

This is an research exposition for an  
upcoming master thesis to be conducted  
during spring term of 2022.

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Research Exposition

for Master Thesis 2022

Matter Space Structure

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## MANIFEST

We live in a fast-paced society, rushing through our lives as we are to arrive somewhere. Wanting more of everything. Repeating our pleasures. Constantly consuming information. Solving problems - meeting deadlines, running errands, fulfilling desires, defending opinions. We live for the lunch, the evening and the tomorrow.

We spend most of our time seeking to become happy. As if something important needs to be found or accomplished or otherwise added to our experience in the present moment. There's simply no resting place - in a sense, we never arrive.

Meditation is the art of discovering that you are fulfilled before the next thing happens,

not because it happened.



**ABSTRACT**

With a theoretical, interpretative and conceptual base in the fields of contemporary neuropsychological research and traditional ancient concepts of meditation, this project aims to explore architecture and spatiality within the public realm as externally induced conditions eliciting meditative states, offering an overstrained population in a ever changing fast-paced society a new type of public domain inviting to practice the mind to attain a more prosperous way of living.

I seek to explore how architecture can create moments of disruption in the public structure characterized by a fast-paced societal atmosphere - encouraging the user to become alert and to interact differently with the world around them.

In the project meditation is defined as a design method, letting experiences of psychological concepts, interpretations and association from the meditative state dictate parts of the design.

Meditation is about amplifying the connection between the intellectual and the sensational of our being, which touches upon the wider discourse of this project - the societal disconnection to emotions.

## BACKGROUND

The relation between body, mind and the built environment is getting more evident through research in recent years. Growing empirical evidence indicates that well-designed environments raise mindfulness, restore cognitive fatigue, improve well-being, maintain health and facilitate healing.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, most of the architecture being built today doesn't facilitate these issues within the design process. Today's buildings often lack an emotional and spiritual content. As stated by Pallasmaa, a result of today's focus on technology in architecture creates cities pervaded by a "sense of emptiness, distance and rejection".<sup>2</sup>

Architecture has the capability to inspire and influence human behaviour. It's one of the most influential human produced artefact, even when not consciously noticed. The majority of our lives is spent inside buildings that may affect our mental well being greatly.<sup>1</sup>

Humans relation to architecture is ambiguous in the sense of its task. Architecture is the enabler of physical comfort and basic shelter, at the same time having the capacity to emotionally move the human soul and nurture people's identities by articulating the wider cultural and societal conditions.

I believe that architectures' psychological aspects is underestimated in today's attitude towards the built environment.

One of the purpose with spatial design is to elicit a response, both physically and mentally, shaping individual, communal and environmental experience.

As designers of our immediate environment we should address human cognitive ability at different levels ensuring to elicit appropriate emotions and provide positive experiences.

Emotions is what dictates how we perceive our world - and more important, our place in it.

If architecture is given the appropriate amount of mental significance, it has the ability and power to shape society in a subtle yet purposeful way that cannot be attained through more conventional or direct attempts.

## MY INTEREST

My interest within the architectural field has gradually manifested itself through my studies. Deriving from a general interest of psychology, I've explored architecture from a psychological interdisciplinary approach and scratched the surface of the interrelationship between humans and their surroundings.

With this thesis I aim to deepen my knowledge within the field of architecture psychology and phenomenology.

During a period of reflections upon the prevailing societal disconnection to emotions I found interest in the practice of meditation, as a tool of amplifying an emotional connection and mental awareness.

Triggered by the overwhelming amount of contemporary research within the field, I thought of implementing meditation as a part of the thesis' exploratory method.

The wider discourse of this project is in the societal disconnection to emotions; meditation, in a contemporary approach, is a method of amplifying the connection between the intellectual and the sensational of our being.

With this master thesis I mean to explore how architecture and spatiality can be designed in such way that elicits individuals to a progression of mental growth.



Exploring the monumental landscape scenery of Gothenburg archipelago as an externally induced condition for a meditative state. Vrångö, July 2021. Photo: Author.

## MEDITATION

In the thesis meditation is defined as a design method, letting experiences of psychological concepts, interpretations and association from the meditative state dictate parts of the design.

This thesis applies the notion of meditation as an intentionally induced psychological state, described as consciousness characterized by mental presence, focused and sustained attention, relaxation, and absence of both internal and external judgment.

Real meditation isn't about understanding things conceptually. It's the ability to experience things prior to concepts, and it leads to another way of being in the world - one that can allow for a kind of psychological freedom that a continuous entanglement with concepts doesn't.

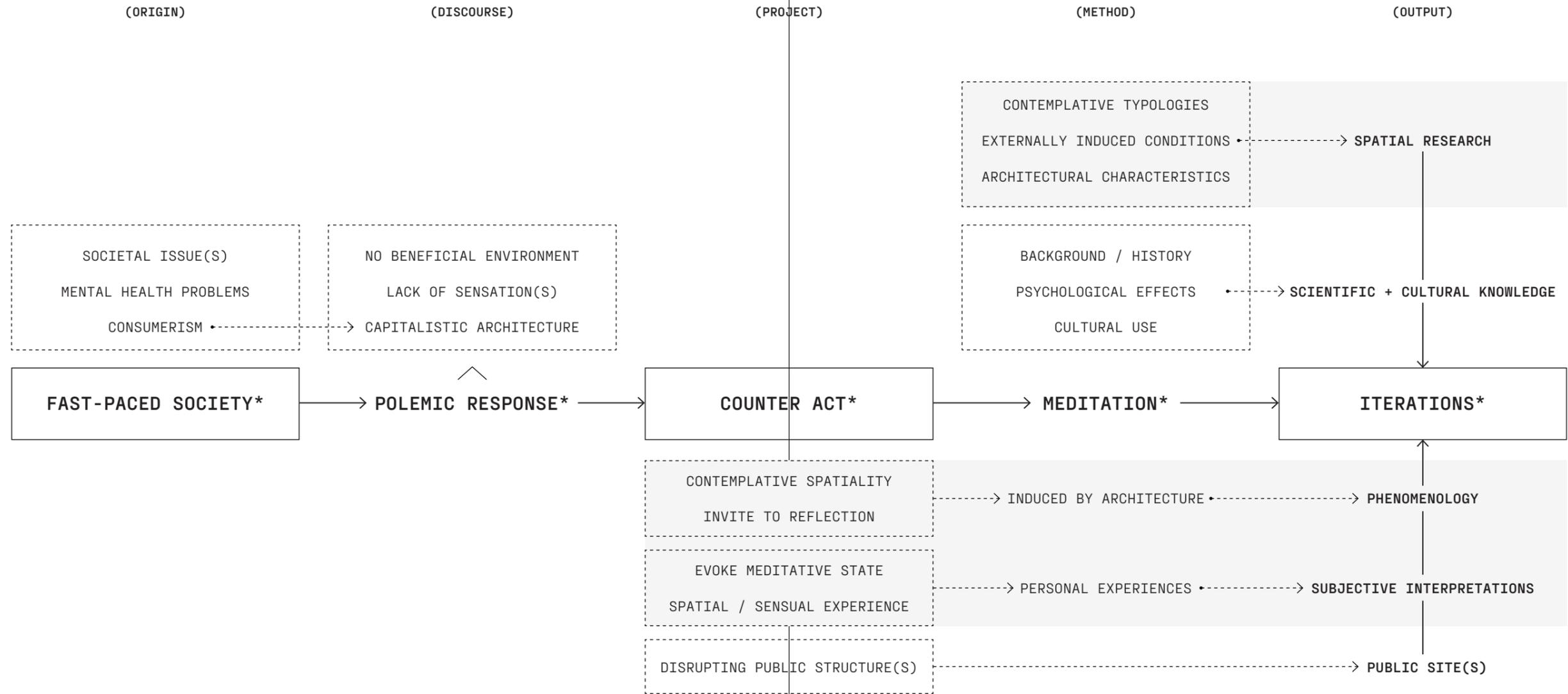
Meditative states can be attained both through internal methods and external conditions. Internally induced methods, which relies on the individual's subjective inner psychological regulations and focus, is for example breathing techniques, auditory instructions and mantras.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas externally induced conditions draws and uphold attention toward their perceptual and objective elements, as for example artefacts, iconography, social situations or natural environments. This is where architecture plays a role.

## THESIS QUESTIONS

- + How can architecture and spatial design act as externally induced conditions to elicit a meditative state with the user?
- + How can architecture be implemented in the public structure to disrupt a fast-paced societal atmosphere?
- + How can moments of disruption of the public realm hold promise for confusing the existing system by creating and encouraging unpredictable human behaviour - forcing the user to become alert and to interact differently with the world around them?

PROJECT FRAMEWORK



\*The **fast-paced society** refers to the societal atmosphere in the western world characterized of an over-consumption of information, entertainment, material things and everyday impressions, causing stress, social pressure, anxiety and lack of individual time and mental space for self-reflection and inward-looking contemplation.

\*A **polemic response** toward mentioned issue of the fast-paced society in regard to the built environment's lack of implementation of psychological aspect within the design process.

\*The thesis project underlying incentive is to propose an alternative that **counter acts** the issues of the discourse and origin.

\***Meditation** as a part of the design method where experiences of psychological concepts, interpretations and association from the meditative state dictates parts of the design.

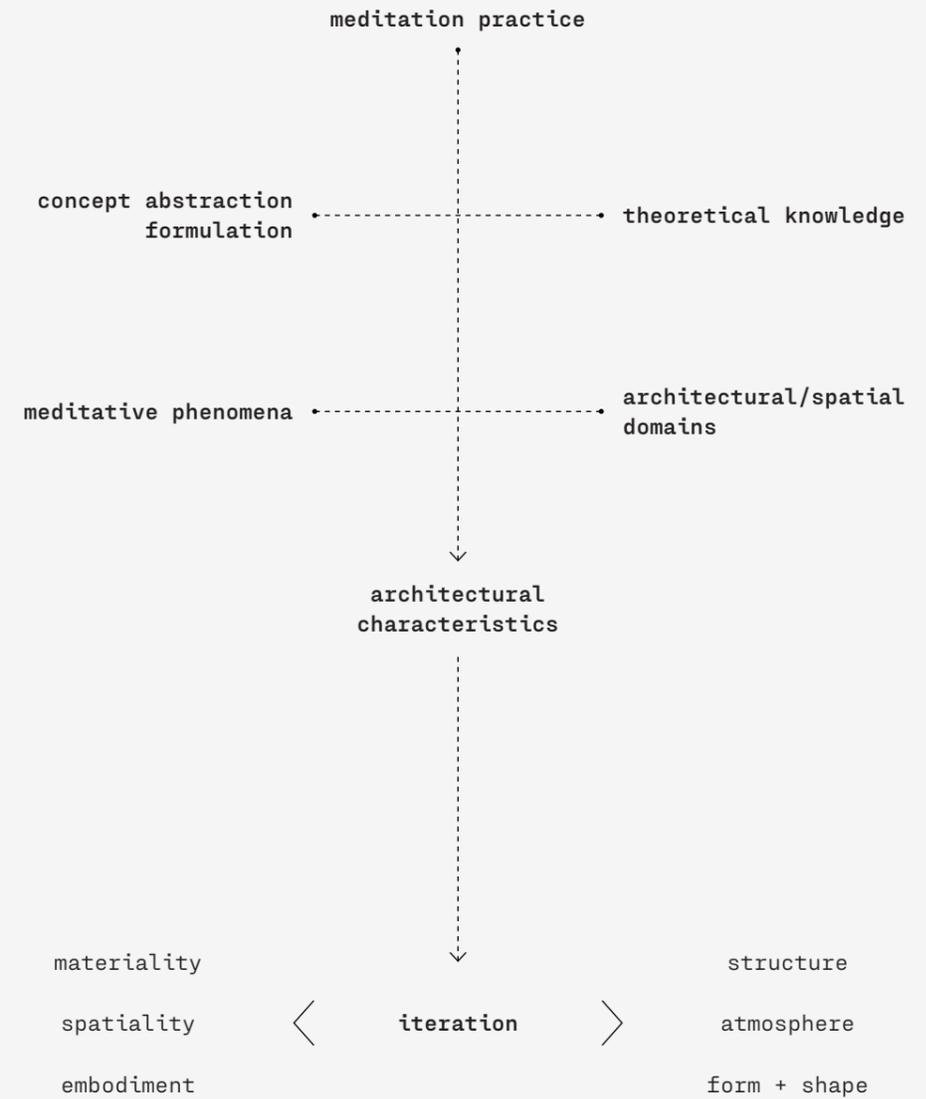
\***Iterations** refers to a synthesizing phase where design are created and tested.

**METHOD**

Together with experiences of psychological concepts, interpretations and association from the meditative state, neuropsychological research within the field of spatial perception are to be implemented - letting the two domains merge together into a symbiotic driving force of the design process.

As part of the interpretative research phase a catalogue of design iterations within the selected architectural domains relating to specific meditative phenomena are to be concluded, intending to identify what spatial characteristics that acts as inductions of a meditative state.

- A Subjective understanding of meditation through continuous practice
  - B Interpretative abstraction and formulation of phenomena related to a meditative state
  - C Theoretical knowledge of meditation and externally induced conditions through research studies
  - D Definition of meditative concepts and phenomena applicable to architectural project
  - E Selection of architectural and spatial domains to explore within the field
  - F Connection of architectural domains and meditative phenomena
  - G Definition of architectural/spatial characteristics related to phenomena
- Iteration

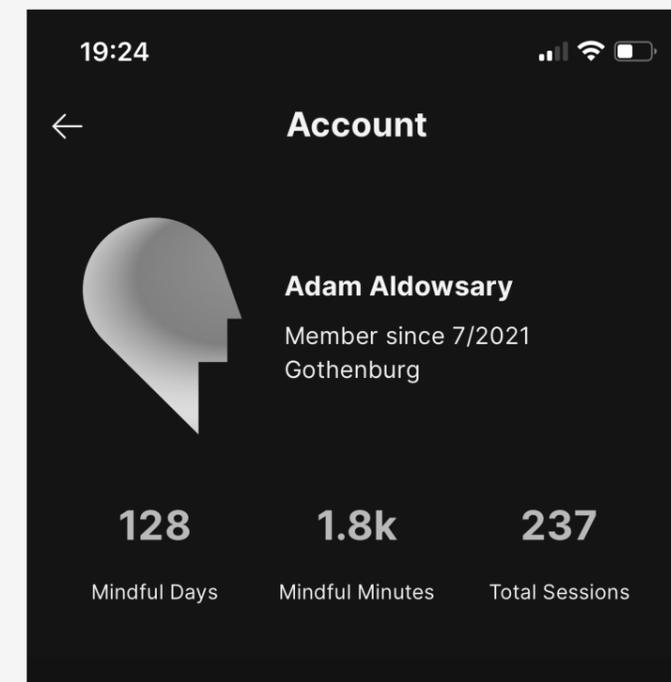


## MEDITATION AS METHODOLOGY

Originating from ancient religious traditions, meditation as a contemporary practice encompasses a wide range of ideas, methods and applications. Additionally, the achieved mental state is highly subjective as it is only applicable within the individual mind. This entails for expressions of individualism and subjectivity within the framework of the design domains.

Meditation is a tacit (implicit) knowledge, meaning that there's no consensus in how to define and transfer the skill set - because of the difficulties to express or extract the knowledge.

During the interpretative part of the research process I, as an intellectual and emotional human being, are to conclude and formulate phenomena and concepts I bring with me from my own understanding of notions of meditation. I will let myself be influenced by whatever means I'm using to condition my own meditative state, as it is my own approach that matters.



Screen shot from meditation app 'Waking Up' illustrating progress data. Guided practice as my main individual method to elicit a meditative state during this project.

**MEDITATIVE PHENOMENA**

Meditation is an ancient practice that touches upon various psychological, philosophical and - to some extent - existential issues and ideas; from attempting to explain the notion of consciousness, ideas of impermanence and to questioning our universal existence.

The understanding of these issues is embodied through sensory and bodily phenomena. Subjective interpretations of various phenomena and concepts of the meditative state is thus defined, which then are to act as a theoretical and conceptual base for further design exploration.

Eight phenomena deriving from the meditative state have been selected. The selection have been made in such way to incorporate a wide range of phenomena, from complex and incomprehensible internal phenomena (eg consciousness) to more physical and controllable such (eg vision).

**Breath**

physical attachment and continuity

**Consciousness**

space of appearances

**Attention**

recognition of appearances

**Body**

cloud of (bodily) sensations

**Transition**

the space (time) in between

**Vision**

visual field of colour, light and shadows + subject-object relation

**Affirmation**

acknowledgement of thoughts

**Auditory perception**

contextual attachment + philosophical appliance

## ARCHITECTURAL (SPATIAL) DOMAINS

A selection of architectural and spatial domains to explore within the scope of the project is made to accompany and relate to the meditative phenomena.

Except from classifying the domains of artistic spatial articulations, they are to define a setting from which architectural and spatial interpretation are to be conducted, attempting to create emotional and sensational resonance with selected meditative phenomena.

The selection of the architectural and spatial domains are deliberately chosen to establish a broad spectra of domains, ranging in scale, complexity and tangibility.

Some domains are recognized within the field of contemplative architecture (eg void and light) and others acts within a more implicit realm dealing with sub-conscious and attentional aspects (eg disruption and displacement).

### Void

free motion in an unobstructed and unveiled spatiality

### Disruption

encouraging unpredictability, alertness and deviating interactions

### Sequence

spatial (physical) transitioning embodying mental process

### Displacement

disconnection from the public structure

### Enclosure

inviting to inward-looking bodily experience

### Tactility

evoking tactile senses through materiality

### Sound

sensory anchoring of auditory perception

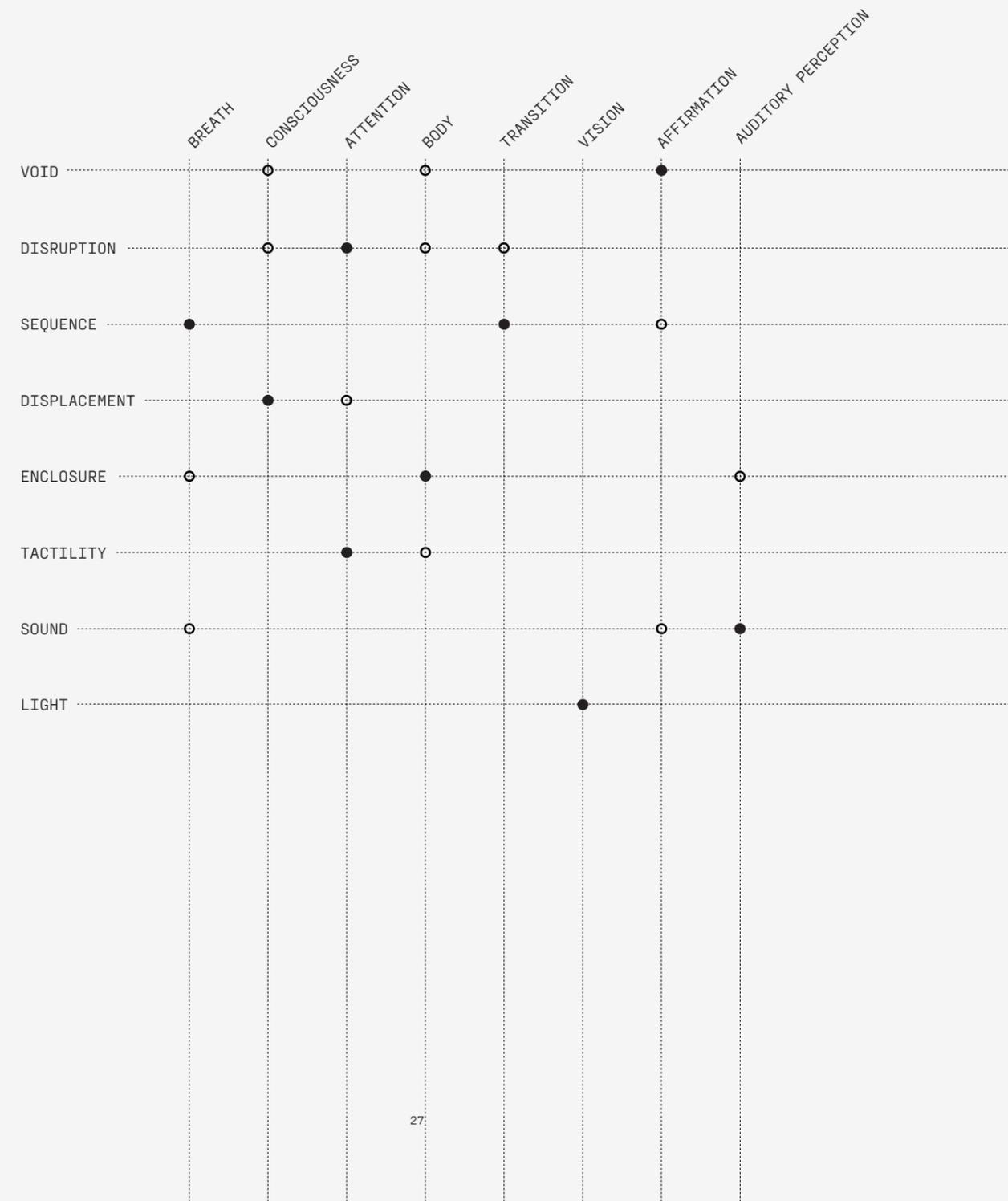
### Light

sensory anchoring of visual field

### ARCHITECTURAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL RELATIONS

As the explorations progress during the master thesis one aim is to define and present connections within the field of meditative phenomena and architectural domains, as a way of translating psychological aspects into spatiality - whether this can be done within a scientific approach or not is yet to be investigated.

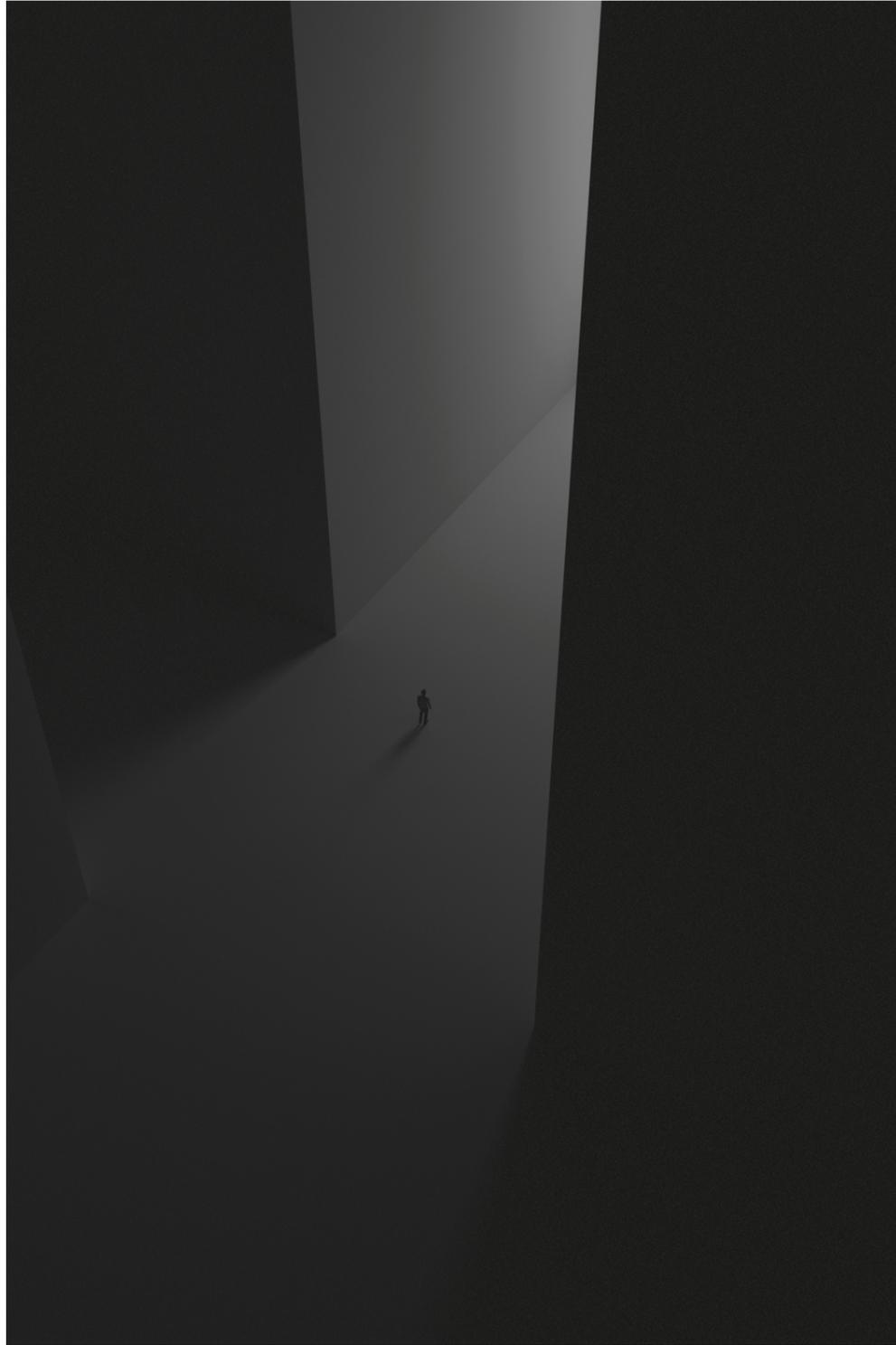
During the exploratory and iterative design phase, mainly aiming to define and structure the framework for upcoming spring semester, most of the design work is iterated through subjective methods, approaching the concerned issues with a more artistic and interpretative approach.



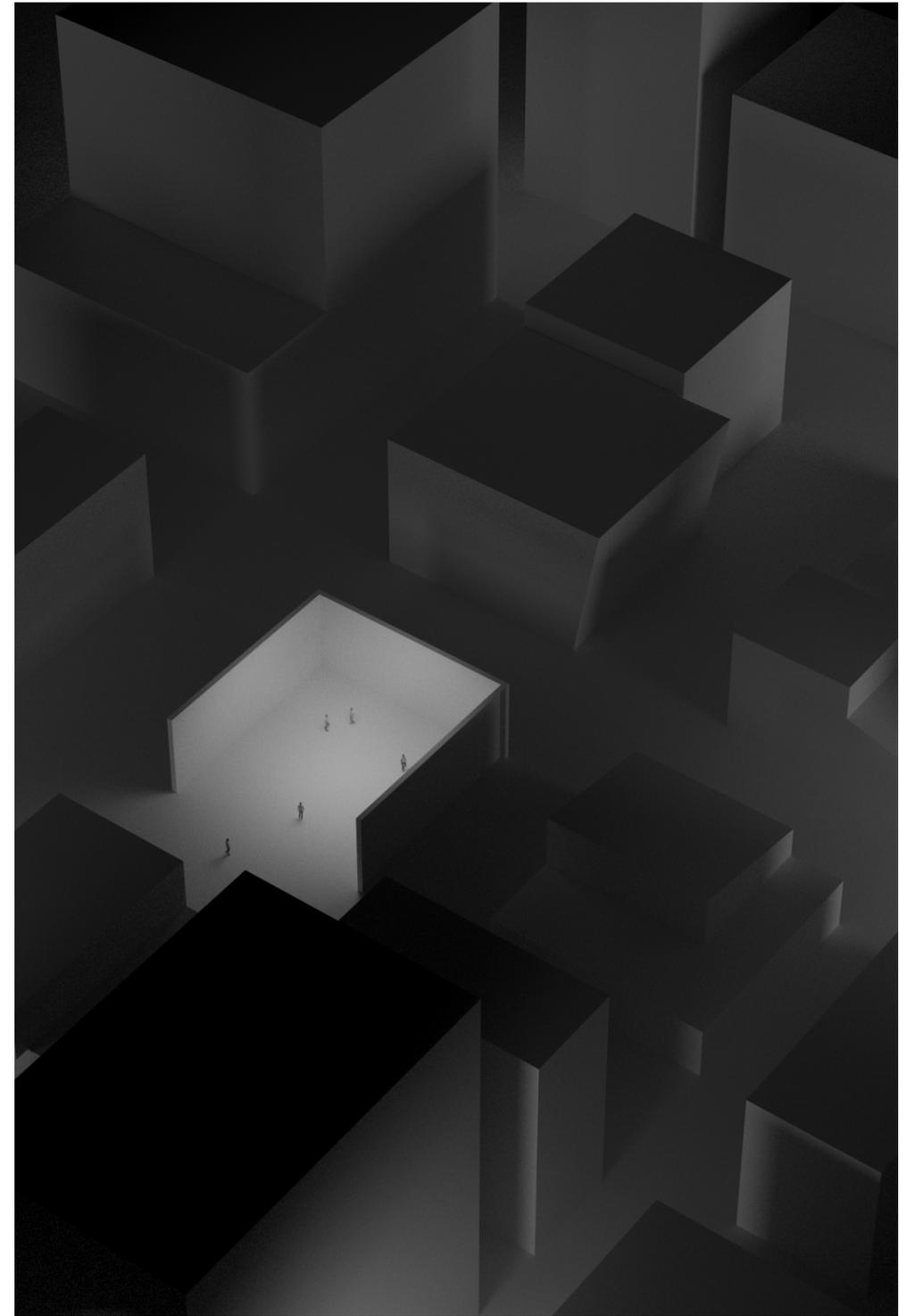
## DESIGN EXPLORATION

During the interpretative explorations of the meditative phenomenon I've created various spatial and atmospheric articulations of the concerned domains to act as representative visual abstractions.

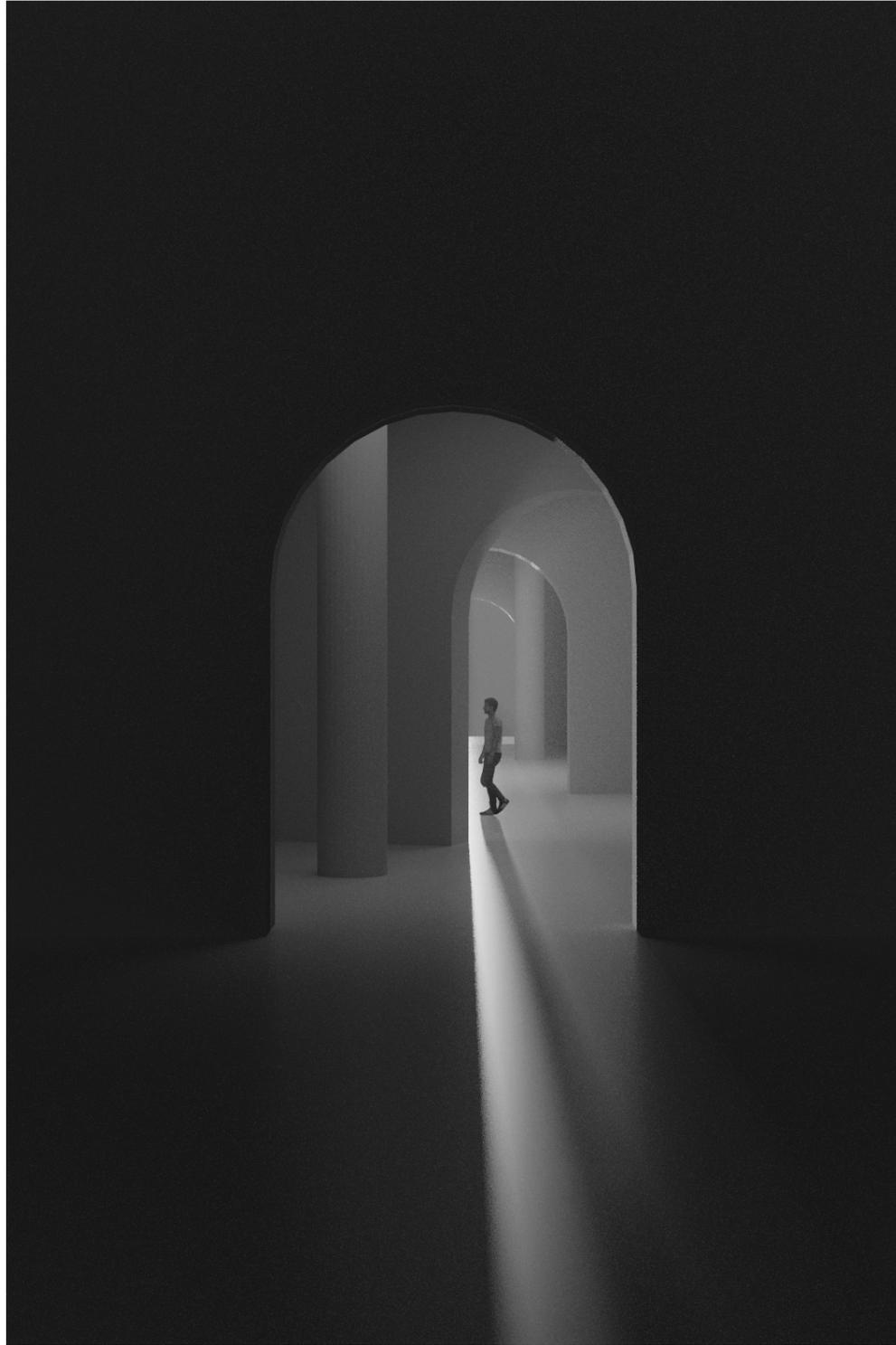
Following are a selection of one iteration per domain.



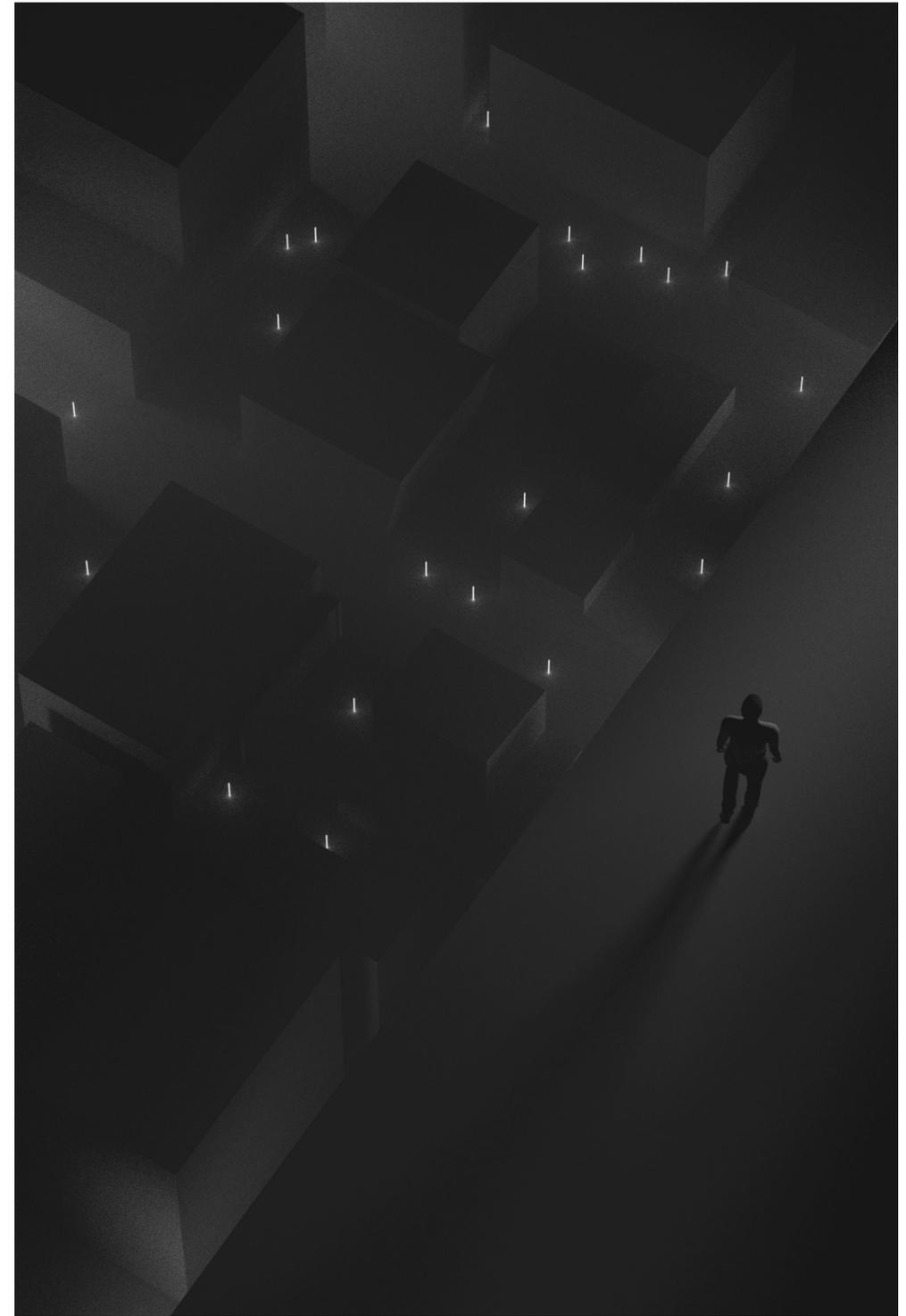
Void



Disruption



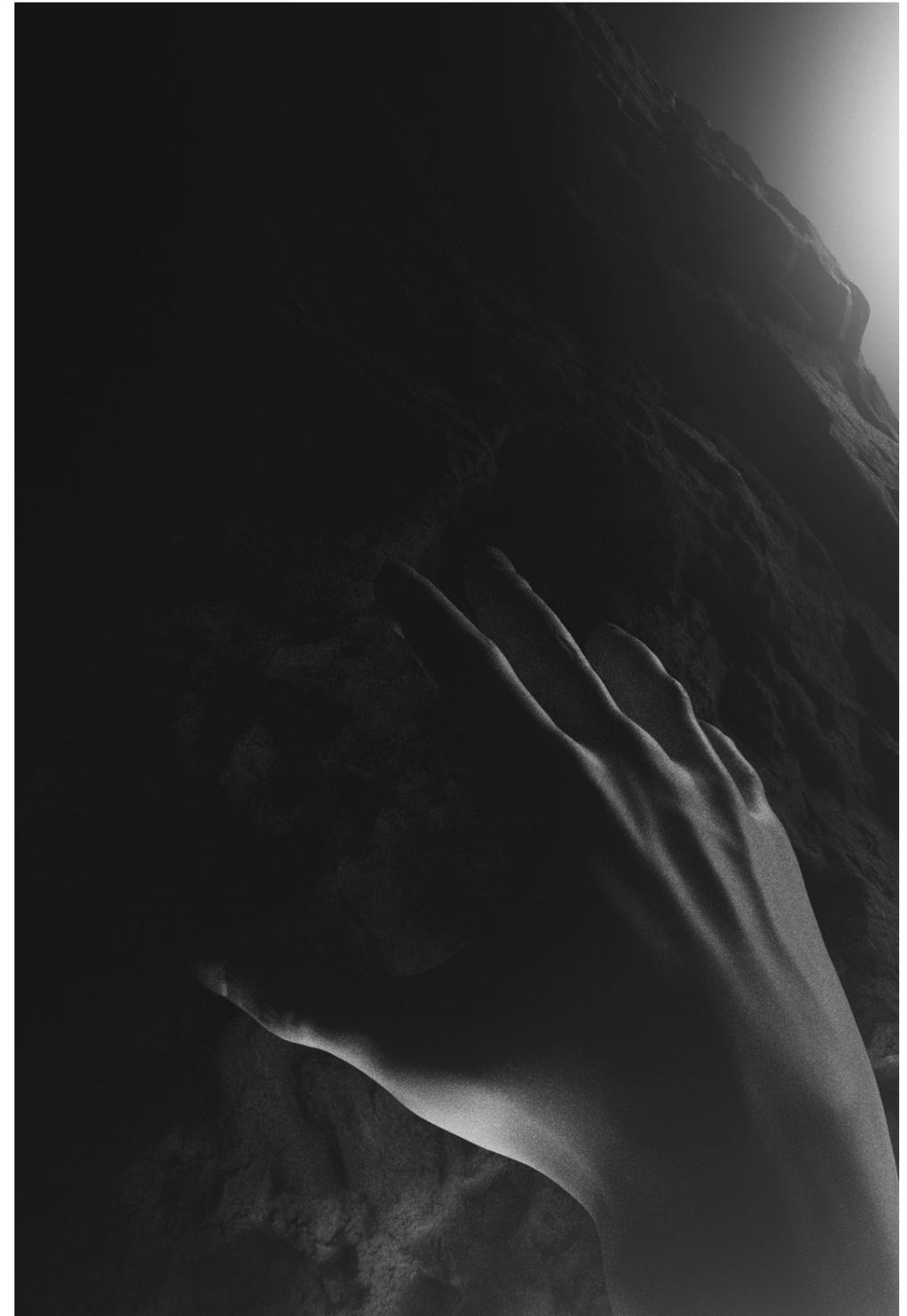
Sequence



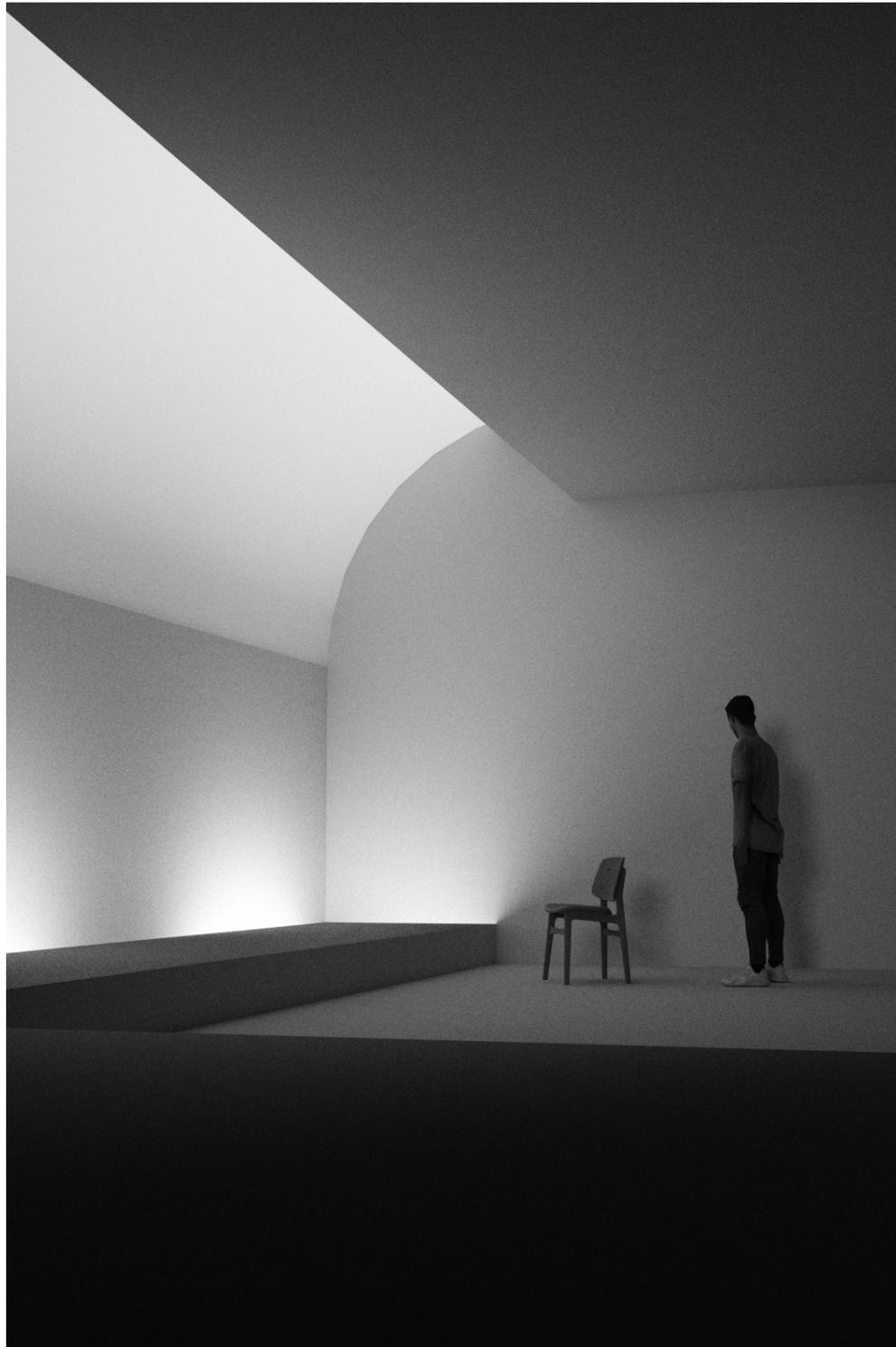
Displacement



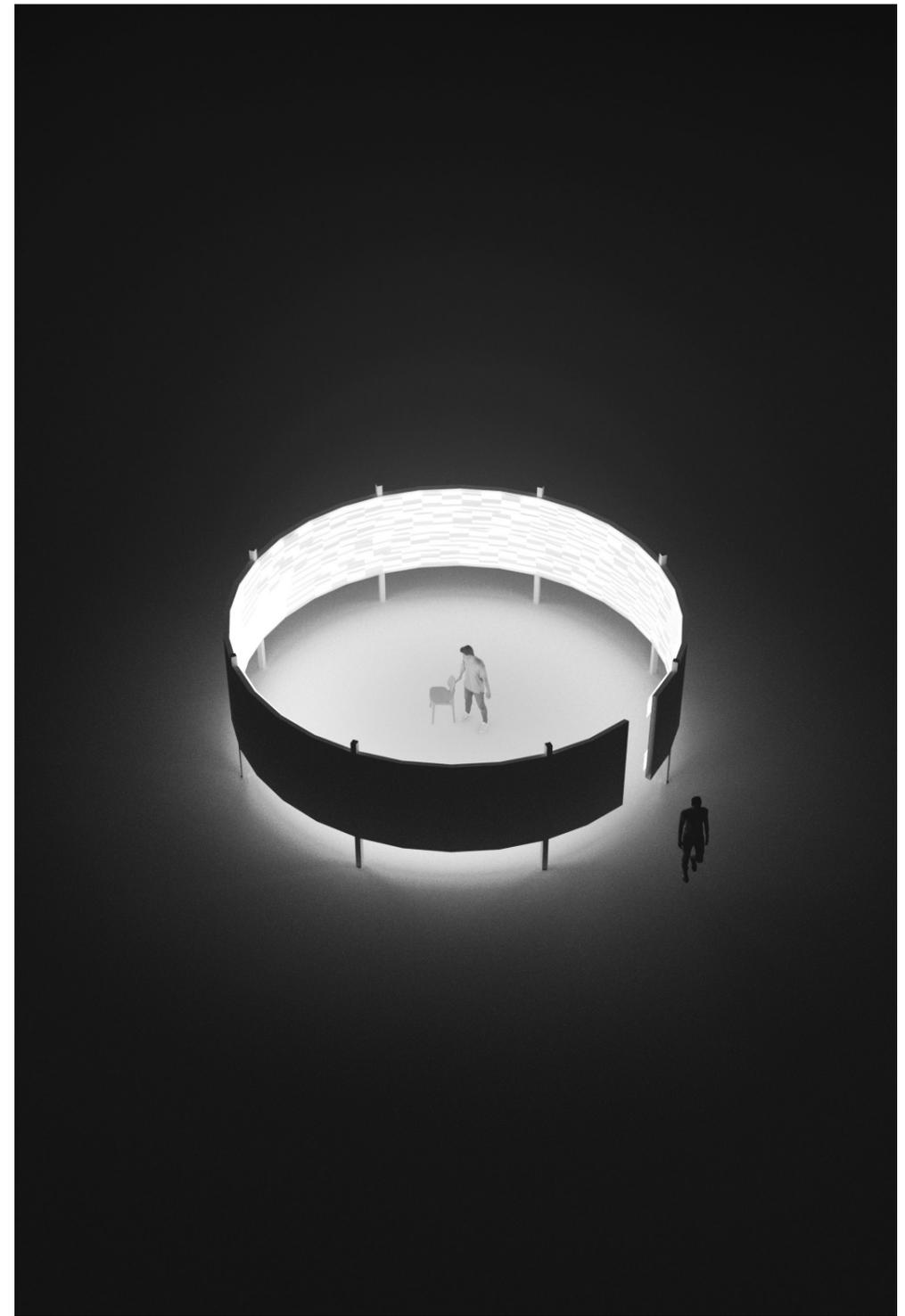
Enclosure



Tactility



Sound

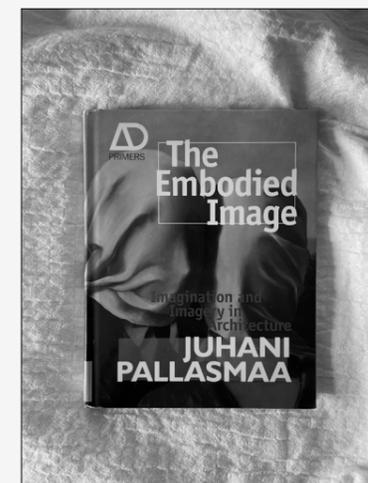
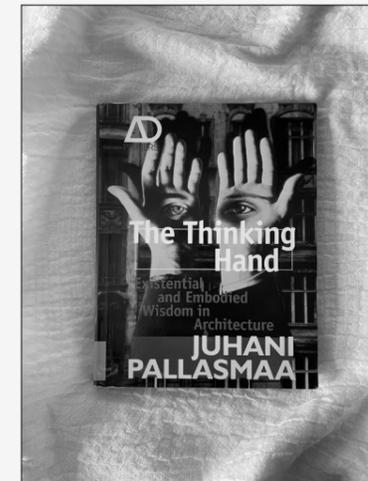


Light

## THEORETICAL DISCOURSE REFERENCES

The architectural discourse of this project mainly refers to the idea of sensual and emotional architecture, and the relation between the body, mind and the built environment.

Juhani Pallasmaa's literary collection, dealing with phenomenology, human senses and embodiment in relation to architecture, acts as a guiding theoretical reference.



### SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH REFERENCES

In order to gain knowledge about the notion of meditation and its psychological aspects some studies on the subject are collected and reviewed.

To strengthen the project scientific significance research studies regarding neuropsychological findings on externally induced meditative states and neuroscientific and phenomenological interpretation of architectural experiences acts as theoretical backbone during further explorations.



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