

RESEARCH ESSAY

The Ground Is Part of the Script: Site-Specific Performance in Contested Space

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A site-specific performance enters a place already occupied by memory, law, daily use, and unequal claims to presence. Calling the ground a stage does not clear those associations; it intensifies them. How can performance respond to contested space without converting conflict into atmospheric scenery? Site specificity is responsible when the site's current users can alter the work's access, narrative, timing, and boundaries. Description becomes explanatory only when it identifies what connects one event to the next. In this inquiry, land status, access routes, consultation, current use, audience movement, environmental limits, and the distribution of interruption make the dynamic between artistic occupation and existing spatial rights available for testing.

A workable inquiry combines site dramaturgy combined with stakeholder mapping and observation beyond performance hours with a ledger of land status, access routes, consultation, current use, audience movement, environmental limits, and the distribution of interruption. The ledger separates direct observation, member explanation, technical condition, and later construction. Case alignment then turns on whether the work changes when people with material claims to the site object or propose alternatives. This procedure leaves room for ambiguity while preventing ambiguity from becoming an excuse for claims that no possible finding could weaken.

A promenade piece follows the route of a demolished neighborhood. Archival testimony plays through headphones, but current street vendors must repeatedly move for audiences, reproducing displacement in the event's logistics. The example should not be generalized by resemblance alone. Its value lies in exposing a chain of resolutions that would disappear in a summary of the final outcome. Within that chain, the dynamic between artistic occupation and existing spatial

rights becomes perceptible as something enacted, and the analyst can identify the point at which a contrasting choice would have changed the reading.

The mechanism can now be stated more exactly. Land status, access routes, consultation, current use, audience movement, environmental limits, and the distribution of interruption locate resolutions in a recoverable sequence, while the dynamic between artistic occupation and existing spatial rights explains why those resolutions matter beyond the finished appearance. The inference remains bounded by whether the work changes when people with material claims to the site object or propose alternatives. If that condition is absent, the case may still be evocative, but it cannot support the same account of result or responsibility.

A riverbank performance begins only after fishing groups select dates and protected areas. Their constraints reshape the choreography and prevent the landscape from appearing empty before the artists arrive. The case adds friction rather than confirmation. Its details force a distinction between formal similarity and equivalent implication. Once that distinction is made, the connection between artistic occupation and existing spatial rights can be evaluated through concrete effects instead of assumed from the category under which the event is presented.

No project can grant every stakeholder equal veto, and conflict may be the very condition the performance must expose. Answering this concern requires more than adding a warning to the conclusion. It changes source selection, since evidence of burden, refusal, and exclusion must be gathered alongside evidence of creative success. The governing test remains whether the work changes when people with material claims to the site object or propose alternatives, applied from more than one position.

The paired scenes turn an abstract

value into an analyzable process. Site dramaturgy combined with stakeholder mapping and observation beyond performance hours traces how the dynamic between artistic occupation and existing spatial rights is proposed, enacted, received, and revised. Each stage can succeed or fail independently, which explains why a formally compelling instance may remain ethically or historically inadequate and why an imperfect instance may still generate consequential knowledge.

Artists should publish intervention authority, pay local expertise, create non-participation options, protect ordinary access, and plan the site's condition after departure. The intervention creates an audit trail without pretending that judgment can become mechanical. It identifies who decided, what alternatives were considered, and how the result was revised. Such records support institutional memory while leaving room for modes of work that require discretion, privacy, or culturally delimited forms of accountability.

Scale introduces another interpretive demand. A choice that supports the link between artistic occupation and existing spatial rights in one encounter may change after repetition, touring, digitization, or administrative standardization. Critical work should follow selected cases beyond their exemplary moment and ask whether whether the work changes when people with material claims to the site object or propose alternatives continues to hold when new actors inherit the form without the relationships that first sustained it.

Uncertainty enters at several points: provenance may be incomplete, remembered motives may conflict, and the analyst's presence may alter the undertaking being observed. The test of whether the work changes when people with material claims to the site object or propose alternatives reduces but does not

remove those difficulties. Conclusions should therefore distinguish what the record demonstrates, what it strongly suggests, and what remains a plausible question for further study.

Future work should test the framework through collaborative replication. Independent teams could apply site dramaturgy combined with stakeholder mapping and observation beyond performance hours to contrasting sites, exchange only their criteria before interpretation, and then compare where judg-

ments converge. Disagreement would be informative if each team can identify which evidence changed its conclusion and whether whether the work changes when people with material claims to the site object or propose alternatives proved too narrow or too permissive.

A further aftermath concerns institutional memory. Without records of rejected alternatives and changing conditions, later practitioners inherit a polished result but not the judgment that made it possible. Preserving that judg-

ment creates a basis for learning rather than simple replication.

The examples do not settle every case; they establish what a responsible next investigation must be able to show. The ground is part of the script because it carries aftereffects that artistic framing cannot suspend. Site-case-bound performance becomes accountable when place is allowed to direct the work rather than merely authenticate it.