

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO FOLDINGS AS SPATIO-TEMPORAL CONTINUITY THROUGH THE MOTIFS OF TURKISH FOLK SONGS AND TURKISH RUGS

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Introduction

Almost everything can somehow be regarded as a phenomenon; phenomenology as a rigorous way of understanding the concerns of everyday life is still under question in many fields. One of the reasons behind this doubt may be traced back to the pseudo-problems relating to reality in Western metaphysics based on the dilemma between idea and matter that still veils our actual world. Hence, although a new reality termed nowadays as “virtual”, which is based on epistemology as the outcome of the above-mentioned dilemma, seems to dominate our world, the ultimate agenda hiding itself in parts remains to be uncovered. Accordingly, architecture like many other disciplines has a role to play in this paradigmatic battle. However, no matter on what theoretical level the ideological battle is conducted, the main aim and concern in actual life is to preserve the quality of the lived environment itself.

In this context, today's production of space via design, or the planning process as a form of framing, calculative and representative mode of cognitive thinking indifferent to the spatio-temporal performance of our immediate environment, dissolves the “belonging togetherness” of man and place. Consequently, the embeddedness of man and spatio-temporal activities are compartmented or dispersed as function, scale, detail or material and so on. In this presentation, contrary to our present day approach, we aim to understand the role of “in-between” as “foldings” in generating spatio-temporal continuity. The reason for comparing vernacular Anatolian settlements with nearby newly constructed ones, which are clear examples of spatial discontinuity, is to examine the phenomenon of foldings where they open themselves up. The newly constructed settlements clearly exhibit how continuity is destroyed by the design and planning process, as in the case of functional zoning at the scale of an urban block or boundary lines petrified by concrete walls at the scale of a building block. However a momentary glance may easily give a sense of the way in which spatial organization in vernacular settlements goes beyond our present-day framing mode of thinking. It can accordingly be assumed that the poetic quality of this mode of thinking can also be traced through the other forms of work of art peculiar to the inhabitants of these settlements. Among these, Turkish folk songs - *turkus* and Turkish rugs - *kilims* as dominant features in the history of Anatolian daily life are used to examine this quality.

Methods

This study is a phenomenological attempt at understanding the role of “in-between” as “foldings” in generating spatio-temporal continuity in vernacular Anatolian settlements¹. Foldings, where differences do not give way to oppositions but to a betweenness, may open

up a way for understanding these relations in terms of specific architectural situations in everyday life. Foldings do not imply either a metaphor or a new conceptual model. Rather, as a phenomenon of development arising from the articulation of “spatio-temporal continuity”, foldings open and close themselves to the possibilities embedded in in-between’s thingly character. No matter what the scale is, having an in-between character in terms of in / out, under / above, up / down, here / there, front / back and now / then actualities of everyday life, foldings are not sheer oppositions, but relations as dualities. Thus a phenomenological approach to foldings may help to understand the condition shaping both space and ourselves in turn. Using the examples of courtyards, streets, and thresholds in vernacular Anatolian settlements, this phenomenon is examined by comparing them with the poetic quality of Turkish folk songs called *turkus* and rugs called *kilims*. A common motif used in many *turkus*, “the front of their home” as a mode of folding will be examined in a number of vernacular settlements.

Results

Turkus and *kilims*² can both be regarded as the works of dwellers whereby they express their understanding of themselves and their world accordingly. They cannot be placed in a formal category of the art of our time. In the case of the latter, a number of studies have been done on their visual and material quality. Among these which are concerned with the field of design is Christopher Alexander’s work on very early Turkish carpets [1]. David Seamon makes his commentary on this work as a “well-argued evidence for the possibility of learning what genuine order is and someday transforming that learning into a concrete world through a spiritualized design and policy” [2]. Alexander’s main finding in the samples is density as a complex whole generated around *centers*. In addition, according to him the strength of the carpets does not arise from their formal beauty but from their spiritual and religious nature [3] in that the “weavers’ seeking to use craft is a way to find union with God” [4]. *Turku* singers too can be regarded as seeking to use their craft as a way to find union with God and also their everyday life. They are an intricate part of the world of the Anatolian people and express their awareness on the meaning of their lives. In both forms, it can be seen that the momentary building of their feelings is guided by simple rules and techniques. This obviously is their way of thinking oscillating between mastery and mystery poetically. Contrary to “one-track thinking”³, weaving a *kilim* and singing a *turku* as a way to find union with God recalls Martin Heidegger’s thoughts on “*measure-taking*”⁴. Measure-taking, in contrast to metric measuring, is man’s way of spanning the between: the dimension by which he measures himself against the Godhead.

Turkus and *kilims*, as in the examples given below (Fig. 1) have a number of common qualities such as strong motifs forming the whole pattern in a rhythmical order. Also, these motifs are the sub-wholes generated by figurative units intertwining the meaning of the whole pattern. These units can range from a single word of a *turku*, as in the below sample of “night, day and go” where life is viewed as a road leading to an unknown destiny. Similar to this, a motif of in a *kilim* can range from a single knot, as in the above sample of a “dragon” motif, the sub-wholes generated by geometrical figurative units which make up the whole pattern (Fig. 2). In *turkus* and *kilims* the repetitive character of such motifs are open to improvisation. Whatever their meaning, the ordered whole created through them is not only a constellation of fragmented parts, but an articulated continuity of a flux. Any motif can be replaced by others without detracting from their uniqueness in their new context. The reason behind this flexibility can be traced through the simplicity of details, the number of scales and the coherency between form and content. According to Alexander, “simplicity is not so simple to

achieve; it is only when simplicity encompasses richness that it counts as a quality” [5]. Through this simplicity, the construction process seems to have a momentary character which reveals the richness of meetings between feelings and knowing, technique and style poetically.



THE ROAD by Asik Veysel

*I walk on a road long and **narrow**;
Night and day, on and on I go.
 Where am I heading? I don't **know**;
Night and day, on and on I go.
 Since I took my first painful **stride**
 I've been traveling far and **wide**;
 The inns have doors that lead **outside**.
Night and day, on and on I go.
 Even in sleep I must forge **ahead**;
 No rest for the weary, no warm **bed**;
 Fate has doomed me to the roads I **dread**.
Night and day, on and on I go.
 Who can tell why my life went **awry**?
 Sometimes I laugh, sometimes I **cry**.
 Craving a **caravanserai**,
Night and day, on and on I go.*

Fig. 1: A *kilim* and a *turku* from Sivas/Turkey



“Night and day, on and on I go”

Fig. 2: The “dragon” motif in the *kilim* and a phrase as motif in *turku*

The above examples of motifs used in *turkus* and *kilims* are so common that they can be seen in almost every part of Anatolian geography. Similar to the geometrical language of the *kilim*, the metric and rhythmic quality of the *turku* can be explained by the use of the words that become a powerful sub-whole called a motif. For example the motif “in the front of “their” home” reveals an architectural situation in everyday life. The repetition of this motif in many *turkus* accompanied by different objects such as wells, stones, thresholds, fountains and trees native to the region implies their belonging togetherness. Such a motif might fold and unfold the spatio-temporal continuity that can be traced in vernacular Anatolian settlements. Motifs as such, found at both the local and regional level, reveal the common experiences of the inhabitants. The motif of “in the front of “their” home” expresses the side by side continuity of the “frontness” through the whole pattern. However having an omni-directional character, this frontness does not imply a definite back. Moreover, it is a meeting place that gathers a world with many confrontations. Around a fountain, a staircase, a niche or a step in the street, a world is built up. These fronts open themselves to various possibilities just as the sub-wholes existing in *turkus* and *kilims* do. Through the nights and days and seasons, a number of activities bring to mind the phenomenon of “in the front of “their” home”. There are many fronts at different levels depending on the complexity of interaction; sometimes the

whole street, sometimes an opening such as a doorway, a window, and even a hollow in a wall or sometimes just a piece of stone (Fig. 3). One front opens onto another continuously.



Fig. 3: "In the front of "their" home", a tree, a well, a stone, a stair, Kayseri / Turkey

The fractal nature of texture calls for a meeting on, in and around itself. Sometimes silent, sometimes aloud, stone is everywhere when you look around. Stone on stone, stone by stone, just as in the words of a *turku* and knots of a *kilim*, a folding reveals itself as an invisible whole. Any repetitive pattern in the settlement similar to that of a *kilim* and a *turku* resonates the rhythmic dimension of life. However, this repetition is not a strict determination against change and transformation. Rather it holds the possibility of giving breath to the life that goes on around at any scale and instance, as in the case of insects and plants living in minute hollows. Hollows between stones and openings in a wall gather life forms so that the spatial performance of a wall is not a boundary but an articulated continuity. Life fills even the momentary places between the stones in a wall or in a pavement as a generative force. It is an articulated continuity where wall and pavement meet. Contrary to the anthropocentric view, the spatial performance of a wall tells a lot about what the fractal and articulated character of continuity is. The front of "their" home is a common experience of daily life. It is not a programmed or designed place. Contrary to the common belief that claims at life and space in traditional settlements are introverted because of the religious beliefs of the inhabitants, the actual reality tells a completely different story. The "there" in this context is quite beyond the introvert / extravert dichotomy. It is a front folding sunlight and shadow, timber and stone, stone and cushion, wall and ground, now and then... poetically (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4: The cushion at the threshold, Harman Street, Talas, Kayseri/Turkey

Conclusion

Today a number of building regulation codes, standards or design guidelines which have been established to ensure quality are openly in conflict with meeting the actual quality of everyday life. Also, the widening rift between spatial discourse and practice can be explained by a number of reasons. However, many of them may easily veil themselves behind the world of the reductive paradigm they rely on. Therefore, rather than posing as pseudo-problems, problem solving through a few principles and elements can be performed as in the above examples as a mode of thinking must be developed. The problem with this way of thinking cannot be just the matter of meeting standards for material, technical and economical necessities aimed for ultimate comfort; that would be a dead relation.

Rather than finding the right answers to the questions concerning formal issues, the phenomenology of foldings may contribute to a mode of thinking on the meaning of questions that may reveal spatio-temporal relations as the meeting of differences. Foldings in this approach may give a sense of opening to these relations not just as an ontic situation, but as an ontological condition. For this purpose, by using the works of *turkus* and *kilims* as examples, the generative potential of foldings for spatial relations as the betweenness of actual life is traced: a syllable of a *turku* or a couple of knots in a *kilim*, a piece of stone in a stair, on a wall or around a well may easily be considered as a folding in this contextual world. The in-between nature of foldings cannot be a direct outcome of predetermined strict relations, but a number of emergent frontness. The frontness of a folding in these cases does not indicate a directionality of confrontation, but an articulated continuity of potential meetings of surfaces at any scale. Unfolding these relations as betweenness, foldings are not finished artifacts, but an ongoing spatio-temporal performance revealing the belonging togetherness of man and place. In this manner, frontness expressed in the phrase “in the front of their home” in many *turkus* reveals the thingly character of foldings that gather a world around themselves.

Notes

1. This study is developed from the PhD dissertation of the author which is supervised by Prof. Dr. Belkis Uluoglu. (Bolak-Hisarligil, B. A Poetic Thinking of Dwelling: The (In- Between) in Vernacular Anatolian Settlements. *An unpublished PhD dissertation*, Istanbul Technical University, Institute of Science and Technology, Istanbul, 2007).
2. *Turku* literally means “belong to Turks”. These songs have been passed from generation to generation through the oral tradition. The stories told by these songs resonated with people’s experiences such that they have been preserved for centuries without losing their essence. Most *turkus* are considered anonymous, where the composer or the lyricist is not known, which only adds to their value as a collective national treasure of the Turkish people. A *kilim* cannot be simply considered as a rug; it is a Turkish word which refers to the way something is made or to the weaving technique. A *kilim* is not made up of pile, a technique used in carpet making. It is a weft faced fabric consisting of interlacing warps and wefts. These products are not an economic activity, but identified with the life rituals of marriage, birth, circumcision and death. Although they have common motifs and colors, they show differences according to regions. Similar to *turkus*, the basic principles forming their motifs are anonymous and have been passed from generation to generation.
3. In 1951 Martin Heidegger gave a series of lectures entitled *Was heisst Denken?* (What Calls For Thinking?). In these lectures Heidegger challenged many of the things that people usually call thinking, questioning whether people have indeed learned to think. He states that we can learn thinking when we learn not to think the thinking of thinking. And he discusses the dangers of the single-mindedness of calculative, instrumentalist or technological thinking which he calls “one-track”

thinking. (Heidegger, M. What Calls For Thinking? In *Basic Writings*, pp. 365-391, Routledge, London, 1993), Instead, Heidegger applauds poetry as true thinking. According to J. Glenn Gray, poetry is “in a strict sense a measure or a standard by which man receives the measure for the width of his being.” Poets alone can teach us our limits and their words are not simply arbitrary: “They are neither subjective nor objective but a true standard of man’s situation in time and in the midst of nonhuman realities. Such utterance is the voice of Being itself. They teach us to dwell rightly on earth, to make a home instead of merely inhabiting a series of houses”. (Gray, J.G. Poets and Thinkers: Their Kindred Roles in the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger. In *Phenomenology and Existentialism*, p.104, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1967).

4. According to Heidegger, poetry is measure-taking; it is not a metric measuring but calling the thing concealing itself. In “...Poetically Man Dwells...”, Heidegger claims that “the poetic” is the basic capacity for human dwelling by his conviction that poetry has the ability to take measure: “*The taking of measure is what is poetic in dwelling. Poetry is a measuring*”. The poetic measure-taking capability of poetry effectively recaptures and restores authentic rooted dwelling. The nature of poetry is one of taking measure, and that poetry is the ultimate building; further, man dwells in that which he builds, and thus man dwells, ultimately, in poetry through measure-taking. (Heidegger, M. Poetically Man Dwells. In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, pp. 213-228, Harper & Row, New York, 1971).

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