleries. which, besides their cultural functions, are ascribed the status of places in the sociological sense. These are

places for meetings, places where one can eat something, discuss matters with someone, or just simply be. They are safe, smoke-free places for children and teenagers, those on their own or in couples, moms and dads, grandparents, and rebels with laptops. There are readers' circles, discussion groups, support groups. There are speakers, writers, tellers of tales, musicians, and master chefs. Breakfasts, lunches, and dinners. Coffee, juice, and milk [Ritzer 2004: 192]. There is certainly no recipe for a universal conceptualization of place. Many realities exist in the social and spatial order of the city. However, as Krzysztof Nawratek rightly argues: "in such a world what really defines a person is what he/she can take with him/her – wherever that may be" [2008: 110]. Thus what is the value today of the saying that humans are given stewardship of place?

NOTES

¹ On the subject of social space see, among other texts, *Nowa przestrzeń społeczna w badaniach socjologicznych*, ed. Zbigniew Rykiel [Rzeszów 2008: University of Rzeszów Press].

² From the Introduction by Krzysztof Wojciechowski to the Polish edition of *Przestrzeń i miejsce* [1987: 10].

³ During his studies at Berkeley, Yi-Fu Tuan was deeply influenced by the most outstanding representatives of humanistic geography – Carl Sauer, Allan Pred and David Loventhal.

⁴ The first major signs of the crisis of the city (and of place) were apparent in the 1960s. One of the most important in a series of criticisms of modernism was Jane Jacobs's study *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). Jacobs questioned the logic of the modern movement, which, in her opinion, had caused the collapse of public places and spaces. Through the example of the socially and ethnically varied community of Greenwich Village, she demonstrated the vitality of the street, contrasted with the murderous regularity of projects for low income groups that kill streets [Ghirardo 1999: 13]. The people there, however, formed a thick mass, indeed a blended one, which, according to Jacobs, bore witness to the wealth of the configuration of interpersonal (neighbor) relations. This thick mass ignored the modernist architecture [Jacobs 1961, English edition 1993].

⁵ In his research and analyses, Kevin Lynch used the cognitive (mental) map method. He collected

materials for its construction in Los Angeles, Jersey City and Boston. He asked his subjects to draw the most significant and memorable elements of the urban structure. After their identification, he compared them and selected the elements that were common to all three cities. Among other texts, compare: Passini R., *Wayfinding in Architecture*, Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York, 1992; *Psychologia środowiskowa*, ed. P.A. Bell et al, GWP, Gdańsk 2004.

⁶ For a further discussion, see Ch. Jencks, *Ruch nowoczesny w architekturze*, Wyd. Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warsaw 1987, p. 440 ff.

⁷ In his studies, he refers to the work of John Ruskin, Camillo Sitte, Amos Rappoport, Gaston Bachelard and Kevin Lynch. Despite differences resulting from living in different periods (Ruskin, Sitte), these authors are united by a similar approach to space and place: a search for harmony with surroundings and context, and a shaping of places in accordance with human imagination and needs.

⁸ The metaphor *genius loci* is open to interpretation, and does not perform the function of conceptually ordering the world. However, it is still widely used. Metaphors sometimes "sink so deeply into the material of language as if they wished to prove that are not metaphors at all, but faithfully portray reality. [. . .] Some images used to create metaphors are ephemeral – their popularity does not last long" [Wieczorkiewicz 2008: 344]. From the economic point of view, *genius loci* is, according to Sircus, simply the brand name of given city, which combines specific expectations as to its quality, consistency, and reliability. In this sense every place is a potential brand name. Similarly, Disneyland, Las Vegas, Paris, Edinburgh and New York are their own brand names, because their image is born from our experiences, feelings, and history [Sircus 2001: 127].

⁹ Gottdiener M. *Life in the Air: Surviving the new Culture of Air Travel*, Lanham, Massachusetts: Rowan and Littlefield, 2001.

¹⁰ See Massey D., 1997, *A Global Sense of Place*, in: Barnes, T. and Gregory D. eds, *Reading Human Geography*, Arnold: London 315-323.

¹¹ See: Tuan Yi-Fu, 1977, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis. ,

¹² Writing in *Spółeczne wytwarzanie przestrzeni* [1988], B. Jałowicki, referring to Lefebvre's reflections, writes: "The concept of production of space includes (. . .) three processes closely connected with each other: spatial practices connected with production and reproduction; ways of presenting space, conditioned by the means of

production and 'order' that space imposes; and spaces of presentation, or complexes of symbols deriving from the hidden side of social life" [Jałowiecki 1988: 14].

¹³ See K. Szalt, *Simmel. Forma. Miasto.*, *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis*, Wrocław 2007, no. 2991.

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