

Community, Place and Environment in Ritual Performance

Specific study on the relation of Place, Environment, and Community in Persian Passion

Theatre and Artus studio's Ephemeral artworks as case studies

by considering the Environmental performance in the Calvary building and its relation with
the Iranian community artists in Epreskert as the artists' masterpiece

Theses of DLA dissertation

Zahra Fuladvand

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Supervisors: Professor Dr. habil. Csanádi Judit DLA,

Dr. Habil Révész Emese DLA,

Abstract:

There are places where we relate to other people, go to work, go on vacation, share travel stories, dig in the garden, explore unfamiliar towns, find our way to new restaurants. It is through our experiences of geographical places that, in diverse and changeable ways, we are connected with the world and the world with us. (Relph, 2015:177)¹

If we want to find a philosophical term to describe our experiences of these everyday geographical places in our life, the term Phenomenology could be mentioned. In simplest terms, phenomenology as a philosophical approach refers to the study of human experiences and situations in everyday life. We can define phenomenology as the exploration and description of phenomena, where phenomena refer to things or experiences as human beings experience them. Anything that human beings can experience, encounter, or live through them is a phenomenon. Any object, event, situation, or experience that a person can see, hear, touch, smell, taste, feel, intuit, know, understand, or live through is a legitimate topic for a phenomenological investigation.

In this thesis, study on the relation of the human being with its environment refers to the human experience and the relationship between the human and nature, which makes the spirit of the place.

If we search for this spirit in the **Theatre environment**, we might refer to the **Ritual** performative events environment which theatre gets its root from. Before the creation of the Theatre buildings, many Ritual performative events such as celebrations, religious rites, and annual festivals were held in the outdoor **found environment**. This open natural space is where we can feel the entity of the sky above and the land under our feet. This unoccupied space gives freedom to human feeling and perception.

We can see the significant role of **community members** who organize these ritual performative events throughout the theatre history. The place of these ritual events is usually where the community members have some memory of or relation to. This place could be a

¹ Edward Relph is a Canadian geographer who has written many articles and book chapters that investigate the sense of place and the ways experiences of place are being transformed.

corner in the street or a corner in the park or a place in front of the church. To describe this **relationship between places and community members in ritual performative events**, this paper will examine two case studies as well as Zahra fuladvand's DLA masterpiece.

The social, spiritual, and cultural relation of human behavior could be defined in an **environmental** discipline. This relationship which is based on human experience in ritual practices will be examined in the social spaces in the **Persian passion play** and the intimate old factory place of **Artus studio** and **the calvary building** where the master piece happened.

Questions of the Study:

What is the difference between built environment and natural found environment?

How the characteristic of the environment of theatre, effect it's relationship with their audiences?

Does the man-made space/place in theatre environment can refine human feelings and perception?

what was the original place/space for the first theatre?

If theatre gets it's origins from Ritual performative ceremony, How was the connection and relation of the audiences/participators with this pre-existing spaces?

Why the experimental theatres exploring these un-occupied given spaces instead of regular theatre buildings in 20th century?

The structure and brief presentation of the Thesis:

In addition to my art practice, during my study at DLA as an artist-researcher, I always searched to find the correct method of artistic research. I gradually understood, that the usual form of secondhand construction of scientific research is not applicable to artistic research since in artistic research understanding arises directly from the researcher's personal sensibility and awareness.

During my study and research on the concept of the place, I came across the term Phenomenology and some specific phenomenological research methods which I found very close to the way of my artistic research. In the **first chapter** of this dissertation: "Phenomenology of Space", I will explain this phenomenological research method and its relation with my research keywords which are: **Environmental theatre, space, place,**

community, ritual, and found audience.

The **second chapter** of this dissertation is a brief study on the environments and different places of theatre through the history of environmental theatre. This study very briefly touch the history from the first natural environment for the primitive performative events, then go to manmade theatre buildings with the proscenium, and then again in the twentieth century, back to the non-theatrical spaces by focusing more on the Environmental theatre approach. Also in this chapter, the term of the Space/Place will be examined from human geographical point of view.

The next keyword is Ritual which I explain in **Chapter 3**: "Ritual and Community Members in Performance". This chapter is the study of the role and significance of ritual ceremonies in human life. In modern life these ritual performative events lost their function but still, we can find these ancient gestures and bring them into Performances to connect with the original ritual events which elaborate throughout history for more than 3000 years. These ritual events originally happened in natural open environments.

One example of these ritual performative events is Muharam festival and the Persian Passion theatre which have been performed for more than 3000 years in Iran. In **Chapter 4** "The relation of place, Environment, and community in Persian Passion" is discussed.

In the **Chapter 5** of this dissertation, I will talk about my experiences in this old factory as well as the environment, place, and space of the Artus Studio specifically the relation of the place, environment, and space with the audience in Ephemeral works as the essence of Artus productions.

In **Chapter 6** the similarity between the Tower of Silence and the Calvary building and its relation with the ritual activities of the Iranian community in The Environmental Performance "After Death" will be mention. In this masterpiece project, the rooftop of the Calvary building is where the audiences meet the ritual performative gestures that come from the Iranian funeral ceremony.

Conclusion:

The natural pre-existing environment is where human beings can relate themselves to this environment during the ritual performative events. Despite the modern man-made buildings for performing arts, these natural sites give the sense of place to their audiences. This natural environment gets its identity by experiences of the people who have memory or feelings related to that place.

In brief, throughout my observation, experiences and research on the relation between ritual activities, community members, environment and place in performative art, I reached to the phenomenon of **human being experiences**. By human experiences, I mean the social, cultural and spiritual relation of human behavior with the environment. This relation or term of place making is usually reserved for community based activities.

The community members, articulate and transform the place to the stage in ritual performative arts. This relation and connection create the spirit of the place which could be observed in the case studies of this paper.

As a conclusion, the environment, and the relation and connection of the people who are building the performative events in these natural found environment, are highlighted in this research paper. As I mentioned some facts in my case studies in previous chapters, the Persian passion play is created by community members of a specific district or village and happens in the social environment which is familiar to them. Moreover, the Ephemeral works as my second case study, were created mostly by the community of artists from Artus studio who know and have experiences related to this old factory environment.

In my last example, the “Arter Death” performance was created by the Iranian community related to their traditional and cultural background. “The funeral and celebrating the life ceremony”, happens in the Calvary building which has a very close similarity with Tower of Silence from the Iranian Zoroastrian history.

In all case studies, the community works make the spirit for the performances. The most significant aspects of the research in this paper are how community members relate to each other, to that specific environment and to other people coming to see the performance. .

Zahra Fuladvand

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