

A Comparative Study of the Concept of Aesthetic Perception in Persian Gardens based on Environmental Psychology and Phenomenology Theories

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Detailed abstract

Introduction

The human perception of beauty within the architectural framework of the Persian garden is fundamentally anchored in a reciprocal, dialectical engagement between the observer and the environmental stimuli. Historically, the design principles of Persian gardens have aimed to cultivate a virtuous and aesthetically rich milieu, purposefully designed to deepen the bond between human cognition and the built environment. These gardens often rely on an intricate, layered spatial organization that challenges the viewer's perception a concept resonant with Robert Venturi's assertion in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966), where the inclusion of "messy vitality" and multi-layered meanings create a more profound architectural experience than reductive, modernist purity.

Despite the historical intent, aesthetic perception, as an epistemological construct, finds its conceptual genesis in diverse philosophical realms, most notably phenomenology. While environmental psychology provides a framework for understanding human responses to space, phenomenology explores the essence of the lived experience. Despite phenomenology's unique capacity to serve as a cornerstone for conceptualizing human interaction with space, it has remained largely underutilized in contemporary architectural design practice. This research aims to synthesize the theoretical contributions of environmental psychologists and phenomenologists to reconcile their disparate viewpoints. By doing so, it elucidates how these philosophical insights can be applied to the aesthetic perception of the core elements of spatial organization in Persian gardens, shifting the discourse from a superficial appreciation of form to a profound understanding of spatial meaning.

Materials and Methods:

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive-analytical (non-positivist) methodology, categorized as fundamental and developmental research. The research process is structured through a systematic content and conceptual analysis, aimed at constructing a comparative framework for aesthetic perception.

1) Unit of Analysis: The spatial constituents of the Persian garden-including water features, axis, enclosure, and planting patterns-serve as the primary units of analysis.

2) Case Study Selection: Representative Persian gardens, selected for their historical and spatial integrity, are subjected to critical review.

3) Analytical Framework: A comparative investigation is conducted by mapping the psychological and phenomenological dimensions of space. By synthesizing these interdisciplinary frameworks, the study

addresses the “complexity and contradiction” inherent in the spatial hierarchy of the garden. The methodology prioritizes the lived experience as the primary dataset, analyzed through an interpretive lens that balances technical spatial function with the subjective phenomenological encounter.

Findings:

The findings reveal that the integration of environmental psychology and phenomenology provides a refined taxonomy for evaluating the “nature and content of aesthetic perception” in Persian garden spatiality. For comparative purposes, the perspectives regarding garden elements are synthesized into four distinct approaches:

- 1) Formal Approach: Focuses on the objective geometry and proportions, echoing traditional Vitruvian principles.
- 2) Phenomenological Approach: Emphasizes the “lived experience,” where the spatial elements evoke memories, temporal awareness, and bodily engagement (Merleau-Ponty’s influence).
- 3) Symbolic Approach: Interpretative analysis of the garden as a reflection of cosmic order, paradise, and cultural mythology.
- 4) Perceptual Approach: Rooted in environmental psychology, this lens investigates the cognitive processes of spatial comprehension, orientation, and environmental preference.

The findings indicate a significant divergence in focus: whereas environmental psychology centers the aesthetic perception process on the “functionality of elements and the environmental affordances,” phenomenology prioritizes the “meaning of elements” and the “embodied experience of the environment.” This tension between the *functional* and the *phenomenological* is precisely where the “complexity” of the Persian garden resides.

Discussion and Conclusion:

The synthesis of these epistemological domains suggests that a holistic understanding of Persian garden architecture requires moving beyond a binary interpretation of space as either a functional container or a symbolic void. In alignment with Venturi theory, the complexity of the Persian garden is not an error to be corrected, but a fundamental characteristic that allows for a rich, multi-dimensional human response.

The study concludes that aesthetic perception in the Persian garden is a multi-layered process. The “structural process and hierarchy of aesthetic perception” identified in this research demonstrate that architectural design must account for both the utilitarian requirements of environmental psychology and the existential depth explored in phenomenology. By embracing the contradictions inherent in the garden—where the artificial meets the natural and the symbolic meets the functional—designers can foster environments that resonate more deeply with the human condition. Ultimately, this research provides a framework for a more nuanced architectural sociology, bridging the gap between historical design wisdom and contemporary theoretical discourse.

Declarations:

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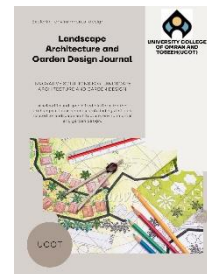
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