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Excerpts to Edifice: Phenomenological Writings as an instrument to Spatial Design for well-being.

Mohesh Babu, Radhakrishnan, C.A.R.E School of Architecture, TN, India, rmoheshbabu@care.ac.in

Abstract: Typography and spatial design share a common goal: to guide user experience through thoughtful organisation of literary and visual elements, respectively. For example, spatial design requires understanding multiple experiences that resonate emotionally and physically with space users. Research states that experiences can be recorded and studied better through visual and writing tools. This paper speeds up three key literary and graphical methods through visual and graphical representation, critical theory analysis, and phenomenological [qualitative] writings to guide spatial design. These explorations allow us to deeply understand the user experience in spatial contexts. One spatial design framework, drawn from literature, comprises nine key parameters under three broad themes in designing for personal and social well-being.

A central theme, 'contemplation', is focused, and three parameters are examined. Each of these three parameters generates distinct outcomes for each investigation tool. This process is dissected and discussed in detail. Finally, this research highlights this method's potential, where all 27 outcomes across nine criteria display its critical role in involving literary and typographic integration into the spatial design process. This study bridges the gap of explicitly linking typographic tactics to spatial design frameworks, providing practitioners with the knowledge that novel approaches enhance both form and function in their creative processes. By proposing a paradigm connecting typography and spatial narratives, this work offers insights for typographical and spatial designers with actionable tools and new perspectives.

Keywords: Phenomenological Writings, Experiences, Well-being, Spatial Design, Architecture

1. Introduction

Experiences are better comprehended through language and literary tools such as writing, theory, narration and spoken words of imagination. This research investigates how

qualitative phenomenological writings transform intangible experiences, such as emotions, into concrete criteria for spatial design. This methodology provides a disciplined way for typographers and spatial designers to combine abstract experiences with tangible forms. It provides a paradigm for connecting human experience to practical design applications by integrating visual representation, critical theory, and interpretative narratives. The following section sets a detailed account of the methodical paradigm.

2. Methods

In the book *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard (1994) talks about how language can heighten our imagination so that we can be almost true about our experiences, especially in space. Brown (2021) adds, "Language shows us that naming an experience gives us the power of understanding and meaning". Moreover, one such language tool is writing. Especially "Qualitative writings" are flexible and literary without formal writing structures which can convey stories (Creswell, 1994, p. 40). Literary tools of expression such as reading, writing, narrating, describing, and storytelling have commendable potential in expressing an individual's experience (Groat & Wang, 2013). These experiences must be primarily understood before designing a space. Figure 1 shows how language is translated into spatial design for an experience.
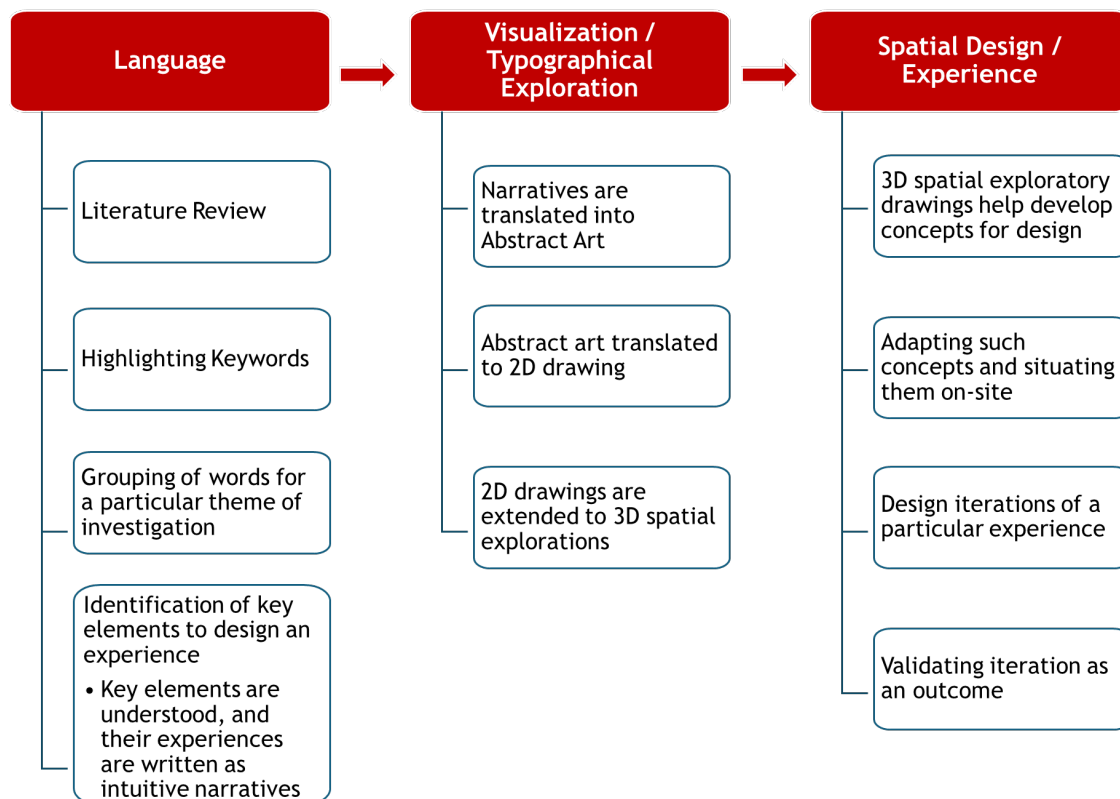

Figure 1: Methodology: Translation from Language to Spatial Design

2.1 Methods

To adapt language and literature as investigation tools, a sequential method was adopted to translate from language to experience to design for such experiences.

The following steps demonstrate the methodical usage of language:

1. Initially, literature was selected to develop the framework. The content was then analysed, and a comprehensive literature review was drafted. The review contained pulled-out quotes from the original authors to withhold the author's intended meanings.

2. Secondly, keywords were highlighted based on the importance and elucidation of research interest. (Fig 2)

Figure 2: Highlighted Key Words from Literature Review and Content Analysis

3. These highlighted words were separated into research focus categories:
   " 1. design intent,
   2. sense/stimuli and
   3. experience or affect evoked". (Fig 3)

4. Grouping them led to a correlational table that informed that when designing for a particular sense/stimuli, a particular element should evoke an experience or effect.

Figure 3: Grouping and Categorisation of a particular theme of investigation

5.   This table was then categorised into three groups (Fig 4) from the developed framework to design experiences. (Radhakrishnan, 2022)

Sense/stimulation	Conscious design of/for	Unconscious affect	Sensory atmosphere
See	Human scale	Comfort	
	Stillness in space	Intimacy	
	Grandeur/monumentality/ **Prospect / Scene**	Heightens our awareness/ emotions	Stillness
	Light and shadow	Conducive to moods	
Touch/feel	Texture/temperature differences	Imagination/memory	
	Familiarity	Domestic/ feeling safe	
	Gradual hierarchy	Unveiling comfort	Social interaction
Smell	Presence of smell/ similarity	Imagination/memory	
Hear	Other humans	Interaction/ emotions	
	Silence	Tranquillity	
Movement	Threshold/boundaries **Freedom**	Imagination/memory	
Memory	Silence	Concentrate	Contemplation
	Pause, sit, resting	Reflection self/others/thinking	
Imagination	Defamiliarization	Creativity	
	Refuge	Contemplation	
Taste	Not a part of this research	Imagination/memory	–

Figure 4: Identification of Key elements to design an experience [sensory atmosphere] / Tabulation

It was evident that writing/words and language have the closest power in defining an experience, be it spatial, physical or metaphysical. (Rendell, 2010).

3. A Case Study: Designing for Contemplation

This paper builds upon the framework for designing spaces that foster well-being (Radhakrishnan, 2022) (Fig 5). The framework emerged from in-depth explorations into the

relationship between spatial experiences and user well-being, categorised into three broader themes: Stillness, Social Interaction and Contemplation. All three themes are evaluated to share nine parameters, ultimately helping to design for personal and social well-being.
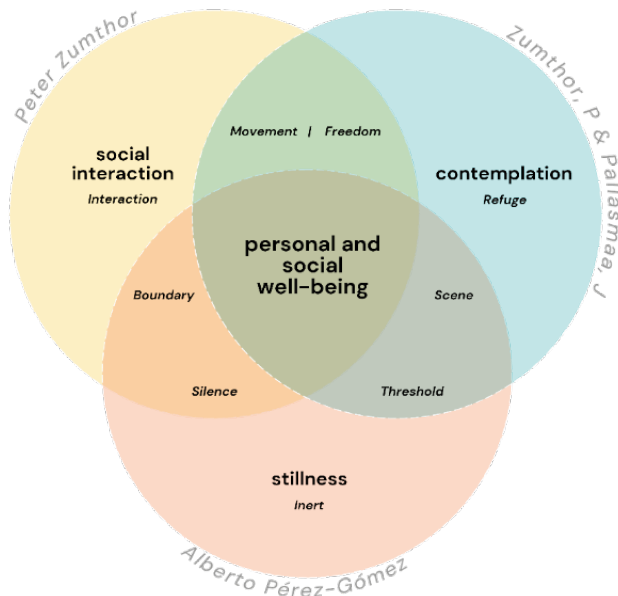

Figure 5: Framework for Spatial Design for Well-being; Radhakrishnan (2022)

A single theme is selected and studied further to employ and test this framework. Among the three broader themes, 'Contemplation' is widely researched as it details the meditative state crucial for individual well-being. The first method involves visual and graphical exploration, which aids in making intuitive design decisions during the proposal development. Critical theories are reviewed for each aspect to deepen the understanding of these experiences, followed by a phenomenological analysis of the author's perspective. For instance, when exploring a word, its abstract experience is first visually represented, followed by a 2D macro drawing and, eventually, a 3D spatial drawing. Finally, phenomenological writings are created for each stage, framed from the author's perspective.

4. Exploring Contemplation through Visual and Typographical Tools

According to Pallasmaa (2014), Architecture provides ground for thinking and directs our thoughts and experience to broader horizons [freedom]. He explains that our spaces strengthen the personal experience, senses, and thoughts, helping contemplation (p.41). He also asserts that these senses can "ignite imagination", thereby articulating organised thoughts required for contemplation (p.45). Similarly, Grahn & Stigsdotter (2010) have suggested that some potential aspects of reducing personal stress are' prospect [scene]

and refuge'.

From this preliminary observation, it is recognised that the moments of contemplation are also vital in improving students' mental health. 'Contemplation' is visually understood through explorations in the following chapter through three entities: Scene, Freedom and Refuge (Fig 6).
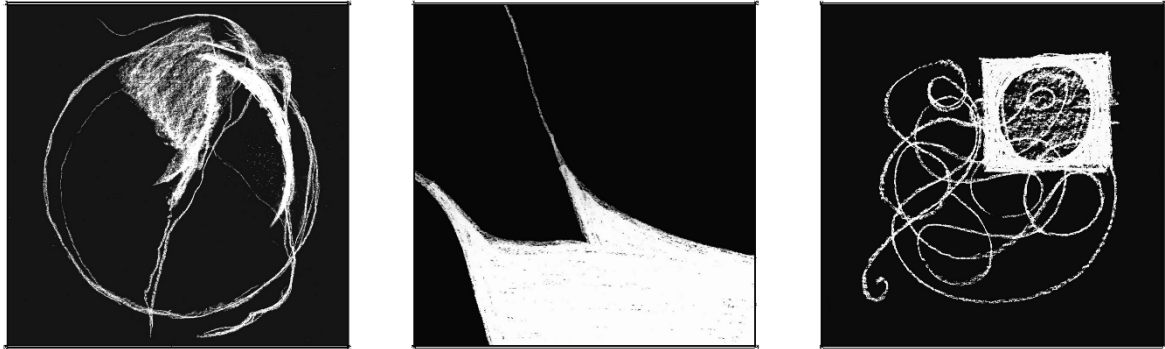

Figure 6: Graphical Explorations; [left to right: Refuge; Scene and Freedom]

4.1 Scene (Prospect)

The importance of scene [prospect] in spaces has emanated from spatial preferences and psychological well-being research. For example, Pérez-Gómez (2006) states that seeing landscapes and vistas can provoke the brain to create something, e.g., awareness, daydream, a piece of art, or even anything creative.

Likewise, Grahn & Stigsdotter (2010) suggests that "it is essential to have a prospect, vistas over the surroundings". They explain that including 'prospects' in design can improve comfort and reduce stress and boredom. They also compare that prospect to nature as a "wild, free-growing and untouched room. (p.268). Hence, the aim to include prospects can be both encouraging and threatening. For example, the prospect does not always need direct access to wild nature. Still, it can also have visual access to nature from a viewable platform (Fig 8). Therefore, safety was also carefully considered when designing for prospects and refugees.

> _**Experience:**_ _The Background and Foreground. The first thing the user sees (FigX), the scene guides the user along the journey. Watching and observing. It is simply the location. The user is visually pleased with the vista, which itself is a canvas. Prospect and Panorama._

Figure 7: Phenomenological Writing of 'Scene (Prospect)' parameter

Figure 8: Visual Outcomes of 'Scene (Prospect)' parameter [left [graphical to visual] to right [visual to spatial]

4.1 Freedom (Choice)

Pérez-Gómez (2016) states that the space with "no boundaries" [no walls] calls for the user to experience imagination, which leads the mind to be creative and makes it create something (p. 107). The term "no boundary" is interpreted as freedom in design (Fig 10). So, the master plan of the proposal could be designed as an open-plan layout with landscape and other services around the individual buildings.

> ***Experience:*** *Openness in space is freedom; it is about freeing the mind (FigX), body and soul. It is giving a choice entering a space, shelter and landscape. Nonconforming to the norms of the journey. Liberty in expression, still inclusive. Inventive and Independence. Safe within site yet with freedom (FigX).*

Figure 9: Phenomenological Writing of 'Freedom' parameter

Figure 10: Visual Outcomes of 'Freedom' parameter [left [graphical to visual] to right [visual to spatial]

4.2 Refuge (Shelter/Protection)

The aspect of 'refuge' has originated from visual preferences in spaces and spatial preferences from the 'scene' aspect. Conditions of refuge in a space can give a user a boundary by creating a personal space (not necessarily a physical space with definitive boundaries) (Fig 12), thereby helping them to reduce stress. Grahn & Stigsdotter (2010) suggest that designing for refuge can help in "…reduced irritation, fatigue and improve concentration and attention." (p268). Furthermore, it is claimed that the attribute of refuge in design has a higher effect on space and prospect (Grahn & Stigsdotter, 2010, p.268). Therefore, spaces of refuge are consciously planned during the design process.

> *Experience: Shelter and comfort. Like the cocoon wrapped around thy self. Alone and grounded with personal thoughts and humbled by thy self. Feeling of containment. Protection and safe haven. Recourse and resorting. A Place of safety, away from the sight of the world.*

Figure 11: Phenomenological Writing of 'Refuge' parameter

Figure 12: Visual Outcomes of 'Refuge' parameter [left [graphical to visual] to right [visual to spatial]

5. Translation of Visualisation to Spatial Design; Contemplative Pavilion Design (The Outcome)

The design had to be situated on-site, and this section details the design and the translation of visualisation to spatial design.

5.1 Site and Introduction

The site sits behind a plain land along the pedestrian walkway to the campus of Kelburn, New Zealand. It is adjacent to a slope and has mildly uneven contours. Also, it has an open lawn with some existing furniture that overlooks the city and the sea. Thus, the site has the potential to be designed for prospect and refuge. Additionally, from the first design test findings, articulation of light' is crucial for designing a contemplative space. Finally, the design framework was revisited while iterating, in which 'scene, freedom and refuge' were integrated as vital aspects for contemplation using visual and typographical concept extensions to spatial design (Fig 13). Therefore, this section begins to detail the iterations of pavilion design using all these attributes.
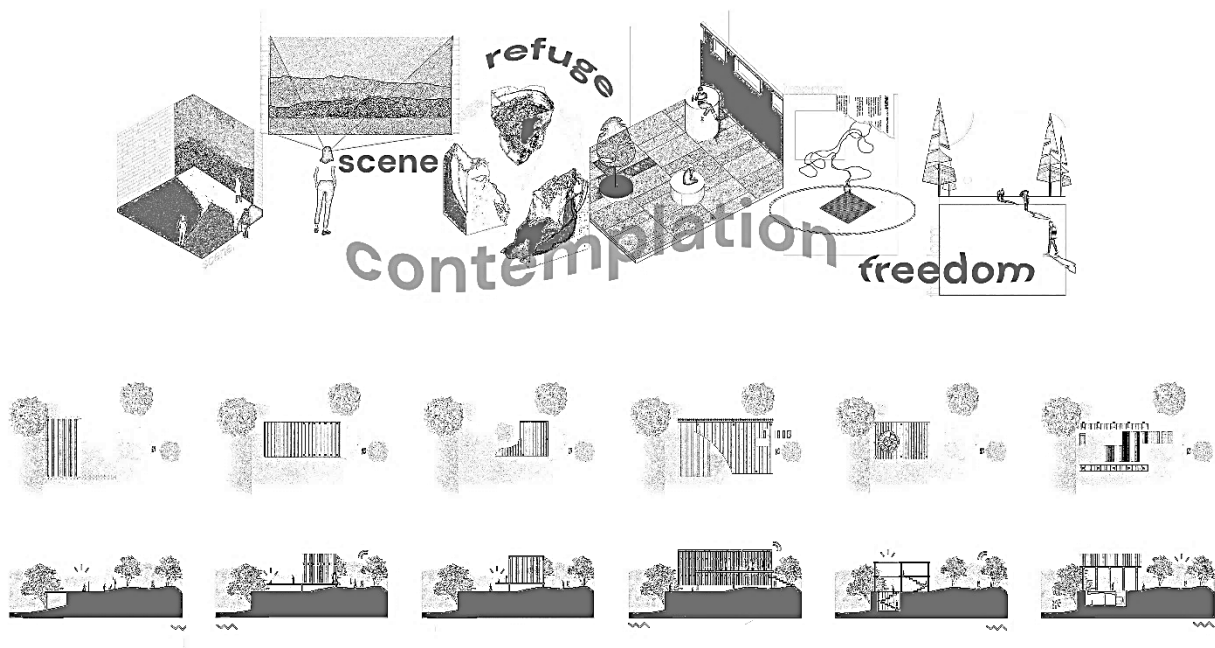
Figure 13: Translation of Visualisation to Spatial Design using Typography [above]; Conceptual Iterations [below]

5.2 Translation of Visualisation to Spatial Design

The experiences of each iteration are primarily described in Table 1. These experiences are translated into written context using keywords from the framework, carefully adapting them based on the site. The writing generates imaginative power through this process, creating physical manifestations and further iterations.

Iteration /Elements	Access to Pavilion/ Movement / Freedom	Prospect	Refuge	Articulation of Light	Model made based on experience
IT1	The access to the pavilion is vertically employed with steps to an elevated deck.	Better views are provided to users through that viewing deck.	Spaces for refuge are directed below the pavilion and other existing furniture on site.	The south elevation of the pavilion was designed with perforated panels to throw an interesting light pattern.	
IT2	The steps were removed from the last iteration to make the design inclusive.	The idea of an elevated deck was retained from the last iteration.	A refuge space for a single user is extended in the deck for personal space.	The shapes of wall planes were adopted from design test 1 to incorporate "lights in space".	
IT3	The concept of accessibility remains unchanged.	The deck is further extended so that multiple users can view the cityscape.	An overhead canopy of wooden posts runs through half the pavilion to provide a sense of enclosure.	The wooden posts are placed in rhythm and harmony to throw stimulating light patterns over the sun's movement.	
IT4	The design of stairs is reintroduced to reach the basement and deck.	The concept from iteration one is adapted again to reach the elevated deck for the prospect.	The light well space descends with stairs to form refuge spaces, where these stairs act as seats.	The circular light well throws focused light into the space required for contemplation.	
Final Iteration	Furthermore, ramps are designed to reach the basement to create an inclusive space.	The idea of prospect is limited, and the pavilion focuses on the refuge.	Basement space with focused light through slit forms a space of refuge.	The light levels decrease as the user goes into the basement, which stimulates reflection for them.	

Table 1. Iterations of Design Outcome and Physical Models

5.3 Design Outcome

The final design outcome was the most realised physical manifestation that suited the brief of a contemplative pavilion, matching the site context and including three keywords: Freedom, Prospect/Scene and Refuge. Later, the model was developed further to generate the design's plans, sections and renders (Fig 14).

The panel members assessed the design and unanimously supported the final iteration, demonstrating the efficacy of the process—translating words into content and then experiences into design.

Figure 14: Outcome and Model of Contemplation Pavilion

6. Conclusions

This study illustrates the potential of integrating phenomenological qualitative writings, visual representations, and typographical exploration into spatial design processes. During Radhakrishnan's (2022) thesis project, it was possible to derive all three domains in the framework: Stillness, Contemplation and Social interaction, where all 27 outcomes were produced (Fig 15). This methodology provides typographers a lens to conceptualise abstract ideas into typographic layouts. Apart from focusing solely on visual exploration, this paper introduces a layered methodology combining visual, theoretical, and phenomenological tools to substantiate abstract and intangible human experiences. The framework offers a process to translate intangible experiences into design outputs for spatial environments within typographic tools, thereby motivating designers to pursue novel research methods.
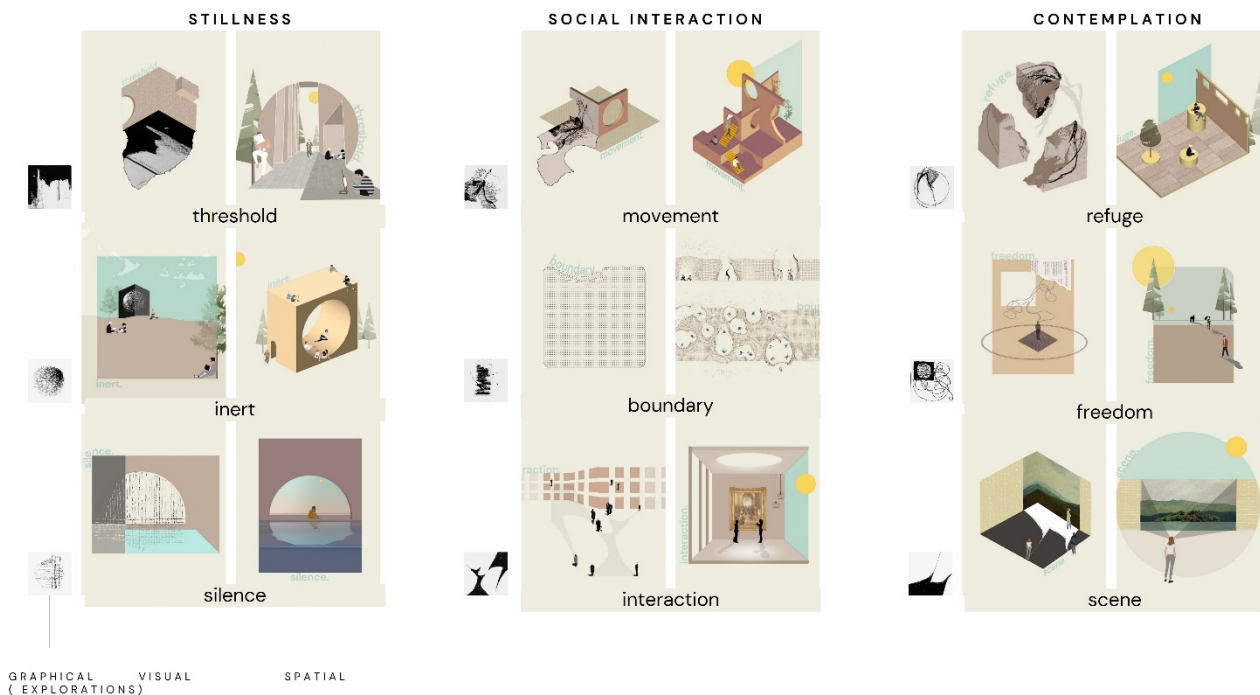

Figure 15: All 27 outcomes exploring nine parameters from the framework for designing for well-being (Radhakrishnan, 2022) explored in 3 explorations each.

This study realises the value of integrating multiple perspectives—visual, theoretical, and experiential—to craft more meaningful narratives for typographical and spatial designers, emphasising the necessity for collaboration within both disciplines. The designed outcome of the contemplative pavilion is evidence that intangible parameters can be translated into tangible outcomes. Future research could widen the scope of this study to include understanding and using typographical, visual, and literary methods, paving the way for new areas of innovation.

Acknowledgements

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