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Original Research Article

The Field of Appresentation in the Ritual Architecture of Ardabil: A Phenomenological– Cultural Analysis of Presence, Memory, and Symbol*

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Abstract

Problem statement: In the post-secular sphere, dwelling architecture is no longer merely a vessel for material habitation but emerges as a dynamic field for presence, perceptual suspension, and profound sacred experience. Despite the significance of this transformation, there remains a lack of precise models capable of explaining the interwoven layers of body, memory, symbol, and resonance.

Research objective: Addressing this gap, the present study examines the mechanisms through which meaning arises in ritual dwelling spaces within a lived-cultural context, using a multilayered phenomenological model. The model -grounded in sensory perception, lived memory, symbolic codes, unconscious archetypes, and resonant qualities- demonstrates how these elements can lead to the ritual transformation of dwelling.

Research method: Employing a qualitative-interpretive approach, the study integrates the phenomenology of perception, cultural semiotics, psychoanalysis of unconscious codes, and lived semantics to test the “Field of Appresentation” model in three historical-ritual sites in Ardabil. The analytical process combines sensory description, genealogy of collective memory, reading of spatial symbols, and examination of perceptual atmosphere.

Conclusion: Findings indicate that space, at the intersection of perception and memory, functions not as a passive container but as an active field in which the event of meaning unfolds. Within such a field, the subject is transformed through processes of pause, repetition, and encounter. Reflective bodily movement, generational memory, directional spatial symbols, and the resonance of light, sound, and material converge in an inner experience that evokes a deep, unspoken memory of the primordial covenant -subconsciously and archetypically embedded in the spatial form- thereby transforming dwelling into a sacred act. The Field of Appresentation model thus reveals how activated dwelling can attain ritual, revelatory, and transformative qualities, becoming not merely a medium for formal representation but a site for archetypal experiences of presence, pause, and return, and for the awakening of the subject within the heart of being.

Keywords: *Field of Appresentation; Ritual Dwelling; Sacred Resonance; Cultural Memory; Spatial Semiotics; Phenomenology of Architecture.*

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of Dr. “Masoomeh Yaghoobi” which has been done at Islamic Azad University, West Tehran Branch, Faculty of Art and Architecture, Tehran, Iran in 2025.

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Introduction and Problem Statement

The question of meaning in architecture, particularly within the fragmented and crisis-stricken lifeworld of the contemporary era, has become one of the central challenges in architectural thought over recent decades. In a world where technological acceleration, the dominance of consumerism, and the erosion of cultural memory have reduced the experience of space from a realm of presence and understanding to one of spectacle and consumption (Norberg-Schulz, 1980), space is no longer merely a container for physical functions or visual aesthetics. It has instead emerged as a multilayered field for the construction of meaning, the reflection of the collective unconscious, and the embodied interaction of memory, symbol, and the sacred.

Yet the same space that holds the potential to evoke meaning can, under the dominance of ideological or commercial representations, become a site for the distortion or erasure of meaning. This tension is particularly acute in residential architecture, which inherently carries the capacity for ritual, mnemonic, and embodied layers. The fundamental question, therefore, is: How can architecture not merely represent meaning, but bring it into presence at a deeper, more transformative level? More specifically: How can the lived experience of dwelling, through the interaction of body, memory, symbolic codes, and sacred presence, be transformed into a ritual and revelatory event?

To address this question, the present article proposes a conceptual framework called the “Field of Appresentation,” which explains the emergence of meaning in architecture through four interwoven layers:

1. Embodied Layer: sensory-motor perception and the corporeal presence of the body in space;
2. Mnemonic Layer: connections with individual memory, cultural memory, and the embedded history of place;
3. Semiotic-Symbolic Layer: the analysis of cultural, symbolic, and linguistic codes;
4. Resonant-Sacred Layer: experiences of presence, inspiration, revelation, and resonance with the transcendent.

This model arises from the synthesis of phenomenological theory (Husserl, 1931; Heidegger, 1962; Merleau-Ponty et al., 2013), analytical psychology

(Jung, 2014), transcendence-oriented psychology (Maslow, 2013), Islamic mysticism (Ibn Arabi, 2006; Suhrawardi, 2020), and studies in cultural memory and semiotics (Sonesson, 1990; Assmann, 2011). From this perspective, architecture is understood not merely as a physical structure, but as a dynamic field of perception, cultural encoding, and ontological presence.

Accordingly, everyday dwelling, when its latent layers are properly decoded, can become a lived ritual: not necessarily religious, but an experience of balance, revelation, cosmic participation, and self-transcendence. In the context of contemporary Iranian architecture -where tradition, memory, urban life, and the search for meaning often stand in tension- the formulation of such a framework is a pressing necessity, both theoretically and in architectural design practice.

The remainder of this article first reviews the relevant research background, then presents the theoretical framework of the Field of Appresentation model, and finally applies it to the analysis of three examples of ritual architecture in the city of Ardabil, examining how the model’s layers shape the ritual experience of dwelling.

Literature Review

Phenomenological approaches to the study of space have gained increasing prominence in recent Iranian architectural research. However, most of these studies have been limited to explaining the lived experience of particular spaces and have seldom developed a multilayered conceptual framework for analyzing sacred and ritual presence in residential architecture.

In the domain of embodied experience and lived perception, studies such as Dashti (2024) and Hasani et al. (2024) have examined the influence of spatial factors such as light, sound, texture, and sensory feedback on perceptual experience. These works align with the notion of embodied perception in the “economy of action” theory (Proffitt, 2006) and the concept of “situated perception” in the writings of Tymieniecka (1999, 2000, 2012). This focus on isolated perceptual factors, however, has left unexplored the deeper interplay between sensory embodiment and other symbolic or mnemonic dimensions, such as cultural memory and ritual practice.

With regard to cultural memory and place, the classic study by Mahmoudinejad et al. (2009) distinguished between the concepts of space and place, emphasizing the role of historical memory in the placemaking of urban space. Similarly, Sekhavatdoust & Alborzi (2018), using a phenomenological approach, have demonstrated how symbolic codes operate in the process of spatial meaning-making. These works parallel Jan Assmann (2011)'s theory of cultural memory and Pierre Nora (1989)'s idea of "lieux de mémoire". However, they do not address the relationship between such memory and the sacred dimension.

In the field of symbol, ritual, and semantic structures, research by Allahyari (2023) and Jafaripour et al. (2024) has shown how ritual elements from "ta'ziyeh" (traditional Shi'i passion play) performances to the notion of harim (a sanctified boundary or spiritual threshold) in Islamic mysticism can provide a medium for experiencing spiritual presence. These analyses resonate with Göran Sonesson (1990)'s cultural semiotics and his theory of symbolic codes. Yet, they lack a systematic framework for integrating bodily, mnemonic, symbolic, and sacred layers into a coherent model.

At the existential and sacred level, Labibzadeh (2022)'s study grounded in the gradations of human existence in Islamic mysticism interprets the Persian garden as a setting for spiritual wayfaring. This perspective aligns with Norberg-Schulz (1980)'s concept of "existential architecture" and with Fuchs (2018)'s reflections on presence in absence. Nevertheless, its focus is confined to gardens and landscapes, without extending to residential architecture.

Regarding the disruption of ritual experience under modernity, Nari Ghomi & Abbaszadeh (2024) have shown that the intrusion of modern discourse has weakened the sacred quality of everyday life in Iranian houses. Likewise, Soltanzadeh & Hasan Pour (2019), in their study of tekyehs (Shi'i congregation spaces for mourning rituals) in Mazandaran, have demonstrated the role of local culture and ritual art in producing meaning. These works are valuable at symbolic and social levels, yet they lack a conceptual model for analyzing sacred presence in dwelling.

Overall, while previous studies have addressed

phenomenological, symbolic, or embodied aspects of space, they have overlooked the development of a four-layer conceptual framework that coherently explains the experience of dwelling in relation to sacred resonance, body, memory, and symbolic codes. This conceptual gap underscores the need to advance the "Field of Appresentation" model as a comprehensive framework for analyzing Iranian ritual architecture and for rethinking the meaning of dwelling within the tensions of modernity. The unresolved question, therefore, remains: How can the integration of body, memory, symbolic codes, and sacred resonance provide a framework for understanding sacred presence in dwelling? The present study seeks to respond to this question.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the Field of Appresentation is conceived not as a sequence of discrete stages but as a continuum of interaction and interweaving among four phenomenological layers: Embodied, Mnemonic, Symbolic, and Resonant-Sacred. These layers function as mutually generative dimensions, each providing the conditions for the activation and unfolding of the others.

The embodied layer, grounded in embodied perception, involves the somatosensory system's processing of tactile, proprioceptive, thermal, and kinesthetic stimuli. Through sensorimotor engagement with space, the body generates neural and affective associations that, at neurobiological and cognitive levels, stimulate memory via sensory-affective linkages (Damasio, 1999; Fuchs, 2018; Sayyad et al., 2019). From the perspective of embodied cognition, the body is not merely a mediator of perception but the primary agent in storing and retrieving meaning (Varela et al., 1992; Varela, 1996; Lakoff & Johnson, 2008; Marjouei et al., 2018).

To strengthen conceptual coherence, the link between embodied and mnemonic experience can also be explained from a cognitive-biological perspective: the body, through sensory resonance and bio-spatial regulation, lays the ground for the consolidation of mnemonic traces in both brain and body. Memory, by recalling historical and unconscious codes, prepares the ground for the reception of signs, a layer that enables the subject's decoding of cultural and semiotic systems.

Through the process of narrative re-cognition, implicit memory is transformed into intersubjective meanings (Assmann, 2011; Azadarmaki, 2019). Subsequently, the resonant layer, by opening itself to the sacred, makes possible the overlapping of layers within a vibrational field of presence, where signs become lived experience and memory manifests in the resonant temporality of sacred presence.

In this final layer, all preceding levels echo within a vibrational-sacred presence. These layers are not static but constantly in transition: the body moves from inertia to embodied spatial entrainment; memory shifts from the unconscious to cultural re-cognition; signs transform from codes into lived experience; and resonance becomes not an end but a threshold for illumination and the suspension of time.

The resonant experience, by generating a state of “temporal suspension” or stretched perception, allows the subject within the field to encounter “sacred time” or nonlinear *durée* (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2005; Bergson & Andison, 2010). Resonance, in this sense, constitutes an ontopoietic threshold for the birth of sacred being, which can be linked to Heidegger’s notion of *ek-stasis* and openness of Being (Heidegger, 1962), as well as to Tymieniecka’s understanding of the ontopoietic process of the emergence of being within the lifeworld (Tymieniecka, 1998, 2000). From a comparative lens, these layers manifest as overlapping moments in architectural experience. In a *gonbad-khaneh* (domed sanctuary), ritual movement activates the embodied layer; familiar motifs trigger mnemonic recall; inscriptions and forms operate within the semiotic layer; and the interplay of acoustics and light produces resonant-sacred experience a nonlinear perception of presence.

The Field of Appresentation, through this tensional transformation between layers, shapes the meaning of dwelling as an ontological womb for self-transcendence, enabling the subject to encounter what lies beyond the self (Merleau-Ponty et al., 2015; Fuchs, 2018).

Interdisciplinary correspondences enrich the framework: in cognitive neuroscience, embodied perception aligns with the embodied layer (Varela et al., 1992; Clark, 2010); in cultural anthropology, liminal space parallels the resonant-sacred threshold

(Turner et al., 2017). In neuro-psychoanalysis, Bion (1961)’s field theory and Hopper’s (2003) notion of the unconscious collective field converge with the resonant dimension. In psychotechnology, the field of lived affects interprets resonance as bodily-emotional presence.

Neurobiological insights such as the resonant brain model, thalamo-cortical resonance (Llinás, 2002) and neural synchrony (Singer, 1999), clarify how rhythmic coordination among brain regions fosters perceptual-emotional integration, interpretable as sacred resonance. Neurophenomenology (Varela, 1996; Thompson et al., 2005) bridges empirical and first-person accounts, situating the Field of Appresentation within a methodology that unites experiential and scientific domains. To provide an integrated, intuitive grasp of this conceptual architecture, Fig. 1 depicts the four layers, embodied, mnemonic, symbolic, and resonant-sacred, arranged in a circular, interwoven configuration inspired by the mandala and Lacan (2011)’s Borromean knot. At the center lies the moment of appresentation, the intersection of sacred presence and lived dimensions. This diagram operates not merely as a visual representation but as a metaphorical embodiment of the continuum extending from embodied perception to resonant illumination.

To facilitate a comparative analysis of the Field of Appresentation framework with similar theoretical models across various domains, Table 1 may be used. Source: Authors.

Each row indicates a conceptual link between a specific layer of the model and a related theory from another field

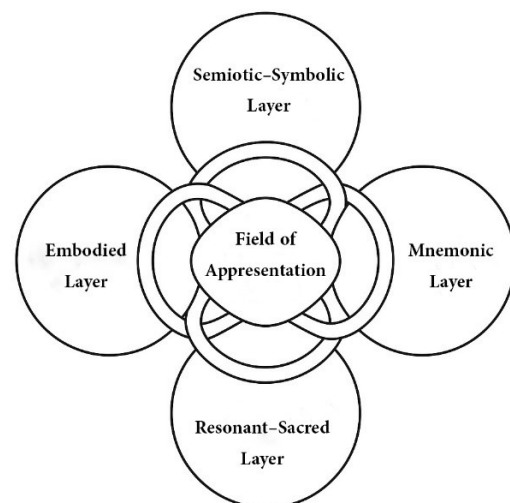


Fig. 1. The conceptual structure of the field of appresentation: Articulating the interlayered and fluid relations of meaning in spatial experience. Source: Authors.

Table 1. Compares the four main layers of the “Field of Appresentation” model with prominent theories in various scientific domains. Source: Authors.

Theoretical Model	Epistemic Domain	Equivalent Layer in the Field of Appresentation Framework
Embodied Cognition	Cognitive Science	Embodied
Cultural Memory (Assmann)	Cultural Studies	Mnemonic
Semiotic Square (Greimas)	Semiotics	Symbolic
Sacred Duration (Bergson)	Philosophy of Time	Resonant–Sacred

of knowledge, thereby contributing to an interdisciplinary understanding of the proposed framework.

In the Field of Appresentation framework, the field is not merely a physical space or an abstract location, but rather a dynamic and tension-laden ground where body, memory, sign, and resonance intersect.

Here, the field operates as a multidimensional and synergistic structure in which lived experience, meaning, and the potential for transformation unfold simultaneously. From a Merleau-Pontian phenomenological perspective, this concept relates to the “embodied space”; a space that is not passive, but is interwoven with perception and action (Merleau-Ponty et al., 2015).

To reinforce the metaphor of the field, it can also be aligned with concepts such as “nonlinearity” or the “observer effect” in quantum physics, which show that the presence of the subject is itself part of the constitution and outcome of the field (Heisenberg, 1959; Graham & Haake, 2006).

Likewise, Bourdieu (2018)’s notion of the “field of cultural production” treats the field as a powerful and structured domain in which social actors and cultural codes engage in a dynamic interplay of power and competition.

This conceptual diversity in understanding the field allows the “Field of Appresentation” to be regarded as a multilayered metaphorical-phenomenological structure, one in which processes of transformation, tension, and illuminative moments emerge as fundamental aspects of the experience of sacred architecture.

• Embodied layer: Perception, movement, and sensory awakening

The first layer considers the body not merely as an instrument of perception, but as the very source of meaning-making within the Field of Appresentation. Embodied perception, grounded in direct engagement with space, initiates the activation of the other layers. Here, perception is not simply the transfer of sensory data; rather, it is an act of regulation, selection, and meaning-construction (Gallagher, 2006).

Through bio-spatial regulation and sensory attunement, the body engages with spatial qualities such as light, sound, texture, temperature, and rhythm, and responds to them. Although these responses are pre-linguistic, they already contain the potential for mnemonic encoding and differentiation. In this sense, bodily stillness becomes an inner movement, and bodily movement manifests as sensory transformation expressed as sensory awareness and readiness to receive meaning (Fuchs, 2018).

Within the Field of Appresentation, the body acts as a medium for receiving resonant and vibrational patterns, and with each environmental change, it reshapes structures of attention and affect. This process marks the threshold of entry into the second layer -the mnemonic layer- since without the lived crystallization of sensation, no enduring memory trace can be formed (Damasio, 1999).

• Mnemonic layer: Cultural recognition and the birth of the sign

Within the Field of Appresentation, memory is not merely a storehouse of information, but a dynamic, intersubjective structure that actively reanimates the past in the living present.

This layer is where implicit and collective memory intersect with cultural and mythic codes, elements that operate in the unconscious yet are summoned through spatial and semiotic experience (Assmann, 2011).

Here occurs the transition from unconscious memory to cultural recognition: emotionally charged and sensory-rich memories, intertwined with spatial experience, are elevated to the narrative and historical level. In other words, places enliven memory, and memory renders place meaningful. In this layer, memory enables the decoding of signs, a process made possible by embodied engagement with space. As Paul Ricoeur notes, memory creates a hermeneutic loop between past and present, producing meaning at the intersection of temporal horizons (Ricoeur, 2004).

To enhance the dynamism of this process, attention must be given to the transformation of implicit memory

into cultural recognition. Through symbolic devices, such as ornamentation, inscriptions, spatial patterns, and movement rhythms, memory activates hidden layers of meaning. This transformation, facilitated by spatial structures, summons historical memory into the lived present (Nora, 1989; Casey, 2000).

From a perceptual standpoint, a mnemonic space is one in which every bodily movement recalls a layer of memory. This memory may be corporeal, cultural, or mythic, and it enters the realm of meaning through spatial symbolism. Thus, memory not only aids recognition but also provides the generative ground for signs in the next layer.

• Symbolic layer: Code, representation, and intersubjective interpretation

In this layer, space becomes the stage for the emergence of cultural and semantic codes.

The sign here is not merely a visual or linguistic signifier, but an intersubjective event activated within the interplay of embodied and mnemonic experience. Signs function as cultural-perceptual units, carrying historical, mystical, and ritual codes that bind spatial experience to cultural interpretation (Barthes, 1977; Greimas et al., 1982).

The decoding process in this layer depends on embodied interaction with spatial structures and mnemonic contexts. For example, in a historic mosque, calligraphic ornamentation is not merely decorative; it carries codes that guide the viewer toward a sacred experience. This layer is the realm of intersubjectivizing meaning; where individual experience is translated into a shared cultural and ritual language.

At this stage, the sign transforms from code into experience: interpretation is no longer only about deciphering but about being absorbed into the lived moment. From a phenomenological perspective, a sign is effective when it bridges inner time, memory, and embodied perception. Thus, signs are not only conveyors of meaning but also the generative matrix for meaning itself (Ricoeur, 1981).

The transition here can be seen in the sign's transformation into resonance: when the subject's experience moves beyond reading into a state of psycho-spatial alignment. This alignment marks the threshold to the resonant-sacred layer, where signs reverberate within the field and become an experience of presence.

• Resonant-sacred layer: Echo of presence and temporal suspension

The resonant-sacred layer is the final and, at the same time, the most encompassing dimension of the Field of Appresentation; a stratum in which all embodied, mnemonic, and symbolic experiences interweave through a form of existential resonance. Here, sacred presence is not perceived as an external object but as the inner vibration of being itself.

Resonance is a form of co-vibration between body and space, elevating the previous layers through emotional, luminous, sonic, or temporal frequencies to a higher register of meaning (Thompson, 2010).

In this layer, the experience of temporal suspension, a rupture from calendrical time, plays a central role. Upon entering the resonant field, the subject seems to step out of linear temporality and into a qualitative and sacred *durée*. This state is linked to what Bergson calls temporal dilation or stilling of time (Bergson & Andison, 2010) and may produce for the experiencer an intuitive sense of the eternal now or the singular sacred time.

Resonance, in this sense, is not merely a sensory or aesthetic reaction but a psycho-somatic, consciousness-altering structure; where sign, memory, and embodied perception, in a state of harmonious alignment, culminate in a moment of illumination. From the perspective of neurophenomenology, this attunement can be explained by the overlap of sensory-motor representations with patterns of cerebral resonance (Varela, 1996; Lutz & Thompson, 2003; Proffitt, 2006).

In such moments, the body resonates within space, memory comes alive, and signs dissolve into the pure field of presence. Ontologically, this layer constitutes the threshold from meaning to being. Resonance becomes the space of gap and openness that positions the subject not only before the Other but before the Absolute. This condition functions as an ontological womb (Tymieniecka, 1999), an open, transformative, and generative matrix for the birth of a renewed self. In Ibn 'Arabi's mystical terms, this corresponds to the stage of "fanā" (annihilation) followed by "baqā" (subsistence); a passage from relative non-being into sacred presence (Ibn Arabi, 2006; Suhrawardi, 2020).

In the resonant field, architecture is not merely a

background for experience but becomes a resonance-generating subject in its own right. Walls, ceilings, skylights, echoes, and movement paths all become part of the embodiment of space. Through its resonance, space awakens the body, activates memory, and transforms signs into the immediacy of sacred presence.

Thus, the Field of Appresentation emerges as a dynamic, stratified structure—more than a theoretical model, it is a framework for understanding sacred experience as a process of existential transformation. The field begins with the body but does not end in resonance; instead, it continually reconfigures all four layers in relation to one another, activating a cyclical interplay of presence, memory, interpretation, and illumination. These layers exist in constant tension and interaction, and architecture—as the field of their manifestation—provides the ground for the lived experience of meaning in time and space.

From this research's perspective, architecture is no longer merely a physical construct or symbolic system, but a medium of transformation, becoming, and revelation of the subject.

To deepen the understanding of dwelling as a lived process of sacred emergence and connection, this conceptual model must expand to incorporate notions such as the "Abyss", the Ontological Womb, and the Primordial Remembrance.

• From embodiment to the ontological womb

The starting point of this framework is the body—a body that is not merely biological or physiological but endowed with sensory awareness, historical depth, and unconscious force (Merleau-Ponty et al., 2015). In embodied perception, architecture operates as a field for movement, pause, stillness, and ultimately becoming. In certain spaces—particularly ritual ones—the body reaches a stage that surpasses sensory perception, undergoing a form of spiritual rebirth: the moment when space itself acts as an ontological womb (Tymieniecka, 1999), not only enclosing the subject but reconstructing them anew.

• Abyss: The fissure of emergence and the possibility of transformation

In this process of rebirth, there is a moment when meaning arises not from presence but from absence, silence,

rupture, and suspension—a moment referred to in this framework as the Abyss.

The Abyss is the zone between the visible and the invisible, between being and non-being; where architecture operates as event (Tschumi, 1994, 2024) rather than as form. Here, gaps, passages, thresholds, and pauses carry a depth of meaning beyond formal or functional concerns; it is the experience in which the pilgrim's body encounters nothingness, its own void, and the presence of an unseen Other. This existential rupture is precisely the condition for revelation.

• Primordial remembrance and the sacred unconscious

Passing through the Abyss is not merely a rupture; it is a kind of cosmic recollection—what Islamic mysticism calls the Remembrance of "al-Ast": "And [remember] when your Lord took from the children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, [saying], 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes, we bear witness,' lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'We were unaware of this'" (The Holy Qur'an, 2004, Al-A'raf, 172). At this moment, architecture is no longer experienced merely as space but as a Mnemonic ontological artifact in which the body, cultural memory, and collective unconscious are interwoven, reawakening what had been forgotten—the primordial covenant, the first presence, the gaze of the Creator. Here, Kristeva's (2024, 2025) notion of the pre-symbolic chora may also be invoked—a domain where body–language still resonates at the unconscious level.

- Appresentation and the triad of the subject

Within the model of the Field of Appresentation, three existential modes of the lived subject emerge:

- The Dwelling Subject, who is embodied and mnemonic within the home.

- The Observing Subject, who, in the ritual space, decodes the system of signs and symbols.

- The Pilgrim-Seeker, who, through the Abyss, enters the realm of transformation.

These are not merely psychological positions but ontological moments of transformation: from dwelling to healing, from absence to revelation, from separation to connection.

This theoretical framework will be applied in this

article to analyze the ritual and domestic architecture of Ardabil, demonstrating how the four layers of the Field of Appresentation are activated through spatial elements, materials, movement rhythms, and embodied spatial experience. The analysis integrates methods from phenomenology, cultural semiotics, and the study of lived experience.

Importantly, this framework is not limited to the analysis of ritual spaces; it can be extended to diverse fields such as therapeutic architecture, residential design, memorial spaces, and even educational environments. Its multi-layered and dynamic nature makes it an analytical tool for exploring spaces that engage lived experience, collective memory, and illumination.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive, and interdisciplinary approach, aiming to explain the mechanisms through which meaning emerges in ritual and residential architecture via the Field of Appresentation model. The central question is how meaning manifests within spatial structures through the interplay of body, memory, cultural codes, and sacred experience. Therefore, the methodology must be capable of analyzing the simultaneous, multilayered, and intersubjective levels of spatial experience.

• Conceptual model and levels of analysis

The conceptual model of the Field of Appresentation is built upon four continuous layers:

- Embodied Layer: The sensory-motor experience of the subject in interaction with space.

- Mnemonic Layer: The presence of historical and cultural memory in space.

- Symbolic Layer: Visual, textual, and architectural codes as structures of meaning.

- Resonant-Sacred Layer: The aesthetic and intuitive experience of presence in sacred space.

To analyze these layers, two complementary methodological paths are considered:

1. Theoretical-interpretive analysis of foundational texts in philosophy, phenomenology, Islamic mysticism, cultural psychology, semiotics, and neuroscience, with the aim of constructing and expanding the theoretical framework.

2. Analysis of historical architectural examples using the four-layer conceptual matrix, with the aim of evaluating the model’s applicability in real contexts.

• Comparative four-layer analysis methods

For each layer of the field, an appropriate analytical method is applied (Table 2).

• Architectural case studies in the context of Ardabil

To test the model, three architectural examples from the city of Ardabil have been selected:

- The Sadeghi Historical House, a case of traditional dwelling and lived everyday experience.

- The Jom’eh Mosque of Ardabil, an educational–ritual space combining religious rationality and sacred presence.

- The Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Complex, a multilayered ritual space with mystical symbolic codes.

The selection of these cases was based on their functional

Table 2. Methodological tools and objectives in the layered analysis of the field of appresentation. Source: Authors.

Analytical Layer	Synthetic Tools & Operational Pathway	Final Analytical Goal
Embodied	- Participatory observation during field visits- Recording body–space interactions- Describing space from the perspective of bodily and movement experience Ihde (1990), Zahavi (2008) & Merleau-Ponty et al. (2013).	- Unpacking bodily perceptions, movement patterns, and the embodied presence in lived space
Mnemonic	- Analysis of cultural and historical layers of space and materials- Interpretation of historical images and local narratives- Identification of collective symbols and memories in architecture	- Reconstructing cultural memory and spatial history- Recognizing the collective unconscious presence in architecture
Symbolic	- Semiotic reading of spatial elements and signs (Barthes, 1977; Lotman, 1990) - Analysis of spatial discourse and power relations (Foucault, 1984; Lefebvre & Nicholson-Smith, 1991)	- Decoding the symbolic and semantic structures- Revealing hidden orders in the organization of space
Sacred–Resonant	- Decoding sacred–symbolic elements in space (Eco, 1976)- Analysis of spatial resonance: sound, light, color, silence, and pauses	- Understanding metaphysical resonance, primordial covenant, and the connection between sacred presence and space- Exploring frequency relationships and resonant qualities of space

diversity, historical depth, symbolic richness, spatial quality, and their role in collective memory.

• **Spatial-conceptual analysis pathway**

The analysis of the cases was carried out using a four-layer conceptual matrix, seeking to examine, within each case, the intertwined processes of body-space, memory-time, sign-power, and resonance-presence. Each analysis was framed as a phenomenological-symbolic interpretation, allowing the multilayered structure of the model to be tested in practice (Fig. 2).

• **Validity and generalizability**

The validity of this study has been evaluated based on qualitative research criteria, including the alignment of theory and data, analytical clarity, and interpretive coherence. Furthermore, the Appresentational Field model has the capacity to be applied in other contexts, such as architectural education, the redesign of sacred spaces, or the phenomenological analysis of contemporary residential environments.

• **Justification for the selection of cases despite functional differences**

Although the primary focus of the main research (Authors’s doctoral dissertation (Mehdilou, 2025)) was on the concept of dwelling and the formation of public mentality regarding the meaning of the lived experience in the city of Ardabil, this article, aiming to expand and

test the theoretical framework of the “Appresentational Field”, analyzes three architectural examples with diverse functions (residential, memorial, and liturgical). This purposeful diversity is necessary for the following theoretical and methodological reasons:

- **Function of the model as a multi-layered framework for meaning analysis**

The Appresentational Field model is a semantic-phenomenological framework grounded in the intertwined mechanisms of embodiment, memory, signification, and resonance. To comprehensively evaluate this model, it was necessary to select spaces that activate different levels of these layers. While the Sadeghi House is closely aligned with the everyday embodied experience of dwelling, the Sheikh Safi al-Din shrine and the mosque, respectively, allow for the analysis of ritual memory, mystical symbolism, and sacred presence.

- **Analysis of the continuum from dwelling to sacredness**

The aim of this article is to analyze the continuum from dwelling to sacredness within the field of human lived experience. Accordingly, the selection of case studies from the house (private dwelling), to the mosque (collective and devotional life), and finally to the shrine (the pinnacle of sacred and illuminative experience)

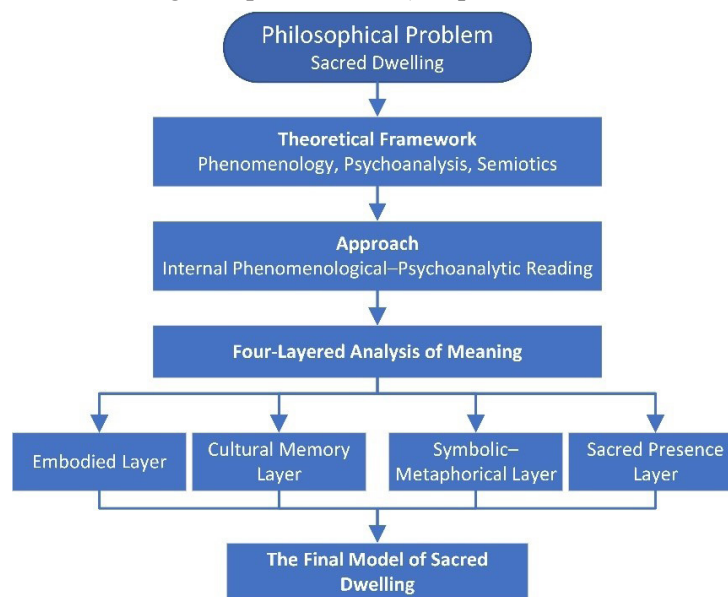


Fig. 2. The phenomenological-symbolic methodological model: From the search for sacred presence to the formation of the four-layered model of dwelling. This diagram depicts the ontological map of the research methodology, beginning with the fundamental question of sacred presence in dwelling and moving through the theoretical fields of phenomenology, the unconscious, and symbolism toward a multilayered analysis of meaning. In this process, meaning is not disclosed at the surface but unfolds in the depth of four layers: embodiment, memory, symbol, and resonance. Ultimately, the final model of sacred dwelling emerges as an entangled and resonant structure, standing at the threshold of the manifestation of the sacred. Source: Authors.

represents a spectrum that both challenges and strengthens the model at empirical and theoretical levels.

- Shared cultural context, divergent forms

All three cases are situated within the same cultural and geographical context (Ardabil), yet they represent different functions and forms. This allows for the analysis of structural differences within a fixed context, thereby enabling a more precise differentiation of the layers of meaning in the model.

- Realization of the idea of “functional integration” in traditional Iranian Architecture

In the tradition of Islamic–Iranian architecture, the boundaries between dwelling, worship, and ritual are highly fluid and integrated. Therefore, the analysis of diverse yet continuous examples is not a deviation from the theme of dwelling; rather, it reflects the unifying logic of traditional Iranian architecture, in which sacred presence can unfold within the fabric of everyday life.

Case Analysis

• Sadeghi House

The historic Sadeghi House (Fig. 3) is one of the prominent examples of traditional architecture in Ardabil from the Qajar period, offering the possibility of a multilayered analysis of the Field of Appresentation model within the context of dwelling. This space possesses a quality that transcends the everyday experience of living, transforming into a field for the formation of identity, memory, and cultural codes. In this analysis, emphasis is placed on concepts of embodiment, cultural memory, semiotic systems, and sacred resonance to reveal a mode of “ritual dwelling” that is not dependent on formal religious rites, but rather emerges from the lived rhythms of the body and generational memory.

- Embodied layer

The narrow entrance and winding corridors of the house gradually lead the body into the inner spaces; this movement creates a spatial threshold effect that, in the phenomenology of perception, is interpreted as a form of ek-stasis -the gradual “standing-out” of the subject into space. The semi-enclosed verandas, the bodily rotation around the central courtyard, and the contrasts in light and sound between winter and summer rooms generate

an embodied perception of dwelling. This embodied dimension, in interaction with local materials such as wood, brick, and stained glass, results in a sensory–perceptual engagement that transforms dwelling from a purely functional activity into a lived experience.

- Mnemonic layer

The tripartite layout of the house, its three central courtyards, and the sash windows with wooden latticework are deep-meaning structures rooted in

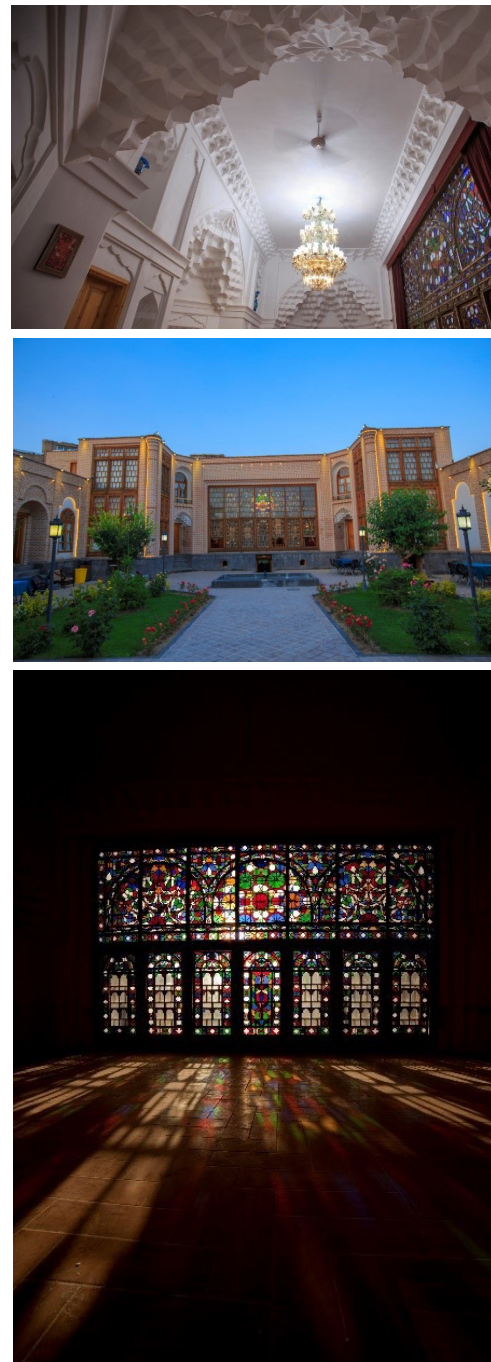


Fig. 3. The Sadeqiha Historical House, Ardabil, Iran. Photo: Bahram Shirinpour, 2018.

the historical and cultural memory of Iranians. These elements, in Pierre Nora (1989)'s terms, act as lieux de mémoire; places where the ritual memory of dwelling is recreated within the everyday setting. The Sadeghi House has been more than a place of living; it has been a venue for enacting domestic rituals such as reciting pilgrimage texts, evening gatherings, candle lighting, or collective prayers in mirror-decorated rooms. These household rituals, even in the absence of formal religious symbols, have been transmitted through generational and genetic memory, planting the seeds of sacred dwelling in the inhabitants' unconscious.

- Symbolic layer

The spatial orientation, placement of mirrors, traditional motifs carved into wooden elements, and stained-glass patterns together articulate a system of cultural symbolism. According to Barthes (1977), these symbolic forms are not merely visual ornaments but cultural events, activated through the dynamic interplay of body, space, and memory. The sequencing of movement, the hierarchy of thresholds, and the choreography of gaze constitute a spatial language that both guides and interprets the inhabitant. In Lotman (1990)'s terms, the house operates as a "cultural text" that continually generates, transmits, and renews its meanings within a symbolic context.

- Resonant-sacred layer

At certain hours of the day, the passage of light through the stained glass and its reflection on mirror mosaics produces an experience close to an illuminative encounter. The midday silence, the echo of sounds in the verandas, and the shimmering light in the courtyard pool collectively generate a kind of "ontological resonance"; what Thompson (2010) identifies as the ground for the body-space co-vibration. In this resonance, the body moves from mere presence to "extended presence," an experience that, from a neurophenomenological perspective (Lutz & Thompson, 2003), can be analyzed as the overlap between sensorimotor representations and brainwave patterns.

Although the Sadeghi House lacks formal ritual practices, its embodied arrangement, cultural codes, generational memory, and inner resonance transform it into a space for ritual dwelling; a form of habitation that is not opposed to ritual, but rather exists in its continuity, illustrating how traditional architecture can serve as a medium for expressing the cultural unconscious (Table 3).

• Jom'eh Mosque

The Jom'eh Mosque of Ardabil (Fig. 4) is one of the oldest religious-educational structures in the cultural setting of Azerbaijan, which underwent gradual expansion

Table 3. The analytical layers in the experience of dwelling in the Sadeghi House based on the field of appresentation model. Source: Authors.

Analytical Layer	Layer Definition	Experiential Description in the Sadeghi House	Key Theoretical Concepts	Meaning-Making Process	Primary Agent of Meaning
Embodied (Perceptual-Motor)	Examining sensory perception and bodily movement in relation to spatial organization	Moving from the entrance door to the central courtyard via the vestibule and corridor, bodily contact with breeze, light, and natural surfaces; pausing in the veranda.	Motor perception and affordance (Merleau-Ponty et al., 2013; Gibson, 2014)	Through movement and pauses, the body activates the perceptual field and renders space meaningful.	Human body (inhabiting subject)
Mnemonic (Lifeworld)	Examining the sedimentation of memory and the persistence of cultural mind in lived structures	Drinking tea, taking an afternoon nap, family conversations in the veranda or courtyard; generational memory embedded in lived habits.	Cultural memory (Assmann, 2011)	Repetitive behaviors and habits embed family memory into space.	Lived mind/family (inhabiting subject)
Symbolic (Spatial Code)	Analyzing cultural symbols and codes manifested in spatial organization	Niches, spatial divisions, traditional geometry and ornamentation; representation of local Ardabil housing patterns.	Semantic organization of space (Cassirer, 1957; Sonesson, 1990)	Encoded patterns embody the cultural system of dwelling within spatial structure.	Cultural system (observing subject)
Resonant (Environmental Perception)	Analyzing environmental and sensory qualities that evoke aesthetic and sacred presence	Sounds of birds and wind, shifting daylight throughout the day, scents of plants and soil; experience of deep silence and tranquility.	Sensory presence (Böhme, 2017; Fuchs, 2018)	Multisensory perceptions give rise to a serene and contemplative dwelling experience.	Environment/space (inhabiting subject)



Fig. 4. Jom'eh Mosque, Ardabil, Iran. Photo: Bahram Shirinpour, 2008.



during the Seljuk, Ilkhanid, and Safavid periods. Serving not only as a place of worship but also as a venue for religious education, public gathering, and urban memory, the mosque provides a rich context for the simultaneous activation of all layers of the Field of Appresentation.

- Embodied layer

The ivan–shabestan spatial structure of the Jom'eh Mosque of Ardabil is designed in such a way that, from the perspective of Gibson's theory of affordances, it provides the pilgrim's body with specific action–perception possibilities. Entering from the open courtyard and gradually passing through the semi-lit ivans into the dark, enclosed shabestan activates, at the level of environmental perception, a combination of invitations to movement and moments of reflective pause. In Proffitt (2006)'s terms, the mosque's gradual sequencing of movement pathways imposes a certain economy of perception upon the body—guiding it, in relation to light, sound, texture, and shifts in ambient temperature, so that the ritual experience becomes not only behavioral but also bio-perceptual.

The contact of bare feet with cold stone, the reverberation of sound within the brick vault, and the passage through the light filters of the ivans activate a multisensory system of spatial perception. Following Varela (1996) and Thompson (2010) in neurophenomenology, such interactions between body and space can synchronize neural networks in the somatosensory cortex and the amygdala, culminating in an appresentational experience of the sacred space and its affective resonance.

From this perspective, the Jom'eh Mosque possesses not only motor and visual affordances but also creates conditions for affective and phenomenal attunement with

the believing subject. The body does not merely pass through; at each spatial station, it engages in a re-reading of the sacred experience.

- Mnemonic layer

The Jom'eh Mosque of Ardabil, as one of the oldest places of worship in northwestern Iran, embodies a form of sedimented ritual and collective memory. From Jan Assmann (2011)'s perspective, cultural memory in architecture is not merely a recollection of the past but an institutionally encoded form of identity and values, materialized in spatial configurations, narratives, and rituals. The mosque's location in the historical core of Ardabil and the uninterrupted continuity of its ritual function over centuries have established it as a lived mnemonic center in which tradition persists as an active layer of the present.

The brick mihrab, with its Qur'anic inscription, is not simply a decorative feature but a marker of the continuity of written memory and the transmission of sacred knowledge. Functioning as a “node of encoded memory,” the mihrab offers a locus for the repeated re-reading of the religious narrative, holding a firmly rooted place in the collective memory of the Ardabil community.

- Symbolic layer

From the perspective of cultural semiotics (Lotman, 1990) and Barthes (1977), the architecture of the Jom'eh Mosque of Ardabil articulates a system of visual-spatial codes that convey meaning, authority, and a distinct worldview. The orientation toward the qibla, the symmetrical arrangement of the ivans, and the precise placement of the mihrab and minbar form a spatial text that structures the believer's experience of presence and meaning-making.

These symbols do not merely signify divine or religious concepts; from Foucault (1984)'s perspective, they also embody mechanisms of discursive power that discipline the body, direct movement, and redefine the relationship between the individual and the congregation as a unified spiritual-political body. Through the creation of visual-kinetic codes, the mosque operates as a "language of silence" (Barthes, 1977), guiding the participant into a meaningful cosmos not through verbal discourse but through the orchestrated order of space.

- Resonant-sacred layer

At the heart of the domed hall of the Jom'eh Mosque of Ardabil, the experience of presence shifts to another plane. What unfolds in this space is a fusion of the muezzin's call, the echo of Qur'anic verses, the modulation of light, and the stillness of the architecture, all combining to form a resonant atmosphere. These spaces constitute "shared perceptual fields" in which the boundary between inside and outside, subject and object, becomes porous, allowing perception to pass into an intersubjective and poetic register (Fuchs, 2018).

The light filtering through the dome's aperture, the resonance of sound in the vaults, and the damp scent of stone in the prayer hall all contribute to a state of vibratory perception; an experience that Varela (1996)

calls the "phenomenological intuition of presence." In this moment, space becomes a medium for the manifestation of the sacred; not because it conveys a concept, but because it enables a form of unmediated presence.

Thus, in analyzing the Field of Appresentation in the Jom'eh Mosque of Ardabil, what emerges is the synergistic continuum of body, memory, symbol, and resonance; a condition in which space is not merely a container for function or representation, but a ground for the occurrence of meaning and the sacred experience. In this way, the mosque becomes not only a site for prayer but also a field of ontological transformation for the subject within the cultural-urban fabric of Ardabil (Table 4).

• The Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Shrine

The Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Shrine (Fig. 5), as one of the oldest and most multi-layered examples of mystical architecture in Iran, is not merely a physical structure but a polyphonic text of ritual memory, symbolic geometry, embodied spiritual journey, and resonant illumination. In relation to the four-layered model of the Field of Appresentation, this monument functions as an unforgettable framework for analyzing the emergence of meaning along the continuum from dwelling to sacredness.

Table 4. The analytical layers in the lived experience of the Jom'eh Mosque of Ardabil based on the field of appresentation model. Source: Authors.

Analytical Layer	Layer Definition	Experiential Description in the Jom'eh Mosque of Ardabil	Key Theoretical Concepts	Meaning-Making Process	Primary Agent of Meaning
Embodied (Perceptual-Motor)	Examining sensory perception and bodily movement in relation to spatial organization	Entering through the main portal, moving across the courtyard, feeling the texture of stone underfoot, adjusting posture to the vastness of the prayer hall.	Motor perception and affordance (Eliade, 1959; Merleau-Ponty et al., 2013; Casey, 2000)	Bodily movement activates the perceptual field, allowing spatial scale and orientation to become meaningful.	Human body (inhabiting subject)
Mnemonic (Lifeworld)	Examining the sedimentation of memory and the persistence of cultural mind in lived structures	Participation in Friday prayers, recollection of community gatherings, echoes of the call to prayer, and generational continuity of religious practice.	Cultural memory (Halbwachs, 1992; Assmann, 2011)	Ritual repetition embeds communal memory into the spatial atmosphere.	Lived mind/ community (inhabiting subject)
Symbolic (Spatial Code)	Analyzing cultural symbols and codes manifested in spatial organization	Orientation of the mihrab toward Mecca, hierarchical spatial divisions, Qur'anic inscriptions, symbolic geometry in tilework.	Cosmic axis and symbolic spatial orientation (Cassirer, 1957; Eliade, 1959; Norberg-Schulz, 1980; Sonesson, 1990)	Encoded spatial patterns express and preserve the cultural system of Islamic worship.	Cultural-religious system (observing subject)
Resonant (Environmental Perception)	Analyzing environmental and sensory qualities that evoke aesthetic and sacred presence	Modulation of daylight through arches, acoustic resonance of the dome, interplay of cool stone and warm sunlight, scent of old wood and stone.	Sensory presence (Böhme, 2017; Fuchs, 2018)	Multisensory atmospheres cultivate a contemplative and sacred dwelling experience.	Environment / space (inhabiting subject)

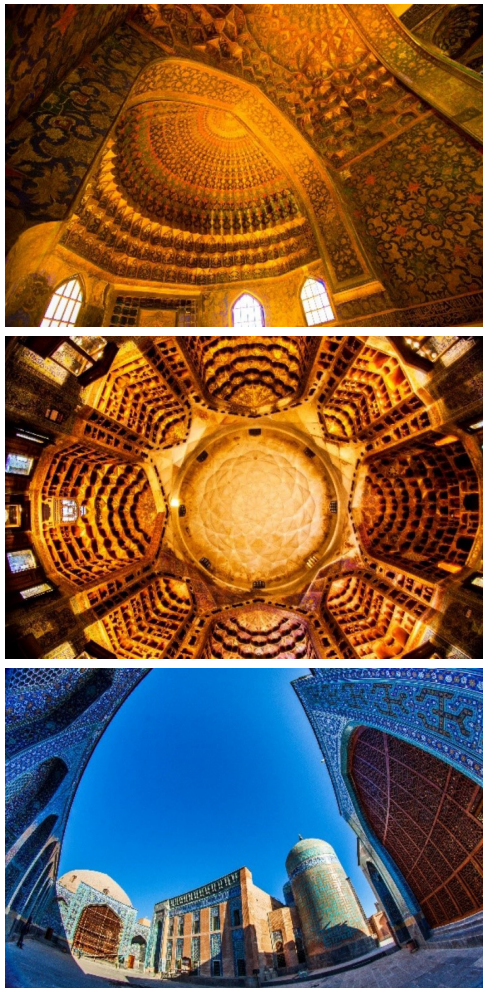


Fig. 5. Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Shrine, Ardabil, Iran.
Photo: Bahram Shirinpour, 2018.

- Embodied layer

The pilgrim's movement from the entrance of the complex to the main domed chamber is not merely a physical passage, but the beginning of a mystical journey. As the body transitions from the fabric of the city to the gateway of the courtyard, and then through narrow corridors into the sacred sanctuary, it shifts from a state of sensory-spatial dispersion to one of sacred focus. This process can be interpreted through the concepts of *ekstasis* (Heidegger, 1962) and perceptual attunement in the theory of the economy of action (Proffitt, 2006).

Moments of pause, bowing at thresholds, encountering changes in temperature, and shifts in lighting place the body in a state of suspension, wherein spatial perception overlaps with the inner depth of self-awareness. Here, architecture is not a mere backdrop to movement, but a guide for the ontological transformation of the body—a

movement that channels dispersed sensation into focused presence.

- Mnemonic layer

The shrine functions as a nodal point of mystical, national, and urban memory. Names, inscriptions, spaces, and spatial sequences act as signs narrating the Sufi path. The naming of courtyards and chambers after the sheikhs of the Safavid order points to the hierarchical structure of mysticism, inviting the visitor to rediscover the self along the chain of tradition.

The concept of “cheleh”, the ritual time of emptying the self, is spatially embodied in the “cheleh-khaneh” (forty-day retreat cell), where the sensory-deprived perception of darkness, silence, and spatial narrowness reconstructs the generational memory of the order. This memory is of an intersubjective kind (Assmann, 2011), persisting not within the individual alone but in the shared field of encoded experiences among members of the Sufi path.

- Symbolic layer

The shrine's spatial layout, with its octagonal plan, embedded Tetractys, and deliberate symmetries, constitutes a visual-spatial text operating within the cultural unconscious. The sacred symmetry of the domed chamber reflects the mystical cosmos, while the rotational procession along its axes accords with the soul's spiral journey through degrees of being.

Thuluth inscriptions, light-diffusing muqarnas, and arabesque and geometric motifs are not merely ornamental; they form a symbolic apparatus of the Sufi path. In Barthes (1977)'s terms, these symbolic codes do not simply represent meaning; they actively produce it within intersubjective experience. In this layer, the symbols do not point to an absent sacred; they appresent it: the sacred is co-present in and as the code.

- Resonant-sacred layer

At the apex of the spatial-perceptual journey, the main domed chamber, an experience occurs that may be described through the concept of ontological resonance. The echo of sound, the reflection of light upon turquoise ornamentation, and the profound silence of the sanctuary together induce in the subject's perceptual-neural structure a state of nonlinear *durée* (Bergson & Andison, 2010).

In this moment, the building is no longer merely space; it becomes a mirror for the emergence of truth. Resonance,

from a neurophenomenological perspective, is the moment when sensorimotor representations converge with rhythmic brain patterns (Varela et al., 1992). The subject’s experience is not one of reflection, but of pure, immediate presence; where signs vanish, and only the vibration of meaning remains.

Here is the ontological womb: the threshold from the “everyday self” to the “illuminated self”; from meaning to being. This moment, in Ibn ‘Arabi (2006)’s terms, is “fanā’ fi Allāh” (the annihilation of the ego-self in God) and baqā’ bi-llāh (the subsistence of the self through God), where the Field of Appresentation intersects with sacred resonance.

Thus, the analysis of the Field of Appresentation in the Shrine of Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn shows that this building is not merely a historical embodiment or a ritual architecture, but a multilayered, transformative, and illuminative space that guides the subject in its embodied-semantic journey from perception to illumination (Table 5).

Body, memory, symbol, and resonance are not discrete elements, but sequential and intertwined moments of a living field in which sacred presence is not representation, but the self-revelation of truth itself.

• **Comparative layered analysis of the cases: From embodied dwelling to sacred becoming**

The three examined cases -the Sadeqi House, the Jom’eh Mosque of Ardabil, and the Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Shrine—were interpreted not merely as ritual buildings but as diverse manifestations of human presence in the world. This analysis was conducted within the framework of the four-layered Field of Appresentation model, inspired by Husserl’s phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty’s theory of embodiment, Yuri Lotman’s cultural semiotics, and the extended mind model developed by Zahavi and Thompson. In addition, by integrating archetypal imagination and elemental imagination, the trajectory of meaning is traced from “dwelling” to “sacred becoming.”

- **The Sadeqi House: Embodied dwelling in the womb of absence**

In the Sadeqi House, the human body is situated within a closed, dim, unadorned space built from local materials; a space designed not to be seen but to be felt. This condition may be analyzed, in Merleau-Pontian terms, as an experience of “being-in-the-world,” where the body is immersed in a field of resonant materials, sounds,

Table 5. The analytical layers of meaning-making in the Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Shrine based on the field of appresentation model. Source: Authors.

Analytical Layer	Layer Definition	Experiential Description in the Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Shrine	Key Theoretical Concepts	Meaning-Making Process	Primary Agent of Meaning
Embodied (Perceptual–Motor)	Examines sensory perception and bodily movement in relation to spatial organization	Moving slowly and in silence from the main gate to the main courtyard, passing through narrow passages and encountering a sudden spatial opening, the pilgrim’s body is engaged in a kind of kinetic asceticism.	Embodied pilgrimage and suspended rhythm (Schutz, 1970; Merleau-Ponty et al., 2013)	Slow, contemplative bodily movement renders the rhythm of pilgrimage perceptible and prepares the body for inner experience.	Pilgrim’s body (pilgrim-subject)
Mnemonic (Lifeworld)	Examines the sedimentation of memory and the continuity of cultural mind within lived structures	Visiting the Sheikh’s tomb, the presence of Safavid symbols, experiencing generational and identity continuity, the city’s history overlaps with the pilgrim’s body.	Embodied memory and sacred identity (Halbwachs, 1992; Assmann, 2011)	Connection to collective and genealogical memory evokes a sense of sacred belonging.	Historical–spiritual identity (pilgrim-subject)
Symbolic (Spatial Code)	Analyzes cultural symbols and codes manifested in spatial organization	The Allah-Allah dome, the decorated mihrab, the sequence of seven spatial stages, and the cheleh-khaneh (retreat cell) gate; architecture as a symbolic passage from multiplicity to mystical unity.	Symbolic transition and ontological mapping (Eliade, 1959; Corbin, 2000)	Through staged structure and mystical symbols, architecture encodes the experience of unity of being.	Architecture–mysticism (observing subject)
Resonant (Environmental Perception)	Analyzes environmental and sensory qualities that evoke aesthetic and sacred presence	Profound silence, sound reverberation under the dome, soft lighting in the courtyards, the scent of aged stone; a spiritual–poetic atmosphere that envelops the soul.	Atmospheric resonance and poetic dwelling (Bachelard, 1994; Böhme, 2017, 2021; Fuchs, 2018)	Sensory resonances elevate the pilgrim’s presence from the physical to the spiritual realm.	Resonant space (pilgrim–wayfarer subject)

and shadows, pre-reflectively intertwined with space (Merleau-Ponty et al., 2013).

At this stage, the dwelling subject is present, not as pilgrim or observer, but as one placed in a womb-like condition. The abyss -existential emptiness- is here not a painful absence but a condition of serenity, an opening that allows repose. Lacan describes this as the “empty place of desire” (Lacan, 2006), but in this architecture, desire yields to a pre-symbolic tranquility.

On the level of elemental imagination, the house fuses with earth and shadow. A silent, sensuous, pre-verbal imagination provides the ground for recalling the primordial covenant—what Corbin termed “occult remembrance,” the pre-temporal memory of the eternal pact (Corbin, 2000). In such a dwelling, healing emerges not through conscious awareness but through a return to the ontological womb—a repose within absence.

- The Jom‘eh Mosque of Ardabil: Being a spectator within the symbolic field

The Jom‘eh Mosque, with its iwan-centered layout, axial mihrab, and sonic–luminous codes, creates a law-governed and systematized ritual space. Within this space, the body is drawn into a regime of guidance: the orientation of the qibla (the sacred axis toward Mecca that aligns body, space, and prayer), the descent of light through the dome chamber, and the repetition of the call to prayer transfer the subject from a state of raw dwelling to sacred inhabitation. This is precisely what Heidegger designates as “dwelling in the presence of things” (Heidegger, 2001).

Here, the subject as spectator is activated; a spectator exposed to codes and ritual order, who generates meaning through symmetry, repetition, and signs. In Julia Kristeva’s terms, this is the passage from the semiotic chora to the symbolic order, though one that remains marked by the wound of absence (Kristeva, 2024).

The abyss in this context takes on another configuration: no longer a tranquil womb, but a ritual rupture. This fissure enables entry into the sacred law and transforms the space into a transitional structure, where the body becomes engaged with cultural codes and the sacred experience ascends to a semiotic level.

From the standpoint of elemental imagination, light dominates here—light that descends from above, subjecting the body to law, distance, and presence. Being within this space recalibrates the body, enabling healing through structure.

• The Sheikh Safi al-Din Shrine: The pilgrim’s journey in the space of becoming

In the shrine, space is organized as a narrative path: from the portal to the cheleh-khaneh, from the arcade to the luminous courtyard, and from darkness to resonance. Along this path, the body both moves and pauses -suspension, threshold, and interval constitute its structural elements. Here, Bernard Tschumi’s notion of architecture as event becomes relevant (Tschumi, 1994): the event occurs not in form itself but in the ruptures and the inner experiences of the body.

The visiting subject is transformed into the seeker (sālik); one who passes through symbols and confronts the transcendent or elected self. This encounter is a form of self-transcendence, made possible through symbols and archetypes as explored in Jungian psychoanalysis (Jung, 2012, 2014). In this moment, the subject no longer merely receives meaning, but becomes meaning itself.

Here, the abyss reaches its peak: the experience of emptiness within the symbol, which is not terrifying but generative. This experience functions as an ontological womb, enabling becoming; a moment when the subject returns to the primordial remembrance (al-ast), but this time not in silence, but with awareness and connection.

Within this space, elemental imagination reaches synthesis: light, sound, movement, silence, stone, and garden all interweave. Healing here is no longer about repose or submission to law, but about existential transformation through absence -marking the beginning of the subject’s sacred journey.

Thus, the analysis of the three sites traces a trajectory from embodied dwelling to symbolic habitation, and ultimately to sacred becoming. Along this path, space is not a backdrop but a medium of meaning -a womb, a law, and an abyss. This movement delineates the generative pattern that the Field of Appresentation model articulates through appresentation, imagination, healing, and the presence of the Other. The final

connection takes place not in form but in absence, remembrance, and the perception of absent presence -where the subject transcends itself, and architecture becomes the stage for human becoming within Being (Table 6).

Discussion

The comparative analysis of the three studied buildings is understood not as isolated cases, but as three successive stages in an ontological-perceptual journey from dwelling to sacred connection. Within the framework of the four-layered “Field of Appresentation” model, this journey reveals that meaning in architecture is not mere representation, but a multi-layered and extended presencing of the sacred. The model emerges from the intersection of the phenomenology of perception, cultural semiotics, archetypal unconscious, and the neurophenomenology of embodied experience.

In this process, three types of subject -the dweller, the observer, and the pilgrim- were defined. Yet the findings showed that these are not fixed roles but ontological configurations that evolve through a revelatory journey in space. In this sense, space is not merely the container of subjectivity, but itself the ground and agent of the subject’s becoming; a locus where dwelling turns into revelation, and pause transforms into the possibility of change.

At this juncture, Bernard Tschumi (1994)’s concept of the “event” becomes relevant: architecture is understood

not as a formal structure but as a corporeal occurrence that takes shape through ruptures, gaps, and suspensions. Particularly in Event-Cities V: Poetic the poetic volume of “Event-Cities V” (ibid., 2024), he explicitly highlights the transformative capacity of “accident, metaphor, and poetic rupture” as elements that reshape the lived experience of architecture- elements fully aligned with the logic of a “womb-like architecture” and a “performative structure of presence.”

Thus, event-architecture, in its link with bodily imagination and the sacred interval, becomes a field in which the subject not only undergoes healing but also encounters the “Other” and experiences the possibility of self-transcendence and sacred connection.

The body is the first point of contact with this process. As Merleau-Ponty has shown, the body is not merely a sensory instrument but the very logic of perception (Merleau-Ponty et al., 2013). In the embodied layer, space is perceived through touch, sound, temperature, darkness, and light prior to the activation of signs, names, or concepts. This layer reaches its culmination in the Sadeghi House: a tranquil dwelling, dark, unmarked, and introverted, where the body is enveloped by the resonance of materials, shadows, and unspoken memory. This state, in Lacan’s terms, is the empty place of desire -not threatening, but soothing (Lacan, 2006). Kristeva (2024) names this zone the “semiotic,” situated prior to the subject’s entry into the symbolic order. It is here that the

Table 6. A comparative analysis of three examples of traditional architecture in Ardabil, based on the “field of appresentation” model and its four layers of meaning-making (embodied, mnemonic, symbolic, and resonant), with the aim of outlining the ontological journey of the subject from raw dwelling to sacred union. Source: Authors.

Criterion/ Case	Sadeghi House – Dwelling	Jom’eh Mosque – Law and Symbol	Sheikh Safi al-Din Shrine – Pilgrimage and Becoming
Type of Subject	Dwelling subject (raw, resting in the womb)	Observing subject (engaged with law, code, and symbol)	Pilgrim subject becoming seeker (connected, transcendent)
Level of Appresentation	Embodied and resonant with the silent presence of the Other	Lawful and semiotic presence of the Other in spatial codes	Confrontation with the absent/higher Other in the ontological rupture
Relation to Absence	Absence as stillness and receptive ground (womb)	Absence as a structured law of meaning	Absence as a ground of transformation and awakening
Experience of the Abyss	Abyss as calmness and formless absence	Abyss as ritual rupture and passage from semi-symbolic to symbolic	Abyss as a moment of spiritual journey, revelation, and connection
Relation to Elemental Imagination	Element of earth, darkness, shelter	Element of light, repetition, geometric order	Element of movement, pause, reflection (light and sound)
Process of Meaning	Meaning as presential/embodied	Meaning as encoded/structured	Meaning as transcendent, becoming the higher self
Concept of Healing	Healing as resting in the womb of space	Healing as reordering the body through sacred law	Healing as existential transformation through resonance and void
The Primordial Covenant (“Alast”: Am I not your Lord?)	Silent, wordless, sensory remembrance	Ritual, lawful, and vocal remembrance	Revelatory, mystical remembrance—visionary and auditory-sensory

abyss emerges as a positive absence—a gap that grounds stillness and reflection rather than annihilation.

In the second step, the subject transitions from a passive state of dwelling to that of an observer. In the Jom'eh Mosque, the body is oriented toward the qibla, confronted with light, the voice of the muezzin, the repetition of materials, and spatial symmetry. Here, space enters the semiotic dimension through order and symbolic codes. This point marks the beginning of dwelling in the Heideggerian sense: living in the world not merely for survival, but through meaning, law, and awareness (Heidegger, 2001). Yet such dwelling still carries a fissure—the loss of primordial tranquility and the birth of meaning out of meaninglessness. As Žižek puts it, “the sacred law is always founded upon a fundamental void” (Žižek, 2001).

The third step unfolds in the Sheikh Safi al-Din Shrine: the subject is transformed into a seeker, engaged in a ritual movement from threshold to threshold, accompanied by pauses, symbols, light, and sound. Here, the body is no longer merely a recipient or observer but an active participant in the production of meaning. In this space, Tschumi (1994, 2024)'s concept of architecture as event is fully realized: the event emerges in the moment of pause, interruption, and confrontation with the abyss. The absence of uniform form, the lack of material centrality, and the narrative-processional structures all transform space into an ontological womb—a place where, in Corbin's words, “the hidden remembrance” becomes possible: the recollection of alast, the forgotten covenant with Being (Corbin, 2000).

This journey from dwelling to becoming is also a path of healing. In ritual space, absence is not a wound but the beginning of psychological and ontological reconstruction; resonance is not mere sound but a form of existential caress; and the abyss is not annihilation but the condition of birth. This state can be conceptualized through the theory of “sacralization” (Mahoney & Pargament, 2004; Mellor & Shilling, 2014). Body, space, memory, and symbols are simultaneously mobilized to elevate the subject from a merely biological condition to an ontological existence. Ultimately, ritual space—when designed and experienced through the four layers of the Field of Appresentation—can be transformed into an ontological womb: a site of

pause, absence, resonance, and remembrance, wherein the subject encounters the possibility of awakening, becoming, and communion with the sacred.

Conclusion

Architecture, in the horizon of this research, is not a neutral container for human activity, but an ontological womb—a field of resonance, memory, sign, and body, in which presence is neither produced nor represented, but appears. This presence always emerges out of rupture, interval, and absence—not a threatening absence, but an awakening one that calls the subject toward the possibility of becoming.

The comparative analysis of three cases (the Sadeghi House, the Jom'eh Mosque, and the Sheikh Safi al-Din Shrine) revealed that dwelling, in its encounter with the codes, memories, and resonant ruptures of architecture, undergoes a transformation: from the primordial repose of domestic dwelling, to inhabiting the sacred order of the mosque, and finally to sacred becoming in the shrine. This process is not linear, but layered and latent, unfolding through the four levels of the Appresentational Field (embodied, mnemonic, symbolic, resonant).

On the first level, the body engages with light, sound, material, and distance—not to represent space, but to be within it. Here, pre-linguistic perception arises, a condition Merleau-Ponty called “being-in-the-world,” enabling the most ancient form of lived empathy.

On the second level, cultural memory and the collective unconscious are activated. Materials, forms, shadows, and orientations weave together a lived code that recalls collective memories and mythic covenants—most profoundly, the remembrance of the primordial covenant (al-ast) as a hidden invocation in Corbin's reading.

On the third level, signs and semantic structures emerge. The dwelling subject becomes an observer, rereading meaning through the mirror of symmetry, repetition, and narrativity of space. Yet this representation is never complete—it is within the very rupture of signs that Lacan's lack arises, and, as Kristeva reminds us, meaning is always accompanied by the wound of the first absence. On the fourth level, sacred resonance and frequency become active—not merely as sound or light, but as the invisible fabric of presence. Here, the subject surpasses the role of observer, becoming a pilgrim, a seeker, and

ultimately a transformed self; not a subject that constructs meaning, but one opened to the possibility of becoming meaningful through the abyss, rupture, and intervals of architecture.

In this openness, architecture becomes the event of moments where the body, at the thresholds of space, encounters something unseen, atemporal, and unspeakable; where dwelling transforms into an ontological event of connection. This is the moment of the emergence of the higher Self in Jung’s sense; the point at which the subject dwells not merely in a place, but in the meaning of being itself.

Ultimately, ritual architecture in this model does not represent sacred meanings but re-embodies sacred life on a phenomenological-archetypal level (Fig. 6). It is here that empathy, memory, resonance, and rupture guide the subject from mere inhabitation to pilgrimage, from mere being to sacred becoming. This model is not simply a visual schema, but a tool for understanding the simultaneity of existential dimensions of dwelling, formed in the interplay of body, memory, code, and resonance; an archetypal mandalic pattern recognizable in many sacred architectures.

In this sense, architecture is the threshold of connection

to the Other; a presence that speaks through nothingness, absence, and silence. The abyss here is not an end, but the opening of another possibility of being.

“Sacred dwelling” is not merely a mode of being in space, but a performative-phenomenological process in which meaning is neither imposed from the outside nor constructed solely by the mind. Rather, it arises within the field of appresentation, in the entanglement of body, place, and the Other. This arising is not the simple transmission of signs but the reactivation of a sedimented layer of the sea of knowledge within a cultural–social horizon -a knowledge deciphered and embodied through empathic imagination, neural mapping, and spatial perception.

In this process, sacred geometry, as an immanent order, paves the path of return to the self not through abstract logic, but through an intuitive, inspirational, and archetypal experience. The sacred presence occurs at the moment when the polarities of existence -light and darkness, life and death, inside and outside- are brought into unity within a harmonious schema. This unity is not achieved by fleeing the present but by dwelling in the kairotic moment, the immanent now.

This immediate encounter with the sacred is, at the same

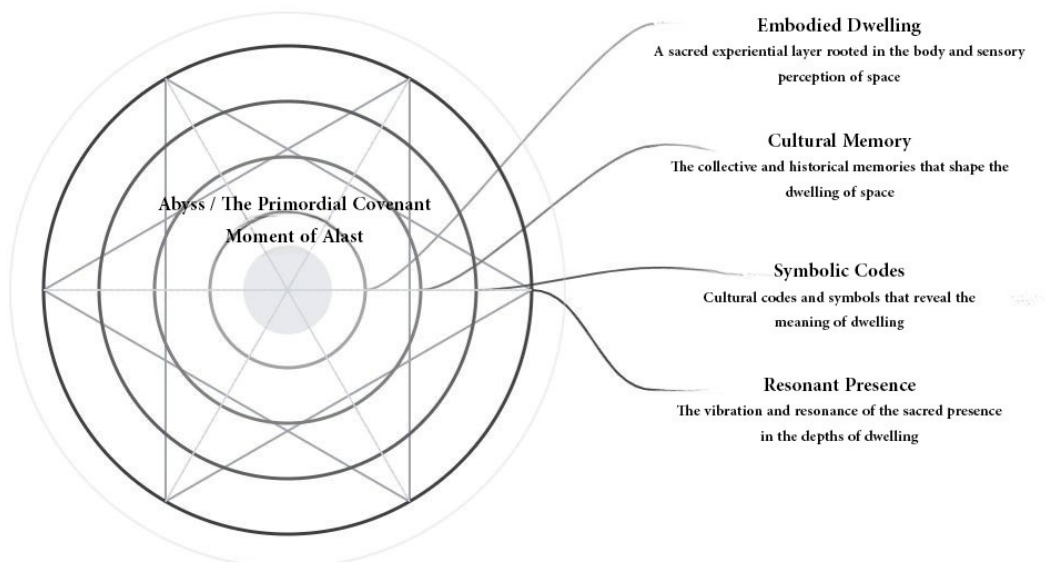


Fig.6. phenomenological–archetypal model of sacred dwelling: the entangled field of embodiment, memory, symbol, and resonance this conceptual model, inspired by the mandalic geometry of the hexagram and by fundamental archetypes such as the circle (unity), the triangle (transcendence), and the center (manifestation), represents the simultaneous structure of four interwoven dimensions in the experience of sacred dwelling: embodiment, cultural memory, symbolic codes, and spiritual resonance. At the core of this field lies the moment of opening to the sacred (Abyss/Alast), which serves as the source of the phenomenological co-resonance of the other layers. The curved lines between the layers indicate not causal relations but the perceptual–ontological co-presence of these dimensions in the process of sacred perception. The geometric symmetry of the model overlaps formally with certain patterns observed in cymatic structures at specific frequencies, without implying any direct causal or empirical relation. In this sense, dwelling is not merely a physical location but a phenomenological and symbolic event of opening toward meaning. Source: Authors.

time, an experience of an inner revelation or self-intuition; a moment when the “elected self” appears as a ray of inner truth within lived space. Such presence is not merely perceptual but an existential-ontological movement in which space becomes a mirror for the recognition of the cultural unconscious and the re-creation of meaning.

When dwelling is emptied of this field of appresentation -when the primordial bonds between body, place, and the Other are severed- architecture is reduced to a neutral container and dwelling to a mechanical existence: a presence devoid of meaning, a life without discovery, a space stripped of identity. This emptiness manifests itself in visual ruptures, semantic discontinuities, and an existential estrangement from the lived environment.

Thus, rethinking residential architecture is not only an aesthetic or functional necessity but an ontological-cultural one: a striving to revive the possibility of presence, awakening, and the experience of unity with the self and the Other.

In this sense, what appears in residential architecture as a sacred experience is the reflection of public mentality sedimented within the hidden layers of cultural, bodily, and imaginative memory; a mentality that awakens in the field of appresentation, is deciphered, and transforms into immanent awareness in the relation between self and Other. From this perspective, architecture is not merely a vessel for living but a ground for the constitution of sacred experience and for the reflection of the collective unconscious in the lived form of space; a place where dwelling re-emerges through a renewed bond between mind, place, and meaning.

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The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in conducting this research.

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