



Places in placelessness — notes on the aesthetic and the strategies of place-making

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the aesthetic aspects of place-making practices in the urban environment of Western metropolises that are struggling with the progressive undifferentiation of their space and the weakening of communal and personal bonds. The paper starts by describing the general characteristics of an urban environment as distinct from the traditional vision of a city as a well-structured entity, and in relation to formal and informal aesthetics and participatory design ideas. The author then focuses on two contrary but complementary tactics for translating a space into a positively evaluated place: by domesticating it through introducing nature into an urbanscape; and by accentuating its alienness with the example of the urban exploration movement. The growing popularity of the latter is presented in relation to the discourses related to the decline of cities and the romantic endeavours for reaching into the realm of the unknown or the uncanny in order to rediscover and enrich the unique identity of a place. The paper ends with conclusions that present the necessity for the cultivation of a multidimensional aesthetic awareness and an aesthetic engagement as a crucial issue in the complex task of endowing places with a density of meaning.

KEYWORDS

domestication; exoticisation; urban exploration; aesthetic engagement

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INTRODUCTION

The last decades have seen the growing importance of aesthetic appreciation of built environments as interwoven into the broadly defined question of quality of life. The return to aesthetic qualities as paving the path to proper living has resulted in abundance of reflection focused on the complexity and richness of urban experience with its dynamics, participatory nature, patches of light but also patches of darkness. The positive, frequently normative, approach to urban aesthetics is powered not only by multiplicity of needs of urbanised environments; it also derives from the idea of a City, fostering its nostalgic image installed beyond the realm of contemporary multcentred practice of life, inscribed rather into the unity of the aesthetic, the psychosocial and the religious as forming a vision of home.

However, in contemporary urbanised spaces cities lose their traditional attributes of singular, clearly articulated physical and mental structures becoming rather 'systems within systems' (Taylor, 2004: 2). It is therefore much safer to use the extremely capacious, although escaping easy definitions, notion of place. Place, despite its lack of a proper name that would almost automatically provide it with a recognisable geographical-social-cultural identity, is not 'merely a synonym for location' (Seamon & Sowers, 2008: 43). Returning to the origins of the last century reflection on the subject, I would like to see it as an experiential whole, focusing human intentionality within spatial context as described by Edward Relph. Places understood as 'significant centres of our immediate experiences of the world' (Relph, 1976: 141), can be viewed as the appropriate functional equivalent of the unstable identity of the contemporary inhabitant of metropolis. They reflect its nature, not really nomadic anymore but rather translational, developed in the dynamic in-between-ness of moving from one place to another, frequently within the frames of a day. In this process, translation functions also as a useful 'metaphor for the liminal zone between the punctual and the fragmented self, between the self and its communities of affiliation, both past and present' (Berman, 2001: 17).

Our awareness of being-in-a-place seems to be drifting between temporary places defined by their distinctiveness, non-places (Augé, 1995: 94) and places-to-be — new locations still immersed in indistinctiveness of placelessness that we, for various reasons, project ourselves on. If we agree that placeness and placelessness are intertwined, sharing always some degree of underlying sameness (Relph, 2014), it allows for the claim that the process of constructing a place is, in fact, translating the unknown and indifferent into the more known and emotionally valid with the use of predictable strategies, mental models and action patterns. These translational characteristics may be applied also to the aesthetics of place-making understood in terms of Arnold Berleant's engaged aesthetics concerned with 'the appreciative engagement of humans as

parts of total environment complexes, where intrinsic experiences of sensory qualities and immediate meanings predominate' (Berleant & Carlson, 2007: 16).

Urban aesthetics is inevitably guided or commissioned by practical implications and interwoven into the complex networks of urban life with its dialectics of order and unpredictability and both public and intimate characteristics. Nevertheless, the aesthetic experience in urban places becomes — at variable level — engaged in the functional activities. This functional status of the aesthetic is reflected by specific strategies and tactics of place-making which we may see as a process of translating it into our own language: domesticating the space but also acknowledging its otherness or exoticising it and, consequently, endowing it with the qualities of the centre, while respecting its inherent alienness in the process of editing it as ours.

The terms of domestication and exoticisation or foreignisation introduced here are borrowed from Translation Studies. They denote two basic translation strategies. Domestication designates the type of translation process aimed at minimising the strangeness of the foreign text, blurring its origin, and making the text conform closely to the target group language expectations, *i.e.* substituting Polish proper names for the English ones in English-to-Polish translation. Exoticisation produces a text which breaks target conventions and retains the foreign characteristics of the source text (Yang, 2010: 77–80). Used in reference to the aesthetic aspect of place construction, a well-balanced usage of domestication and exoticisation strategies appears to be the basic way of enhancing the inhabitants' sense of belonging and familiarity and the aura of otherness and fascinating mystery rooting a place in its existing contexts.

URBANISED ENVIRONMENTS

A living city has usually been seen as a separate being, a circular centre, a multidimensional mental structure and an ostentatious presence in which human beings participate. It exists in the word that names it: Messina, Bremen, Brugge, Alhambra, Durham, as well as New York, Toronto, Sydney, or Medina, Jerusalem, Beer Sheva — cities upon the hills. We wander among names of things, in labyrinths of sense, multi-level junctions of emotions — Verdun, Auschwitz, Nagasaki. We wander — first and foremost — following traces, our own and ones carried by cultural memory of the place, creating *mnemotopoi* (Gwóźdź, 2006: 127) recognised in paintings, tales, and songs. Between the narratives of a name, the aesthetic of a vision and returns of our memory, cities last in the space of spirituality, aspiring to the dimension of religion, which is lent to them by the notion of home. The city, the desert rose,¹ is a point where

¹ The vision of a 'desert rose' has become inspiration for the tallest construction created by human civilisation, Burj Khalifa in Dubai, which is also a place in itself.

time and space converge, and from which they radiate. The city, the centre, the *axis mundi*.

Most of contemporary city-dwellers do not have a chance to share this profound vision, experiencing the rather overwhelming dynamics of urban agglomeration, its intricate webs of stimuli, fragmented, yet forming a continuous flow of existence, ‘an indissoluble complex, no part of which can be grasped in isolation’ (Berleant, 2012a: 109).

The perfect embodiments of such environment may be thickly populated regions in the United States embracing Boston, New York and Washington D.C., so called Bosnywash,² Tokyo–Yokohama complex in Japan or a global integration zone in Europe — the pentagon London–Hamburg–Munich–Milan–Paris–London. Functionality of these vast trans-metropolitan regions becomes the ultimate goal determining economic and political strategies, which frequently results in neglect of aesthetic values.

This process of superimposing pragmatic requirements onto aesthetic choices amplified by the impact of popular culture is clearly visible in clusters of suburban environments in almost every part of the world. Filip Springer describes such ‘failed aesthetics’ on the example of Polish urbanscapes in his multiple projects³ and in publications documenting architectural paradoxes of contemporary post-communist cities (Springer, 2013). Rolf Sternberg observes similar processes in American small towns: ‘the building mix that came into existence was and remains conspicuous for its morphological simplicity and general aesthetic sterility’ (Sternberg, 1991: 71).

The inhabitants of these aesthetically sterile areas are confronted with neuroses of placelessness defined as the lack of a recognisable focal point (or points) of mental and material space that one could connect to. Urbanised spaces, if deprived of rich semantic structure, aesthetically degraded, representing ‘lo-fi soundscapes’ (Schafer in: Oddie, 2011: 170) or smellscapes, reveal an inherent disposition to install fear, evoke anxiety and solastalgia⁴ dispossessing people of their sense of belonging, annihilating their personal hopes for the future of the locality and weakening their bonds with its past (Akkerman, 2000: 268). In return, the increasing acceptance of placenessness as a form of living in the world, especially in urbanised societies, leads to a growing indifference toward the environment in all its aspects including the aesthetic one.

² According to the Metropolitan Institute Census Report 05:01, July 2005, in 2003 ten Megapolitan Areas in the US ‘contained less than a fifth of all land area in the lower 48 states, but captured more than two-thirds of total US population — almost 200 million people’ (Lang & Dhavale, 2005: 1).

³ E.g. the cycles of photographs *Miało być ładnie* [It was supposed to be pretty (2009)] (Website 1) or *Płacz nad rozlanym miastem* [Cry over the spilled city (2009)] (Website 2).

⁴ Solastalgia, the term coined by Glenn Albrecht, is the distress produced by environmental change turning familiarity of the place into the alienness of placelessness (Albrecht, 2005).

Presently, some of the abovementioned issues seem to be addressed with a wide array of instruments. Urban environments have become a field for interdisciplinary research, innovative solutions and urban planning conducted according to the parameters of a balanced development and broadly perceived well-being of city-dwellers, their 'rights to the city' (Purcell, 2002: 99–108). The aesthetic interests are essential to these rights; the rich sensual fabric of urban spaces makes it first of all an aesthetic experience.

However, the aesthetic in human-made environment does not always possess the degree of autonomy which is available to works of art or most activities considered artistic. It serves particular extra-aesthetic purposes of urban life; what is more, our aesthetic sense is easily shaped and manipulated, as everyday existence amply demonstrates. The aesthetic is a powerful instrument affecting the actions, the choices and the consciousness of people, shaping our image of the world and with it reality as such, in its social and private dimension.

This concerns in particular the largely formalised aesthetics of public urban spaces. Thus, a certain non-transparency of processes taking place in urban environment as if beyond the individual's decisions facilitates effective management of the environment enhancing control mechanisms through aesthetics addressing our emotional needs. Fragmented, mobile, urban consumer populations with unstable nets of social relations and low level of active participation in local initiatives are organised mainly by multiple highly developed information channels offered by technology and media. Consequently, they tend to rely on standardised aesthetic solutions provided by the administrative authorities. The resulting, formal urban aesthetics benefits organisation of city life but diminishes the creativity of the inhabitants and, in consequence, the construction of places.

At the other end of the spectrum of intermediary states, aesthetics created and edited in the informal sphere often proves to be the proper carrier of significations crucial for the reversing of the processes of fragmenting reality (Berleant, 2012b: 186–188), for development of a distinct stratification, and at the same time for a consolidation of the space into Place people wish to call theirs.

PLACE AND THE STRATEGIES OF PLACE-MAKING

The beginnings of wide interest in the idea of place in urbanised spaces may be linked with the proposals of theoreticians, among others, cultural geographers Yi-Fu Tuan (Tuan, 1977) and Edward Relph (Relph, 1976), and practitioners, such as an urban writer Jane Jacobs (Jacobs, 1958), and with the ideas of William H. Whyte (Whyte, 1980), involved in Project for Public Spaces.

This conglomerate of voices prepared a fertile soil for further actions and today, we may talk about a multiplicity of definitions and opinions, but also — broad popularisation of the idea among urban planners. Interdisciplinary considerations of conceptions, characteristics and demands of place as endowed with identity and — in mutual exchange — endowing it to its inhabitants run in various directions (*e.g.* Patterson & Williams, 2005: 361–380). Nevertheless, most authors agree with an almost automatic division of urban place reality into three interacting dimensions — built and natural environment, inhabitants, and the *genius loci* or cultural/historical element (Seamon, 2012: 3). Perceived phenomenologically as a lived and experienced indivisible whole, they determine place distinctiveness and the quality of place attachment and all three should be approached with care and respect. Consequently, we increasingly tend to call into question the taken-for-granted nature of already-existing places searching for the ways of improving our experience of the actual location of our everyday existence (Seamon & Sowers, 2008: 44–45) as a foundation for the proper functioning of a community.

The basic top-down strategies of place-making that are on offer are, first of all, a real partnership of the public with the private, or a multiplicity of forms of planning that consider the user's input (participatory design⁵) and the necessity of a balanced space structuring: providing some degree of mental and/or material enclosure and allowing for proper communication with the existing human and non-human environment.

The most effective bottom-up initiative seems to be participatory design resulting naturally from a sense of *continuum* between private and public space, which allows members of a community to describe both as their own. A discourse based on the notion of property or ownership has proven, at least in western countries, better adapted to the needs and expectations of the people than the rhetoric and terminology of human rights and the invoking of public needs.⁶ Only then can one trust the 'human capacity to project themselves into these environments, [...] to feel connected to them ecologically' (Blanc, 2013).

Nathalie Blanc suggests using the term 'environmentalisation' for complex strategies of creating proper environments for the human beings (Blanc, 2013). The most effective seat of these strategies appears to be the aesthetic turned towards the practice of the everyday engaging both senses of distance and of

⁵ A term describing various ways of including users in the decision-making processes of urban planning (McClure & Hurand, 2001: 107).

⁶ Discourses including human environment in the realm of ethics and ethicality appeared in early 1970s. Natural environment was seen as a seat of subjectivity along with rights due to it, while built environment — as the object of efforts of people interested in the conditions of their own existence. Research therefore focused on problems related to life quality, issues of the identity of private and public space as well as the question of ethicality, inalienable in these contexts (*e.g.* Mishori, 2010).

contact. Aesthetic appreciation accompanies plastering walls, setting paths in lawns, designing a bus shelter or conducting a communal discussion on the architecture of a shopping centre. Thus, the search for a semantic matrix invariably leads towards the aesthetic ingrained in existential experience, towards an active and engaged aesthetic stance, far from the Kantian dogmas of distance and disinterested contemplation. As Chris Abel claims, 'to belong to a place means to have an existential foothold in a concrete everyday sense' (Abel, 2000: 143).

Aesthetic engagement directed toward a long process of (re)constructing a local sense of a given place-to-be requires implementation of practices and perceptions investing it with meaning, addressing also its heritage and tradition — meaning both the strategies of the aesthetic domestication, and of estrangement or exoticisation.

Domesticating initiatives — including participatory design described above, with emphasis on moral-aesthetic judgments of aesthetic engagement — as obviously desirable, enjoy popularity and administrative support. However, their fruition is more than often a standardised environment constituting a unified texture of localness, characterising numerous locations pervaded with a striking sense of cosmopolitan sameness. Thus, in order to give a human dimension to what is anonymous, domesticating initiatives introduce — again through the aesthetic — the elements of individualised creativity, humour and play, accentuating the uniqueness of a given place-to-be. They tell us 'where we are' (Fleming & Tschärner, 1987: 1), not only in metaphorical but also in literal meaning. Moreover, domesticating strategies are usually targeted at spaces already noted for their popularity. Mural town revitalisation programs, highway projects, gateway or street furniture projects are frequently based on the data provided by the maps of citizens' social activity documenting 'social hubs that emerge organically in cities [...] as fragmented islands' (*Urbagram*, 2010) with well-developed pedestrian networks separated by large areas of low activity level.

The other type of strategies, focused on alienness, also offers a broad range of possibilities, well grounded in our urban experience. These include planned artistic actions using aesthetics of anxiety and provoking negative aesthetic pleasure, so intimately intertwined with human experience of Being.⁷ Entering the space of otherness may open before a guest the abyss of aesthetic experience evoking the sudden awareness of our vulnerability and nullity as it happens to those who visit the holocaust monument in Berlin, moving in its non-human alienness. An interesting example presenting the juxtapositioning of domestication and exoticisation is the architecture of new complex of

⁷ An interesting example may be the disturbing graffiti commissioned by city of Atlanta in 2012 (Jarvie, 2012).

buildings of Silesian Museum in Katowice, inviting diversity of its visitors into the underground space of a former coal mine, familiar to some percentage of Silesian citizens, mostly of the older generation, but foreign to the newcomers and most of young inhabitants of the region.

Exoticising strategies may also emphasise the presence of elements that are different in terms of culture, social factors or ethnicity. The latter is often presented as creating the inalienable aesthetic value of the city, for example, Chinatown in San Francisco, with the splendid gate leading into it, or — in another part of the world — the search for former housing estates inhabited by Chinese people in Katowice. However, racial or social otherness may also be edited as a wholly alien, ghettoised world, deprived of human subjectivity. We will find it in Camilo José Vergara's strangely beautiful, but ethically alarming photos of American black districts, with shadows of human silhouettes, blurred as smudges of paint. Aestheticisation becomes another instrument of alienation, alongside poverty and race.

The other extreme may be represented by actions characterised by far-reaching spontaneity, individualisation and informality, or even obscurity. They focus around projects undertaken by individuals or small groups, often claiming artistic ambition, inscribed indirectly in discourses developed around the issue of the 'decline of the city'.

Despite the diversity of strategies in each of the two abovementioned currents, we might want to juxtapose at least two examples here: taming space through introducing greenery and so-called urban exploration or urbex,⁸ stressing its otherness, evoking the uncanny feeling.

Cultivating nature within urban environment, creating parks, rows of trees along streets, flower beds on squares and in front of offices is a representative example of domestication of space according to the demands of aesthetic pleasure principle reflecting the idea of a Garden as the oldest home of Adam. However, these well-known practices are not always to be evaluated positively from the perspective of environmental ethics. As Saito notes, nature in a city is seen as 'a well-behaved, nicely dressed guest', bound by constant rules: 'its timeless appearance, lack of biodiversity, inhospitable habitat for natural creatures, and general sterility, as well as the assumption that the literal fertility of fruits and vegetables is not aesthetically appreciable' (Saito, 2014).

On the other hand, despite the reification of nature and assigning mainly decorative value to it, in the city it is the object of respect, care and protection, which finds expression, paradoxically, in 'a neat border', as Joan Nassauer

⁸ A term introduced in 1996 by Jeff 'Ninjalicious' Chapman, the spiritual father of the movement and the founder of the website *Infiltration*. It is 'the investigation of the man-made places ignored and largely unseen by the public' (Paiva & Manaugh, 2013: 9).

observes (Saito, 2014), in clear-cut demarcation of territory assigned to natural objects; its absence means neglect, social and aesthetic degradation of the place, lack of its aesthetic sustainability. The latter is important to the extent that in the city, greenery proves to be the most significant aesthetic element conducive to so-called walkability (Neckerman *et al.*, 2009: 264–285), and thus influencing the internalisation of local space through the sensuality of experience and participation in the everyday of the place.

The perfect example of domesticating the place-to-be space by greenery's capacity to strengthen the aesthetic qualities seems to be the spontaneous initiative of inhabitants of Kraków who — without permission of city authorities — turned a part of a pavement at Krakowska Street into a flower bed. The eyesore covered with dirt and litter and used as a free toilet by the homeless and the drunk in a short time appeared to be a nice place where people would stop to talk. The almost immediate result was increased walkability and positive evaluation of the place aesthetics by the community. A representative of an informal group of local activists aDacie (in English: it-is-Doable), justifying the illegal action⁹ of the citizens, said: 'Our experience and research data prove that if you 'domesticate' such seedy corners they become neat and pleasant' (Gurgul, 2015: 1; trans. M.K.). The choice of the word 'domesticate' in reference to the function of active or engaged aesthetic experience in the described place-making effort is worth noting as it confirms the accuracy of the term in the activists' opinion.

The greenery was introduced according to the rules suggested by Joan Nassauer, with the use of a clear-cut border, the positively evaluated change of the aesthetic quality of the place being marked by the shifts between the notions of dirty/clean, noisome/pleasant, untidy/neat, insipid/colourful, aversive/inviting, and ugly/nice.

Aesthetic strategies domesticating urban space at the same time discipline it, subjecting it to conscious and planned interventions and organising practices, both in official and informal actions. Studying encounters with alienness hidden in urban environment, we should consider choosing another term: one should rather speak of *tactics* undertaken by 'discoverers of their own paths in the jungle of functionalist rationality' (Certeau, 2011: xviii), stepping outside, into the lands, where one should indeed mind one's step.

The most interesting phenomenon in this foreignising strand seems to be the informal urban exploration movement erasing the aesthetic pleasure/displeasure divide, aimed at discovering the unknown, the invisible, the forgotten or the threatening in the peripheral regions, in the liminal spaces between

⁹ The bottom-to-top initiatives are still discouraged by the Kraków administration, however, their number grows rapidly as the data of City Movements Agreement (Porozumienie Ruchów Miejskich, PRM) prove (Gurgul, 2015: 1; Website 3).

the urban place and urban placelessness, but also — at the threshold between urban and environmental decay.

Its beginnings might be traced back to the second half of the Twentieth century, when the reflection on the city and artistic vision of urban environment revolved around the ‘discourse of decline’ imagery of urban jungle, or the powerful semiotics of urban wilderness with all its vocabulary and tradition.¹⁰ In the United States,

the imagery of wilderness and frontier has been applied less to the plains, mountains and forests of the West — now handsomely civilized — and more to the US cities back East. As part of the experience of postwar suburbanization, the US city came to be seen as an ‘urban wilderness’; it was and for many still is the habitat of disease and disorder (Smith, 2005: 8).

Usually, the progress of decline in different parts of cities varies (Guerrieri, Hartley, & Hurst, 2012: 120–126). Some places are deteriorating or dissolving during planned demolition,¹¹ while other neighbourhoods undergo endogenous and exogenous gentrification becoming isles of meaning and social nodes establishing the desired status of life surrounded by grey peripheral zones, subjected to slummisation and easily turning into postindustrial wastelands.

In this age of shrinking traditional urban organisms — mainly heavy industry American and European cities including some Polish mining towns, such as Wałbrzych and Ruda Śląska (Knoop, 2014) or satellite cities losing their centre character, overgrown with moss of decaying districts — urbex movement proves to be at once nothing more than a fascinating game, a thing of play and wonder and a heroic journey heralding the post-urban era. The environment of urbex is always an area of the new frontier, wilderness of urban territories, with abandoned housing estates, ruined chimneys, train stations buried in shrubs, decaying psychiatric hospitals, dark sewers, where nothing flows anymore: things that are abandoned, empty, but endowed with secret stories, vanished voices, shadows of the past.

The terminology of urban exploration reflects its complex character: it leans towards the vocabulary of geographic/nature expeditions popularised by National Geographic, towards notions of specific, bravado-filled tourism (*i.e.* visiting ‘zombie cities’¹²) and towards the language of the virtual world — IT, RPG.

¹⁰ In the 1970s and 1980s this anti-urban approach was partially replaced by more romantic efforts of city renewal.

¹¹ The policy of ‘ungrowth’, disinvestment and large-scale urban demolition is already on its way in such American cities as Cincinnati, Baltimore, Philadelphia and numerous towns all over the United States (Apel, 2015: 155). Similar processes have been observed in Europe, resulting in urban planning discourses focused on the phenomena of demographic crisis.

¹² A city that has been consumed, used and abandoned, deprived of life, but still retaining its decaying shell (*e.g.* Apel, 2015: 153).

Urbex is 'reality hacking', and at the same time, convincing evidence of perceiving urban environment in a way reminiscent of our perception of nature around us, with its processuality, its laws of growth and decay, and its own, separate life, hidden from our gaze.

Even the most familiar scenes given time and allowed to collapse under their own weight, colonized by birds, rats and vegetation, will become literally uncanny, somehow foreign to the very culture that constructed them (Manaugh in: Paiva & Manaugh, 2013: 6).

An interesting evidence of this aesthetically fascinating unfamiliarity seems to be the photographic documentation of exploration of the 'Silesian Porcelain' Factory remains in Katowice-Bogucice.¹³ Opened in 1922, then operating as 'Giesche' Porzellanfabrik, after IIWW it was nationalised by the communist government and continued the production to the year 2009 when it was closed. Now, the abandoned premises — once participating in the complex history of the region and its people — represent the alienness of dystopic or abstract forms: hardly recognisable shapes of cups and plates, newspapers on the floor, the production line falling apart, open cabinets with forgotten personal items, colourless, immersed in dim light covered with dust and flakes of peeling paint. The tension between the familiar and the alien, the fascinating and the aversive seems to be the outcome of the paradoxical death/life status of the premises. However, the artistic appeal of these photographs is undeniable; accompanied by short commentary on the history of the factory they bring it back to life, return it to the inhabitants of Bogucice and contribute to the distinctiveness of the place.

The anonymous authors of these photos share with the growing international net of urbex groups the experience of Burkian sublime, document the progress of apocalyptic chaos, but at the same time — of the eternal present of being, *zoe* in its abundance blooming in the widening cracks in the man-made world. This is a journey towards the heart of time, the giving of testimony, a meticulous reconstruction of the identity of places drowning in the dust of placelessness, touching them without interventions into their physicality according to the 'take only pictures, leave only footsteps' rule.

Shifting this peculiar peregrination into the aesthetic sphere, into the form of a photographic sequence or a film allows the explorers to build extensive semantic fields, not only to discover unexpected tales of the place but also to restore to it high aesthetic values, which stabilise its disturbing identity.

Places where we find and/or build identity and a certain distinctiveness of meanings show a tendency to exist in packs, in clusters — they form archipelago

¹³ The photographic documentation is presented anonymously at Website 4.

networks, constellations of social nodes, the maps of our lives. Place-making strategies of domestication and estrangement, signalled here, seem to be useful in working not only for the benefit of a particular location, but as a certain pattern of activities repeatable in similar urban settings.

FINAL REMARKS

Despite growing interest in finding an appropriate formula for place aesthetics, we still do not have solutions which would enable preserving some logical continuity in western aesthetic thought referring to its — artistic or extra-artistic — objects and at the same time meet the variety of demands made by urban reality. Challenge is still posed by questions such as solidly addressing the full range of sensual, emotional and intellectual perception of the human being, and the problem of aesthetic evaluation of phenomena transcending the western conception of the work of art. The third issue seems to be the controversial problem of relations between the aesthetic and the ethical leading us toward normative and evaluative aesthetics and the idea of moral-aesthetic judgments¹⁴ informed by knowledge, and formulated in accord with psycho-social needs of a given community and location.

We are engaged in the processes of place-making as a part of our everyday life. What is surprising, our actions are motivated ‘more profoundly by the experience of beauty in all of its forms than by intellectual arguments, abstract appeals to duty, or even by fear’ (Orr, 2002: 178–179). So, is the aesthetic really just a caprice of taste and the luxury for our senses? Or is it one of the major factors of our well-being in the world? A good place is always meant to be a beautiful place, but the aesthetic of the place is not limited to what has been traditionally considered beautiful; it may be our way to find a proper dwelling, in Heideggerian and in everyday sense; our way home.

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¹⁴ However, it is not the answer to all problems: traps of a ‘moral’ vision of the urban space, especially the negative evaluation of lifestyle diversity are discussed by Evelyn S. Ruppert on the example of Ontario Municipal Board claims in 1997 (e.g. Ruppert, 2005).

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