

# A Phenomenological Interpretation of Fushimi Inari Taisha through Gordon Cullen's Lens of Serial Vision

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# A Phenomenological Interpretation of Fushimi Inari Taisha through Gordon Cullen’s Lens of Serial Vision

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Abstract

This independent work aims to analyse Fushimi Inari Taisha while applying theory by Gordon Cullen. Fushimi Inari Taisha, nestled in Kyoto, Japan, is renowned for its torii gate pathways, and is a major symbol of Japanese indigenous religion, shintoism. Gordon Cullen's theories often focus on the experience of space, movement, and the perception of urban landscapes. By applying his theories to the analysis of Fushimi Inari Taisha, one can explore a Japanese cultural landmark through the lens of a Western architectural theory. Applying theoretical frameworks such as Cullen's to real-world examples allows for the testing and validation of those theories in practical contexts: a part of the process which helps to refine and evolve theory. The goal is to better understand the phenomenology of the site by examining the optics, place and content. The primary method consists of two parts: collection of data through site visits, photography and notes, and processing of said data through theoretical interpretation of Cullen's theories. The material is then presented through an elaborate serial vision and image analysis.

*Keywords:* Cullen analysis, Fushimi Inari Taisha, phenomenology, serial vision, site analysis, visual perception

Sammanfattning

Detta självständiga arbete syftar till att analysera Fushimi Inari Taisha med Gordon Cullens teorier genom insamling av material där den visuella uppfattningen utforskas över platsen. Fushimi Inari Taisha, beläget i Kyoto, Japan, är känt för sina torii portgångar och är en viktig symbol för inhemsk japansk religion, shintoism. Gordon Cullens teorier fokuserar ofta på upplevelsen av rymd, rörelse och uppfattningen av urbana landskap. Genom att tillämpa hans teorier på analysen av Fushimi Inari Taisha kan man utforska ett japanskt kulturarv genom linsen av en västerländsk arkitekturteori. Att tillämpa teoretiska ramverk som Cullens på verkliga exempel möjliggör testning och validering av dessa teorier i praktiska sammanhang: en del av processen som bidrar till att förfina och utveckla teori. Målet är att förstå platsens fenomenologi genom att undersöka områdets optik, plats och innehåll. Den primära metoden består av två delar: insamling av data genom platsbesök, fotografi och anteckningar samt bearbetning av data genom teoritolkning av Cullens teorier. Materialet presenteras sedan genom en serial vision och bildanalys.

*Nyckelord:* Cullen analys, Fushimi Inari Taisha, fenomenologi, serial vision, platsanalys, visuell perception

Table of Contents

1. Introduction ----- 6

    1.1 Background ----- 6

    1.2 Aim ----- 7

    1.3 Question formulation ----- 7

    1.4 Delimitations ----- 7

2. Methodology ----- 8

    2.1 Fieldwork model ----- 8

    2.2 Theoretical analysis ----- 8

    2.3 Phenomenological analysis ----- 8

3. Theory ----- 9

    3.1 Preceding studies ----- 9

    3.2 Cullen - Phenomenological theory ----- 9

        3.2.1 The concept of optics ----- 9

        3.2.2 The concept of place ----- 10

        3.2.3 The concept of content ----- 13

4. Analysis and result ----- 14

    4.1 Preceding discoveries ----- 14

    4.2 Serial Vision in regard to place and content ----- 14

    4.3 Serial Vision presentation ----- 14

        SV1: Entrance ----- 16

        SV2: Senbon-torii ----- 18

        SV3: Shin-ike pond ----- 20

        SV4: The crossroads ----- 24

        SV5: Labyrinth of otsuka and open view of Kyoto ----- 26

        SV6: Beginning of the looping trail around Mt. Inari ----- 32

        SV7: Fluorescent lights ----- 36

        SV8: Reaching the summit ----- 40

        SV9: Peak within the peak ----- 44

        SV10: The loop concludes ----- 46

        SV11: Leaving the mountain ----- 48

        SV12: At the backdoor of the beginning ----- 50

5. Discussion ----- 52

    5.1 Result discussion ----- 52

    5.2 Method discussion ----- 53

6. Conclusion ----- 54

References ----- 56

# Table of figures

FIGURE 1: MAIN GATE OF FUSHIMI INARI-TAISHA SHRINE. (ZAIKON 2016) [CC-BY-SA-4.0](#) 6

FIGURE 2: MAP OF WHERE KYOTO (RED) IS LOCATED IN JAPAN, THE BLACK DOT REPRESENTING THE CAPITAL TOKYO. (COMIX 2024) [CC-BY-4.0](#) 6

FIGURE 3: MAP OF WHERE FUSHIMI INARI TAISHA IS LOCATED IN KYOTO WITH CITY SURROUNDINGS. THE MOUNTAINS AROUND THE CITY IS GOING AROUND IT, AND THE CITY IS SETTLED IN A REFUGE. MAP DATA ©2024 GOOGLE. 7

FIGURE 4: AERIAL VIEW OF TRAIL PATH THAT WAS STUDIED, ARROWS POINTING TOWARDS THE TRAVEL DIRECTION . SEE FIGURE 2 FOR VIEWPOINT ORIENTATION. MAP DATA ©2024 GOOGLE. 8

FIGURE 5: STATIC POSSESSION. PEOPLE RESTING OR STANDING IDLE UNDER THE TREES, TAKING POSSESSION OF THE SCENE (CULLEN 1971:22). 10

FIGURE 6: POSSESSION IN MOVEMENT. A PAIR WALKING DOWN AN ALLEY OF TREES, POSSESSING THE SCENE BUT WHILE IN MOVEMENT (CULLEN 1971:23). 10

FIGURE 7: ENCLAVES. OPEN YET INTIMATE, THE PILLARS AND OVERHEAD CREATE MULTIPLE ENCLAVES (CULLEN 1971:25). 10

FIGURE 8: ENCLOSURE. SURROUNDED BY THE BUILDING FACADE AND PROTECTED BY A CANOPY, THIS SITE FULLFILLS THE PERCEPTION OF ENCLOSURE (CULLEN 1971:25). 10

FIGURE 9: NARROWS. THE OBSERVER IS BEING SQUEEZED THROUGH THE PASSAGE, EVOKING AN INTENSIFIED PERCEPTION OF SPACE (CULLEN 1971:45). 10

FIGURE 10: FOCAL POINT. A PILLAR IN THE MIDDLE OF THE OPEN SQUARE IS A CLEAR SIGNAL AGAINST AN EMPTY SKY IN THE MIDDLE OF A PLAZA (CULLEN 1971:26). 11

FIGURE 11: CLOSED VISTA. HERE, THE PERSPECTIVE IS NARROW BUT ALSO FRAMING A GRAND BUILDING (CULLEN 1971:43). 11

FIGURE 12: INCIDENT. THE ROUNDED CLOCK TOWER STICKS UP FROM THE LINE OF FACADES, ITS UNIQUENESS CAPTURING YOUR LINE OF SIGHT (CULLEN 1971:44). 11

FIGURE 13: PUNCTUATION. THIS CHURCH BREAKS THE STRAIGHT PATH, CLOSING THE SENTENCE TO START A NEW ONE (CULLEN 1971:45). 11

FIGURE 14: ANTICIPATION. THE ROAD AHEAD IS OBSCURED IN SHADOW, AND THE APPROACH TO THE STREET CORNER BREW A SENSE OF ANTICIPATION FOR THE OBSERVER (CULLEN 1971:49). 12

FIGURE 15: INFINITY. THE SKY IS CAPTURED IN THE FRAME OF THE ARCH, THE ARCH BEING THE GROUNDING FOREGROUND ELEMENT CAPTURING THE EXPANSIVE SKY (CULLEN 1971:50). 12

FIGURE 16: MYSTERY. A SCENE HINTING AT AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER WITH SOMEONE HALF ENSHROUDED IN THE SHADE, CAUSING A SENSE OF MYSTERY (CULLEN 1971:51). 2

FIGURE 17: JUXTAPOSITION. TWO LANDSCAPES IN CONTRAST, THE VILLAGE HOUSING AND THE WILD, ROLLING FIELD NEXT TO IT: A JUXTAPOSITION (CULLEN 1971:60). 13

FIGURE 18: METAPHOR. METAPHOR MATERIALIZED IN THE LANDSCAPE, A MANS HOUSE IS HIS CASTLE (CULLEN 1971:71). 13

FIGURE 19: BUILDING AS SCULPTURE. THE UNIQUE SHAPE OF THE BUILDING IS AKIN A SCULPTURE (CULLEN 1971:74). 13

FIGURE 20: OPPOSING MOUNTAINS ON THE HORIZON APPEARED VIBRANT BLUE DURING THIS RAINY DAY, THE HIGHWAY AND TRAINRAIL IN THE CITY WAS VISIBLE, AS WELL AS THE ENTRY POINT TO THE SHRINE FROM WHERE NOTES WERE TAKEN. LOCATION IS SITE OF SERIAL VISION 5. 14

FIGURE 21: SERIAL VISION MAP DISPLAYING THE ORDER OF AND LOCATIONS OF SV. MAP DATA ©2024 GOOGLE. 15

FIGURE 22: SV1: SEQUENCE 1A, 1B AND 1C. 16

FIGURE 23: 1A. AN ELEVATED PATHWAY GUIDES THE VIEWER TOWARDS THE ENTRANCE, THE PICTURE OF THE ENTRANCE TAKEN FROM AFAR. 16

FIGURE 24: 1B. A CLOSED VISTA OF THE ENTRANCE AT NIGHT, WHERE SOFT LIGHTING AND AN AB-

SENCE OF CROWDS CREATE A MYSTICAL ATMOSPHERE, INVITING THE VIEWER INSIDE. 16

FIGURE 25: 1C. FROM WITHIN THE BUILDING, A FRAMED VIEW OF THE ENTRANCE GATES AT NIGHT CREATES A SENSE OF REFUGE, CONTRASTING WITH THE QUIET SURROUNDINGS OUTSIDE. 16

FIGURE 26: PERSPECTIVE DRAWING OF THE ENTRANCE. DRAWING BY THE AUTHOR. 17

FIGURE 27: MIDDLE POINT DRAWING, SAME POSITION IMAGE 1A (FIGURE 23). DRAWING BY THE AUTHOR. 17

FIGURE 28: TORII IN FRONT OF THE SHRINE NOT CAPTURED BY PHOTO. DRAWING BY THE AUTHOR. 17

FIGURE 29: PERSPECTIVE DRAWING OF THE ENTRANCE, SAME POSITION AS 2A. DRAWING BY THE AUTHOR. 17

FIGURE 30: SV2: SEQUENCE 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D, 2E, 2F AND 2G.. 18

FIGURE 31: 2A. AN ANGLED PATH WITH A LANTERN AS A DEFLECTING FOCAL POINT LEADS THE VIEWER'S GAZE, WHILE THE TORII GATE IN THE BACKGROUND HINTS AT THE NEXT SCENE, SYMBOLIZING THE 'THERE'. 18

FIGURE 32: 2B. THE GRAND ENTRANCE TO THE SENBON-TORII MARKS A SPATIAL TRANSITION. 18

FIGURE 33: 2C. CROWDS NAVIGATE THE TIGHTLY PACKED TORII GATES, A TUNNEL-LIKE PASSAGE IN POSSESSION. 18

FIGURE 34: 2D. A LONGER STRETCH OF THE TORII PATHWAY, WHERE THE GATES FRAME THE PATH AND OFFER GLIMPSES OF THE NATURAL SURROUNDINGS. 18

FIGURE 35: 2E. SCATTERED LANTERNS OUTSIDE THE GATES BECKONS THE VIEWER TO EXPLORE FURTHER. 19

FIGURE 36: 2F. TREE TOWERING OUTSIDE THE TORII, AS A STRIKING INTERRUPTION. 19

FIGURE 37: 2G. FIRST TORII CLEARING. OFFERS A MOMENT OF PAUSE. 19

FIGURE 38: SV3: SEQUENCE 3A, 3B, 3C, 3D, 3E, 3F, 3G, 3H AND 3I. 20

FIGURE 39: 3A. A BRIEF OPEN SPACE WHERE THE TORII GATES END, OFFERING A MOMENT OF VISUAL RELIEF AND A CHANCE FOR VISITORS TO PAUSE. 20

FIGURE 40: 3B. THE MAW OF THE NEXT APPROACH, THE PATTERN DRAWS THEM BACK INTO THE PATHWAY. 20

FIGURE 41: 3C. MOMENT BEFORE RE-ENTRY TO THE ENCLOSED PATH OF TORII GATES. 20

FIGURE 42: 3D. A RIPPLING STREAM ALONG THE TRAIL DRAWS THE VIEWER'S ATTENTION, CREATING A SENSORY FOCAL POINT.. 21

FIGURE 43: 3E. THE NEXT SET OF STAIRS GRADUALLY COMES INTO VIEW, WITH THE TORII GATES AHEAD CONCEALING WHAT LIES AT THE TOP. 21

FIGURE 44: 3F. THE STAIRCASE DIRECTS THE GAZE UPWARD, WITH THE TORII GATE FRAMED BY TREES, CREATING A CLEAR FOCAL POINT AT THE TOP. 22

FIGURE 45: 3G. WATER BASIN AND SIGN, SYMBOLISING A RITUAL OF PURIFICATION. 22

FIGURE 46: 3H. A NARROW PATH LINED WITH SHOPS AND STRUCTURES OFFERS A SEQUENTIAL VISUAL JOURNEY, BLENDING DAILY LIFE WITH COMMERCIALISM AND SHINTOISM. 23

FIGURE 47: 3I. AN INTIMATE VIEW OF THE SHRINE'S INTERIOR, WHERE THE ALTAR AND SACRED OBJECTS CREATE A SERENE, ENCLOSED LANDSCAPE, SEPARATE FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD. 23

FIGURE 48: SV4: SEQUENCE 4A, 4B AND 4C. 24

FIGURE 49: 4A. MAN LOOKING AT A MAP WHERE STONE LANTERNS MEET INFORMATIONAL SIGNS. 24

FIGURE 50: 4B. A FORK IN THE PATH FRAMED BY TORII, WHERE INSCRIPTION EMBODY CULLEN'S CONCEPT OF A HANDSOME GESTURE. 24

FIGURE 51: 4C. THE GATE SERVES AS A THRESHOLD, LEADING TO A SHOP AREA. 25

FIGURE 52: SV5: SEQUENCE 5A, 5B, 5C, 5D, 5E, 5F, 5G, 5H, 5I, 5J AND 5K. 26

FIGURE 53: 5A. AN ASCENDING STAIRCASE GUIDES THE OBSERVER'S GAZE UPWARD, FLANKED BY NATURAL TERRAIN AND MAN-MADE STRUCTURE, BUILDING ANTICIPATION TOWARDS THE DESTINATION AT THE TOP. 26



FIGURE 54: 5B. A HIGH METAL FENCE WITH BARBED WIRE DISRUPTS THE SERENE PATH, YET ITS SILHOUETTE OFFERS A FRAGMENTED CONNECTION TO THE SKY, CREATING AN IMPERFECT YET INTRIGUING FRAME. 27

FIGURE 55: 5C. A SWEEPING VIEW OF THE CITY UNFOLDS, OFFERING A VAST, OPEN HORIZON THAT CONTRASTS WITH THE ENCLOSED PATHWAYS OF THE TORII GATES. 27

FIGURE 56: 5D. AT THE CROSSROADS FURTHER UP, BENCHES AND OPEN SPACES OFFER REFUGE, WHERE VISITORS PAUSE TO TAKE STATIC POSSESSION OF THE ENVIRONMENT. 28

FIGURE 57: 5E. A FRAMING MOMENT CREATED BY THE TORII GATES, GUIDING THE EYE UPWARD ALONG THE LINEAR PATHWAY. 28

FIGURE 58: 5F. A SHOP SELLING SMALL TORII AND SOUVENIRS CONTRASTS THE VIBRANT COLORS AND TEXTURES OF COMMERCE WITH THE UNIFORMITY OF THE SACRED GATES. 28

FIGURE 59: 5G. THE MAIN SHRINE, FRAMED BY THE TORII GATES, CREATES A CLOSED VISTA SURROUNDED BY A DENSE COLLECTION OF OTSUKA. 29

FIGURE 60: 5H. A PATHWAY LINED WITH STONE LANTERNS AND SMALL GATES CREATES A SEQUENCE OF VIEWS, ENRICHING THE SENSE OF JOURNEY AND MYSTERY. 29

FIGURE 61: 5I. RED FENCES FRAME THE PATHWAY, DIRECTING MOVEMENT. 30

FIGURE 62: 5J. AN OPEN PATHWAY UNFOLDS INTO A VIEWPOINT, MARKING THE TRANSITION FROM ENCLOSED SACRED SPACES TO AN EXPANSIVE, OUTWARD VISTA. 30

FIGURE 63: 5K. A SWEEPING VIEW FROM THE OVERLOOK OFFERS A CONTRAST TO THE ENCLOSED PATHWAYS 31

FIGURE 64: SV6: SEQUENCE 6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E, 6F, 6G, 6H, 6I AND 6J. 32

FIGURE 65: 6A. THE TORII PATHWAY NARROWS AHEAD, WITH FEWER PEOPLE NOW OCCUPYING THE SPACE, 32

FIGURE 66: 6B. THE TORII GATES MERGE INTO A SINGULAR TUNNEL, CREATING A CONTINUOUS PORTAL THAT EMBODIES THE LAYERED HISTORY OF GRATITUDE 32

FIGURE 67: 6C. A SIDE VIEW OF THE TORII GATES REVEALS THEIR DENSE ARRANGEMENT. 33

FIGURE 68: 6D. A SHOP MIRRORING THE SHRINE, WHERE VISITORS PURCHASE CANDLES AND CHARMS, ADDING A SENSE OF VISCOSITY AS HUMAN ACTIVITY ENLIVENS THE PATHWAY. 33

FIGURE 69: 6E. "CANDLES, RUNNING WATER, AND TORII GATES NEAR THE SHRINE CREATE A MYSTICAL ATMOSPHERE. 34

FIGURE 70: 6F. A BROADER VIEW OF THE PATHWAY REVEALS THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN SACRED TORII GATES AND EVERYDAY STRUCTURES, BLENDING SPIRITUAL PRACTICE WITH DAILY LIFE. 34

FIGURE 71: 6G. A DIRECTIONAL SIGN GUIDES THE JOURNEY UPWARD, MARKING THE SPACE AS BOTH A MOMENT OF ANTICIPATION AND A STEP TOWARD THE SUMMIT. 34

FIGURE 72: 6H. A CURVED PATHWAY INTERRUPTS THE LINEAR JOURNEY, OFFERING A VISUAL PAUSE. 34

FIGURE 73: 6I. A PATHWAY LINED WITH TORII GATES AND FENCES, WHERE THE REPETITION OF VERTICAL ELEMENTS GUIDES THE VIEWER'S MOVEMENT AND STRENGTHENS THE SENSE OF DIRECTION. 35

FIGURE 74: 6J. A DOWNWARD PATHWAY TOWARDS THE TORII GATES CREATES A SENSE OF PROGRESSION, WITH THE OPEN FENCE GUIDING THE JOURNEY. 35

FIGURE 75: SV7: SEQUENCE 7A, 7B, 7C, 7D, 7E AND 7F. 36

FIGURE 76: 7A. A QUIET CORNER WITHIN THE SHRINE COMPLEX, AN INTIMATE RESTING SPACE. 36

FIGURE 77: 7B. THE TORII GATE MARKS A SYMBOLIC AND VISUAL THRESHOLD. 36

FIGURE 78: 7C. PATH CONTINUES WITH MORE TORII GATES AND STONE STEPS. 37

FIGURE 79: 7D. APPROACHING THE STEEP STEPS FRAMED BY LUSH GREEN FOLIAGE, WHICH CREATE A VIVID CONTRAST ALONG THE GENTLY ILLUMINATED PATHWAY.. 37

FIGURE 80: 7E. ASCENDING THE SHRINE'S HIGHER REACHES, METAL RAILINGS GUIDE THE UPWARD JOURNEY 37

FIGURE 81: 7F. ALIGNED GATES AND FOREST SURROUNDINGS CREATE A BALANCE OF OPENNESS AND ENCLOSURE. 38

FIGURE 82: SV8: SEQUENCE 8A, 8B, 8C, 8D, 8E, 8F AND 8G. 40

FIGURE 83: 8A. A COUPLE WALKING ALONG THE GENTLE SLOPED PATH. COUPLES, STUDENTS, AND TOURISTS OCCUPY INARI TAISHA, EACH GROUP ENGAGING WITH THE SPACE IN UNIQUE WAYS, REFLECTING VARIED FUNCTIONS AND USES. 40

FIGURE 84: 8B. THE SAME COUPLE STOPPING TO OBSERVE SOMETHING OUTSIDE THE TORII, GOING FROM POSSESSION IN MOVEMENT TO VISCOSITY. 41

FIGURE 85: 8C. ASCENDING THE FINAL PATH, NATURAL LIGHT GRADUALLY RETURNS, BRIGHTENING THE ATMOSPHERE WITH EACH STEP. 41

FIGURE 86: 8D. STEEP CORRIDOR OF TORII CONTINUES, PLAYING OF THE LIGHT.. 42

FIGURE 87: 8E. TURN ALONG THE PATH REVEALS YET ANOTHER SET OF TORII GATES, CREATING A SENSE OF DISCOVERY. 42

FIGURE 88: 8F. THE JOURNEY CULMINATES WHERE THE SKY OPENS UP. THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE SACRED STONES AND THE VAST OPEN SKY CAPTURES THE TENSION BETWEEN THE IMMEDIATE PRESENT AND THE INFINITE SKY. 43

FIGURE 89: 8G. THE JOURNEY BACK DOWN LOOKS SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT, WITH MEANINGFUL DETAIL. 43

FIGURE 90: SV9: SEQUENCE 9A, 9B, 9C, 9D, 9E, 9F, 9G AND 9H. 44

FIGURE 91: 9A. ARRIVING TOWARD A ANOTHER CLUSTER OF OTSUKA. 44

FIGURE 92: 9B. CORNER WITH A HEAP OF FUNCTIONAL SANDBAGS. 44

FIGURE 93: 9C. A SERIES OF SACRED STRUCTURES MARK THE ASCENT, EACH PEAK ACTING AS A PAUSE RATHER THAN A FINAL DESTINATION. 44

FIGURE 94: 9D. APPROACHING THE MAW, DRAWING IN THE VISITOR. 45

FIGURE 95: 9E. RELATIONSHIP, MAW ON LEFT. 45

FIGURE 96: 9F. RELATIONSHIP, BASIN ON THE RIGHT. 45

FIGURE 97: 9G. CLOSE-UP OF THE DRAGON-SHAPED FOUNTAINHEAD. 45

FIGURE 98: 9H. STEEP STAIRS GOING DOWN THE TORII ENCLOSURE. 45

FIGURE 99: SV10: SEQUENCE 10A, 10B, 10C AND 10D. 46

FIGURE 100: 10A. TUNNEL OF TORII GATES ALONG THE STEEP DESCENT. 46

FIGURE 101: 10B. ENCLAVE WHERE THE OBSERVER IS AT A POINT OF COMMAND.. 46

FIGURE 102: 10C. EXIT ENCLAVE, GREETED BY A CITY VISTA. 46

FIGURE 103: 10D. A VIBRANT ORANGE GATE MARKS THE SYMBOLIC TRANSITION FROM THE SPIRITUAL REALM BACK TO THE EVERYDAY WORLD, WITH THE CITY BELOW EMPHASIZING THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE SACRED AND THE SECULAR. 47

FIGURE 104: SV11: SEQUENCE 11A, 11B, 11C, 11D, 11E, 11F AND 11G. 48

FIGURE 105: 11A. NOW THE ROOFS OF BUILDINGS YOU ONLY SAW THE FACADE OF BEFORE ARE VISIBLE. 48

FIGURE 106: 11B. BACK AT THE CROSSROADS, NOW FROM AN OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE.. 48

FIGURE 107: 11C. THE GENTLE SLOPE WELCOMES YOU BACK DOWN. 48

FIGURE 108: 11D. RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL STRUCTURES APPEAR. 49

FIGURE 109: 11E. MANY TORII ARE NOW PLACED SIDEWAYS. 49

FIGURE 110: 11F. A NEUTRAL SPACE, THE ORDINARY, WHERE HOUSES AND EVERYDAY OBJECTS SIGNAL THE END OF THE SHRINE EXPERIENCE. 49

FIGURE 111: 11G. MAYBE WE ARE LOST? THE ATMOSPHERE HAS CHANGED GREATLY FROM BEFORE TO A FEELING OF BEING AT A COMMERCIAL BACKDOOR. 49

FIGURE 112: SV12: SEQUENCE 12A, 12B, 12C AND 12D. 50

FIGURE 113: 12A. PATH ALONG CALMER, MORE OPEN AREA FOR OTSUKA AND OTHER SHRINES. 50

FIGURE 114: 12B. THE FINAL TORII GATE STANDS AT THE TRAIL'S END, FRAMED BY A HEDGE AND SHOP, GUIDING THE OBSERVER BACK TO THE MAIN SHRINE AND MARKING THE JOURNEY'S CONCLUSION. 50

FIGURE 115: 12C. THE STRAIGHT PATH FLATTENS AND TRANSITIONS INTO AN URBAN SCENE, WHERE THE TORII GATE FADES INTO THE BACKGROUND AMIDST PARKED VEHICLES. 50

FIGURE 116: 12D. THE HIDDEN PATH LEADS YOU BACK, MARKING A THRESHOLD 51

# 1. Introduction

**In this section, the broader context of the thesis will be introduced. The subheadings that follow will address the background, question formulation, and specific aims of this research.**

## 1.1 Background

Fushimi Inari Taisha sprawls across the base and slopes of Mount Inari, a forested hill in Kyoto, Japan (figure 2). It is a significant landmark for Shintoism, a traditional Japanese belief system focused on the worship of "kami," which are spirits or deities that are believed to inhabit various natural elements, objects, and the landscape itself (Bring 1981:145). Fushimi Inari main gate, known as Romon (Taiyo 2019), is the first building that welcomes visitors to the site and represents quite a typical sight when visiting most shinto shrines (figure 1). The shrine is best known for its thousands of red torii gates that create winding paths up the forested mountain. The facility's origins can be traced back to the year 711 AD and today it consists of more than a thousand torii gates (Fushimi Inari Taisha n.d.).

Fushimi Inari Taisha presents a particular case study for spatial analysis due to its interplay between movement and sequential visual experiences. The site's long rows of torii gates create a dynamic and ever-changing visual experience, making it a great example for exploring how moving through a space step by step affects the way we see and understand it. Additionally, the way the paths go along the mountainside provides an opportunity to study the relationship between spatial enclosure and openness.

While Gordon Cullen's concept of serial vision has been extensively applied to Western urban environments and has been widely applied and developed in subsequent works (Trancik 1986; Carmona et al. 2021), influencing the design of public spaces throughout Europe and North America, its application to non-western, culturally significant landscapes remains limited. This is evident in studies like "Analyzing Spatial Visual

Characteristics in Japanese Stroll Gardens Based on Eye-Tracking Technology: Case Study of Saiho-ji Garden," which, while addressing sequential visual experiences in Japanese gardens, do not explicitly employ Cullen's serial vision framework (Shen et al. 2023). Furthermore, previous studies that do use Cullen's theories, for example "Research on the Spatial Renovation Design of the 798 Art District and Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art Guided by Gordon Cullen's Methodology" that studies Beijing's 798 Art District (Shao 2024), mostly use serial vision for structural, visual, or urbanistic analysis. This paper has more of a phenomenological approach, exploring how an observer physically and emotionally engage with the space.

Cullen's theoretical framework offers a lens through which to investigate Fushimi Inari Taisha, especially when approached from a phenomenological perspective. This approach is particularly useful as it allows for an exploration of the site based on universal human experiences rather than solely on culturally specific knowledge. At its core, the phenomenological approach emphasizes how individuals perceive and experience space. It suggests that our understanding of a location is deeply intertwined with how we sense our body's presence and positioning within that space (Wylie 2007:139). In this context, Cullen's theory provides a way to dissect how the physical layout and environmental elements of Fushimi Inari Taisha contribute to a personal experience.

Conducting an analysis on spatial dynamics at a unique landscape such as this one can provide

further insights into how spaces are experienced. The primary reference for this thesis is Gordon Cullen's most influential work "The Concise Townscape." In this book, the idea of townscape as a way to understand and analyse the visual character of urban areas is introduced. It emphasises the importance of visual elements in creating a cohesive and aesthetically pleasing urban environment. These theories will be applied to Fushimi Inari Taisha, a place with a unique sense of place which can't be found anywhere else in the world. Thus this



Figure 2: Map of where Kyoto (red) is located in Japan, the black dot representing the capital Tokyo. (Comix 2024) [CC-BY-4.0](#)



Figure 1: Main Gate of Fushimi Inari-taisha Shrine. (Zairon 2016) [CC-BY-SA-4.0](#)



analysis in turn represents a novel examination to understand a phenomenological experience using the theories by Gordon Cullen. Cullen’s theories and the results will be firstly presented with a “serial vision”. Cullen introduced the concept of “serial vision,” which refers to the unfolding sequence of views and experiences as a person moves through an urban space (Cullen 1971:17), or in this case, a shinto facility.

Japan stands out from the West in its unique interpretation of authenticity. As this thesis aims to understand a Japanese facility from a western theory it’s crucial to highlight certain differences in how we perceive. In the West, referring to the demography which is mainly European or North American, the original materials and make of a structure is highly related to its perception of

authenticity and value. Papmehl-Dufay touches on this by an example of an old farmhouse in Sweden: “To us, the age of the house and the farm itself gives it an authenticity and a ‘soul’ that is not possible to achieve with a newly built house” (Papmehl-Dufay 2015:144). The other studies found in the collections of “Landscape biographies” (2015) also touch on authenticity specifically and question how the original environmental fabric of a site can be best conserved (Gillings 2015:117).

In contrast, the eastern, such as the Japanese, view of authenticity embraces a more holistic perspective. Unlike the western approach, where nature and culture are often separated and judged independently, the eastern perspective integrates both tangible and intangible values (Taylor 2012). This difference creates a contrast between the external method used

by the author and the internal perspective of the native Japanese. The Japanese approach sees nature and culture as connected, requiring a more nuanced understanding of authenticity that goes beyond material conservation.

Conducting an analysis on spatial dynamics at a unique landscape such as this one can provide further insights into how spaces are experienced. By analysing the sites spatial dynamics, we can better understand how space isn’t just something that’s physically made, but also something we experience phenomenologically. Cullen’s theories exemplify a phenomenological approach by emphasizing that the experience of space is rooted in human perception. This perspective is particularly valuable because it underscores that an individual does not need an intrinsic cultural familiarity with a site to connect with it. Cullen’s theories support the idea that the spatial configuration of a place can trigger visceral, almost intuitive, responses, and invites visitors to interpret the site in a personal way.

In summary, this work will analyse the spatial dynamics at Fushimi Inari Taisha through the theory of Gordon Cullen’s work “The Concise Townscape” (1971), using his methods to explore perceptions across the site, resulting in a serial vision and an analysis of its qualities that encompass optics, place and content.

## 1.2 Aim

The aim of this study is to explore how Gordon Cullen’s serial vision method can be used to analyse the phenomenology of spatial experience in landscapes with a strong sense of place, using Fushimi Inari Taisha as a case study. By applying Cullen’s theories beyond their conventional urban context, this research seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of how sequential spatial experiences shape our phenomenological experience of a site. Despite the prevalence of Cullen’s serial vision in western urban analysis, its application to culturally embedded natural environments like Fushimi Inari Taisha is rare and using it as a tool for phenomenological research in such contexts is even more uncommon. This gap justifies the need for a study that examines how such a theoretical lens can reveal universal aspects of spatial experience.

## 1.3 Question formulation

What insights into the phenomenology of Fushimi Inari Taisha can be gained through analysis of place, content and serial vision?

## 1.4 Delimitations

Visual representations such as photography and drawing are used for identifying and analysing spatial elements as per Cullen’s concepts, excluding symbolic values. While communicating my personal experience from a phenomenological perspective it’s important to keep in mind that the site has a deep history and meaning, which requires an understanding that cannot be attained by an outsider from a completely different culture. This is to remain objective and provide comparable results. Since the symbolic values are important to the site, the perception and research results may differ more depending on the understanding of it. Therefore, the symbolic values and meanings will be discussed under the discussion.

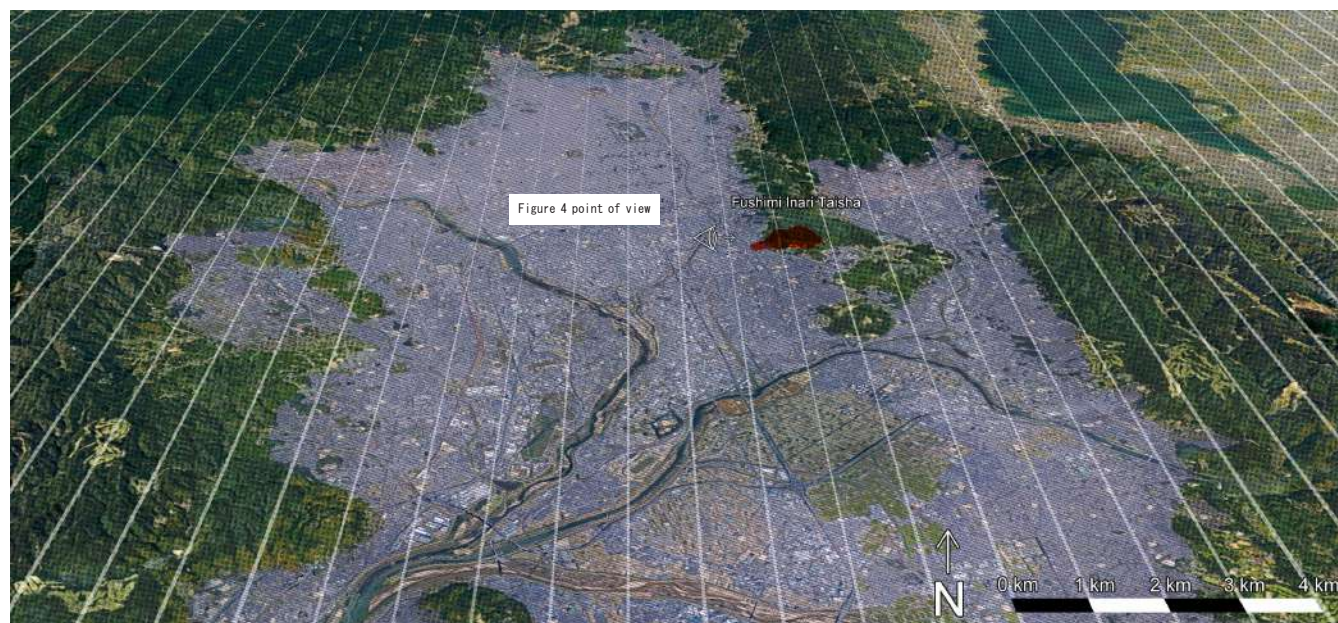


Figure 3: Map of where Fushimi Inari Taisha is located in Kyoto with city surroundings. The mountains around the city is going around it, and the city is settled in a refuge. Map data ©2024 Google.



## 2. Methodology

**The following will present the combination of methods applied to answer the thesis question. Starting with the initial literature study, followed by site analysis methods, how presentation of results will be construed; and concludes with the delimitations.**

### 2.1 The phenomenologic fieldwork method

Phenomenology, as a research approach, focuses on understanding how individuals experience and perceive the world around them. In landscape architecture, this means studying the sensory, emotional, and spatial experiences people have when moving through or inhabiting a landscape (Wylie 2007). Rather than relying solely on objective data or technical measurements, phenomenology captures first-person experience, often through drawing, writing, photography, and reflective observation (Swales 2016). This method is especially useful for exploring how space is felt and interpreted. Cullen's serial vision also centers on the experiential qualities of movement through space. In this study, a phenomenological approach enables a deeper exploration of Fushimi Inari Taisha by attending to the intuitive engagement with the site's spatial sequences. In this thesis, phenomenology was chosen as it directly supports the aim of exploring the sense of place at Fushimi Inari Taisha.

The literature used for the phenomenological field study were "Field Sketching and the Experience of Landscape" (2016) by Janet Swales. Swales discusses perception through participation in the landscape, as well as methods of passing on a subjective, phenomenological experience to a reader. The first day's goal was to visit the site, journal memories, and review any spontaneous photos, as outlined in Swales fieldwork model. The main motivation for using this model was due to its ability to bridge the gap between creative expression and scientific analysis.

By mapping the site and noting key viewpoints, the aim was to identify what is most memorable and characteristic of the location. The process of mapping in this context, as described by Swales (2016:106), is not intended to be a technical survey but rather a way

to gain a reasonable impression of the spatial layout and get to know the place on a deeper level. Figure 4 presents the trail alongside phenomenological experiences, which later developed to serial vision.

In summary, the data collection involved photography, journaling, and sketching during field trips. After gathering photographs that were taken along the trail, the serial vision research method was decided on (see 2.3).

### 2.2 Theoretical analysis

A theory study of "The Concise Townscape" (Cullen 1971) was conducted, with focus on methods of analysis, including presentation of perception. The main method of site analysis was "serial vision", but the literature also provided understanding of how landscape is perceived. Thus the analysis will be applied to the pilgrim trail around the mountain to present the changes of perception to include a more complete explanation of travel around the site. The results of the theory study are gathered under 3. Theory.

### 2.3 Phenomenological analysis

There were scheduled site visits in October 2023, on each day from October 4th to October 13th. The site visits involved the analysis of various facilities in Kyoto identified through prior literature work, consisting of Fushimi Inari Taisha, Ginkaku-ji, Katsura Imperial Garden and Heian Shrine Garden. The decision to carry out fieldwork in Kyoto, Japan, was also driven by a long-standing personal interest in the country's landscapes and cultural heritage. The unique sense of place found in Japanese environments has been a source of inspiration, and visiting Kyoto had been a long-term aspiration. This personal connection contributed to my relation with the site and strengthened the

phenomenological approach, where subjective experience plays a central role.

The final selection of Fushimi Inari Taisha was made early on the third day of the trip, in total the main site that was analysed for the thesis, Fushimi Inari, was visited six times. Daily activities encompassed phenomenological studies, site notation, and photography. Following the return home, a serial vision analysis was constructed using the photographs and sketches made during site visits. This involved examining images in sequence and presenting them on the trail map, and interpreting them.

The main reason for the chosen site being Fushimi Inari Taisha is the accessibility and possibilities to visit at any time, any day, facilitating extensive data collection. Its red torii gates and buildings set amidst natural landscapes create a visually dynamic experience. The site also offer an excellent opportunity to learn about Japanese landscape architecture.

Section 3 will touch further on analysis methods as the result of the literary study, and 3.2.1 will describe the serial vision in more detail, as well as motives for the places and images selected.

The volume of people was greatest near the entrance area and the initial sections of the trail, gradually thinning out as it progressed deeper into the shrine's grounds. This phenomenon presented an opportunity to capture more images of the site further into the trail. Regarding the results, certain places deeper within the shrine complex might have garnered more data, while photos taken earlier on the trail are more sparse.

Photos were taken at eye level, staying away

from experimental perspectives not to distort the representation of perception. For analysis and presentation of findings some images have gone through minor edits, such as cropping and drawing of sightlines. This is to fit images so they can be presented in a sequence. The results of this analysis are found under 4. Analysis and result.

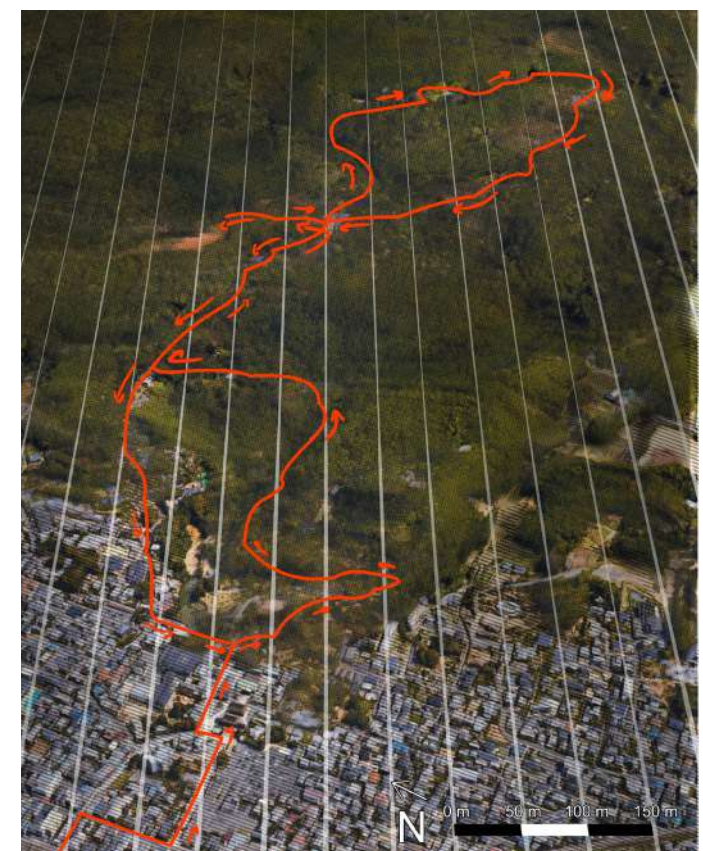


Figure 4: Aerial view of trail path that was studied, arrows pointing towards the travel direction . See figure 2 for viewpoint orientation. Map data ©2024 Google.

## 3. Theory

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**This section will divulge the different theories from literature studies and the theoretical framework with which photographs will be analysed. Firstly, breaking down what has to be understood of Japanese landscapes and phenomenology, and then dissecting Gordon Cullen's theories.**

### 3.1 Preceding studies

Before reading "The Concise Townscape", phenomenological perspectives and literature about phenomenology was part of the main method for landscape study. It resulted in understanding of differing theories for exploring phenomenology of West and East, the western view of genius loci and eastern of shintoism. Genius loci, which means "spirit of place," is not inherently a phenomenological perspective, but it shares some common ground with phenomenology. The concept of genius loci refers to the unique, distinctive atmosphere of a place, encompassing its physical, cultural, and emotional characteristics and looks different depending on where you are. Neither is Shintoism a phenomenological perspective, but it encompasses elements that can be explored through phenomenology as its philosophy is that places are characters of their own, heightening the sense of place (Bring 1981:145-149).

Literature pertaining to Japanese landscape history, parks and culture were materials for the initial study two weeks before the field visit. Serving as an introduction to ideals, and providing a deeper understanding of the Japanese view on landscapes.

A compromise was made when opting for literature written in English, as finding accessible sources by native authors in English didn't yield any options.

After this literature study the choice of method fell on Gordon Cullen theories with a "serial vision", as the fieldwork proved to gather material that were straightforward to examine with his theories.

Shintoism, the indigenous spirituality of Japan, emphasises a deep connection with nature, rituals, and the presence of "kami". From a phenomenological viewpoint, it could be examined how Shinto practices and beliefs shape the lived experiences of individuals and their perceptions of nature.

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach that

studies structures of experience and consciousness from the first-person perspective, and was the first data collected at Fushimi Inari Taisha. The meaning, and spirit, of a place is rendered through complex processes of human behaviour and psychology (Papmehl-Dufay 2015), so a shrine's meaning will also change over time, as people do.

Phenomenology, a philosophical approach studying structures of experience and consciousness from the first-person perspective, was the basis for the initial method used in examining Fushimi Inari Taisha. Gordon Cullen's work in "The Concise Townscape" can be interpreted as having a phenomenological perspective: Cullen emphasises the experiential and perceptual aspects of urban environments, focusing on how individuals perceive and experience the cityscape. The concept of "serial vision" highlights the importance of human experience and sensory engagement with urban spaces, which align with phenomenological approaches that prioritise subjective experience and the meanings that arise from interactions with one's environment. This is why Cullen's serial vision became the primary theory for the thesis.

### 3.2 Cullen - Phenomenological theory

The primary reference for this thesis is Gordon Cullen's most influential work "The Concise Townscape." In this book, the idea of townscape as a way to understand and analyse the visual character of urban areas is introduced. It emphasises the importance of visual elements in creating a cohesive and aesthetically pleasing urban environment. These theories will be applied to Fushimi Inari Taisha, a place with a unique sense of place which can't be found anywhere else in the world. Thus this analysis in turn represents an examination to understand a phenomenological experience using the theories

by Gordon Cullen. Cullen's theories and the results will be firstly presented with a "serial vision". Cullen introduced the concept of "serial vision," which refers to the unfolding sequence of views and experiences as a person moves through an urban space, or in this case, a shinto facility.

To make an in-depth examination of Fushimi Inari Taisha, a framework is created using theories by Gordon Cullen. It will be used to identify and evaluate how spatial elements contribute to the overall feel of the place. The materials which the framework is applied to are the photographs, sketches and notations taken during site visits. Cullen's book is divided into two parts - known as the "casebook" and "general studies". Primarily, the analysis and result will be presented through the casebook categories. The main themes are summarised in his following division: optics, place and content. On the opposite page and onward are the interpretations of the literature for each category, which will be applied later on in the analysis (4. Analysis and result). The categories being the concept of optics (3.2.1), referring to serial vision, as well as the concept of place (3.2.2) and content (3.2.3).

#### 3.2.1 The concept of optics

Optics, as the term suggests, involves views. But not only views, it's also the unfolding of these views as one navigates through the environment. Our perception of space and time is experienced differently compared to reality, and this can be shown through a "serial vision". Sketching or photographing views, and presenting them in progression is a way of presenting one's perception of the site, resulting in a more accurate representation of the experience. A long, straight road is considered less impactful to the mind - the initial view becomes monotonous quickly. Human minds react to contrast, emphasising the importance of the difference between scenes and putting them in

juxtaposition. The "serial vision" involves the existing view and the emerging view, which are two elements in the optical viewpoint (Cullen 1971).

Through serial vision analysis, spatial structures perceived within the facility can be revealed. Making sure each scene is represented with an even distance of travel between them - as Cullen - while also making sure not to miss characteristic scenes that is vital for the experience of the facility as a whole. Presenting each scene in the order of encounter to also emulate the journey across the site.

In addition to considering the structured progression of views along the trail, it's crucial to acknowledge the blind spots. Certain sections were left with less documentation due to people crowding in the pictures, and the constant movement forward by the crowds, not leaving breaks for analysis or photography. These blind spots pose a challenge in accurately capturing the complete experience of the trail, and appear at the most in the beginning. The breaks in documentation will also be presented on the map under results (4.).



### 3.2.2 The concept of place

This section discusses the concept of “place” and how our reactions to the position of our body in its environment can influence our perception and emotions. The category of place includes the aspect of different layouts of rooms, their demarcation and how to move between rooms, the “here” and “there” (Cullen 1971). Since this analysis is on a facility instead of an urban environment, the method may not be applicable 1:1 on the chosen site; demarcations are made with this in mind. For one, there are a myriad of ways to describe the phenomenon of “here” and “there”, and the best suited terms for the case of studying Fushimi Inari Taisha were selected and described next.

#### Static Possession & Possession in Movement

There is more than one way of how humans may relate to outdoor spaces. The first aspect is static possession, which means owning or having control over a place while staying still. The second aspect is about possessing a place while in motion, possession in movement (Cullen 1971:22). To see if a place expresses possession one needs to discern whether the individuals in the image exhibit characteristics of possession and whether it is static possession or possession in movement. The difference is determined by the subject. If the subjects are stationary, appearing to own or control the space without significant movement; it aligns with the concept of static possession. If the individuals are actively engaged in movement within the outdoor space, it suggests possession in movement.



Figure 5: STATIC POSSESSION. People resting or standing idle under the trees, taking possession of the scene (Cullen 1971:22).

#### Viscosity

When there’s a mix of static possession and possession in movement there is viscosity (Cullen 1971:23). To analyse this, places where there appears to be a mix between static and moving subjects will be examined.



Figure 6: POSSESSION IN MOVEMENT. A pair walking down an alley of trees, possessing the scene but while in movement (Cullen 1971:23).

#### Enclaves

Enclaves can be used to describe a space that is both connected to the outside and inside. This space allows easy and direct movement between the two. It is a special and accessible place, somewhat separate from the main flow of movement. It has the advantage of offering a view of the surroundings from a safe and strong position (Cullen 1971:25). Where there are spaces that seem to provide a sense of calm with less intense lighting, as well as vantage points that provide both safety and a commanding view - connecting the inside to the outside - that is an enclave.



Figure 7: ENCLAVES. Open yet intimate, the pillars and overhead create multiple enclaves (Cullen 1971:25).

#### Enclosure

Outside the enclave space is characterised by noise and fast, impersonal communication that is not tied to any particular place. On the inside, there’s a contrast with quietness and a more human scale, typical in areas like squares, quads, or courtyards. The idea is that enclosure is the destination or result of traffic, and without it, traffic loses its meaning (Cullen 1971:25). Like the enclaves there is a sense of an “inside” and “outside” area in the scene that is observed. The sense of contrast between “outside” and “inside” can be heightened by changes in noise levels, the pace of activity, or the overall scale.



Figure 8: ENCLOSURE. Surrounded by the building facade and protected by a canopy, this site fullfills the perception of enclosure (Cullen 1971:25).

#### Narrows

Enclosure and narrows are similar in that they both describe spatial conditions that create a feeling of confinement or restriction within a particular area. However, they differ in the degree and nature of that confinement. Narrows specifically refer to a space that is physically constricted or limited in width, often implying a narrow passage or corridor. They create a sense of pressure because they restrict movement, often leading to an intensified perception of space due to the limited breadth (Cullen 1971:45).



Figure 9: NARROWS. The observer is being squeezed through the passage, evoking an intensified perception of space (Cullen 1971:45).



### Focal point

In towns and villages, the focal point, whether it's a column or a cross, serves as a central symbol that brings people together. It acts as a clear marker. This clarity is powerful in many communities, but in some places, the function of the focal point is diminished by the chaos and dangers of traffic (Cullen 1971:26). To identify the focal point in a scene elements that serve as a central focus or gathering point have to be identified. For example objects like statues, columns or crosses, emphasising the significance of the place.



Figure 10: FOCAL POINT. A pillar in the middle of the open square is a clear signal against an empty sky in the middle of a plaza (Cullen 1971:26).

### Closed vista

This approach involves placing a building in a way that encourages you to step back and appreciate it. It's a somewhat "inorganic and purely architectural approach" (Cullen 1971:43), but it can be adapted in many ways. Elements that guide the gaze and create a sense of closure or focus on a building will be the most important to attribute a scene with the closed vista (Cullen 1971:43).

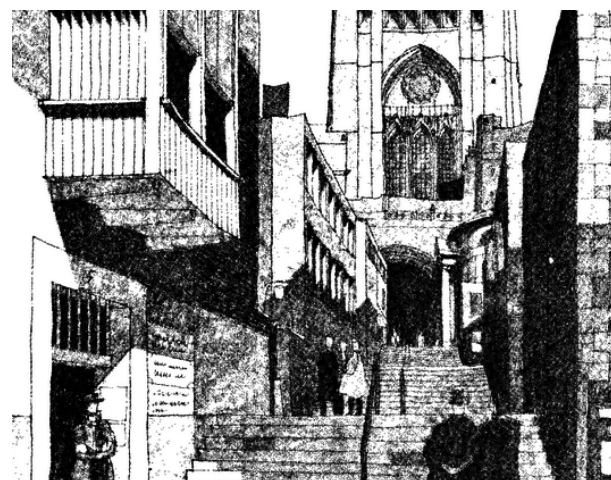


Figure 11: CLOSED VISTA. Here, the perspective is narrow but also framing a grand building (Cullen 1971:43).

### Incident

Interesting elements, in a street or a place, such as towers, belfries, unique silhouettes, or vivid colours are incidents. They capture the viewer's attention and prevent their eyes from getting bored or sliding away into the background (Cullen 1971:44). These incidents add character and emphasis to the basic shapes of the street or place. It's like giving a gentle nudge to draw attention, it can be pillars, towers or other elements that catch the eyes similarly.

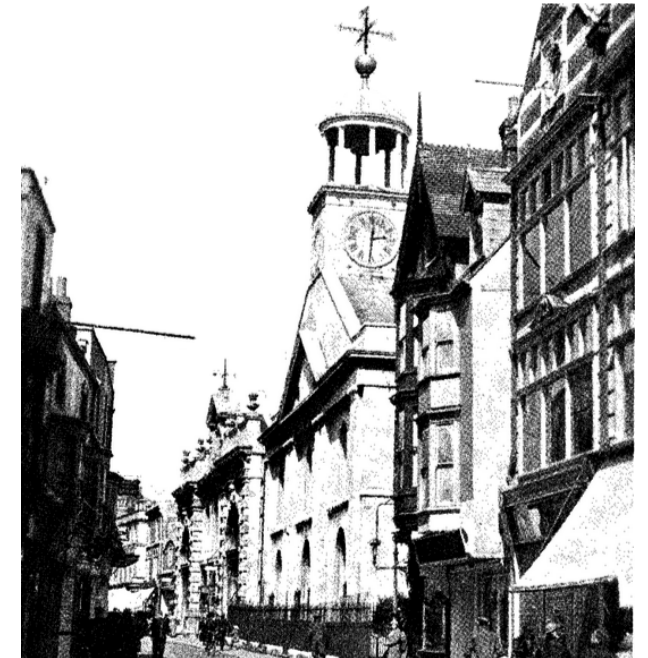


Figure 12: INCIDENT. The rounded clock tower sticks up from the line of facades, its uniqueness capturing your line of sight (Cullen 1971:44).

### Punctuation

Evaluating a landscape scene as "punctuated" requires assessing its visual elements to see if they create natural breaks or pauses, akin to punctuation marks in writing (Cullen 1971:45). To determine this, look for how distinct elements in the scene guide the viewer's attention and demarcate shifts in the "narrative." Determine if the landscape's arrangement creates a narrative with distinct parts, each marked by natural pauses that act like punctuation, helping to break up and organize the scene's flow (Cullen 1971:45).



Figure 13: PUNCTUATION. This church breaks the straight path, closing the sentence to start a new one (Cullen 1971:45).



### Anticipation

Situations where you are in a known place "here" but what lies ahead "there" is unknown, creates a case of anticipation (Cullen 1971:49). The characteristics of anticipation involve a sense of curiosity about what lies beyond the visible scene, for example when you see a turn in the street ahead, it makes you curious about what you'll see when you reach the end of it (Cullen 1971:49). An analysis of anticipation would provide insight into the intrigue of exploration. To help the analysis, elements such as leading lines, perspective, and framing are identified to understand what draws the viewer's gaze towards the unseen endpoint of the street.

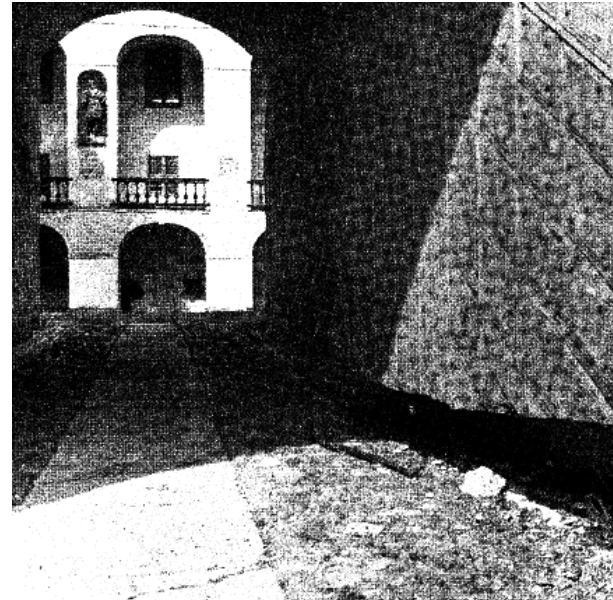


Figure 14: ANTICIPATION. The road ahead is obscured in shadow, and the approach to the street corner brew a sense of anticipation for the observer (Cullen 1971:49).

### Mystery

Mystery encompasses the interplay between the known and the unknown, the ordinary and the extraordinary, emphasising the potential for diverse experiences within the landscape (Cullen 1971:51). To analyse a picture with the given term in mind, the scene has to express some sort of juxtaposition between the mundane, matter-of-fact elements of the pavement or familiar surroundings with the hints of the unknown and mysterious aspects of the place (Cullen 1971:51).

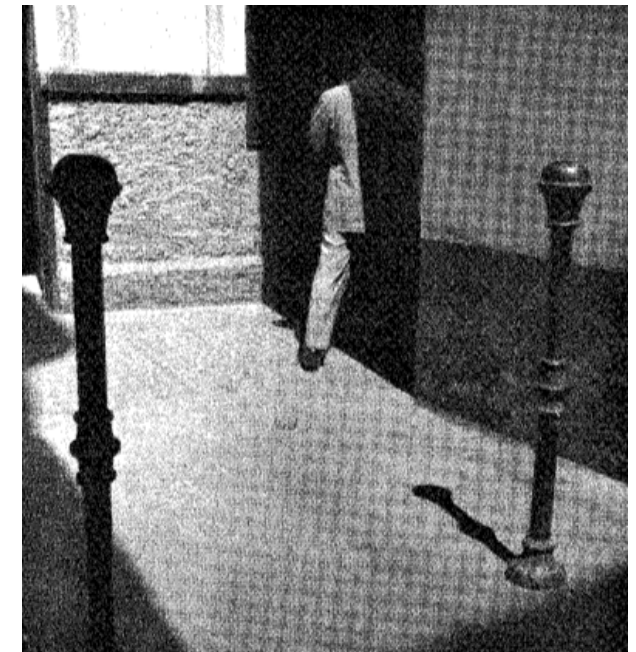


Figure 16: MYSTERY. A scene hinting at an unexpected encounter with someone half enshrouded in the shade, causing a sense of mystery (Cullen 1971:51).

### Infinity

Analysing infinity involves examining the depiction of sky and its relationship with the landscape, but not the sky itself (Cullen 1971:50). The most crucial aspect in such an analysis would be to observe how the scene utilises techniques like truncation or juxtaposition to emphasise the firsthand experience of contrast between the immediate surroundings and the vastness of the sky. If infinity is expressed would be through finding insight into how the scene conveys the impact of the sky on the urban environment and human perception. Understanding how the image portrays the solitude and expansiveness of the sky, perhaps by cutting out the middle distance or placing it in juxtaposition with the foreground elements, or how the viewer's expected line of travel is disrupted, transforming the sky into a symbol of infinity.



Figure 15: INFINITY. The sky is captured in the frame of the arch, the arch being the grounding foreground element capturing the expansive sky (Cullen 1971:50).



### 3.2.3 The concept of content

The last category addresses what is in the room and details that can strengthen or weaken its expression. The focus lies on the category of "content," exploring the elements that constitute the fabric of towns, such as colour, texture, scale, style, character, personality, and uniqueness. Content is about the "this" and "that" (Cullen 1971:57).

#### Juxtaposition

Analysing a picture with juxtaposition in mind involves comparison between different categories or elements within the scene, for example focusing on the contrast between village and countryside or pastoral and industrial settings (Cullen 1971:60). The most important aspect to consider in such an analysis would be the visual representation in the image and how it highlights the distinct characteristics between the view of two sceneries in one, the two differing characteristics being the "this" and "that" to one another. This comparison between scenery leads to an emotional reaction to the contrast between the imagery of scenes present. Also, analysing juxtaposition can determine how well a scene navigates the balance between clarity and chaos, particularly where different elements are blended together (Cullen 1971:60). Furthermore, analysing the soundscape or the physical attributes between the scenes can further heighten the sense of juxtaposition between each environment.



Figure 17: Juxtaposition. Two landscapes in contrast, the village housing and the wild, rolling field next to it: a juxtaposition (Cullen 1971:60).

#### Metaphor

The metaphor involves examining how the scene employs symbolic representations to convey deeper meanings or associations. The most important aspect to consider would be the identification and interpretation of metaphorical elements within the composition (Cullen 1971:71). Paying close attention to visual cues, such as objects, settings, or arrangements, that serve as metaphors for broader concepts or themes. Finding the metaphor in landscape alludes to the power of suggestion, and hinting at "this" and "that", it provokes thought about the subjects depicted (Cullen 1971:71).



Figure 18: METAPHOR. Metaphor materialized in the landscape, a mans house is his castle (Cullen 1971:71).

#### Significant objects

How ordinary objects within the scene attain prominence and distinction, either through their inherent sculptural qualities, vivid colours, or their unexpected visual impact within the overall composition. It is the identification and interpretation of these significant objects and their role in the visual narrative of the image that matters in the analysis (Cullen 1971:73). It involves looking for objects that stand out amidst the surrounding elements, drawing the viewer's eye and potentially altering the perception of the scene.

#### Building as sculpture

Buildings can transcend their conventional roles as architecture to become artistic expressions in their own right. The most important aspect to consider would be the extent to which the building achieves a new significance as an art form (Cullen 1971:74). Its visual elements and architectural features that contribute to this transformation, such as unique shapes, forms, or placements within the landscape are observed.

#### Geometry

Geometry alludes to examining how geometric elements imbue the landscape with a sense of scale and detachment transforming its character (Cullen 1971:75). The most important aspect to consider would be the visual representation of geometric forms and patterns within the composition, and their impact on the perception of the landscape. Finding if there is an arrangement of shapes, lines, and angles that evoke a sense of order and structure, as well as comparison of that geometry (Cullen 1971:75). How geometric elements reshape the perception will be noted.

#### Multiple use

Analysing multiple use is considering how different functions and activities coexist within the same space. Typically it refers to spatial arrangement of different functions, such as residential areas alongside recreational spaces (Cullen 1971:76). Paying attention to if the image contains visual cues that convey the concept of multiple use, diverse activities occurring simultaneously, or the integration of various functions within will be examined. And how the balance of these features are expressed, for example between shopping, worship, festival, tourism and recreation.



Figure 19: BUILDING AS SCULPTURE. The unique shape of the building is akin a sculpture (Cullen 1971:74).

# 4. Analysis and result

This chapter will consist of picture analysis according to Cullen’s principles of optics, place and content. Concerning optics, following Cullen’s terminology, it addresses the concept of “serial vision”. This will be followed by analysis on the principles of place and then content. Since preceding discoveries were made prior they will be summarised briefly before the main serial visions picture analysis.

## 4.1 Preceding discoveries

The initial days of the analysis were dedicated to an open study of the site’s phenomenology, which later evolved iteratively into an exploration of spatial perception incorporating Gordon Cullen’s work. This development of the method was chosen later on as it allowed for a clearer understanding of the spatial analysis approach (see 3.1). The preceding discoveries and their methods are compiled under this section.

The goal of day one was to visit the site and afterwards journal the memories and review any spontaneous photos, as Swailes (2016) fieldwork model was the main research method at the start. It was applied to Serial Vision (SV) 1 to 5, with results presented in the SV overview text. Time was spent sketching and taking pictures to understand the visual appearance of the site, as well as to gather data, using both iPad and paper to draw (figure 20).



Figure 20: Opposing mountains on the horizon appeared vibrant blue during this rainy day, the highway and trainrail in the city was visible, as well as the entry point to the shrine from where notes were taken. Location is site of serial vision 5.

## 4.2 Serial Vision in regard to place and content

When choosing one site over another for the SV, the decision may be influenced by several factors. After capturing images along the trail, a selection was chosen for the SV with the following motivations:

- The scene’s significance in relation to the overall focus of the analysis.
- Its ability to represent key spatial characteristics relating to the theories of Gordon Cullen.
- Consideration of the sequence and flow of scenes within the visual narrative, ensuring a cohesive and engaging progression.

The map displays all the main SV captures across the site, each number, SV1-SV12, containing more than one scene within the total sequence to better present the unfolding of views and make it comparable to a first hand visual experience. Each scene should build upon the previous one by revealing new spatial features or by offering a different interpretation of the surroundings. Furthermore, the viewpoints aim to be diverse and show multiple perspectives. The divisions are mainly to give a better understanding of the characteristics for each of the areas and their topography.

## 4.3 Serial Vision presentation

The presentation of the SV follows a visually guided format, where each numbered heading (1A,1B, etc.), corresponds to the image that illustrates the described scene. This allows for a blend of the textual Cullen analysis and visual representation. Each image is positioned next to its respective numbered heading. The main overview map (figure 21), has each photo captured marked as a red dot and each serial vision labelled by the name of the SV, as well as a white line aligned to the photo captures.

To clarify the connection between the analysis and the theory, Gordon Cullen’s terms optics, place, and content are used consistently as analytical tools. These terms are marked in bold throughout the text to highlight when a specific aspect of Cullen’s theory is being applied to interpret the image material. In this way, the concepts serve as a structuring lens through which the experience of the site is analysed, with each image sequence from the SV illustrating different spatial qualities through these themes.



# Main overview map of the trail and the serial vision locations

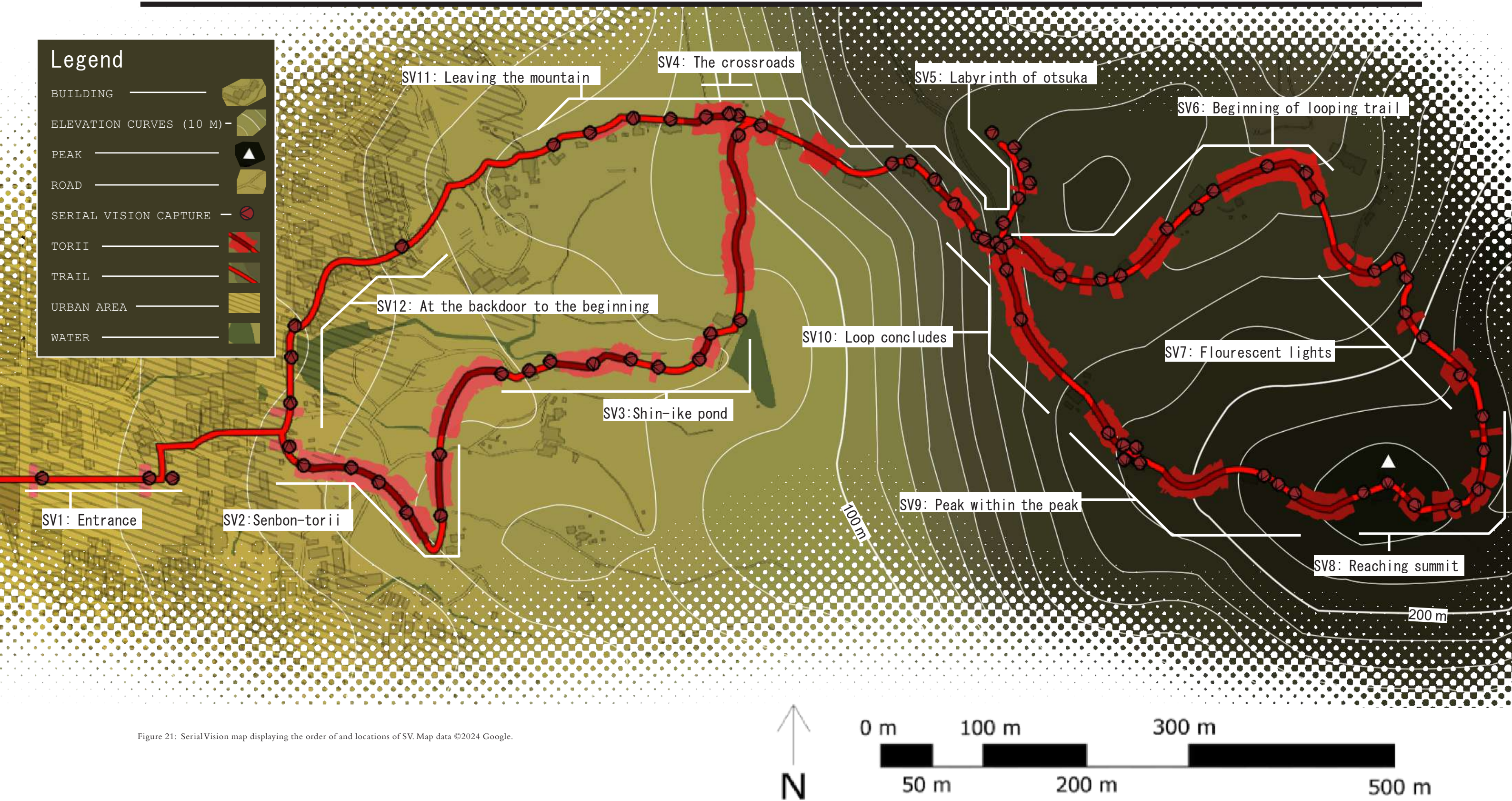


Figure 21: Serial Vision map displaying the order of and locations of SV. Map data ©2024 Google.



**SV1: Entrance**

The entrance to the shrine welcomes you with torii gates larger than the ones found on the trail, the main two punctuating the points of entry passage from the town to the interior shrine, see figures 26 and 28. Nighttime allowed for photographing without crowds, with the first serial vision (SV1A) being the approach to the entrance on slightly elevating ground. The nighttime does bring out other qualities of the environment as the day brings light from the sky, and here it envelops the visitor from below and the sides.

The serial vision was taken at night as an attempt to gather more varied phenomenological data, but didnt work as there were encounters with wildlife: as I reached the first torii on the main trail towards SV2, a boar was spotted. There were many warning signs about wild boars and monkeys, and with fewer people around after dark, animals seemed more comfortable venturing closer to the trail area.

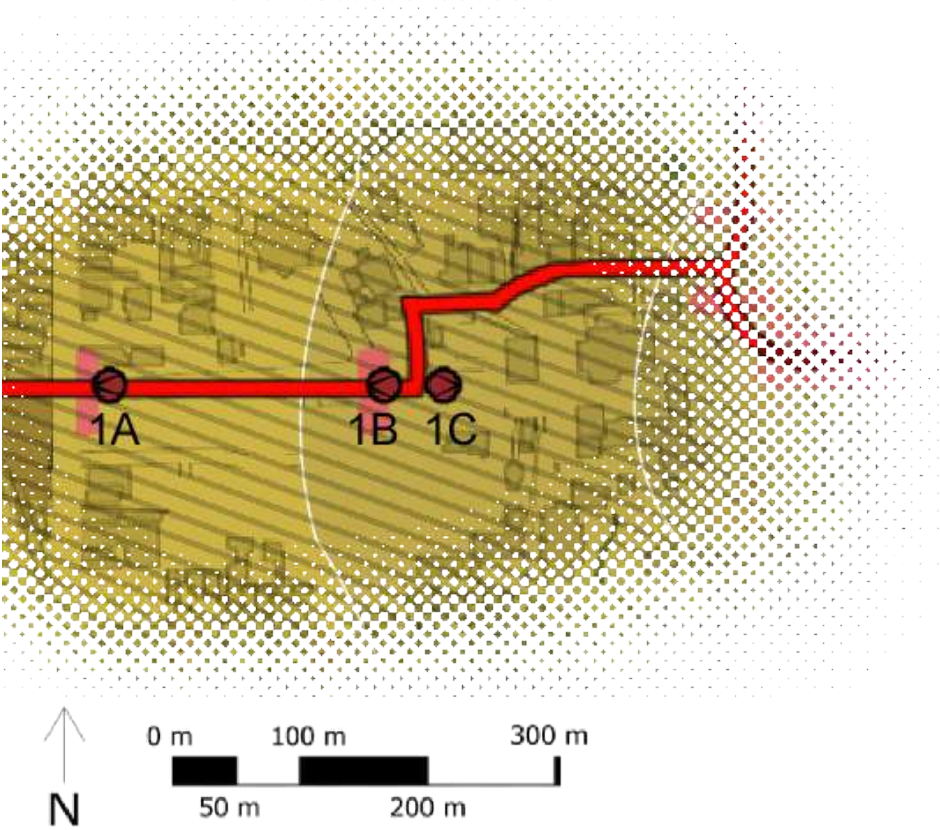


Figure 22: SV1: sequence 1A, 1B and 1C.

**1A - Framed Approach**

This image captures the entrance from a distance, offering a comprehensive view of the building’s exterior while marking the start of the journey. The elevated ground suggests a gradual ascent toward the building. As the viewer moves closer, an interplay between **”here”** and **”there”** emerge (Cullen 1971:10). There is an **anticipation** of experience as one approaches the entrance. The elevated ground suggests a gradual ascent towards the building, which adds a sense of procession. The walled sides and the lined lanterns create a guided pathway, directing attention towards the **focal point** of the entrance.



Figure 23: 1A. An elevated pathway guides the viewer towards the entrance, the picture of the entrance taken from afar.

**1B - The Closed Vista**

The view from the outside inwards. This image presents a **closed vista** of the building, capturing the immediate surroundings of the entrance. The lack of crowds and the nighttime ambiance contribute to a different perception of the space compared to daytime. The play of light from below and the sides, as opposed to the light from the sky during the day, alters the visual experience and emphasises different architectural features. Lights seem more **mysterious** as my usual connotation is that where there is light, there are people. I’m being welcomed inside by the building itself instead.



Figure 24: 1B. A closed vista of the entrance at night, where soft lighting and an absence of crowds create a mystical atmosphere, inviting the viewer inside.

**1C - Framed View Outward**

This image offers a perspective from within the building, looking outward. Cullen would likely highlight the significance of this viewpoint in terms of prospect and refuge. It is the nighttime setting and the absence of people that creates a sense of refuge within the building. The view outward becomes a framed scene, where the entrance gates are highlighted against the backdrop of the surrounding environment. This spot that is **enclosed** as it clearly forms an **”inside”** environment, **enclosed** by a literal roof and walls.



Figure 25: 1C. From within the building, a framed view of the entrance gates at night creates a sense of refuge, contrasting with the quiet surroundings outside.

### First approach through the torii gate

This first gate is highly symbolic, it's the first step through from the mundane to the sacred. The large torii gate dominates the foreground, signalling the entrance. The wide, evenly spaced elements (pavement, trees, and the torii gate) contribute to a balanced scene, with leading elements towards a **focal point** ahead.



Figure 26: perspective drawing of the entrance.  
Drawing by the author.

### Progression towards a shrine gate

The scene feels more **enclosed** compared to the first image, with the pathway narrowing slightly and the trees becoming denser, heightening the sense of focus on the destination. The second torii gate frames the shrine, acting as a threshold between the outer and inner spaces, the “**here**” and “**there**”.



Figure 27: middle point drawing, same position  
image 1A (figure 23). Drawing by the author.

### Arrival at the shrine

The space opens up, with the shrine occupying a significant portion of the view. The upward angle of the shrine, combined with the framing by the torii gate, creates a clear visual hierarchy, with the shrine positioned as the ultimate destination. Now its clear the initial **focal point** was leading towards a **closed vista**.

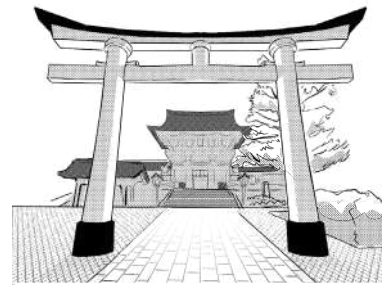


Figure 28: torii in front of the shrine not captured by photo. Drawing by the author.

### Shrine close-up

The visual focus changes from the path and torii to the shrine's more intricate details. The progression from the large-scale approach to this intimate view, gives the impression of a **closed vista**.

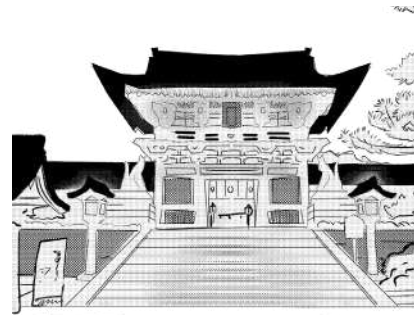


Figure 29: perspective drawing of the entrance,  
same position as 2A. Drawing by the author.

This sequence of drawings showcases the progression from the initial approach through the entrance gates to the final arrival at the shrine through a different medium. It offers a clearer, idealised representation of the space, detailed photos cannot. The consistent use of vertical elements (torii gates and trees) express **geometry**, which is pleasing to the eye (Cullen 1971:75).



**SV2: Senbon-torii**

Senbon-torii, meaning ‘a thousand torii’ (Fushimi Inari Taisha n.d.), was best experienced in daylight, as the area became unsafe at night. In notes from preceding discoveries this section is described as dynamic in the auditory dimension as well as the visual. Steps in the gravel and rock, as well as wooden clappers could be discerned before reaching the first torii gate from which point on it quietened. Even on a Monday the temple was full of people, mostly tourists.

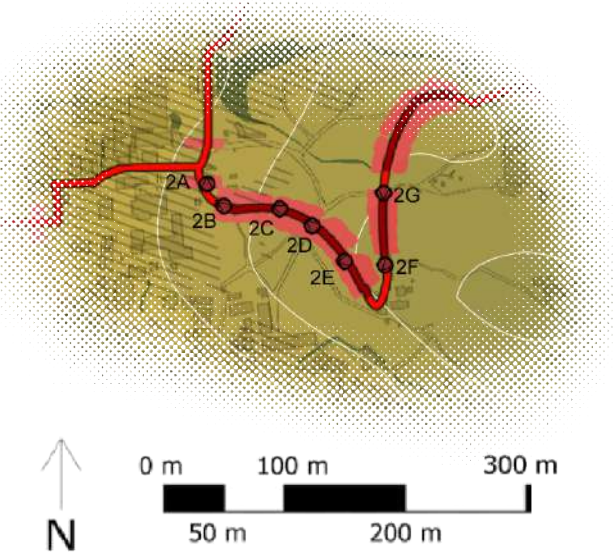


Figure 30: SV2: sequence 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D, 2E, 2F and 2G..

**2A - Progression and Deflection**

Proceeding along the angled path, by a lantern, the shift in auditory landscape became apparent as I went past the main courtyard. The steps and soft murmurs of other visitors formed the beginning of a new scene. Here, the path created a sense of progression, while the lantern served as a deflecting **focal point**, guiding the viewer’s gaze to the side of the path. The torii gate in the background is hinting at the next scene, symbolizing the **”there”**.



Figure 31: 2A. An angled path with a lantern as a deflecting focal point leads the viewer’s gaze, while the torii gate in the background hints at the next scene, symbolizing the ‘there’.

**2B - The Gateway to ”There”**

Upon reaching the grand entrance to the senbon-torii, marked by the imposing gate, there was another change in the spatial perception. The prospect of embarking on the hike signalled a transition. In Cullen’s framework, the grand entrance and torii gate represent the **”there,”** the distant element that draw the observer towards a **focal point** or destination.



Figure 32: 2B. The grand entrance to the senbon-torii marks a spatial transition.

**2C - Possession in Movement**

The photo captures crowds of people walking through the tightly packed torii gates. At this point the combination of the tightly spaced torii and constant movement of the crowd portray **narrows**, as well as **possession in movement**. Each step taken reveals a new section of the path, maintaining a sense of **anticipation**. The dense arrangement of torii gates creates a tunnel-like effect, focusing attention on the immediate surroundings and the act of passage. The gates themselves are the primary architectural content, their uniformity and repetition creating a cohesive environment.



Figure 33: 2C. Crowds navigate the tightly packed torii gates, a tunnel-like passage in possession.

**2D - Framed Pathway**

The next section shows a longer, more open stretch of the torii pathway. The gates frame the pathway, leading the eye forward. Spacing between gates allows glimpses of the natural surroundings, providing moments of visual relief and variety, while the viewer is **enclosed**. The spacing between the gates allows for a more relaxed and elongated perspective of the path. The gates act as frames. The inscriptions on the gates add detail and texture, providing points of interest that break the visual monotony.



Figure 34: 2D. A longer stretch of the torii pathway, where the gates frame the path and offer glimpses of the natural surroundings.



### 2E -Beckoning Lanterns

A row of lanterns outside the gates are beckoning for exploration. Each representing a **significant object** with their unexpected visual impact.



Figure 35: 2E. Scattered lanterns outside the gates beckons the viewer to explore further.

### 2F - The Tree as an Incident

The tree towering over the torii tunnel as an **incident** in the otherwise consistent row of trees.



Figure 36: 2F. Tree towering outside the torii, as a striking interruption.

### 2G - Interruption and Continuity

The first break in the continuity of the torii gates, a small relief. This interruption in the sequence introduces a pause, allowing visitors to momentarily step out of the repetitive rhythm of the gates. and creates an emotional contrast. Visitors can absorb the change in scenery, heightening their **anticipation** for the resumption of the gates ahead. The resumption of the gates further ahead re-establishes the pattern, creating a sense of continuity and coherence in the journey. This continuation reinforces the serial vision, as visitors transition from one framed experience to the next.

The torii makes a great example for what Cullen describes as **metaphor** in regards to content (Cullen 1971:70). Torii gates are typically placed at the entrances of Shinto shrines to mark the transition from the everyday world to the sacred space within (JAANUS 2001b). This passage from the mundane to the sacred has a considerable cognitive and symbolic meaning and as such acts as a **metaphor**. Torii gates are a physical manifestation that amplifies the perception of “**here**” and “**thereness**”.

Preceding analysis, from the perspective of phenomenology, noted the serene atmosphere and rustling leaves. The torii were experienced like layers. The progression through the gates in the following images captures the dynamic aspect of serial vision, where the experience is **not static** but evolves as one moves. This movement engages the observer, creating a narrative of spatial progression that is central to Cullen’s theory and will continue to be presented in the coming serial visions.



Figure 37: 2G. First torii clearing, offers a moment of pause.



SV3: Shin-ike pond

The alternation between open spaces and enclosed pathways strengthen the sense of place, providing moments of rest amid the torii gates. Ascending the stone steps to the pond, the gradual incline could be felt. From this point on sections with steeper steps start to appear more. Notes from preceding field studies mention the sounds from the pond and nearby flowing water and the crickets.

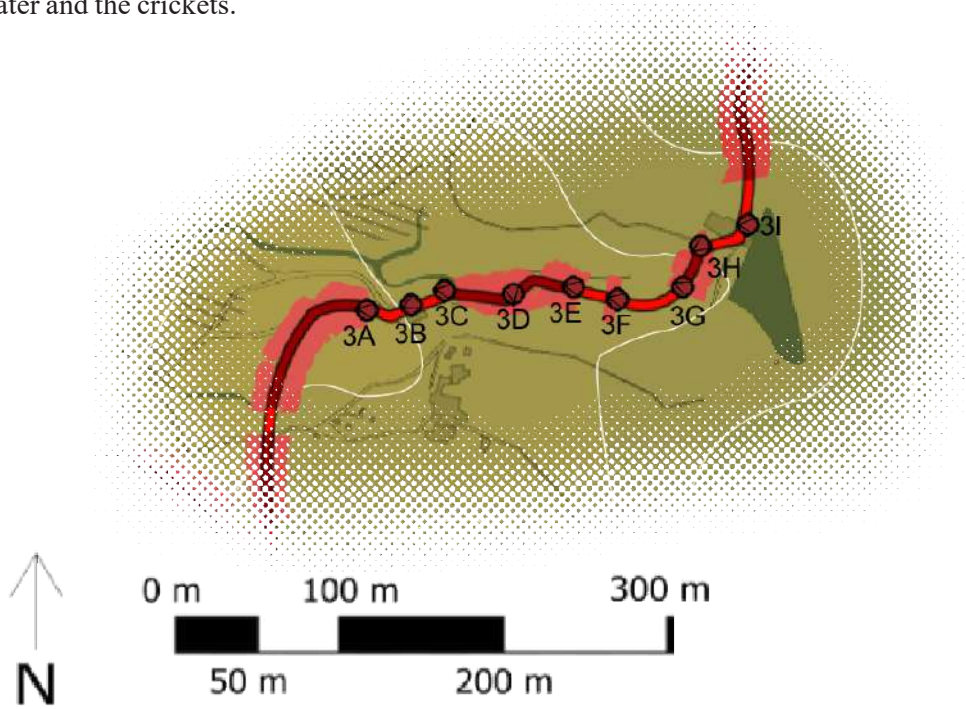


Figure 38: SV3: sequence 3A, 3B, 3C, 3D, 3E, 3F, 3G, 3H and 3I.

3A - Leaving Enclosure to Open Space

Arriving at an open space where the torii gates briefly end, allowing visitors to move freely without the feeling of enclosure. This creates a momentary pause in the journey, providing visual relief and a chance to reorient. People in traditional clothing signal about the function of place.



Figure 39: 3A. A brief open space where the torii gates end, offering a moment of visual relief and a chance for visitors to pause.

3B - Transition and Closing in on the Maw

Here is a transition as visitors approach the next sequence of torii gates. This transition reintroduces the pattern of the gates, drawing the visitors back into the pathway.



Figure 40: 3B. The maw of the next approach, the pattern draws them back into the pathway.

3C - The Enclosed Path

The image shows the re-entry into the enclosed path of torii gates, continuing the journey through the shrine.



Figure 41: 3C. Moment before re-entry to the enclosed path of torii gates.



### 3D - At A Line of Advantage

The sound of running water along the trail creates a subtle yet compelling line of **advantage**, drawing people toward it (Cullen 1971: 24). Much like the preference for standing along the parapet of a bridge to enjoy the immediacy of its view and position, the flowing stream becomes a sensory **focal point**.



Figure 42: 3D. A rippling stream along the trail draws the viewer's attention, creating a sensory focal point..

### 3E - Concealment of The Stairs Ahead

Ahead the next set of stairs come gradually into view. The torii concealing what's at the top, inducing a sense of **anticipation**.



Figure 43: 3E. The next set of stairs gradually comes into view, with the torii gates ahead concealing what lies at the top



**3F - Staircase Framing the Focal Point**

The staircase leads the eye upwards, drawing attention to the torii gate at the top. The framing of the torii gate by the trees and the stairs provides a **focal point**, guiding the observer’s view.



Figure 44: 3F The staircase directs the gaze upward, with the torii gate framed by trees, creating a clear focal point at the top.

**3G - A Ritual of Sound and Direction**

The viewer’s eye is guided from the flowing water of the basin to the sign. The water basin is a common element in Japanese shrines, serving as a purification station (JAANUS 2001a). According to local legend, clapping your hands in front of this pond will cause an echo to return from the direction where a lost person can be found (Fushimi Inari Taisha n.d.).



Figure 45: 3G. Water basin and sign, symbolising a ritual of purification.



### 3H - Movement Through Viscosity

A **narrow** path leads the observer through a series of views, with shops and structures providing points of interest along the way. This sequential visual experience creates a sense of movement and exploration, a **viscosity**. The mix of commercial and cultural elements reflects an interaction between daily life and spiritual practice.



Figure 46: 3H. A narrow path lined with shops and structures offers a sequential visual journey, blending daily life with commercialism and shintoism.

### 3I - Enclosure and Intimacy

The serial vision concludes with an intimate, detailed view of the shrine's interior, focusing on the altar and the sacred objects within. The **enclosed** space of the shrine interior emphasises its separation from the outside world, representing an **enclosed**, indoor landscape.



Figure 47: 3I. An intimate view of the shrine's interior, where the altar and sacred objects create a serene, enclosed landscape, separate from the outside world.



**SV4: The crossroads**

At a later point the trip will cross this path again on the way back, in a sense this area is also SV number 10.

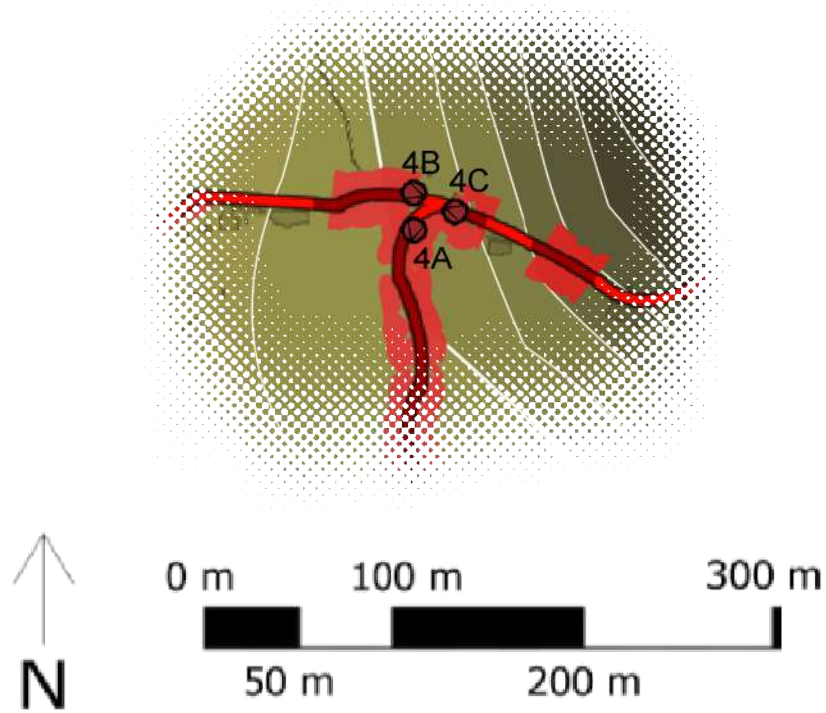


Figure 48: SV4: sequence 4A, 4B and 4C.

**4A - The Pause for Orientation**

Capturing a moment of orientation, where the observer is pausing to look at a map. The content here is **functional**, serving as a guidepost for visitors. The traditional elements like the stone lantern blend with modern informational signs, reflecting the integration of old and new.



Figure 49: 4A. Man looking at a map where stone lanterns meet informational signs..

**4B - A Handsome Gesture**

This fork in the road stands between a left and right path, the left leading back to the main shrine area and will be returned to at a later time on the journey. The presence of inscriptions on the torii add historical context, but also express what Cullen would call a **handsome gesture** (Cullen 1971:42).



Figure 50: 4B. A fork in the path framed by torii, where inscription embody Cullen's concept of a handsome gesture.



#### 4C - Threshold and Cultural Context

The right path continues on as the main pilgrimage towards the summit. It opens up to a break with a new shop area. The gate acts as a threshold, marking a significant point of entry. The presence of people dressed in traditional attire adds to the cultural context, highlighting the site's role as both a tourist destination and a place of cultural significance.



Figure 51: 4C. The gate serves as a threshold, leading to a shop area.



**SV5: Labyrinth of otsuka and open view of Kyoto**

The fifth serial vision covers the arrival to the first viewpoint of the trail. In the preceding studies it is noted that the distant mountains weren't as visible because of rain. The fox statues made the biggest impression. Each is carved in pairs, and placed together with the otsuka (worshipping stone). The statues represent yin and yang (Taiyo 2019). Furthermore, visitors had the option to buy smaller torii gates inscribed with their names to place on the otsuka behind them.

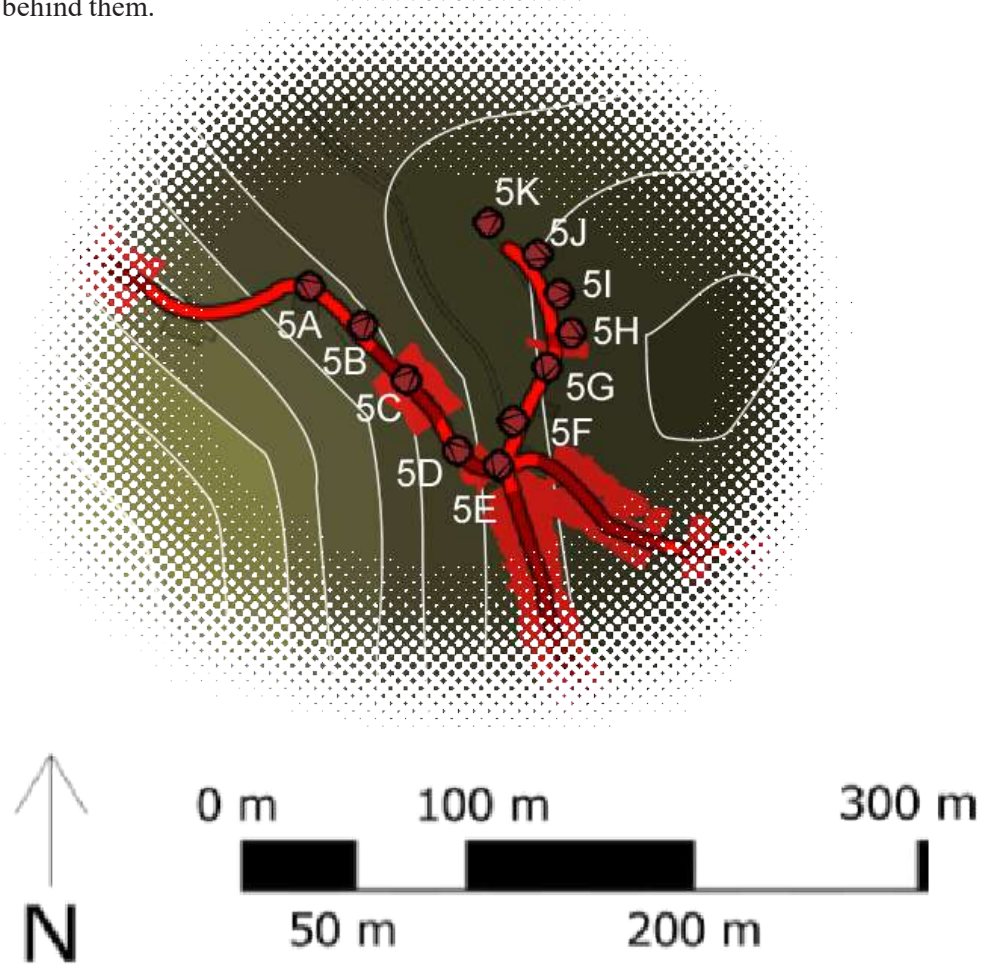


Figure 52: SV5: sequence 5A, 5B, 5C, 5D, 5E, 5F, 5G, 5H, 5I, 5J and 5K.

**5A - Ascending Towards a Destination**

The serial vision starts with a long, ascending staircase, guiding the observer's eye upwards towards the destination at the top. The linear, gradual progression up the steps creates a sense of **anticipation**. The staircase is flanked by natural terrain on one side and a man-made structure on the other, creating a contrasting environment, that represents the **juxtaposition** of the site. The presence of people at the top, seemingly at pause, suggests an endpoint.



Figure 53: 5A. An ascending staircase guides the observer's gaze upward, flanked by natural terrain and man-made structure, building anticipation towards the destination at the top.



### 5B - Barrier and Sky

On the side of the path the view is blocked by a high metal fence with deterring barbed wire. The silhouette contrasts from the wholesome experience of the climb so far, but it also offers a connection to the sky and **nets** it, as an imperfect filigree.



Figure 54: 5B. A high metal fence with barbed wire disrupts the serene path, yet its silhouette offers a fragmented connection to the sky, creating an imperfect yet intriguing frame.

### 5C - A Shift to Infinity

After the climb, the view opens up to a broad, panoramic vista of the city. This serves as a visual reward, providing a stark contrast to the **enclosed** experience of the torii pathways in previous serial visions. The distant mountains and cityscape add depth, and makes the sky feel more expansive providing a sense of openness and freedom, it tangents on Cullen's definition of **infinity** (Cullen 1971:50).



Figure 55: 5C. A sweeping view of the city unfolds, offering a vast, open horizon that contrasts with the enclosed pathways of the torii gates.



**5D - At Crossroads with Static Possession**  
Going further up there are benches and places for refuge. The nature of the place is sort of a crossroad with openness. People are taking the place in **static possession**.



Figure 56: 5D. At the crossroads further up, benches and open spaces offer refuge, where visitors pause to take static possession of the environment.

**5E - Framed Progression**  
Another framing moment by the torii toward a linear upward progression, drawing the eye forward through the pathway.



Figure 57: 5E. A framing moment created by the torii gates, guiding the eye upward along the linear pathway.

**5F - Juxtaposing Sacred and Commercial**  
And another mix between commercial and sacred environment. In this shop small torii are sold as well as souvenirs. The bright colours and varied textures of the shop create a visual contrast with the uniformity of the torii gates.



Figure 58: 5F A shop selling small torii and souvenirs contrasts the vibrant colors and textures of commerce with the uniformity of the sacred gates.



#### 5G - Closed Vista: Shrine and Torii Enclosure

Here lies the main shrine of the area. Creating a **closed vista** framed by the torii. Surrounding this area lies many otsuka, more densely than other areas along the trail.



Figure 59: 5G. The main shrine, framed by the torii gates, creates a closed vista surrounded by a dense collection of otsuka.

#### 5H - Path of Lanterns and Gates

The path continues through an area with numerous stone lanterns and small gates, maintaining the sense of **mystery**.



Figure 60: 5H. A pathway lined with stone lanterns and small gates creates a sequence of views, enriching the sense of journey and mystery.



**5I - Led by Red Fences**  
The red fences along the pathway provide a visual guide, containing and leading the observer's movement along.



Figure 61: 5I. Red fences frame the pathway, directing movement.

**5J - Transition and Reveal**  
The open pathway leading to an overlook signifies the transition from **enclosed**, sacred spaces to an open viewpoint.



Figure 62: 5J. An open pathway unfolds into a viewpoint, marking the transition from enclosed sacred spaces to an expansive, outward vista.



### 5K - The Panorama

The panoramic view from the overlook provides a sort of visual climax. The wide, open view of the cityscape creates a sense of vastness and freedom, **juxtaposing** with the confined torii pathways.



Figure 63: 5K. A sweeping view from the overlook offers a contrast to the enclosed pathways



**SV6: Beginning of the looping trail around Mt. Inari**  
The trail is getting more dim from here, and there are less people for the trail going round the mountain. In the preceding study there was note of the contrasting openness and new paths appearing. As well as the sign creating a great sense of **anticipation** for the summit further ahead.

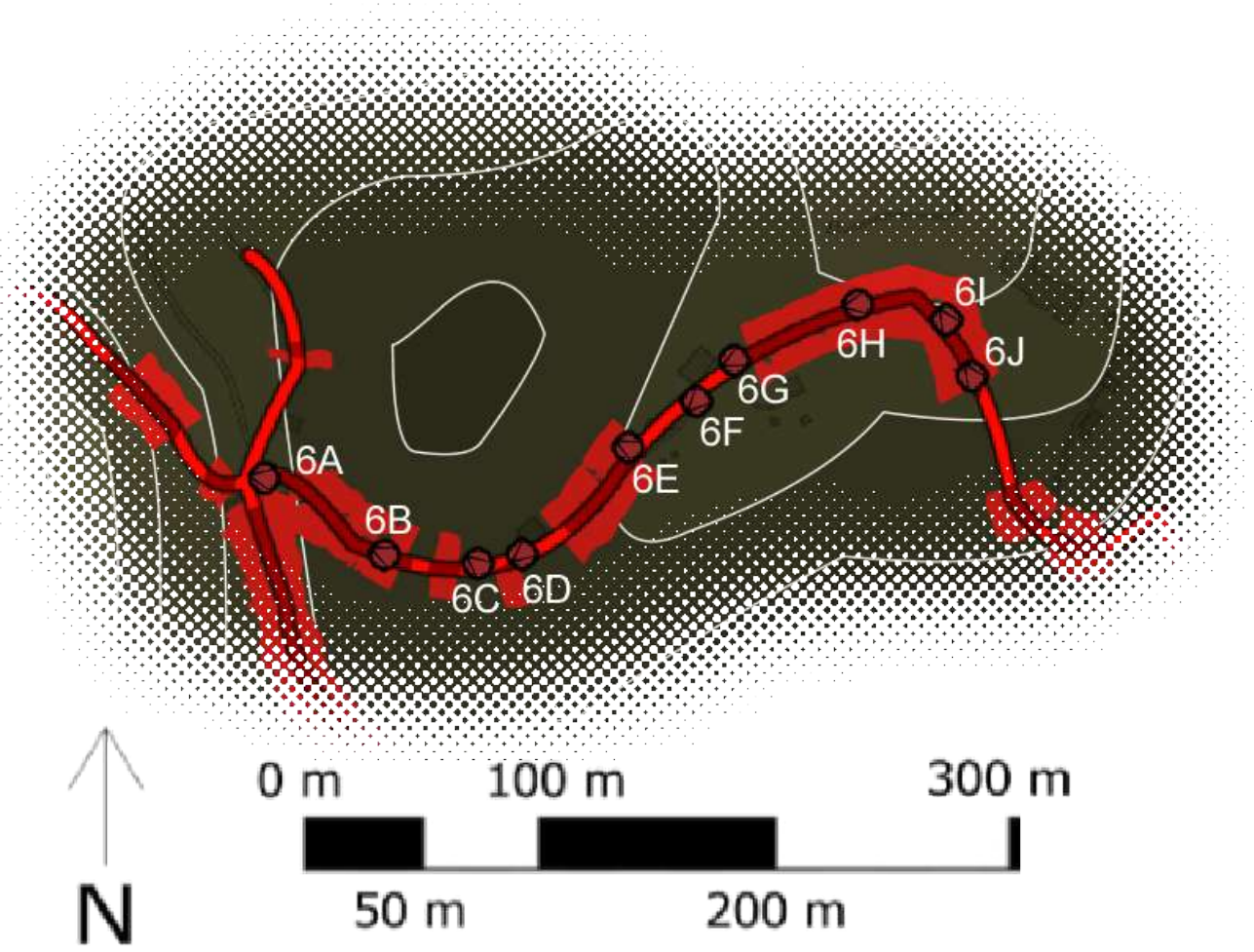


Figure 64: SV6: sequence 6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E, 6F, 6G, 6H, 6I and 6J.

**6A - Constriction**  
The journey continues with another enclosing torii pathway. But fewer people occupy the space than earlier. The reduced presence of people amplifies the sense of constriction. The **narrowing** of the pathway creates a spatial pressure, akin to the crowding together of buildings in an urban setting (Cullen 1971:45).



Figure 65: 6A. The torii pathway narrows ahead, with fewer people now occupying the space,

**6B - The Torii Tunnel**  
The torii tunnel does feel like one singular structure rather than many small gates. The torii, is a portal on its own, but the amalgamation creates a greater whole as the portal turns into a tunnel, giving a physical display of the long history of gratitude expressed at this location.



Figure 66: 6B. The torii gates merge into a singular tunnel, creating a continuous portal that embodies the layered history of gratitude



### 6C - New Perspective

The side view of the torii gates introduces a new angle, this perspective highlights the density and complexity of the torii gate arrangement. This change in perspective provides visual variety, the main path leads to the side of the pathway which breaks from earlier patterns on the journey.



Figure 67: 6C. A side view of the torii gates reveals their dense arrangement.

### 6D - Viscosity: Human Activity Along the Pathway

A shop mirroring the shrine, where you can buy candles for the shrine or charms. The presence of people interacting with elements along the pathway adds a layer of human activity, showing the space in **viscosity**. The pathway's sacred nature is maintained, but human interaction brings it to life, emphasising its role as a lived, functional space.



Figure 68: 6D. A shop mirroring the shrine, where visitors purchase candles and charms, adding a sense of viscosity as human activity enlivens the pathway.



6E - Sense of Place and Atmosphere

Candles, running water and torii gates by the shrine enhances the sense of place. There’s many details to observe and understand. The atmosphere is **mysterious** with the living candles.



Figure 69: 6E. "Candles, running water, and torii gates near the shrine create a mystical atmosphere.

6F - Juxtaposing Sacred and Everyday

Here a broader view of the pathway is introduced, showing adjacent buildings and informational signs. The mixture of sacred gates and everyday structures provides an integration between the **juxtaposing** spiritual practice and daily life.



Figure 70: 6FA broader view of the pathway reveals the interplay between sacred torii gates and everyday structures, blending spiritual practice with daily life.

6G - Wayfinding

Here is a directional sign pointing towards the top, guiding the observer’s journey and creating **anti-cipation** for the summit. The area serves as both a way finding point and a transitional space.



Figure 71: 6G. A directional sign guides the journey upward, marking the space as both a moment of anticipation and a step toward the summit.

6H - The Deflected Vista

There is a curved pathway adding a new visual element to the journey. The curve breaks the linear progression, offering a moment of visual pause. The proximity of the building and the continuation of torii gates create a **juxtaposition** of built and sacred environments.



Figure 72: 6H. A curved pathway interrupts the linear journey, offering a visual pause.



### 6I - Vertical Frames

This image shows a pathway flanked by fences and torii gates. The visual repetition of vertical elements (gates and fences) creates a strong sense of direction, enhancing the sense of **geometry** and experience of movement.



Figure 73: 6I. A pathway lined with torii gates and fences, where the repetition of vertical elements guides the viewer's movement and strengthens the sense of direction.

### 6J - Fences

The image captures a downward pathway towards torii gates, offering a new perspective. As the pathway descends, a sense of progression and movement is introduced, with the diminishing perspective of the gates drawing attention to the change in elevation. Here, the fence becomes the leading element, its open nature contrasting with the more enclosed form of the torii gates.



Figure 74: 6J. A downward pathway towards the torii gates creates a sense of progression, with the open fence guiding the journey.



SV7: Fluorescent lights

Artificial lights shine bright in a dimmer section of the mountain. When I arrived at Mt. Inari, the shrines, stone fox statues and torii are to be seen all around, by the foot of the mountain and at the summit. As I walk up the mountain the main visuals are of the torii, shrines and occasional viewpoints (and vendor houses with vending machines). There are no places for rest other than inside vendor cafes, the main phenomenological, or bodily, experience is the physical walk. And the sounds of the crowd or an occasional nearby streams.

Here, the traditional Japanese elements like the torii gates, stone lanterns, and altars, along with the rough stone steps and moss-covered surfaces, provide rich content. The mixture of natural materials and traditional architectural forms is visually striking. The repetition of orange (for here the colour appears more orange than red as before) gates, stone structures, and forest elements contribute to the uniqueness and identity of the place. There is a sense of intimacy and **mystery** when walking between gates as the lighting is colder and more dramatic.

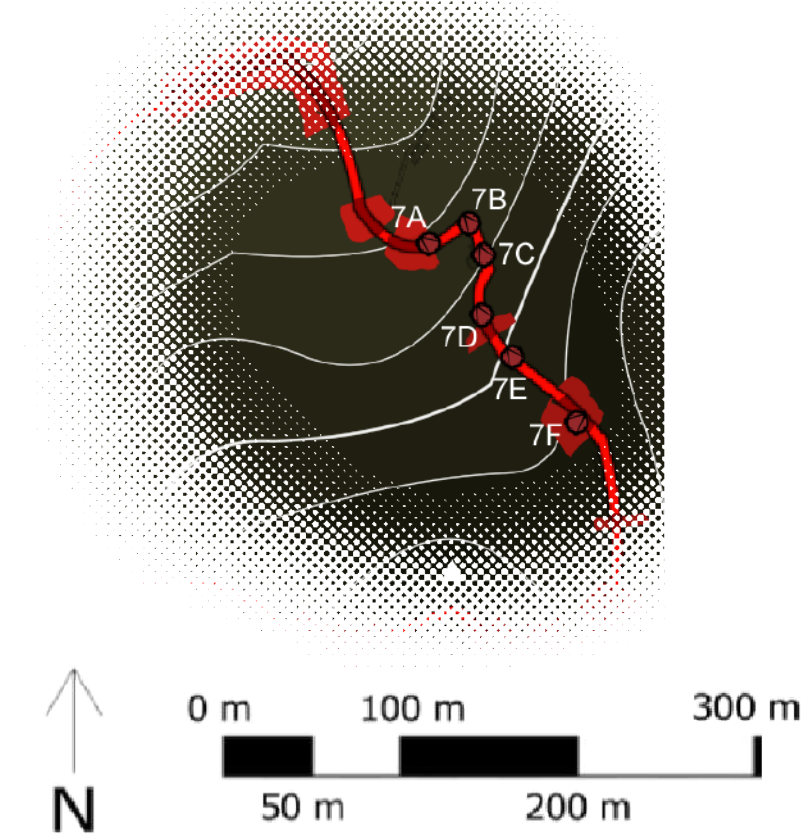


Figure 75: SV7: sequence 7A, 7B, 7C, 7D, 7E and 7F.

7A - Intimate Functional Place

This image captures an intimate place within the shrine complex. The wooden benches, low tables, and overhead canopy in this image are functional elements that suggest this is a space for resting or conducting work. The moss-covered surfaces add a natural atmosphere. The overall layout communicates a sense of humility and simplicity.



Figure 76: 7A. A quiet corner within the shrine complex, an intimate resting space.

7B - Otherworldly Transition

The torii gate acts as both a visual and symbolic gateway representing a transitional place, where visitors are moving between spaces, emphasising the journey rather than the destination. The stone steps and lanterns add to the solemn content. The verticality and diagonal stairs criss-crossing add to the otherworldly atmosphere, invoking **mystery**.



Figure 77: 7B. The torii gate marks a symbolic and visual threshold.



**7C - From "Here" to "There"**

Progression from previous frame. Visitors are guided through this **narrow**, linear space, experience a sense of **enclosure**. The place is designed to channel movement upward towards the shrine, making this a moment of transition but also an essential part of the overall experience.



Figure 78: 7C. Path continues with more torii gates and stone steps.

**7D - Contrast and Ascent**

The orange torii gates stand out against the green foliage, creating a striking visual contrast. The steps and railing add functionality to the content, making the ascent physically manageable for visitors. Here, the space is less **enclosed**, allowing for a more expansive feeling. The lighting adds a gentle illumination that makes the place feel calm and slightly otherworldly.



Figure 79: 7D. Approaching the steep steps framed by lush green foliage, which create a vivid contrast along the gently illuminated pathway..

**7E - Possession in the Ascent**

The stone and metal railings introduce a functional element, ensuring safety while ascending. It is a place of movement, where visitors are not expected to linger but instead progress upward to the shrine, taking **possession in movement**.



Figure 80: 7E. Ascending the shrine's higher reaches, metal railings guide the upward journey

**7F (see next page) - Arrival Prelude**

This is a transitional place with a more defined sense of arrival. This place is similar to the previous one in that it is a transitional space. The space feels open yet focused due to the alignment of the gates and the forest surroundings. The natural light filtering through the trees and the lamps along the path create a blend of **enclosure** and openness, and a contrast. The area feels like a prelude to the final destination.











### SV8: Reaching the summit

These images represent a journey that moves from **enclosed** spaces to a climactic destination, **punctuated** by the torii gates and stone steps. The interplay between natural surroundings and spiritual structures exemplifies Gordon Cullen's townscape principles, focusing on the sequential unfolding of space and meaning.

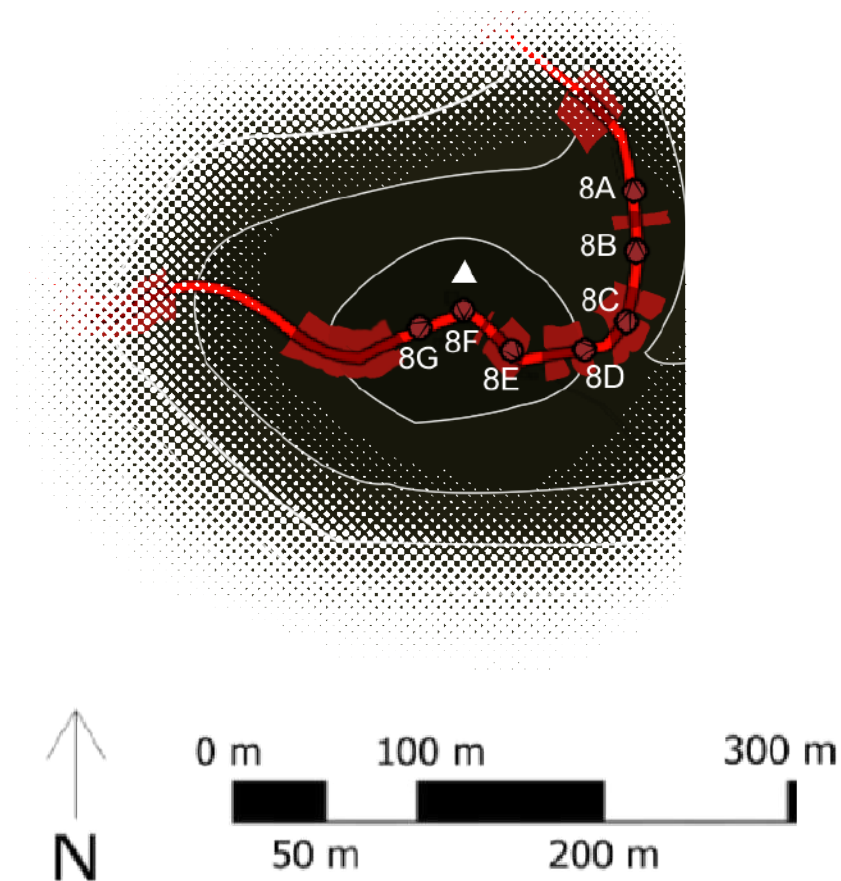


Figure 82: SV8: sequence 8A, 8B, 8C, 8D, 8E, 8F and 8G.

### 8A - Occupation and Function

Visiting Inari Taisha were many couples, as well as high school students and tourists. Every group commands the space with **possession in movement**. But the use of space, the function, differs.



Figure 83: 8A. A couple walking along the gentle sloped path. Couples, students, and tourists occupy Inari Taisha, each group engaging with the space in unique ways, reflecting varied functions and uses.



### 8B - Lanterns and Torii

The tall stone lanterns line up along the path, drawing the eye in a similar way to the torii. The difference being the more open character and the omitting light.



Figure 84: 8B. The same couple stopping to observe something outside the torii, going from possession in movement to viscosity.

### 8C - From Shade to Light

The start of the final upward path. Natural light starts to come back, the clearer atmosphere becomes more bright as you ascend.



Figure 85: 8C. Ascending the final path, natural light gradually returns, brightening the atmosphere with each step.



#### 8D - Steps

This tunnel is not much different from earlier. The biggest difference is the steepness is greater than before, and the experience of the light is shifting. 8D is a mid-point of the ascent on this side of the mountain.



Figure 86: 8D. Steep corridor of torii continues, playing of the light..

#### 8E - Turn with Anticipation

The slight turn in the path introduces a sense of discovery. A transitional space, where movement toward the sacred space is emphasised by the progression of steps and the framing of the gates.



Figure 87: 8E. Turn along the path reveals yet another set of torii gates, creating a sense of discovery.



### 8F - Infinity

The open sky contrasts with the enclosed feeling of earlier images. The large, ancient stones wrapped with ritual shimenawa ropes signify spiritual significance.

The final image embodies Cullen's concept of **infinity**. The journey through the dense torii gates and enclosed steps culminates in this open, expansive scene. The rocks and their connection to the sky evoke a sense of timelessness and continuation, suggesting that although the visitor has reached a destination, the essence of the shrine extends infinitely. The open sky creates a feeling of vastness, while the ritualistic stones ground the viewer in the immediate moment.

In Gordon Cullen's theory, the concepts of "**here**" and "**there**" refer to the spatial relationship between the viewer's immediate surroundings and what lies beyond—a psychological or physical tension between the present and the future, the known and the unknown. The concept of "**here**" and "**there**" is represented by the contrast between the immediate foreground (the sacred stones and the ground) and the open space beyond (the sky and forest in the background).

Here, there is both a sense of arrival and a sense of continued journey beyond the physical destination.



Figure 88: 8F. The journey culminates where the sky opens up. The contrast between the sacred stones and the vast open sky captures the tension between the immediate present and the infinite sky.

### 8G - Handsome Gestures

Upon having reached the top, the descent now have torii gates facing you with their inscriptions now showing. Much like the quiet, ordinary streets of urban landscapes, these torii gates display a modest yet meaningful expression. The text, much like gilded lettering illuminating a **narrow street**, serves as a simple yet significant detail that enhances the experience (Cullen 1971:42), breaking up the solid red, now each gate has its own story on display.



Figure 89: 8G. The journey back down looks slightly different, with meaningful detail.



**SV9: Peak within the peak**

The experience of landscape is primarily through seeing, but when in the midst of the walk through Mt. Inari I realise that the visual has been minimised to, or concentrated into, the red torii surrounding me. In discussions of phenomenology of landscapes and its principles this is highly unusual, as seeing during the journey is the paramount experience of the landscape – entering and exit different spaces is constant and what has a meaningful effect on our feelings of participation while exploring the landscape (Swales 2016). In a sense, the theme of Inari Taisha is repetition. When reaching the summit and moving on you end up in what feels like a replica of the summit shrines (summit to Harrushigesha shrine), a bit of a surreal experience. And when you do enter a new room it’s always quite impactful- seeing either a city panorama or a shrine. The shrines were typically enveloped between the forest, torii and vendor buildings, intimate spaces.

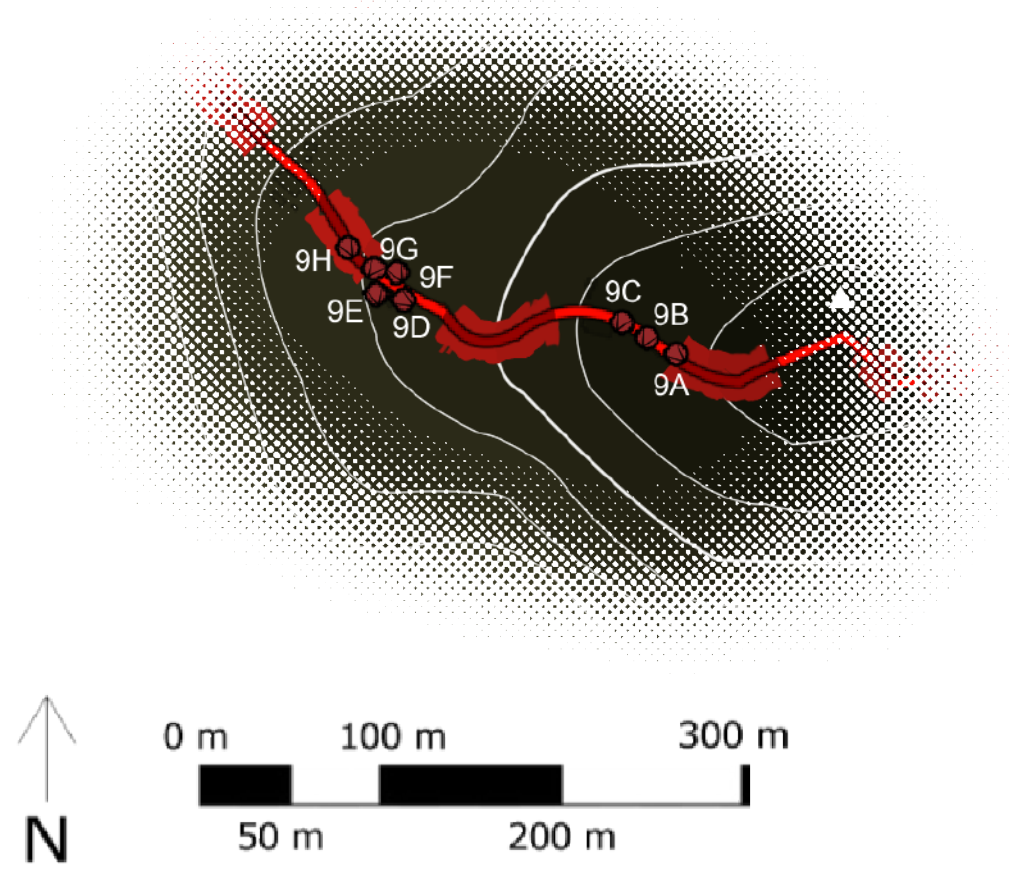


Figure 90: SV9: sequence 9A, 9B, 9C, 9D, 9E, 9F, 9G and 9H.

**9A - Anticipation for the Next**

Arriving at another shrine area after the peak. Descending the mountain, the view that unfolds here is less about the upward **anticipation** of the climb and more about the gradual return to the everyday world. After the openness and expansiveness of the mountain’s peak, this image reintroduces a sense of **enclosure**.



Figure 91: 9A. Arriving toward a another cluster of otsuka.

**9B - A Clash**

The white bags in this image appear to be sandbags, likely used for erosion control or flood prevention. The bags could also be part of temporary measures for maintaining the landscape or infrastructure around the shrine area. They create a visual interruption to the sense of place, the bags creating a tension between the picturesque and the pragmatic.



Figure 92: 9B. Corner with a heap of functional sandbags.

**9C - Punctuation**

This third image presents a familiar visual scene—another hill with a series of sacred structures leading upward to a peak-like area. Each peak reached does not represent an endpoint but a **punctuation**.



Figure 93: 9C. A series of sacred structures mark the ascent, each peak acting as a pause rather than a final destination.



#### 9D - The Maw

In this context, the "maw" refers to an opening or gateway that consumes the visitor, drawing them from one space into another (Cullen 1971:50). It acts as a point of transition, where the familiar and known give way to the unknown or to a shift in experience. The large, framing Torii gate in the image creates this effect.



Figure 94: 9D. Approaching the maw, drawing in the visitor.

#### 9E & 9F - Relationship in the Scene

The scene below is showing the relation between the maw and the **significant object**, before the continuation of the descent.



Figure 95: 9E. Relationship, maw on left.



Figure 96: 9F. Relationship, basin on the right.

#### 9G - Significant Object: The Purification Basin

Cleanse basin welcoming people arriving from this side of the shrine area. The dragon-shaped fountainhead at the purification basin is a clear example of a **significant object**. This dragon fountainhead is not only a decorative or symbolic object but also a **functional** one. Visitors use the water from the fountainhead to wash their hands and mouths in a cleansing ritual before approaching the shrine (JAANUS 2001a).



Figure 97: 9G. Close-up of the dragon-shaped fountainhead.

#### 9H - Change of Level

Continuing the serial vision, levels significantly influence our experience of space: descending creates a sense of moving into the known, evoking **intimacy and enclosure** (Cullen 1971:38). The slope leads away from the openness of the shrine towards a more **enclosed** space. The journey downward mirrors Cullen's concept of levels as a narrative tool, marking a transition from the elevated unknown into the known.

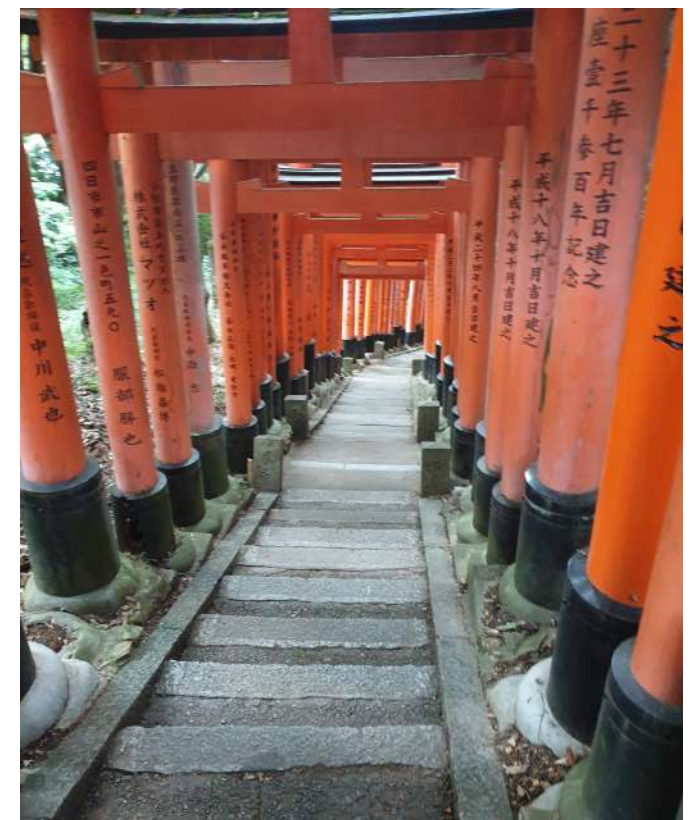


Figure 98: 9H. Steep stairs going down the torii enclosure.



**SV10: The loop concludes**

These images depict the descent from a peak back into the world below. Place shifts from an intimate, sacred descent to a more expansive and reflective view of the world below, marking the return to the ordinary.

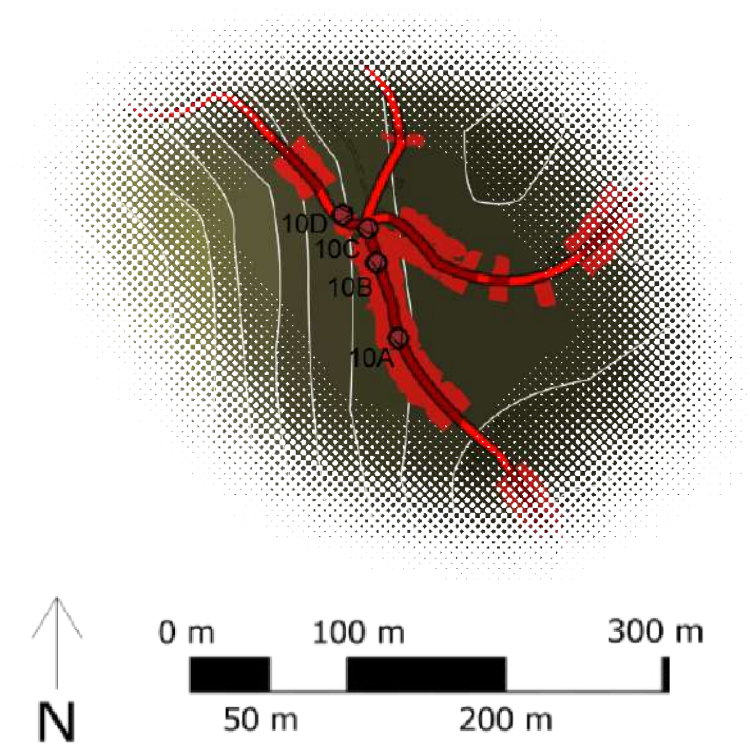


Figure 99: SV10: sequence 10A, 10B, 10C and 10D.

**10A - Progression Downwards**

The tightly enclosed gates create a sense of containment, marking this place as a liminal space between the spiritual experience above and the more familiar world below.

The symbolism of each gate marks the visitor’s journey back toward normalcy. The torii are no longer blank, text grabs your attention. The presence of text on the gates adds a layer of cultural and social meaning to the descent. The inscriptions, often names of families, companies, or individuals who donated the gates, connect the traveller to the community that supports and sustains the shrine (Taiyo 2019).



Figure 100: 10A. Tunnel of torii gates along the steep descent.

**10B - Entering Enclave**

This resting area represents a pause. The shelter structure provides shade and protection, an **enclave**.



Figure 101: 10B. Enclave where the observer is at a point of command..

**10C - Leaving Enclave**

Leaving the **enclave** to the open space, we returned to the main crossroad area, as shown in serial vision 5.



Figure 102: 10C. Exit enclave, greeted by a city vista.



### 10D - Vista

This is a symbolic place of departure, where visitors, having reached their spiritual peak, now transition back into the secular world. The gate serves them a final moment of reflection before the return to everyday life. The content here is particularly striking: the contrast between the bright orange gates and the expansive city below. The gates represent the spiritual journey, while the city symbolises the real world. This contrast embodies the duality of the experience—an immersion into the sacred, followed by a return to the ordinary.

Figure 103: 10D. A vibrant orange gate marks the symbolic transition from the spiritual realm back to the everyday world, with the city below emphasizing the contrast between the sacred and the secular.



**SV11: Leaving the mountain**

These images depict the final descent from the mountain shrine. We can see how the visual rhythm of torii gates and sacred markers gradually gives way to more mundane, everyday spaces. The experience becomes one of closure.

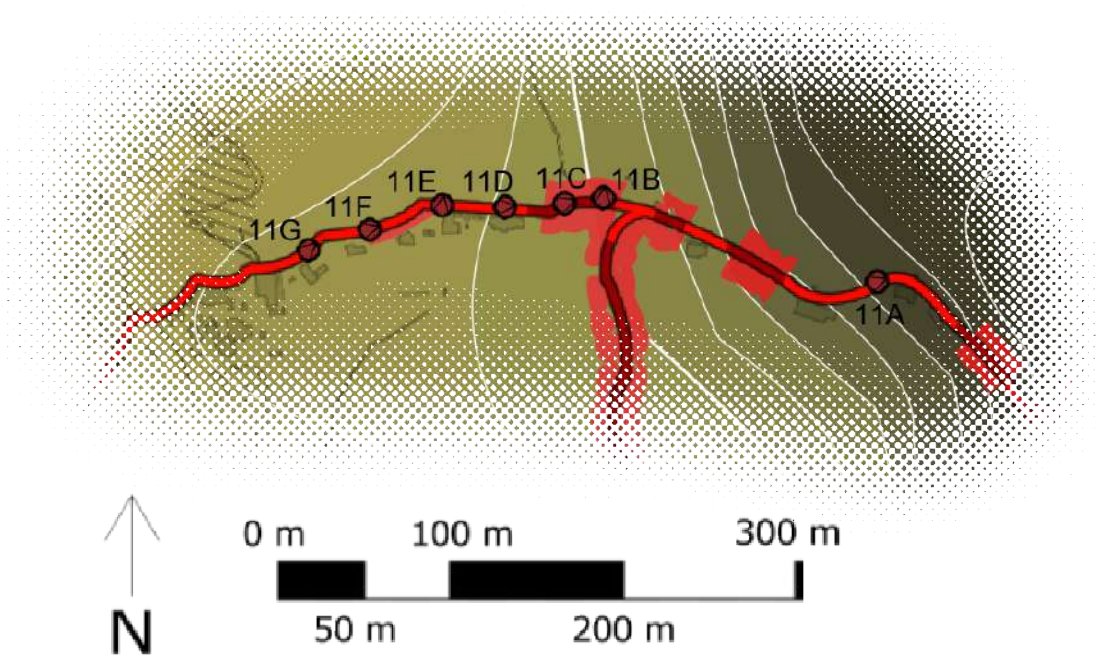


Figure 104: SV11: sequence 11A, 11B, 11C, 11D, 11E, 11F and 11G.

**11A - Commanding Perspective**

View down from a point of elevation. This change in level invokes a sense of strenght and command over an area. The roofs are visible, giving the visitor a completely new perspective of the area.



Figure 105: 11A. Now the roofs of buildings you only saw the facade of before are visible.

**11B - Relationships at the Crossroad**

Back to the crossroads (SV4), a key point from earlier on the trail. The path, surrounded by natural elements and aligned with the gates, creates a dialogue between the man-made structures (torii gates) and the natural world.



Figure 106: 11B. Back at the crossroads, now from an outside perspective..

**11C - Structured Pathway**

The path straightens, signalling a more structured, grounded experience as the visitor nears the exit of the shrine area. The orange pillars inscribed with text continue to convey meaning.



Figure 107: 11C. The gentle slope welcomes you back down.



### 11D - A Backstreet

This visual widening of the path prepares the visitor for re-entering a more open, less ritualistic space, symbolising the gradual return to normalcy. The houses and natural surroundings on the periphery signals this too.



Figure 108: 11D. Residential and commercial structures appear.

### 11E - Netting the Sky

The sideways placements of torii invite the visitors to new clusters of otsuka, they also work as a **netting** element capturing the sky with the silhouettes.



Figure 109: 11E. Many torii are now placed sideways.

### 11F - Neutral Space and a Lack of Torii

The absence of torii gates in this part of the path signals the separation from earlier, where the torii was a constant. You are no longer surrounded by gates or ritual markers, but by everyday objects, providing a visual cue that the sacred experience has ended. This place feels more neutral, with fewer elements tying it to the shrine. The atmosphere here is more relaxed, with everyday features like houses and pathways.



Figure 110: 11F. A neutral space, the ordinary, where houses and everyday objects signal the end of the shrine experience. .

### 11G - Downward Descent

The stairs lead the eye downward, marking the final steps in the trail. The framing of the house and the nearby path signify a return to the everyday, ordinary world, with the shrine's influence gradually fading into the background. This descent feels practical and grounded. The content here is mundane.



Figure 111: 11G. Maybe we are lost? The atmosphere has changed greatly from before to a feeling of being at a commercial backdoor.



SV12: At the backdoor of the beginning

These images, as part of the final moments of the trail, depict the transition from the sacred shrine space back into the everyday life of the city. Using Gordon Cullen’s theory of serial vision, we see the gradual unfolding of the journey, where sacred elements like the torii gates give way to urban features, shops, and homes. Place is represented as a liminal zone—neither fully sacred nor fully secular, while the content blends spiritual markers with the mundane.

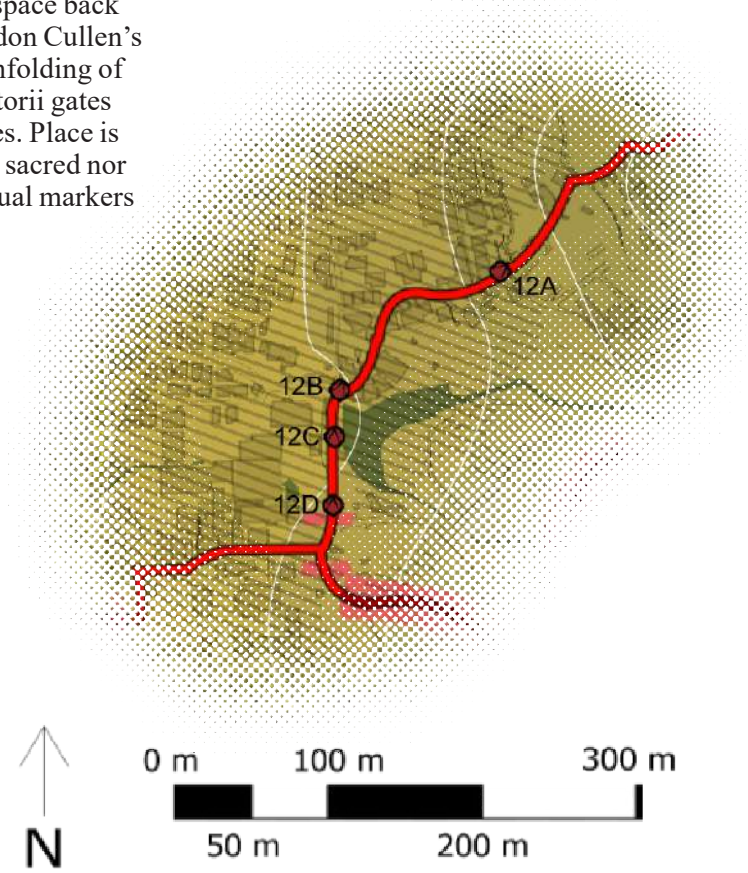


Figure 112: SV12: sequence 12A, 12B, 12C and 12D.

12A - Transition and Sequence

Walking down the final slope to where everyday life resumes. The path slopes downward, creating a visual sequence where the distant city and mundane structures gradually come into focus. This place serves as a liminal zone.



Figure 113: 12A.Path along calmer, more open area for otsuka and other shrines.

12B - Enclosure and Release

At the backdoor of the beginning, the final torii gate stands at a distance, marking the end of the trail where you return to the main shrine area. The straight, **narrow** road, framed by a hedge and shop, visually pulls the observer toward the gate, giving a sense of return to where the journey began.



Figure 114: 12B.The final torii gate stands at the trail’s end, framed by a hedge and shop, guiding the observer back to the main shrine and marking the journey’s conclusion.

12C - Dissolve

The journey reaches its final moments as the straight path leads directly to the torii gate. The road has flattened out, and the urban environment begins to dominate. The focus shifts to urban and mundane content, like the parked van and shop, which contrast with the earlier sacred markers. The gate, while still standing, now takes secondary focus.



Figure 115: 12C.The straight path flattens and transitions into an urban scene, where the torii gate fades into the background amidst parked vehicles.



### 12D - The Final Passage

Returning to the beginning, the stairs lead back up to the main shrine, marking the final passage before re-entering the world. Much like the coordinated sequences described by Gordon Cullen, this space is the culmination, where the interplay of closure and revelation defined the experience.

This final passage may be accidental or deliberate, but as Cullen (1971:110) explains, it embodies the essence of a model "townscape." The steps act as the threshold where the sacred and the mundane meet. Here, the environment reflects the same principles, offering a sequence that transitions smoothly yet dramatically, ensuring the return to the world carries the memory and impact of the journey just concluded, leaving you with a sense of completion.



Figure 116: 12D. The hidden path leads you back, marking a threshold



## 5. Discussion

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**To interpret the results, the methodological approach is combined with an analytical interpretation of the theoretical concepts. The findings from field visits, together with the interpretation of the theoretical framework which was derived from Serial Vision and literature, form the answer to the research question.**

### 5.1 Result discussion

Fushimi Inari Taisha is particularly well-suited to Cullen’s concept of Serial Vision due to its sequential layout and the repetitive yet evolving nature of the space. As visitors walk through the dense torii gates, each one frames the next, punctuating the journey. The progression through the gates mirrors Cullen’s idea of unfolding vistas, or jerks of revelations—with each step, the experience changes subtly, and as a visitor you are drawn forward. The thesis offers an exploration of how visual, spatial, and symbolic elements interact with the help of the Serial Vision. An approach which effectively captures the essence of moving through the shrine, from the mundane to the sacred, and from enclosed to open spaces. While Cullen’s theory is rooted in urban design, it translates well to the experience at Fushimi Inari. The shifts between enclosed pathways and open vistas (such as viewpoints over Kyoto) provide moments of contrast. Cullen’s emphasis on juxtaposition is clearly visible in these alternating experiences, where the visitor moves between the confined, repetitive space of the torii gates and the expansive, open views of the landscape.

Cullen’s concept of optics is closely related to the unfolding of views as one moves through space. Despite its compatibility with Serial Vision, capturing the full experiential and spiritual depth of Fushimi Inari in a purely visual sequence can be challenging. The sensory aspects (sounds of nature, the feel of ascending steps, the presence of other visitors) are integral to the experience but may not be fully captured through visual representation alone. Additionally, the crowding in some areas disrupt the fluidity of the serial vision, creating gaps in the narrative.

Cullen’s theory of place examines how spatial configurations influence human perception and emotional responses. Ways to describe the

phenomenon of “here” and “there” such as possession or enclaves did facilitate the analysis of each Serial Vision image. In general, the enclosure of the gates limited the lateral view, directing attention forward and immersing the visitor. The transition from the outer shrine to its interior created a sense of refuge. The enclosed space, combined with intricate details of the altars - a peek into an indoor landscape - enhances the feeling of separation from the outside world. This space embodies Cullen’s idea of enclosure, providing a quiet, intimate area for reflection. The presence of spiritual objects and ritualistic elements grounds the observer in the sacred qualities of the site.

The large focal points of shrines, staircases, or viewpoints culminate in moments of visual reward, akin to Cullen’s notion of focal points and vistas in urban settings. Other than focal points, vistas and incidents also proved to create highlights across the journey on the trail, while the repetition of the gates offers a constant anticipation. The gates and the shrine clusters form a strong visual sequence that enhances a sense of movement and mystery. Similar to urban spaces where buildings and streets frame views, the gates control what the observer can see. Cullen’s principle of anticipation is present throughout the journey, especially in the curved pathways and glimpses of shrines that are only partially visible until approached. This sense of unfolding narrative keeps the visitor engaged, maintaining a balance between the known and the unknown.

The arrival at the city vista and the mountain summit represents a moment of openness after the enclosed journey through the torii gates. The panoramic view over Kyoto offers a sense of release, contrasting the previous dense, enclosed paths. Cullen’s concept of infinity is particularly relevant here, as the vast sky and distant mountains evoke a feeling of endless space,

both physically and metaphorically.

The content analysis focuses on the elements within the landscape that contribute to its character, such as objects, textures, and materials. The content of Fushimi Inari is imbued with cultural and spiritual meaning. Cullen’s approach to content—which looks at the material and symbolic details within a space—can be applied to the shrine’s architecture, its torii gates, and the natural landscape. Exploring the elements that constitute the fabric of Fushimi Inari Taisha, such as colour, texture, scale, style, character, personality, and uniqueness. The torii gates serve as a metaphor for transition from the secular to the sacred. According to Cullen’s theory, elements like statues, street furniture, and public art in urban environments act as significant markers that shape a city’s identity. At Fushimi Inari, the gates play a similar role, marking the progression of the trail. There is also a juxtaposition between the natural surroundings (the forested mountain) and the man-made elements (the gates, shrines, and lanterns). This dynamic contrast between nature and architecture resonates with Cullen’s idea of juxtaposing materials and forms in urban spaces to create emotional and visual interest.

The torii gates serve as a powerful metaphor, marking the transition from the mundane to the sacred. As physical markers, they symbolise passage and transformation, and their repetitive structure reinforces the spiritual journey. The inscriptions on the gates add to their meaning, connecting the visitors to the community that supports the shrine, while also representing the intersection of cultural, spiritual, and historical elements. Furthermore, objects like the water basins, stone lanterns, and altars contribute significantly to the spatial narrative. These significant objects act as focal points, guiding the observer’s attention. The dragon-shaped fountainhead at the

purification basin exemplifies how functional objects can also serve as spiritual symbols, embodying both practical and metaphorical significance.

When walking under the gates, one by one, at first, there’s not much that engages you except for the tread and the bright red surrounding you. But as you keep moving ahead, you begin to feel an opening and a new spaciousness in the chest. You will realise what a gate was: it’s an indication that you had left one space and were entering another. You think you arrived. But life was always arriving. There was always another gate to pass through. What was a torii? A doorway. A portal. The possibility that you might walk through the door and reinvent yourself as something better than you had been before. By the time you reach the end of the torii gate pathway, there is a resolve. It doesn’t ever have to be the end. You will always find yourself in a long line of spaces between gates.

Using a western theory like Cullen’s serial vision to analyse a culturally specific, non-western site like Fushimi Inari Taisha brings up some important ethical questions. While the method helped highlight the visual and spatial experience of moving through the shrine, it also risks overlooking the deeper cultural and historical meanings in the site. Cullen’s concepts are rooted in a western urban design context, and applying them directly to a sacred Japanese landscape can feel a bit out of place. It’s not that the method doesn’t work, but rather that it only captures part of the story. This brings up the issue of how much we might miss when using a framework that wasn’t made with this type of environment in mind.

There’s also something to be said about authenticity, both in how the site was experienced and how that experience is presented in this study. The phenomenological approach helped keep things grounded in personal, lived experience, but there’s no



way to avoid the fact that this is still a subjective take. What stood out to me might not be what stands out to someone else, especially someone from Japan or with a deeper connection to the culture. That doesn't necessarily weaken the study, but it's worth being honest about the lens I'm working through.

In terms of sustainability, travelling to Japan for research brings its own set of considerations. Fushimi Inari is already a major tourist destination, and while the visit was made with respect and care, it's still important to acknowledge the larger context of travel and tourism. Academic work, especially when it involves travel to cultural heritage sites, needs to be aware of the potential impact, even if it's small in the grand scheme of things.

Overall, while the methods used offered valuable insights, it's important to be critical of their limitations. This study isn't a complete or objective analysis of Fushimi Inari, it's one interpretation, shaped by background, interests, and the tools I chose to work with.

This study set out to explore how Gordon Cullen's serial vision method could be applied to understand the phenomenology of spatial experience in a culturally significant landscape. Through the analysis of Fushimi Inari Taisha, the study demonstrates that Cullen's principles, originally developed for urban design, are indeed adaptable to non-western environments. The analysis of place, content, and serial vision reveals how sequential spatial experiences at the shrine shape perception a sense of meaning. The method helped highlight contrasts between enclosure and openness, repetition and variation, as well as the anticipation embedded in the trail's design. While limitations arose due to crowding and the subjective nature of the phenomenological method, the study shows that Cullen's framework

offers valuable insights into the relationship between physical space and emotional experience. Thus, the research contributes to a broader understanding of how phenomenology and serial vision together can reveal universal principles of spatial experience—even in culturally and physically distinct settings like Fushimi Inari Taisha.

## 5.2 Method discussion

Serial Vision, with its focus on the sequential unfolding of space and experience, prove to be an adequate tool for analysing the spatial dynamics of Fushimi Inari Taisha. It reveals not only physical movement, but emotional as well. Other methods prior, being the phenomenological field study, did also provide some complimentary materials. The combination of photography, journaling, sketching, and mapping complement each other by offering various perspectives.

Much of Fushimi Inari and the experience of walking is presented well enough through the photos, but the method and pictures may not be referred to as a systematic Serial Vision as Gordon Cullen makes. The images are taken in order of the trail, but sometimes may be difficult to relate to the preceding image at times, which isn't ideal for a Serial Vision method, see how loosely SV2B and SV2C are visually related for example. Deciding on Cullen before the trip would have resulted in more clear results for the analysis, as images would be more mindfully taken with a Serial Vision in mind.

Literature regarding phenomenology was what would make the framework for the site analysis of a Japanese landscape. John Wylie's essay on ascending Glastonbury Tor was part of the inspiration as it was recommended for this thesis early on. John Wylie's retelling of the phenomenological experience of

elevation and travel was to aid my own method and retelling of the experience of Mt. Inari. Then, to anchor the method, Janet Swailes method presented in her work Field Sketching and the Experience of Landscape was used. The use of phenomenology, inspired by Janet Swailes and John Wylie provides a subjective understanding of place. This approach is particularly strong in capturing personal and perceptual experiences, making it valuable for interpreting human interaction with the landscape. The phenomenological approach, while strong in capturing subjective experience, may also be a weakness. The results are personal and may not be easily replicable by other researchers, limiting the methodology's generalizability. Furthermore, the personal nature of the data collection (e.g., what is "memorable" or "characteristic") introduces bias, making it harder to produce universally applicable conclusions.

The choice to apply Gordon Cullen's concept of Serial Vision allowed for a structured analysis of the progression of views along a trail. This method is effective in presenting the sequential experience of navigating a space and captures both the spatial and perceptual dynamics of the site. In the early stages of mapping the Serial Vision it totaled 20 different areas of the mountain. But as I worked through them, they were too similar to each other to be able to draw new, interesting conclusions about spatial perception. Another challenge was the blind spots in the data due to crowding or incomplete documentation, which posed challenges in fully capturing the experience of the shrine. This could have led to an uneven representation of the spatial dynamics of the site, particularly in high-traffic areas.

The integration of Cullen's Serial Vision with cultural insights from Japanese traditions such as shintoism adds a unique point of outcome to the

analysis. The decision to exclude symbolic values in the analysis, while justifiable from an objective perspective, may result in a less comprehensive understanding of the site. Given the cultural significance of the shrine, this omission potentially weakens the analysis. Still, the visual dynamics at Fushimi Inari Taisha can be effectively analysed through Gordon Cullen's western urban theory. Despite the cultural and spatial differences between Japanese shrines and western urban environments, the principles of Serial Vision—optics, place, and content—are highly adaptable to the visual experience of Fushimi Inari Taisha.



# 6. Conclusion

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**The conclusion of this thesis serves to encapsulate the findings of applying Gordon Cullen’s urban theory of Serial Vision to the analysis of Fushimi Inari Taisha, a significant cultural and religious site in Japan.**

In conclusion, this thesis has successfully applied Gordon Cullen’s urban theory of Serial Vision to the analysis of Fushimi Inari Taisha, a unique shinto shrine in Kyoto, Japan. By utilising Cullen’s principles, such as optics, place, and content, the study explored how the sequential layout of the torii gates and shrine pathways invokes different visual and spatial experiences for visitors. Through site visits, photography, and mapping, the analysis captured the spatial dynamics at Fushimi Inari Taisha, particularly the interplay between enclosed and open spaces.

Cullen’s theory, despite being rooted in western urban environments, proved adaptable to the shrine’s sacred and natural setting. Key elements like anticipation, focal points, and mystery were evident in the unfolding views along the trail, while the repetition of the torii gates created an immersive journey. While the analysis excluded certain symbolic and cultural aspects, focusing instead on the visual and spatial experience, it nevertheless highlighted how Cullen’s urban design concepts can deepen our understanding of traditional Japanese landscapes. The application of Serial Vision to Fushimi Inari Taisha underscores the value of utilising western architectural theory with non-western cultural heritage sites, offering new insights into how people perceive and interact with such spaces.

In summary, this work not only contributes to the academic discourse on spatial perception but also enriches our appreciation of Fushimi Inari Taisha’s intricate design, illustrating how visual elements shape both personal and collective experiences within landscapes.

Future research in this field could build upon the findings of this study by exploring the application of Cullen’s Serial Vision in different cultural contexts. While this study has demonstrated the theory’s adaptability to Fushimi Inari Taisha, further comparative

analysis could examine how Serial Vision applies to other non-Western environments, such as Chinese temples, Indian ghats, or Middle Eastern bazaars, assessing its relevance across diverse spatial traditions. Additionally, a more holistic understanding of spatial experience could be achieved by incorporating multisensory analysis, moving beyond the visual to explore how auditory, tactile, and olfactory elements influence perception in sacred spaces. Temporal and seasonal variations could also offer valuable insights, as changes in light, shadow, and weather conditions likely alter the spatial experience of sites like Fushimi Inari Taisha.



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