FROM WORDS TO WORLDS: GENERATIVE RECONSTRUCTION OF *THE ALCHEMIST* NARRATIVES

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Abstract

This paper explores the creative translation of narratives into atmospheric qualities of space using artificial intelligence (AI). The study transforms the textual descriptions of events based on the notable works of Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* into generative architectural representations. Exploration of prompts in text-to-image generative technologies is still defined by the description of forms and context instead of based on events. The study argues that utilising stories of events as prompts creates possibilities for a more enriching and evocative visualisations of architecture. This study utilises the Microsoft Bing Image Generator DALL-E 3 to generate images based on the prompts derived from the key events of *The Alchemist* narratives. Nine particular events of *The Alchemist* novel are used to create images, which are further transformed into AI-generated prompts. The study follows by regenerating the prompts into another set of images.

The resulting AI-generated images reveal the potential of AI in creating architectural spaces that embody the atmospheric qualities of *The Alchemist* narratives, with varying degrees of details and nuances of the narrative events. Through annotating the generated forms, the contrast of lights, and the materiality of the generated images, the study creatively reconstructs the atmospheric qualities of *The Alchemist* events. In doing so, the study blurs the lines between textual and spatial storytelling, empowering the craft of meaningful and impactful spaces through the power of narrative. This paper highlights the potential of AI not just as a tool for visualisation but also as a catalyst for innovative and creative explorations in the design field.

Keywords: narrative, atmosphere, prompt, events, AI images generator

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Introduction

This paper delves into the transformative potential of stories in shaping the profound interplay between narrative events and AI-generated images in creating the atmospheric qualities of space. Psarra (2009) argued that narrative and architecture are intrinsically intertwined, with narrative transcending the physicality of space and form, offering layers of depth and significance. We propose to harness the capabilities of AI, particularly advanced image generation technologies, to translate the rich tapestry of narratives into evocative visual representations of architecture (Oppenlaender, 2022).

Central to this exploration is Paulo Coelho's renowned allegorical novel, *The Alchemist*, a tale of self-discovery and the pursuit of one's personal stories (Coelho, 2014). The protagonist Santiago's transformative journey, laden with symbolic landscapes and pivotal encounters, provides a fertile ground for investigating narrative translation into spatial experiences. The study translates the key events of Santiago's journey that showcase his hopes, fears, and triumphs into evocative prompts. The importance of events in architecture is asserted by Tschumi (1996) through his statement that "there is no space without event" (p. 139). On the other hand, as Böhme (2014) argued, narrative can effectively create atmospheres. He argues that a story does not merely describe a place's atmosphere but recreates it for the reader, allowing for a deeper and more immersive experience. Events potentially enable AI image generators to create architectural visualisations that embody important atmospheric qualities of the narrative. This study aims to unravel how the landscapes and transformative events in *The Alchemist* can be reimagined atmospherically by employing AI image generators as a bridge between the textual and the visual.

Current applications of AI, particularly generative models like GANs, can now generate images and text interchangeably. These dual possibilities of AI has the potential to expand its uses of AI not only to visualise spaces but also to reconstruct textual narratives based on the dynamic unfolding of events within those spaces. By examining how key events in *The Alchemist*—such as encounters, transformations, and revelation—can be translated into architectural prompts, the study aims to demonstrate how AI can facilitate the unfolding creation of virtual space with specific atmospheric qualities.

This research is anchored in the belief that AI, particularly generative models like GANs, are not merely tools for visualisation but also enable creative exploration based on the dynamic interplay between textual descriptions and visual interpretations (Enjellina et al., 2023). Creative explorations of AI can be done by reproducing the prompts that will be used as the basis of the generated images. This process becomes interesting as the iterative process of prompt engineering, where creators refine textual inputs to guide the AI's image generation, mirrors the narrative crafting itself (Oppenlaender, 2022). Each prompt modification acts as a brushstroke on the canvas of imagination,

shaping the visual narrative and breathing life into architectural concepts (Oppenlaender, 2023).

The study starts by theoretically discussing the discourse of narrative and architecture, then elaborating on the creative roles of AI through the interplay between text and image generation. The study then explores such a process by transforming key events of *The Alchemist* into images and corresponding prompts. In subsequent, the study generates a set of images of a virtual space based on such prompts. A reflection on the atmospheric qualities of such virtual space and how it relates to prompts of events are outlined. Through this fusion of narrative power, spatial storytelling, and AI's generative capabilities, we aspire to contribute to a new discussion of narrative and atmosphere in architecture.

Narrative architecture and AI's text-to-image generation systems

Narrative acts as a potent force in shaping architectural space, transforming it from a mere physical construct into a vessel of meaning and experience (Coates, 2012). Architecture exists as a storytelling medium, where buildings become vessels for narratives that engage emotions and craft immersive spatial experiences (Coates, 2012). de Certeau (2002) highlights the user's role in creating their own 'spatial stories' as they navigate and interact with the built environment. He argues that individuals interpret spaces based on their own experiences and cultural backgrounds, thus co-creating the narrative of a place.

By weaving together stories, narratives construct literary manifestations of places, imbuing them with distinct characteristics and atmospheres (Gallagher, 1993). Narratives carry memories and emotions tied to specific places, enabling us to build a sense of belonging and connection (Coates, 2012). This perspective emphasises the open-ended and multi-layered nature of architectural narratives, where meaning is not solely determined by the architect but also shaped by the user's perception and actions (Gélinas-Lemaire, 2018). In essence, they emphasise the power of narrative to frame and elevate spatial experiences, transforming architecture into a medium for storytelling, self-discovery, and the dynamic interplay between the built environment and its reader or users (McMurtrie, 2015).

Text-to-image generation systems enable conversion between human-written textual descriptions into visual representations with similar semantic meanings (Yıldırım, 2022). Such technologies have been developed into various forms that enable the creation of diverse content, from text and images to 3D models, that have the potential to be utilised in various architectural design processes (Ayman et al., 2024). In creating stories, text-to-image generation technologies have been used to simplify the storytelling process, creating a collaborative creative process (Antony & Huang, 2024). Text-to-image generation systems reflect how designers now do not create images but operate within the images in fabricating the virtual world (Vale, 2021). Such technologies shape the utilisation

of narratives not only in the context of physical spaces but also in the development of virtual environments (Lukovich, 2023). AI image creators generate images of specific scenes, and we perceive the focus of that scene as events within a space. This capability of AI to visually frame events within a narrative has the potential to transform storytelling, offering new ways to engage and immerse audiences (Kim et al., 2024).

Within text-to-image generation systems, prompts serve as the crucial link between human intention and machine output (Oppenlaender, 2023). Prompts are the primary means users can creatively guide, control and shape the generated images to align with their desired outcomes (Collins, 2021). Prompts provide the AI with a textual description of the desired image. This description can be simple or complex and include various modifiers that further refine the AI's interpretation (Kudless, 2023). The AI then uses this prompt as a guide to navigate its vast database of images and concepts, selecting and combining elements to create an image that matches the prompt's specifications. As AI becomes more integrated into various aspects of our lives, understanding the importance and function of prompts will be crucial for harnessing the full potential of AI (Oppenlaender, 2023).

The iterative and curative prompt engineering has been studied to understand how they can be understood as a creative process (Oppenlaender, 2022; Vale, 2021). Prompt engineering becomes relevant as AI's interpretation of a prompt is not always predictable (Enjellina et al., 2023). The AI's response is shaped by its training data, which consists of a massive collection of images and text from the internet. This data can introduce biases and limitations into the AI's understanding, leading to unexpected or undesired results. Several iterations of entering prompt may be needed to generate satisfactory results (Oppenlaender, 2022). Prompts are essential to the effective use of AI, enabling users to guide and control the AI's creative process.

The generative aspect of the prompt is critical. It is not about dictating every detail to the AI but instead providing the essential elements and allowing the AI to fill in the gaps with its creativity. The prompt is the catalyst that sets the AI's imagination in motion, leading to an image that truly embodies the essence of the story (Dilaveroglu, 2024). Just as a catalyst in chemistry speeds up a reaction, the iterative process of entering a prompt accelerates the AI's creative process, leading to a faster and more efficient generation of images that align with the narrative. It is a harmonious blend of human guidance and AI working together to create something new and captivating (Kudless, 2023).

This study explores the atmospheric quality of architectural images produced by the text-to-image generation systems. Atmospheres are the attuned spaces that resonate with our emotions and bodily presence (Böhme, 2014). In today's digital age, technologies shape the experience and representation of architecture, moving the preference from traditional architectural drawing to images that contain "a more ambiguous, 'atmospheric' and contingent idea of place" through

images (Degen & Rose, 2012, p. 21). The digitally produced images create equally powerful opportunities to generate the atmosphere of places as a form of aesthetic production within the visual representation practice (Böhme, 2014; Marinic, 2019). Just as narratives shape our understanding of physical locations, they can also shape our experiences within the virtual realms produced by digital imagery.

The atmospheric quality of image-based narratives is translated through the evocative dimensions of the staged space. To begin with, light illumination has been discussed as elements that bring such evocative feelings (Böhme, 2014). Light is not simply a functional element but an artistic medium capable of creating spaces, shaping perceptions, and evoking emotions depending on its colour, intensity, and distribution. Light can create a sense of safety and security and evoke feelings of freedom and expansiveness (Böhme, 2014). The way light illuminates creates a sense of becoming for its perceiver (Degen & Rose, 2012; Ingold, 2012). The existence of shapes and lines can also be used to create an atmospheric quality. Lines proliferate and create an immersion in the atmosphere (Ingold, 2012). The use of curved lines can evoke a sense of fluidity or movement, while the use of straight lines can create a sense of stability or order. Materials can also be used to create variations of atmospheric nuances, reflecting traces and dynamics of occupation (Marinic, 2019). Narrative architecture seeks to engage with these atmospheric qualities, creating spaces that tell stories not through words but through the interplay of light, form, and materiality.

Prior studies about generated architectural images explore the conveyed narratives through the way prompts deliver a set of images that reflect specific qualities of space (Dilaveroglu, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). Text-to-image generative systems have the potential to enrich architectural storytelling through the reconstruction of images (Dilaveroglu, 2024). In previous explorations, prompts were determined through collections of short keywords (Zhang et al., 2024). However, such exploration can lead to oversimplification of the image portrayed in some iterations (Dilaveroglu, 2024). The study aims to explore how prompts can be driven by a narrative about storied events. The human experience of space is intrinsically linked to the unfolding of events within it. These events, in turn, are woven into narratives, stories that encapsulate our experiences and shape our understanding of the world around us (Thomas, 2016).

Just as we construct narratives from our personal experiences within spaces, so too can we decipher narratives embedded within the very fabric of buildings (Psarra, 2009). Storied events potentially create a rich tapestry of experiences within the produced images (Paananen et al., 2023). Narrative in architectural images is not about a linear storyline but instead framed representations of events that evoke a range of emotions and interpretations (Degen & Rose, 2012). The following section discusses the translation process of such storied events using events narratives from *The Alchemist*. Further reading towards

the atmospheric elements of the images is done to determine their evocative qualities.

Generating the storied events: A methodological inquiry

This study examines the image generation process using events as prompts, which are then interpreted into architectural images with atmospheric qualities. The events' narrative are constructed from the works of *The Alchemist*, creating a set of images which is then transformed into prompts. The prompts are then transformed into a series of images of an architectural space. The study then analyses the atmospheric qualities of the resulting images. These images will be used to construct a chronological visual story, allowing us to assess the coherence and expressiveness of the generated architectural spaces. Additionally, this study will examine how AI interprets these events as a form of architecture, providing insights into the creative potential of AI in producing images based on storied events.

The study explores stories of the transformation events found in *The Alchemist* novel. The book tells a story about Santiago, an Andalusian shepherd boy, who journeys across places to find the treasure he dreamed of. During his journey, he encountered various people, from a king who gave him wisdom to a girl he fell for and a robber who provided him with information. One of the important people he encountered was the Alchemist, who joined his journey to look for treasures together. Various interesting events are happening in the journey; some can be unfortunate for the boy. For example, the boy got scammed early in the journey and was later taken prisoner by the tribes they encountered. There are also magical events, such as when he can transform into the wind to be released from imprisonment. The journey ends with the boy realising that the treasure he dreamed of is located in his hometown, signifying the significant journey of transformation itself (Coelho, 2014).

The protagonist's journey's diverse landscapes and transformative events provide a fertile ground for translating narrative into spatial representations. Using *The Alchemist* as a narrative framework, we can explore the potential of AI to create architectural spaces that evoke emotions, symbolise personal growth, and resonate with the human quest for meaning (Coates, 2012). This book presents a series of significant events that serve as the focal points for our research. Nine events were selected that provide impact towards Santiago's journey, comprising of the recurrent dream Santiago is having, the encounter with another person in the story named Melchizedek, getting scammed by theft in Tangier, the experience of working in the Crystal Shop, meeting a lady named Fatima at an oasis, the tribal wars and the test from the Alchemist, Santiago's conversation with the elements, Santiago's arriving at the Pyramids of Egypt, and the last is the discovery of treasure.

The quest to translate the narrative of *The Alchemist* into spatial representations has led to the meticulous process of crafting prompts from the above key events in the story. These prompts were designed to capture the essence of each event,

detailing the scene, emotions, and symbolism embedded within the narrative. Our initial experiments revealed that incorporating specific character names, such as Santiago, resulted in image generation errors. A more generalised approach is done by omitting proper names to ensure smoother image generation. The experiments also showed that including the names of places, like Tangier or Al-Fayoum, significantly enhanced the generated images' contextual clarity and spatial grounding, providing a stronger sense of setting and atmosphere. This observation underscores the importance of carefully selecting and refining prompt elements to effectively guide the AI's interpretation and generation of architectural spaces that resonate with the intended narrative.

Our second stage of the experiment shifted our focus to translating events from *The Alchemist* into narrative atmospheric spatial prompts using Gemini AI. This involved putting the event description into the AI, producing a generative narrative prompt. Subsequently, these AI-generated prompts are used to create architectural images, aiming to capture the spatial atmosphere and emotional undertones embedded within the narrative of the events. This approach provided a unique opportunity to explore the AI's interpretive and creative capabilities in generating creative architectural spaces embodying narrative events' essence. An analytical reflection of the images generatively produced using the AI-based prompts is done to uncover the nuances of its spatial atmosphere and gain a deeper understanding of how AI can be utilised to create architectural imagery based on event narratives.

Generative architecture based on the storied events of *The Alchemist*
***Prompts creation process based on* The Alchemist's key events**

This stage showcases the visual interpretations of our manually crafted prompts from nine events from the novel, which are then transformed into images. The images are then transformed into AI-generated prompts. The following table depicts the manually written prompts, the AI-generated images, and the AI-generated prompts from *The Alchemist* events.

Event (1)	
Manual Prompts	A young shepherd boy named Santiago sleeps in an abandoned church, clutching a book beneath his head. In his sleep, he dreams of a child leading him to the Egyptian pyramids
Generated Images	
Generated Prompts	Architecture spatial atmosphere that symbolises the initial spark of Santiago's Personal Legend and could be represented spatially as a threshold or a symbolic gateway leading to the unknown

Table 1. Images and prompts generations from nine events in The Alchemist (Images generated by Microsoft Bing Image Generator; prompts generated by Gemini AI)

Event (2)	
Manual Prompts	A robed king stands in the Andalusia town square, gesturing towards a shepherd boy sitting on a bench. The king is explaining something with great passion
Generated Images	
Generated Prompts	Architecture spatial atmosphere that could be visualised as a crossroads or a place of decision, symbolising the choice to follow one's dreams

Event (3)	
Manual Prompts	A shepherd boy stands in the middle of a crowded Tangier marketplace, he realises he has been tricked and abandoned
Generated Images	
Generated Prompts	Architecture spatial atmosphere that could be represented as a disorienting or constricting space, reflecting Santiago's feelings of loss and vulnerability

Event (4)	
Manual Prompts	A shepherd boy cleans crystal glasses in a shop in a narrow, hilly street of Tangier
Generated Images	
Generated Prompts	Architecture spatial atmosphere that could be visualised as a space of introspection and transformation, perhaps with elements of both confinement and expansion

Event (5)	
Manual Prompts	A young couple gazes into each other's eyes beside a well surrounded by lush palm trees in the Faiyum Oasis
Generated Images	
Generated Prompts	Architecture spatial atmosphere that could be represented as a serene and beautiful space, symbolising the oasis of love in the midst of the desert

Event (6)	
Manual Prompts	The Shepherd boy and The Alchemist face the dangers of tribal wars in the desert
Generated Images	
Generated Prompts	Architecture spatial atmosphere that could be visualised as challenging and dramatic spaces, filled with tension and the possibility of danger

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Event (7)	
Manual Prompts	A Shepherd boy stands atop a cliff, looking out over a vast desert as a sandstorm rages around him
Generated Images	
Generated Prompts	Architecture spatial atmosphere that could be visualised as a vast and open space, symbolising the interconnectedness of all things

Event (8)	
Manual Prompts	A boy kneels before the majestic pyramids, tears streaming down his face
Generated Images	
Generated Prompts	Architecture spatial atmosphere that could be visualised as revealing a map not of a place, but of a transformative journey

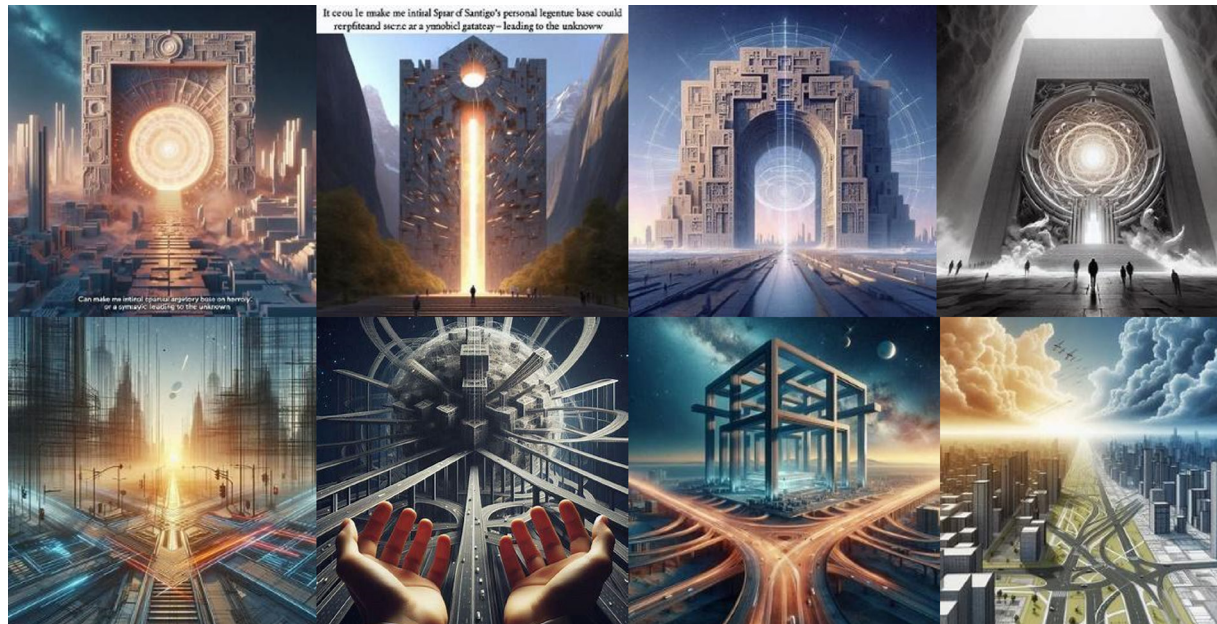| **Event (9)**	
Manual Prompts	A boy digs at the base of a sycamore tree in an abandoned church in Andalusia
Generated Images	
Generated Prompts	Architecture spatial atmosphere that could be represented as a hidden chamber or a place of revelation, symbolising the fulfillment of one's Personal Legend

Reading the atmospheric qualities of architecture created by generated prompts

Narratives stem from our experiences, woven into stories that capture events from many perspectives. However, human subjectivity colours these narratives, blurring the lines between objective truth and subjective interpretation. In this context, AI offers a unique opportunity to generate architectural images based on events within the narratives. The AI-generated prompts can recreate the spatiality of these events, offering a unique lens through which to understand the event. The beauty of AI-generated narratives lies in their diversity and multifaceted nature, allowing for a richer understanding of the event and opening doors to a broader range of interpretations. The visuals show a blend of textual descriptions and corresponding images, suggesting the translation of narrative into a spatial atmosphere. This experiment stage is done by feeding the generated prompts of the events produced in the first stage to generate architectural images. The study follows by exploring the atmospheric qualities as perceived from the contrast of light, direction of form, and materiality of the images.

There are some relations between Event (1) about Santiago's recurrent dream and Event (2) about his meeting with the robed king, in the way it encourages Santiago to follow his dream and embark on a specific personal journey to discover the treasure. Such understanding can be reflected in the generated images (Figure 1). In Event (1), the AI, drawing upon its vast knowledge base, interprets this event and translates the dream about starting a personal journey into a form of gates, with a light in the middle. The strategic use of light evokes a sense of another world or an unknown journey, adding a layer of mystery and intrigue to the scene beyond the gates. Meanwhile, for Event (2), the prompt is interpreted less as a cohesive architectural form and instead as a crossroads to reflect a place of decision to follow one's dreams. The light in the Event (2) images also reflects the divisive quality between two separate directions. Such light placements create an atmosphere of confusion, disarray, and conflicting directions. The interplay of light and shadow here is not merely an aesthetic tool but a narrative device conveying disorientation and uncertainty.
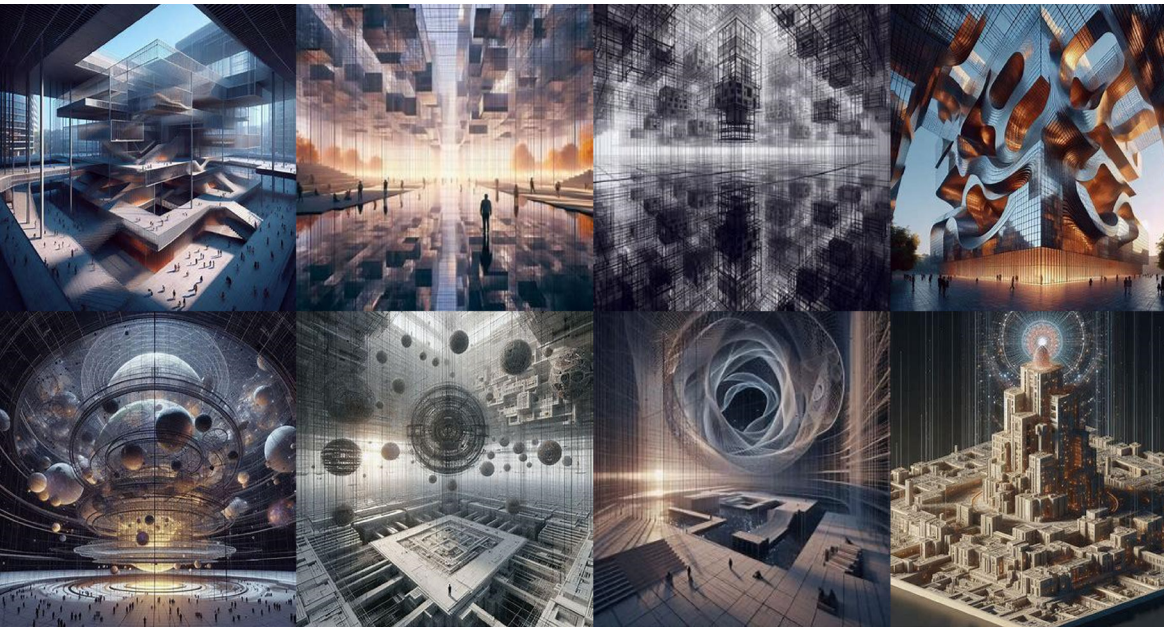

Figure 1. Architectural space of Event (1) (top) and Event (2) (bottom) (Images by author, generated by Microsoft Bing Image Generator)

The following events produced an architectural image that focused on personal growth and transformation of self when Santiago got scammed and eventually had to work at the crystal glasses shop. Images created from the Event (3) prompts highlight a building that evokes a sense of tension, further demonstrating the AI's capacity to generate a specific atmosphere by carefully selecting and manipulating forms that seem to explode into separate parts. In contrast, images created from Event (4) present captivating scenes dominated by circular forms in the centre that started integrating with one another. The light and materiality of these images influence the evocative feeling presented. Event (3) utilises a division of light across the landscape and shiny, reflective materials. Event (4), on the other hand, focuses on small, dimmed lights in the corner with soft, muted, or transparent materials.

These qualities reflect the dynamic atmosphere of the space about changes in Santiago's journey (Figure 2).

Events (5) and (6) focus on two very different forms of relationship, based on the event of meeting Fatima in the oasis and the tribe wars that happened afterwards. Architectural space generated from Event (5) creates an enclosed space in the middle of the desert, using circular, mostly simple forms that are enclosed transparently. The lighting is distributed throughout or dimmed in some images, providing a sense of privacy reflecting the relationship with Fatima. On the other hand, Event (6) creates a challenging space, evolved in the forms that manipulate the surface forms and height, creating unevenness or contrasts of scale. Dark and contrasting lighting is used in Event (6) images to bring further tension to the scene. The complexity of forms

brings different atmospheric feelings towards the overall space of the events (Figure 3).

Events (7) to (9) reflect a sequential journey in which Santiago approaches the space and finally finds the treasure he has been looking for all along. Figure 4 (top) demonstrates these sequences and shows sets of images that approach a destination from different perspectives, from angles far away to a closer view of the destination (Figure 4, middle). The sequence ends with an inside perspective (Figure 4, bottom) that shows the arrival towards the inside of the space itself. In these images, the forms of the building are dominated by circular forms, in the form of cosmic objects and civilisation in images of Event (7), circular voids, views, and circular space in images of Event (8), and a centred circular voids and openings in images of Event (9). The forms, lighting, and materiality in these images demonstrate different senses of spatiality. Event (7) images focus on the vastness of open space, Event (8) images focus on the grand scale of the architectural objects, and Event (9) images reveal the space that was otherwise hidden.

Figure 4. Architectural space of Event (7) (top), Event (8) (middle), and Event (9) (bottom) (Images by author, generated by Microsoft Bing Image Generator)
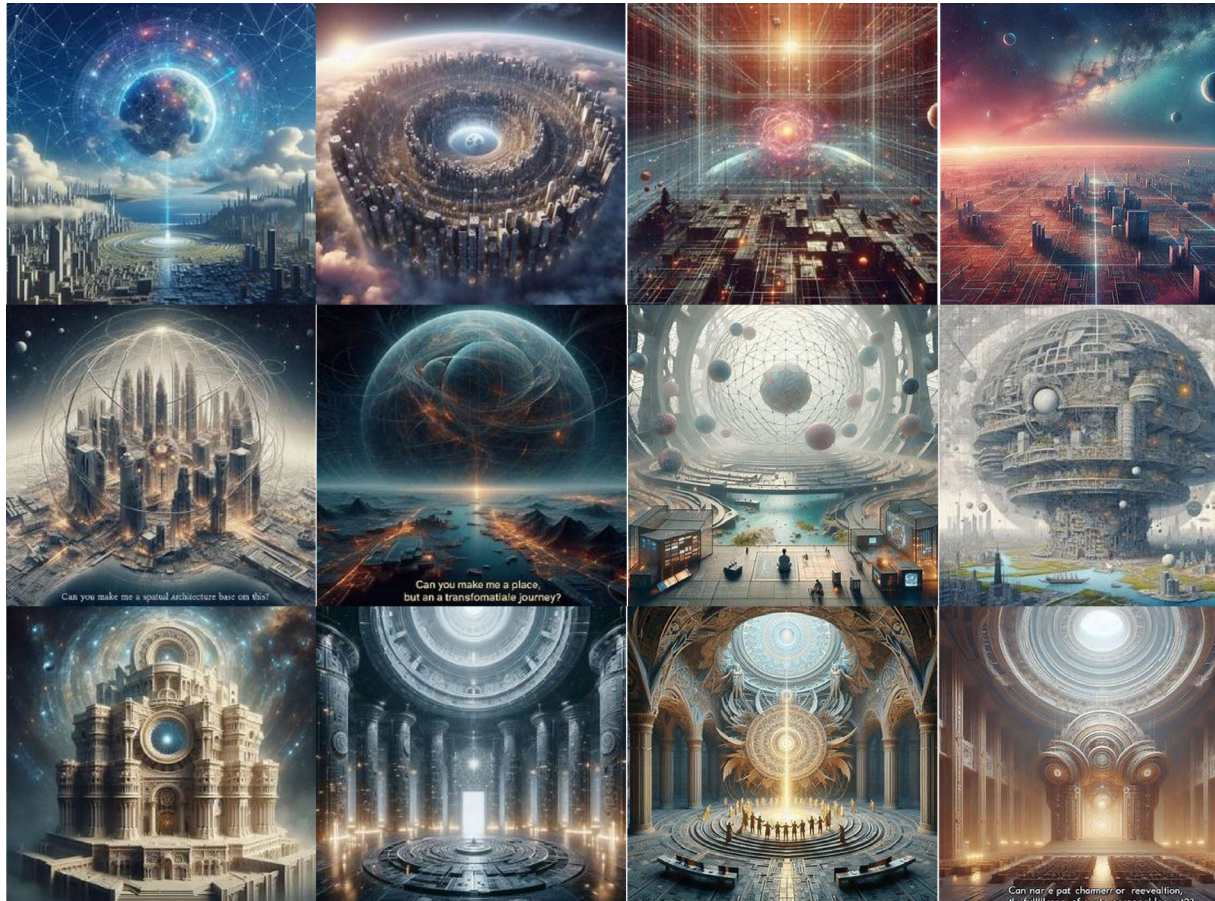
These images depict a virtual realm that evokes a sense of wonder and imagination by creating atmospheric qualities based on interpreting events. Drawing inspiration from the atmospheric nuances of specific events in *The Alchemist*, this study offers different inquiries on how prompts can be informed by events instead of keywords of architectural styles, creating

a more enriching spatial quality. This phenomenon highlights the dynamic interplay of forms, lights and materiality in AI-generated images, demonstrating how such interplay creates a more immersive and evocative presence of the images.

Conclusion

This study translates Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* event narratives into architectural spaces using AI image generation, revealing the atmospheric spatiality of the generated images. The process of transforming narrative events into architectural prompts and subsequently generating visual representations through AI highlights the potential of this technology in bridging the gap between the written word and the built environment. The study is particularly interested in how prompts can be driven from events instead of from simple descriptive keywords.

While the AI-generated images demonstrate varying degrees of success in capturing the specific details and nuances produced from descriptive prompts, the study argues that events provide possibilities for the generated images to have a more enriching and evocative atmospheric quality. Nine particular events from *The Alchemist* are transformed into images and their corresponding prompts. The prompts are then used to generate a series of images of architectural spaces. The atmospheric qualities of the generated images are shaped by the form, the interplay of light and shadows, and the materiality of space within the image. The study identifies how form, light and materiality express the atmosphere presented by the narrative of the events, demonstrating spatial dynamics, transformation and relations in space.

As AI technology continues to evolve, there are possibilities for more sophisticated and nuanced interpretations of narratives in the built environment. The iterative process of prompt engineering and the AI's ability to interpret and translate complex narratives can lead to a new architectural discourse where buildings transcend their physicality to become vessels of meaning, experience, and transformation. The fusion of narrative power, spatial storytelling, and AI's generative capabilities architectural design. The study blurs the lines between textual and spatial storytelling and empowers architects to craft meaningful and impactful atmosphere spaces through the power of narrative.

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