Week 1: What is danger?

My research

This week I started looking into Nuclear Semiotics. At first, I just wanted to understand why nuclear waste needs such special ways of warning people in the future. But then I realised that the idea is actually much more interesting than I expected.
I found that a lot of different artists and designers were thinking about the same question: **If people thousands of years from now no longer understand our language, how would they know that a dangerous place should not be entered?**
Some of the ideas are quite strange, but I think that is also what makes them interesting. For example, I came across the idea of **Ray Cats**. Basically, the idea was that cats could change when they were exposed to radiation, and people could use stories, music and other forms of culture to teach future generations that if the cat changes, something is dangerous.
I think this idea is quite strange, but I really like it. Instead of making a normal "DANGER" sign, it makes a living thing become the warning. So the danger is not just a fixed image. You understand it by noticing a change.



Image source: Online visual reference — Ray Cats / Nuclear Semiotics, accessed September 2026.

There were also ideas about putting information into plants. I found this interesting because it made me think that **a warning does not have to be a symbol.** It could be a plant, an animal, or even the **whole environment**.



Image source: Online visual reference — Nuclear Semiotics, accessed September 2026.

I also saw some more direct architectural ideas, like using **huge spikes**, **strange rocks** or **uncomfortable spaces** to make people not want to go near the area. This actually feels quite close to what I want to do.
It is not telling you "this place is dangerous". Instead, it makes you feel that something is not right here.

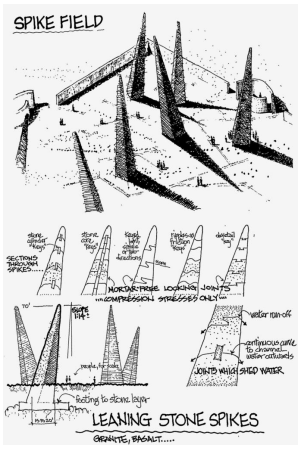




Image source: Michael Brill, "Spike Field", WIPP long-term nuclear waste warning project, accessed September 2026.

So now I feel that I do not necessarily want to use the radiation symbol directly. **I am more interested in making the space itself become the warning.**

Group context

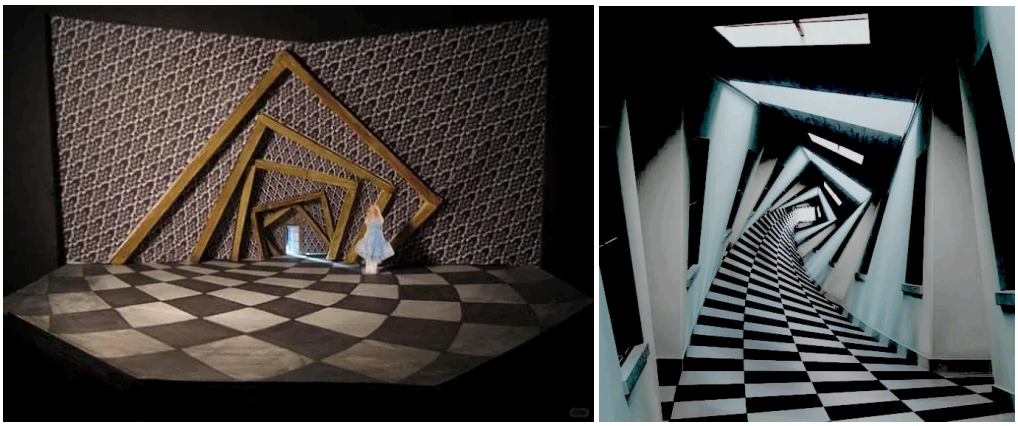
This week, our theme is **Nuclear Semiotics**, and we started with the question: **What is danger?** This is also the first question in our five-week project. At the moment, We imagine a future where human civilisation has disappeared a long time ago, and a mechanical life-form discovers an ancient human ruin. This ruin will continue as the setting for the following weeks, while we explore different questions through what has been left behind by humans.
When we discussed Nuclear Semiotics, one of the important ideas was that if humans disappear, the language, symbols and cultural meanings we use today may not still be understood by future forms of life. For example, when we see the radiation symbol, we immediately understand that it means danger. But for a future life-form that knows nothing about human culture, it could simply be a strange pattern. It might even recognise that people died here, but not understand that these deaths were actually a warning telling it **not to approach**.

My own idea: Can the space itself communicate danger?

Brainstorming:

After the group discussion, I started thinking about another question: **If a future life-form cannot understand human language or symbols, do we necessarily need a specific "danger sign" to tell it that a place is dangerous?** I became more interested in whether the space itself could communicate danger.
The first direction I thought about was **distorted space**. Normally, we expect a space to be stable and ordered. For example, the floor should be flat, walls should be vertical, objects should have reasonable proportions, and it should be possible to understand the

direction of the space. When these things slowly start to change, I think we can feel that something is wrong even if there is no text telling us that the place is dangerous. Because of this, I do not really want to represent danger as one specific “dangerous object”. Instead, I want the player to gradually realise that the space is becoming more and more abnormal as they move forward. At first, it could be something very small, such as a slight tilt or an object with a strange proportion. Then the abnormality could slowly increase. The walls might start to bend, the structures could become more crowded, and sharper forms could appear. Eventually, the player may even start to lose their sense of direction and understand less about the space around them.



Inspiration reference found online, accessed September 2026.

At this point, I started thinking about **poisonous mushrooms**.What interests me is not really the physical shape of a mushroom, but the contradiction within it: **it can look beautiful and attractive, while also being poisonous.** I think this feeling of “something that makes you want to approach it, but should actually be avoided” is very close to the kind of dangerous space I want to explore.



Inspiration reference found online, accessed September 2026.

At the moment, my own direction has slowly developed from simply making a “dangerous scene” into a spatial experiment around **danger, distortion, growth, attraction and poison**. I am not sure whether the final environment will actually look like a mushroom, and I do not want it to become a “mushroom-themed” scene. For me, the

mushroom is more of a **conceptual reference**. What I really want to explore are its qualities, and whether those qualities can be translated into spatial language.

From Concept Art to a Real Space

This week, I was **mainly responsible for the concept art, model design and production, as well as the soundtrack for the final video**. Looking back at the whole process, I think the biggest challenge was not completing each individual task, but figuring out how to **turn an abstract visual idea in my mind into a 3D space** that could actually be built.
When we first discussed how to express a sense of danger and unease through space, I imagined a **distorted and dislocated environment**. I wanted the space itself to feel **"wrong"**. Instead of using obvious warning signs or symbols, I wanted the player to sense that something was dangerous through the abnormal structure of the environment.
During the early concept art stage, I experimented with many different visual directions based on distorted and surreal spaces. I used Midjourney and Nano Banana to generate visual references and kept changing the prompts to explore how different spatial structures, architectural forms and atmospheres could create different feelings.
Some of the images from this stage were visually very interesting to me. For example, I experimented with entrances that did not follow normal perspective, stretched or displaced architectural structures, and spaces where it was difficult to understand the scale or direction.

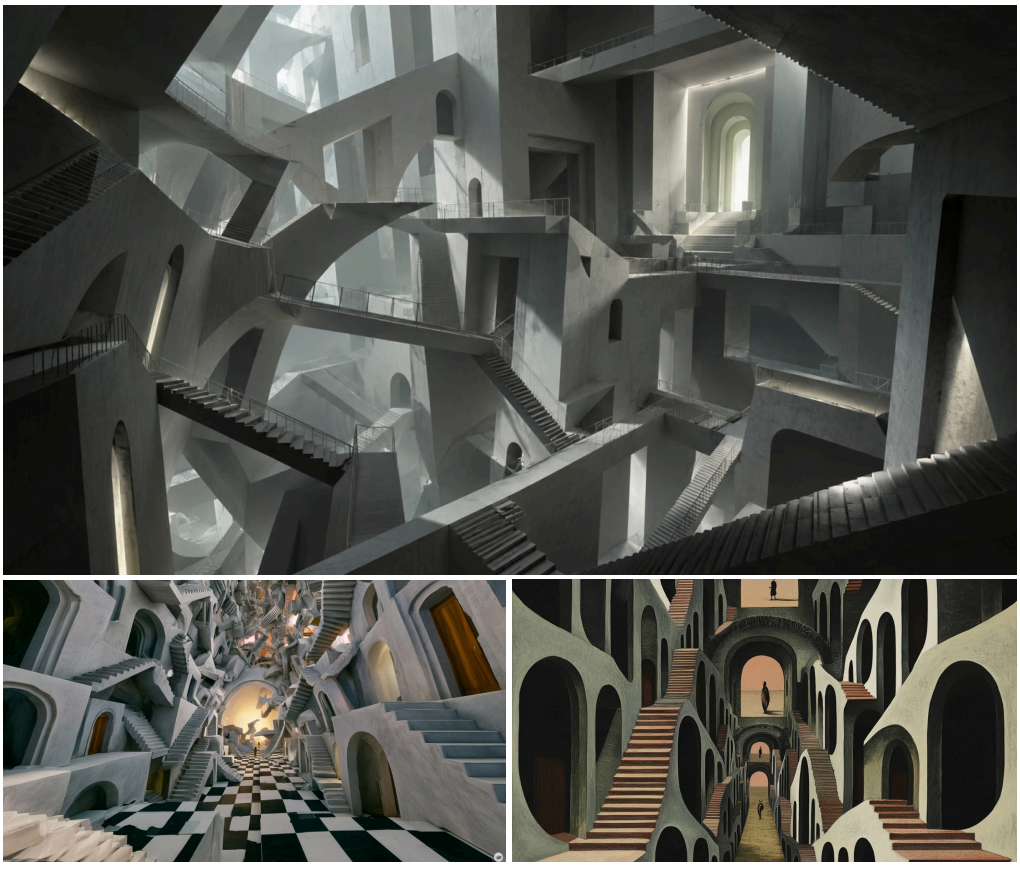


Fig. 1. Early AI-generated concept experiments exploring distorted and impossible architectural spaces. Generated using Midjourney / Nano Banana. October 2026.

However, when I started thinking more seriously about production, I gradually realised something important: a visually interesting concept image does not necessarily mean that it will work as a VR environment.

If we continued with a highly distorted environment, it would have been difficult to use existing assets. Many of the structures would have needed to be modelled from scratch. We had already spent quite a lot of time developing the concept, so continuing in this direction would have made it difficult to finish the whole scene within the remaining time. Because of this, I decided to move away from my original idea of a distorted space.
I also experimented with a more surreal visual style. Compared with ordinary architectural environments, this direction created a **much stronger sense of unfamiliarity and strangeness.** However, after several experiments, I felt that some of the images, although visually interesting, were starting to move away from our original theme. They became **more about being "strange" or "surreal" rather than communicating danger through the environment itself**.

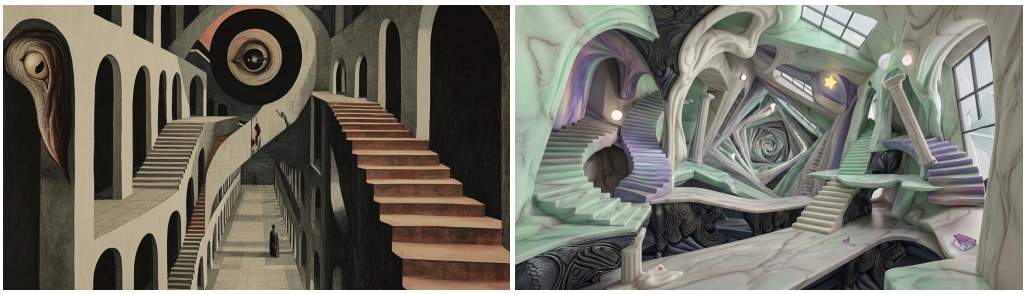


Fig. 2. AI-generated concept experiments exploring surreal architectural environments and a sense of unfamiliarity. Generated using Midjourney / Nano Banana. October 2026.

Considering both the limited production time and the theme, I eventually moved towards **a larger outdoor environment**. I used a **main abstract structure surrounded by smaller architectural forms to build the scene**. Compared with the distorted interior spaces I had explored before, this direction was more manageable to produce while still keeping the sense of unfamiliarity and unease that I wanted.



Fig. 3. AI-generated concept experiments exploring abstract outdoor environments. Generated using Midjourney / Nano Banana. October 2026.



Fig. 4. Final concept image for the outdoor environment. Generated using Midjourney / Nano Banana. October 2026.

After deciding on the general visual direction, I started thinking about how to translate the concept images into usable 3D models.

Instead of asking AI to directly generate a 3D model from a simple text description, I first created concept images that captured the atmosphere I wanted. I then selected the architectural forms that I thought were most important from these images.

I was mainly responsible for the large central structure and several smaller abstract structures surrounding it.

To make these structures easier to translate into 3D, I first used ChatGPT to isolate individual buildings from the concept images and generate front, side and back reference views. I then made further adjustments in Photoshop, changing proportions, structures and smaller details. After that, I used the edited images as references in Tripo AI to generate the basic 3D models.

This process involved much more trial and error than I originally expected.A building in a concept image can look convincing because of lighting, perspective, or even structures that do not completely make sense in three dimensions. However, once it becomes a 3D object that can be viewed from different angles, many problems start to appear. Some structures looked good from the front but became extremely thin from the side. Some details looked natural in a 2D image but became strange when converted into 3D, while overly complicated forms were often difficult for the AI to understand correctly.

Because of this, I did not simply accept the first result generated by AI. I repeatedly returned to the image stage and made changes. I went through many iterations with ChatGPT, adjusting things such as the proportions of the main structure, the size of the central form, the shape of the base, and the material and level of damage on the building surfaces.

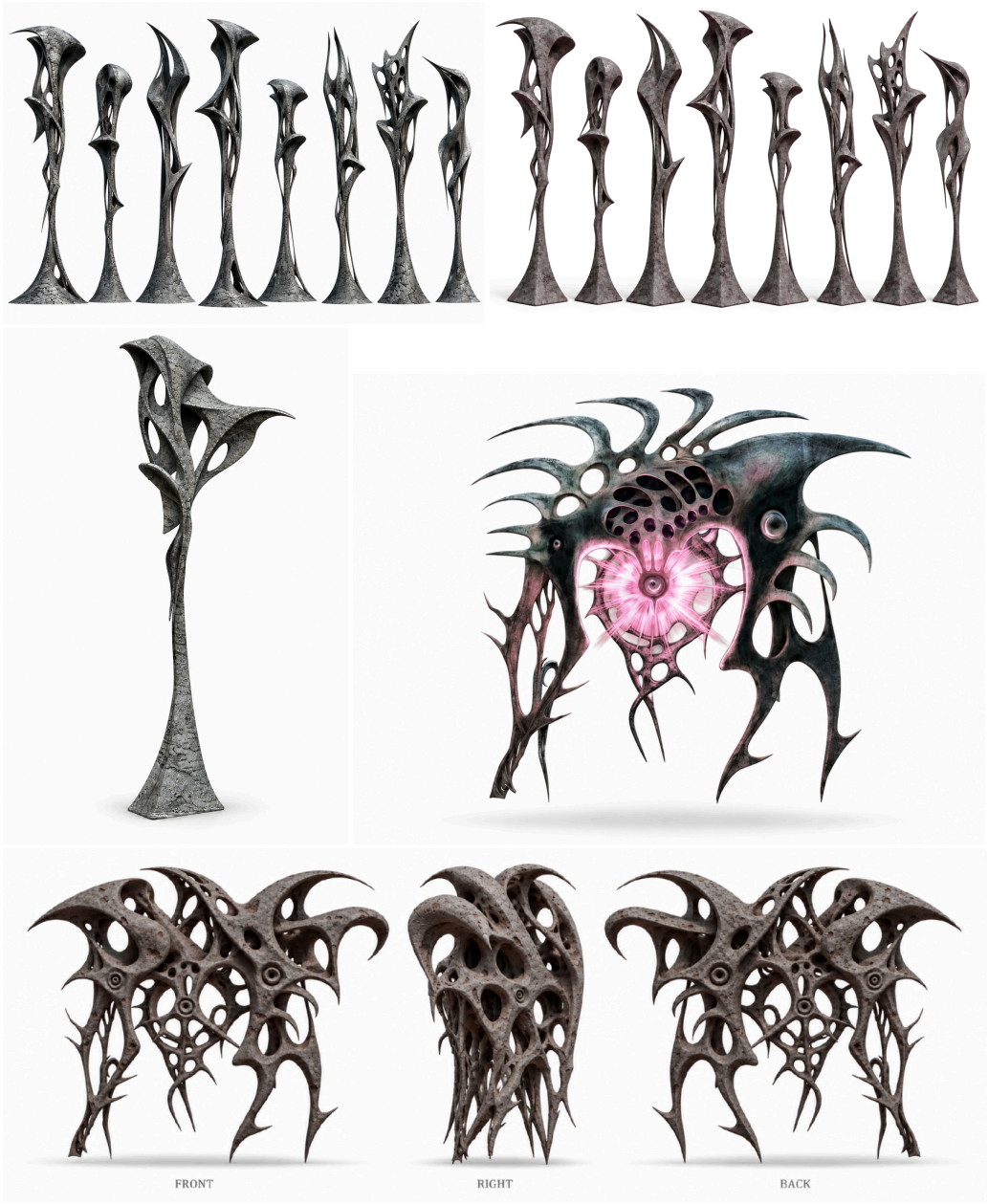


Fig. 5. Model design and reference images developed from the final concept. Generated and refined using ChatGPT. October 2026.

For me, this process became less about simply “using AI to generate models” and more about continuously making decisions: what should be kept, what should be removed, and what kind of form actually fits the visual direction I want.

AI sometimes generated unexpected structures that I had not considered before, and these results could give me new inspiration. At the same time, however, it could also easily push the design in a completely different direction. Through this process, I started to see AI more as a tool for quickly testing possibilities rather than something that should make the final design decisions for me.

After the models were completed, I started to notice more clearly the difference between a concept image and an actual 3D environment.

In a concept image, the atmosphere is already “built into” the image. The lighting, colour, fog, placement of buildings and composition are all fixed from one ideal viewpoint. However, when these models are placed into Unity, the environment needs to

work from different viewpoints, and the atmosphere of the original 2D image does not automatically appear.

There was still a noticeable difference between the final Unity environment and my original concept art. Since Unity scene building was not my main responsibility this week, I was not deeply involved in the later adjustments. However, from the final result, I think one of the main differences came from the lighting.









Fig. 6. Final environment built and rendered in Unity. October 2026.

This made me realise something important during this week: the model itself is not the final visual experience.

Before this project, I tended to focus heavily on whether an individual model looked good. Now I am beginning to understand that in a real-time environment, the **model, lighting, scale, composition and the player's position** all work together to create the final experience.

Sound Design

In addition to the concept art and modelling, I was also responsible for the soundtrack of the final video.

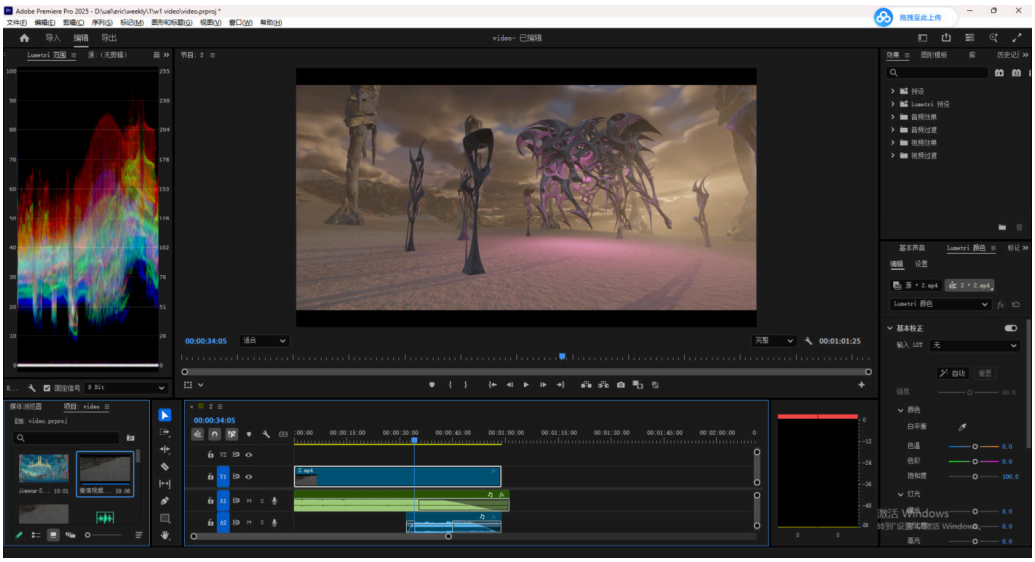


Fig. 7. Sound design and music editing for the final video in Adobe Premiere Pro. October 2026.

I wanted the sound to strengthen the oppressive and uneasy feeling of the environment. My initial direction was to use dark and tense ambient music combined with stronger drum beats. I also wanted the rhythm to match some of the flashing visual effects in the video.

During the process, I also experimented with sounds that communicate danger more directly, such as **alarms, tinnitus-like ringing and white noise**. These sounds can easily be associated with **danger, tension or physical discomfort**, so at first I thought they might help the audience understand the atmosphere more quickly.

However, once I actually added them to the soundtrack, they felt too obvious and out of place.
The alarm sound in particular communicated danger too directly. It changed the environment from something unknown and ambiguous into something that felt more like “an accident has happened here”. The tinnitus and white noise had a similar problem. If they were not integrated carefully, they felt more like sound effects added afterwards rather than something that naturally belonged to the space.
In the end, I decided to remove these more obvious danger sounds and focus again on the oppressive atmosphere and tense drum beats. I also adjusted the music slightly according to the length and pacing of the final video, so that the sound could follow the visual changes without taking too much attention away from the scene itself.

Reflection

At the end of this week, I think my biggest learning point was not simply learning how to use a new AI tool. More importantly, I started to understand how different an image in my mind can be from an actual working environment in Unity.
Previously, when working on concept design, I often felt that a more complex and visually impressive image was automatically better. However, after moving repeatedly between AI-generated images, 3D models and the final Unity environment this week, I started to think differently: whether a visual concept can actually be translated into a 3D/VR space may be more important than how complex or impressive it looks as a single image.
I also reconsidered the role of AI in my creative process. Midjourney, Nano Banana, ChatGPT and Tripo AI allowed me to test many different possibilities very quickly. Sometimes unexpected AI results gave me new inspiration, but I still needed to rely on my own visual judgement to decide the final direction. If I give too much of the design process to AI, the project can easily lose a clear visual direction.
Another important issue for me this week was time management.
We spent more time than expected developing the concept as a group at the beginning of the week. As a result, by the time we moved into modelling, scene building and final visual production, the schedule became quite rushed. This also limited the amount of time we had for further adjustments and experimentation.
For the next weekly project, I want to change the way I manage the process. I plan to decide the main concept, visual direction and key models within one day, rather than allowing the early concept stage to continue for too long. I want to enter production earlier so that there is more time for scene building, lighting, visual development and testing.
If I have more time in future projects, I also want to rely less on AI for generating final models and continue improving my own modelling skills. I would also like to become more involved in Unity scene building. This week made me realise that, especially in VR, the important thing is not only designing an interesting object, but understanding how that object exists within a space and what the player might actually feel when they enter that environment.