

Ballet amidst fences: placelessness and place-attachment in one Prague suburb

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Abstract

Jenerálka, formerly a small industrial settlement on the outskirts of Prague, has been recently undergoing an extremely profound change. Since 1989 it has become a target for developers offering luxurious dwellings “in one of the greenest parts of Prague” while within a stone’s throw of the city centre. Even if it is still called Jenerálka, it has changed fundamentally, socially as well as materially. In the confines of Jenerálka the old and new intermingle in an assemblage that can tell us about the overall socio-economic change brought about in the last two decades.

In this paper I employ the theoretical insights into place of two phenomenological geographers – David Seamon (1980) and Edward Relph (1976) – in order to analyse this change and to offer an unorthodox way of understanding it. Apart from a phenomenological and visual analysis of its spatiality, my understanding of Jenerálka is based on ethnographic methods targeting the socio-spatial practices of its inhabitants, resulting in what Seamon calls “place-ballet”, and a potential absence of this resulting in a situation Relph terms “placelessness”.

The paper’s aim is to demonstrate that by analysing the materiality of Jenerálka we can obtain an alternative way to conceive, theorise and speak about such topical issues as suburbanisation or gentrification.

Key words

place-ballet, placelessness, phenomenological geography, suburbanisation

Introduction

Jenerálka, the place I concentrate on in this paper, is situated at the very limits of Prague, the capital city of the Czech Republic. It is still quite a small settlement consisting of old, rebuilt or newly-built houses scattered around a green valley. For me the place is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, part of my family comes from there and I remember spending there a significant part of my childhood at my great-grandmother's house. Secondly, long after she died I returned there to do research on the change wrought in Jenerálka by the fall of communism and the consequent societal, political and economic developments. Jenerálka then became interesting for me, since from this condensed area a lot could be gleaned and understood about the big changes in the contemporary Czech landscape and society.

In this paper I would like to link my research experience of Jenerálka to my present interest in phenomenological geography. Indeed, the processes Jenerálka has been faced with could be approached by means of concepts worked up thoroughly in recent anthropological and geographical literature on suburbanization (e.g. Champion, 2001; Hnilička, 2005; Ouředníček, 2008) and gentrification (e.g. Lees, 1994, 1996, 2000; Low, 2003; Phillips, 1993; Smith, 1996; for the Czech context see e.g. Temelová & Novák, 2007). However, I believe the phenomenological approach I propose here can illuminate the situation differently and offer an alternative way to understand, write about and conceptualise Jenerálka's transformation.

In what follows, I shall first describe Jenerálka in terms of its material setting, its spatiality, and its physical as well as discursive landscape. Then I shall present the insights into place, space and landscape of two phenomenological geographers – David Seamon (1980) and Edward Relph (1976) – whose works I find most inspiring. Apart from phenomenological and complementary visual analysis of Jenerálka's

spatiality, my understanding of Jenerálka is based on ethnographic experience of it comprising its materiality as well as the socio-spatial practices of its inhabitants. These insights I shall use in order to re-describe Jenerálka in regard to its visual, particular material and experiential characteristics that will help me to draw some conclusions about the nature of the changes Jenerálka has been undergoing.

The aim of the paper is thus twofold. Firstly, it seeks to provide a phenomenologically informed understanding of Jenerálka as a place and the changes it has sustained. Secondly, though, by means of a phenomenological analysis of Jenerálka, the paper intends to demonstrate that a phenomenological approach can offer a way of approaching and theorizing urban change complementary to the aforementioned studies in gentrification and suburbanization.

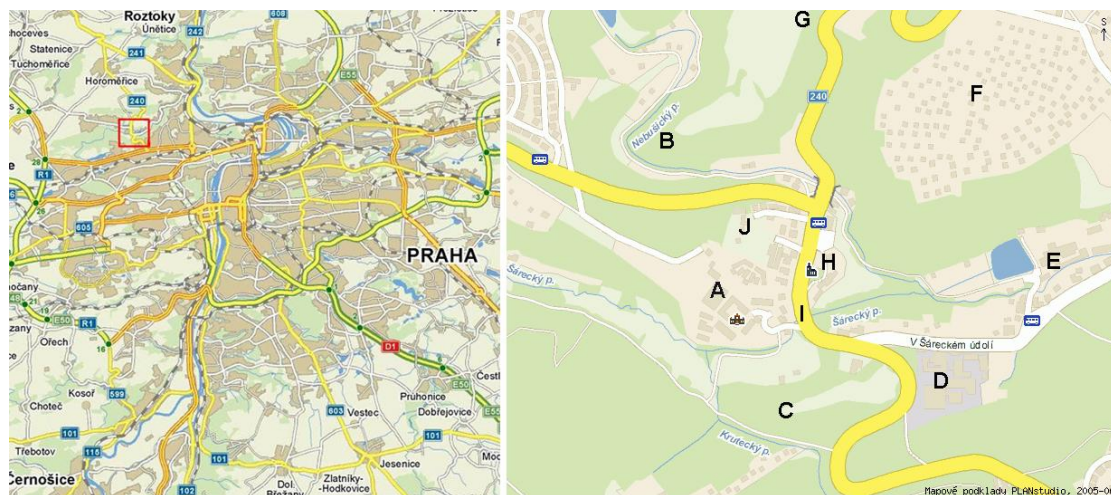
Jenerálka as a locality: an analytical description

Jenerálka is a part of Prague's 6th district and stretches over three cadastres. Historically, it evolved in a valley around the junction of two brooks – Šárecký and Nebušický. Divoká Šárka, a nature reserve located to the west of Jenerálka, changes its character here and becomes Tichá Šárka, a luxurious old villa quarter stretching along the brook to the east, to the river Moldau. Jenerálka is crossed by the Horoměřická road that snakes down from Prague in the south and ascends to the north where residential developments have been built around old villages such as Horoměřice.

Although being formally divided between three cadastres, located at the intersection of two valleys and split by a busy road, it is still perceived – by locals as well as others – as one place, as a whole that is on the one hand rather heterogeneous but on the other bounded by (imaginary) borders and having its own history and character. The main built-up area is located at the Horoměřická road in the vicinity of a once

central point – a château owned by Premonstratensians who used to have a summer residence here (Augusta, 1996; Veselá, 2006). A small chapel on a hill on the other side of the road surrounded by houses creates a second focus for the place.

Jenerálka is a heterogeneous place consisting of various spatial and social settings that make it an outstanding research field (see fig. 1 with letters for the location of particular components of the Jenerálka landscape). If one stands at the chapel facing north, one will have the château on one's left side together with a natural monument, a tiny rocky ridge, called "Jenerálka" (J), and a small garden or residential colony in the valley of the Nebušický brook (B) further on. Due to the trees one would not be able to see on the right a pond with an old mill where two residential projects have been built facing each other with locked gates (E). Ahead, where the Horoměřická road (I) continues its way from Prague, old hamlets (G) and a huge garden colony (F) are situated. On the other side, on its descent from Prague, the road passes a small, untidy colony of breeding enthusiasts (C) and a former brickyard(D).



Ill. 1 – Prague, Jenerálka and its distinctive landscape components (lettered) ¹

¹ All illustrations apart from maps are the author's own photographs. The maps are from: <http://www.mapy.cz/> (accessed 10th April, 2010).

The heterogeneity of Jenerálka is indeed a consequence of historical development. A former agricultural settlement attached to the château changed in the inter-war period into an industrial one, and a few brickyards were set up here in which the main part of the population worked. After WWII, the château was used as a research facility² where again some inhabitants of Jenerálka used to work. In 1960, Jenerálka was appended to Prague. The history of the château is interesting because the research facility was closed in 1992 and subsequently sold to the European Baptist Federation in 1994. The château was reconstructed and an International Baptist Theological Seminary (IBTS) was set up here with a voluminous theological library. Part of the château is used as a hotel (Augusta, 1999; Veselá, 2006).

The distinct spaces described above indeed mean that different people pop up here and experience Jenerálka. Tourists, gardeners, animal breeders, old inhabitants, newcomers living in old houses or in newly-built residential projects, and even a researcher, all of them have their own image of Jenerálka because of their diverse engagements with its different spaces. However, despite its obvious heterogeneity Jenerálka has acquired quite the distinct and unambiguous label of a good locality to buy a house in and make one's own home. This labelling predominantly uses the image of unspoilt nature. The hotel and the way it speaks about Jenerálka is in this sense illuminating:

“IBTS is located in a quiet part of Prague in Dejvice, which is situated *very close to the airport, underground metro and the historical centre of Prague – the Prague Castle*. You can easily get to the Prague city centre by bus in 20 minutes. The Airport is 10 minutes far by car. The Metro is within two bus stops from the hotel. IBTS is

² From 1947 to 1960 the château hosted an army research facility, which was assigned in 1960 to the Research Institute of Vacuum Technology (Augusta, 1996; Veselá, 2006).

located in the greenest part of the city. Surrounded by a natural park where smog and pollution never appears” (IBTS 2010, author’s emphasis).

In the quotation above Jenerálka appears to be an ideal place where two seemingly incongruous characteristics merge. Jenerálka is at the same time natural and (sub)urban. It lies in the vicinity not only of transport nodes but also of the very centre of the city while it at the same time retains the natural purity that has irretrievably disappeared from (late) modern urban space. Such an image of a naturally pure locality that lies within a stone’s throw of the city centre constitutes a principal element of the way in which Jenerálka has been represented recently. It is no surprise then that Jenerálka has acquired the status of a good locality, which also means becoming expensive and at the same time luxurious – at least on a discursive or imaginary level. This can be well illustrated by the presentation of the residential project that has been built by a pond where an old mill called “Oak Mill” stands:

“The Oak Mill is a highly exclusive project of only eight villas of ‘Country Lodge Villa’ type, four villas of ‘Land House Villa’ type, and five ‘Mill-house Villas’ built into the newly reconstructed premises of the mill. Villas are designed in a modern classical style with the emphasis on spaciousness and elegance with the use of natural materials and with allusions to oriental style when designing bright, capacious spaces. Each of the villas and houses stand on its own grounds *where privacy and security are fully maintained and natural surroundings are masterfully exploited*. All the villas are beautifully oriented. The total area of the project is 13,517 m² and it also encompasses the pond, the nearby park and recreational facilities. The project is located in the nature reserve of Divoká Šárka, in the prestigious residential locality of Prague 6 – At Oak mill 4. There is good access by public transport and it is conveniently located

between the airport and the city centre” (ORCO 2010 [English language online presentation of the project], author’s emphasis).

Here the image of a natural haven just outside the city centre is enriched by the emphasis on luxury, safety and privacy. Privacy in Oak Mill is assured by fencing the premises off from their surroundings. This ironically leads to Oak Mill being cut off from the nature that makes the place so unique and to turning nature into a kind of inert background, into scenery.

While I will get back to the act of fencing oneself off from Jenerálka and to various fences shortly, it is also necessary to pin down another characteristic of Jenerálka that resonates with the labelling of Jenerálka as a good locality. Again, the image drawn by the hotel’s presentation can be of good assistance, since it clearly states “what is the best offer of accommodation in IBTS”. “You can stay in a real country mansion dating from the 18th century! Wander around its buildings, quietly relax at the water fountain and feel the history of this place.” (IBTS 2010)

The image drawn in the discourses on Jenerálka quoted above is in fact predominantly a commodified one. Location, nature and history, all three main components of the image are commodified and as such they figure in a market presentation of Jenerálka, but as regards history, this also materializes here in its commodified form – old grindstones displayed in front of a luxurious restaurant, an old inscription re-installed into the body of a repaired bridge (Ill. 2), old château buildings precisely renovated and painted.



Ill. 2 – The commodified past at the bridge leading to the IBTS Hotel

This is a different past from the one materialised on the site of a former small garden colony uprooted because of the Oak Mill development project (ill. 3). A collapsed fence along a road with derelict and switched-off public lights showing a lawn with narcissuses here and there still sketching blossomed trails of perished flowerbeds. This other image, reified only by my taking a shot of it with my digital camera, shall remind us that history and past surround us everywhere we go. But it shall also draw our attention precisely to the fact that regarding the past, landscape, the space of our movement and experience does have a palimpsest-like nature stemming precisely from the fact that landscape is more a process than a static spatial domain (Gibas & Pauknerová 2009). As a result of commodification, this process of the past's having

been inscribed into the space of our experience becomes reified, static (see e.g. Shanks & Tilley 1996) and in consequence potentially depersonalised.



Ill. 3 – The past lurking in the present:

Remnants of a garden colony that gave place to the Oak Mill project

Place and landscape: a theoretical intermezzo

At this point, it is necessary to make a short theoretical detour before getting to the phenomenological or experiential dimension of Jenerálka as a place or landscape. This detour will help me to clarify my theoretical position and at the same time to theoretically support the following re-description of Jenerálka in terms of phenomenological (or experiential) analysis.

The metaphor of landscape as a “marvellous palimpsest” (Maitland quoted in Gojda, 2000, p. 54) has been more dynamically and thus aptly restated by Barbara Bender, who perceives landscape as a “time materialising” because like time “landscape never stands still” (Bender, 2002, p. 103). Landscape thus represents a medium that holds traces of the past and of the processes by which the past has been continuously re-inscribed. But one can ask where in such a view of landscape there is a place for the

human being. Is the human being a kind of a reader who reads out of the landscape its traces the way the historian decrypts a palimpsest?

Complementary to this is an approach to landscape introduced by Tim Ingold, who understands landscape in terms of “taskscape”, or, socially constructed space of human activity (Ingold, 2000). Landscape comes into being in the form of a taskscape, or in other words, through human engagement with the surrounding material world. Landscape is thus always a landscape to be experienced and lived by somebody; it consists of pieces of engagement – places having meaning (rooted in human engagement and activity) that interconnects them with other places into a whole, into landscape as taskscape.

Here phenomenology comes into play, because we can ask whence and how the meaning of place arises. And it is exactly at this point that I want to turn attention to two key phenomenological geographers who have both engaged with the issue of place. While Edward Relph (1976) draws on existential analysis that leads him more to a static view of place, David Seamon (1980) attempted to conceive place more dynamically as a kind of synergy. It must be said that since their time, or since the cultural turn of the 1990s, the interest of geography has shifted towards spatial rather than placial issues as being more politically and socially acute as well as having greater critical potential (Massey, 2005).

However, phenomenology did not disappear completely but has fuelled rethinking of space-and-place in contexts as diverse as social/environmental psychology (e.g. Altman & Low, 1992), architecture theory (Seamon, 1993) or anthropology (Low & Zúñiga, 2003). Most recently, the phenomenological approach to place and landscape and the embodied experience of space has been taken up by anthropological-archaeological research on landscape (see Tilley, 1994; Tilley & Bennett, 2004; 2008;

Bender, Hamilton, Tilley, & Anderson, 2007). This renewed interest in phenomenology is I believe based on the assumption that phenomenological analysis of place can offer an alternative way to speak about places (like Jenerálka).

Relph's (1976) understanding of place is based on the binary opposition of space and place in which space is conceived as a potentiality while place acts as its realization, or in the words of Yi-Fu Tuan: "place is security, space is freedom" (Tuan, 1977, p. 3). The essence of place, according to Relph, lies in the experience of "insideness" that radically differs from "outsideness". While space is a potentiality over which we can slide, place only comes into being by the act of plunging inside that potentiality. To be "inside" the place means to belong to the particular place, to identify oneself with it. The more inside one is, the more identified with the place one becomes. Being "inside" and "outside" the place can however be experienced with varying intensity, on different levels. "Existential insideness" represents the most intimate, the deepest experience of and identification with the place, since it denotes belonging to the place in terms of deep and absolute immersion. Home is such a place of existential insideness when "place is experienced without deliberate and self-conscious reflection yet is full of significance" (Relph, 1976, p. 55). Existential insideness has its counterpart in "existential outsideness", a wilful, deliberate alienation from place, an intellectual homelessness (see Relph, 1976, p. 34-55).

According to Relph, places can be approached in two opposing ways. The authentic sense of place encompasses and acknowledges the whole complexity of place as a source of meaning and identity, while the inauthentic sense of place perceives places only in terms of their appropriate characteristics. Inauthentic sense of place results in places that lack the substantial character of place and are thus rather "placeless"

insofar as they do not act in the ways authentic places do existentially. Placelessness³ resulting from inauthentic sense of place cannot sustain the existential meaning places have for us and thus represents a reckless and potentially dangerous approach to places and spatiality in general.

David Seamon (1980) has based his theorization of place on the same binary opposition of space and place but has worked it out in a very different way. He pays attention to the ways people move through space and argues that by means of routine movements people become familiar with space. Again, routine movement is unreflective rather than reflective or rational; it is habitual, repeated and coordinated by the bodily intentionality he calls “body-subject”. This intentionality stems from our being our bodies and operates the most routine and mundane tasks that stretch across time and space. Driving to work, washing the dishes or going for the morning newspapers can all stand as examples of such “time-space routines”, as Seamon terms these, however complicated, habitual tasks operated by the intentionality of body-subjects. Various time-space routines spontaneously performed through the dynamism of me-body (body-subject) can meet in a particular space and merge into a kind of time-spatial synergy Seamon calls “place-ballet”. What can, according to Seamon, arise from the amalgamation of individual time-space routines within the place-ballet of a particular space is a feeling of familiarity or at-homeness⁴. “People come together

³ Landscape is based on the notion of place. Landscape without places is landscape without meaning and vice versa. Placelessness weakens the identity of places to the extent that places start to look and feel the same. Paraphrasing Marc Augé, placelessness is a situation in which places ceased to have anthropological qualities and became non-places (Augé, 1995). The result of this more and more common placelessness is a “flatscape”, a landscape shallow in meaning and significance, lacking the intentional depth of authentic places (Relph, 1976, p. 78). A placeless landscape is absurd because it ceases to be landscape and becomes a prefabricated emptiness.

⁴At-homeness is the experiential situation of belonging to a place that stems from an existential insideness. As Seamon put it, at-homeness is “the usually unnoticed, taken-for-granted situation of being comfortable in and familiar with the everyday world in which one lives and outside of which one is “visiting”, “in transit”, “not at home”, “out of place” or “traveling”(. . .) The components of at-homeness (. . .) are rootedness, appropriation, regeneration, at-easeness and warmth.” (Seamon, 1979, p. 70).

in time and space as each individual is involved in his or her own time-space routines and body-ballets. They recognize each other and often partake in conversation. Out of these daily, taken-for-granted interpersonal dynamics, these spaces of activity evolve a sense of place that each person does his small part in creating and sustaining” (Seamon 1980, p. 161).

Seamon’s view of place as emerging within an interpersonal time-space synergy of place-ballet is much more dynamic than Relph’s existentially autobiographical place concept. However, in both of these attitudes, individuals are perceived as rooting and being rooted in places; the familiarity of place, the place-attachment and thus the place itself comes into being as an accretion of significance in time either through autobiographical or interpersonal processes that make space become place. In this sense we could even understand Relph’s and Seamon’s place concepts to be linked by an emphasis on “emotion-spatial hermeneutics”, by the very fact that “meaningful senses of space emerge only via movements between people and places” (Davidson & Milligan, 2004, p. 524).

Jenerálka as a place: an experiential re-description

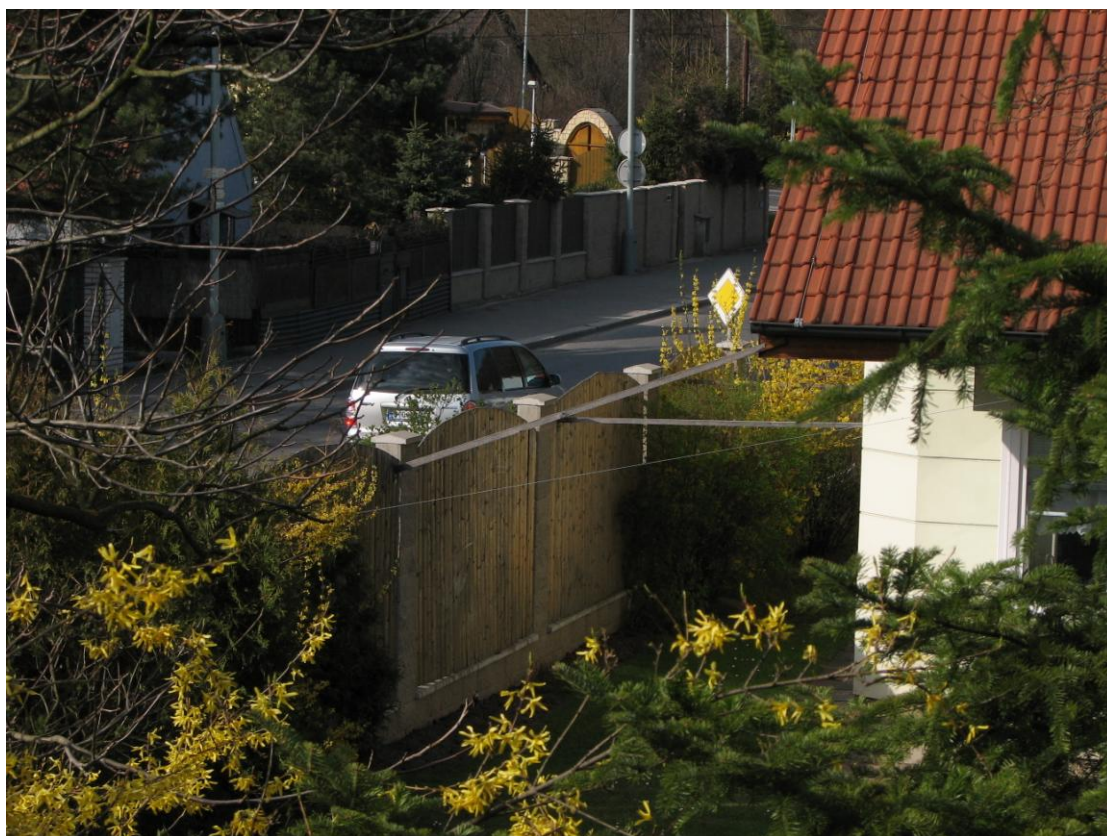
Here we can get back to the account of the past materialised in the landscape, or, throughout the places and spaces of Jenerálka. The commodified past materialised in artefacts scattered around Jenerálka and that protrudes in an overall approach to its materiality and representations can be confronted by a more subtle manifestation of the process in which “what is now becomes what has been” (Rendell, 2006, p. 98).

As our detour into the realm of the phenomenological geography of Relph and Seamon demonstrated, the past and the present intermingle in particular places, resulting in places becoming livelier, acquiring significance and meaning – differing for each person involved. Place is simultaneously the place of memory and the

present, it is a kind of time-space by-pass connecting our present to our past and becoming an anchor of our place-attachment. Memories that spring for us from the materiality of the place are not (at least generally) deliberately induced but rather spontaneous. By contrast, the commodification of the past (by means of artefacts as well as discourses) is in fact a process of freezing-up the past and its personal or autobiographical level in particular.

However, Jenerálka is not a place of memory-as-commodified-history. This is partly because the interconnection of personalised past and present is inherent in any place in general, but also because Jenerálka is a place where people live, act, meet, know or do not know each other, go for walks etc. It is a place where everyday life goes on; everyday life whose flow deposits the past onto the space and continuously recreates it as a place. Thus even the artefacts of a commodified past can in time acquire their own past that is not displayed in and by means of them and that has little in common with the past reified by them. In other words, due to time and energy they can acquire a significance for someone not predictable from their commodified present.

Everyday life and autobiography merge in time and strengthen the feeling of at-homeness, the experience of existential insideness, the attachment to place and thus the place itself. Jenerálka as a place thus also comes into being as a place-ballet. So if we want to ask about the change it has been undergoing since 1989 we have to focus on how the place-ballet of Jenerálka has been transformed, or, with regard to the phenomenological nature of my inquiry, how the material setting of the place-ballet has changed and how this alteration of conditions has influenced, strengthened or weakened the socio-spatial dynamics at Jenerálka.



Ill. 4 – The busy road faced by blank, solid fences

Due to the extensive suburban developments in Jenerálka and at other more or less similarly “luxurious” localities just outside Prague, the road crossing Jenerálka from north to south has become busier and busier. Since the (original) houses in Jenerálka stand predominantly along the two roads, the other one leading along the Tichá Šárka valley and being much calmer, the whole situation has resulted in a material change represented predominantly by fences (ills. 4 and 5). The sides of gardens or houses facing the busy road became blind and solidified against the noise and pollution, which – if one wanted to be ironic – surely never appears here. One of the houses on the road is even fenced with a high, plastic anti-noise barrier (ill. 5). This barrier seems to be a definite and highly rational reaction to growing traffic. However, the consequences for the place-ballet are rather negative, since solid fences prevent the

most place-making activity in the place-ballet of a small, condensed community – random chatting over the fence.

Barriers to the place-ballet at Jenerálka are not only related to traffic. The pond at Oak Mill was a part of public space until the residential project was finished. The adjacent garden colony used to be crossed by a tourist path that led to the pond and continued to Tichá Šárka. The project engulfed the pond, fencing it off from Jenerálka with a solid, opaque fence that stripped Jenerálka of another potential location for place-ballet.



Ill. 5 – The house with an anti-noise barrier

Fences and gates have come to visually dominate the area, having, as they do, security and privacy as a discursive reason for their existence. There are however many forms of detachment to be found at Jenerálka. Two gated communities, Oak Mill project and

the one it faces across the pond, are not only segregated by gates and fences, but also by the presence of guards and CCTV cameras that oversee their spaces. Significantly the cameras are not just the property of these communities. The house with the anti-noise barrier is also guarded by cameras and further detached from Jenerálka by the absence of a bell and nameplate at the letterbox – another barrier to place-ballet as well as to the growth of the place in terms of social familiarity.



III. 6 – The same calm road, two radically opposite approaches to public space

To build a solid fence in such a way does not necessarily represent a natural reaction to the rising noise and pollution caused by traffic. There is a place offering a clue to

understanding what has been going on in Jenerálka. Just before you come to the north end of the built-up area a small road turns off the main, busy road. On both sides of the entrance to the road, two houses stand facing each other across the narrow roadway. Both border on the main road with solid fences. But while the house on the right faces the small road with the same solid fence, the house on the left does not (ill. 6), since there is no practical need for such a barrier. I witnessed a neighbourly chat over the picket fence and realised how material setting informs and influences place-making and place-ballet, since on the other side such a situation could never happen. When I talked to the people in Jenerálka, I realised another substantial feature – the landscape of Jenerálka represents, at least for long-term residents, a social rather than a material landscape.

“There lives the Křiklán family. Next to them Bareš. It belonged to the Kyčka family, you know. Old Kyčková had a daughter who married Bareš. He died and left a son who lives there now with his family. Next to that, the Vodenka family used to live. But he sold it, old Vodenka. Before he died, he sold it(...) There are new people living there now. One has the front, and the other the back. But these are total strangers.”

This is how one old resident described Jenerálka to me. His (much longer) speech about who used to live where and which house belonged to whom clearly illustrates how the place is comprehended - it is perceived in terms of its biography and that of those who inhabit it. Some lawyer bought the house on the right side of the small road (ill. 6), rebuilt it, and with its fence cut it off not only from the physical landscape but, what is more important, from the social, narrative, or biographical landscape of

Jenerálka also. The same applies to those who inhabit the house with the anti-noise barrier as well as those from the gated communities and other fenced-off houses. They all go by car rather than by public transport, and thus cannot wait at the bus stop, they are not to be seen gardening and cannot be approached and consequently incorporated into the place with the name Jenerálka.

However, this does not mean that these people live and inhabit the place inauthentically. What I am trying to elucidate is not that because of newcomers unwilling to plunge into its social landscape Jenerálka has become placeless, although it can feel that way. What has been happening at Jenerálka is I believe a collision of two approaches resulting in the re-materialization of Jenerálka. Jenerálka re-formed by place-ballet and based on (auto)biographical existential insideness has been eroded into an archipelago of small, fenced-off units, homes that in themselves still must have borne the existential qualities Relph credited places with – but they do not share. These detached localities do not integrate into a larger whole of Jenerálka. On the contrary, they bite off pieces of space from it. Jenerálka thus became a perforated, eroded landscape regarding both its physicality and materiality and its sociality.

Conclusion

In this paper I approached Jenerálka, a small (sub)urban settlement on the outskirts of Prague, from two viewpoints. I described it in terms of its spatial properties according to the discourses that are held about it. I thus sketched the image of Jenerálka as a locality ideal for living due to its natural character, historical roots and location close to the city centre. Then I plunged into the waters of phenomenological or experiential geography in order to understand how the concepts of space, place and landscapes can be related to each other as regards the human experience of the material world around. And in the end I tried to re-describe Jenerálka for its experiential qualities and thus

concentrated on its materiality (and the visible necessarily standing side by side with the material).

Drawing on Relph's and Seamon's insights on place-making and hence implicitly on place-attachment too, and by exploring fences and various ways of detaching re-built or newly constructed houses and projects, I showed how Jenerálka, a socially and biographically supported place continuously re-created by place-ballet, has been eroding into a perforated landscape where some of its space began to be occupied by small, detached localities turned aside from the place they physically belong to.

What I wanted to show is that the erosion of the place called Jenerálka has its own material expression in the many ways of detachment and segregation that reinforce the erosion process as such. This however does not mean that Jenerálka has necessarily been becoming a placeless flatscape. Rather, it has begun to be constructed as a place for which a larger socio-experiential geography ceased to play an important role. In this sense, Jenerálka can not only be grasped by a phenomenological geography that helps to disclose, describe and understand the erosion process, but that on the other hand also shows the limits of such an approach lying exactly in the fact that within phenomenological geography the idea of how space becomes place is evaluative and despite all efforts rather inflexible.

The inflexibility lies in an implicit assumption that place can be authentically experienced from the inside as a personal-and-social entity only. The core of the problem lies in the social being understood as bounded by the immediate physicality of the place. Despite all the differences, the phenomenological understanding of place both Relph and Seamon hold in theory is exactly the same as what old residents, instanced here by the guy talking about the social biography of Jenerálka, live in their lives. Both Seamon and Relph tell in different words about place stemming from an

undifferentiated space due to a personal autobiography (“insideness”) intertwined within a social synergy (“place-ballet”) taking place here, on the spot. Place is not a locality but a locale of settled personal and social times. Place stems from its very own space and is bounded by it. In other words, what the phenomenology of Relph and Seamon implicitly presupposes is a very special kind of fixed spatiality. And this spatiality and the place based on it nicely correspond, according to my research experience, with the way Jenerálka exists for its old residents and how they exist in it. The newcomers have brought change to Jenerálka and to Prague surroundings in general. We can understand in terms of socio-economic development the changes that have materialised in the form of suburbanisation and gentrification, as many studies mentioned in the introduction do. But what phenomenological inquiry shows is that it is not just a visual or material change that goes hand in hand with the wave of new residents bringing their own segregative aesthetics with them. What lies beneath is a fundamentally different demand regarding the space that is to become place. The new and the old intermingle in Jenerálka, but the new and the old are the expressions of different kinds of spatiality being in play.

I believe the sense of place of those living in gated communities is not phenomenologically dissimilar to the one of Relph, Seamon or old Jenerálka residents although it could not look less alike. It is still experientially based on existential insideness and reinforced by place-ballet. But all this happens in a different spatiality – it simply does not happen predominantly in Jenerálka. That is why Jenerálka has become a porous, eroded and seemingly placeless place. I tried to show in short that the erosion process can be productively approached by phenomenology. A new understanding of the place in question could be achieved. Now it is time to start

investigating closely the new spatiality because of which Jenerálka has been falling apart. In this venture, I expect phenomenology to prove illuminating too.

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