

Phenomenological Narratives

Exploring Space and Identity in Fiction

现象学
虚构叙事
身份
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space

虚构作品使我们能够表达与受限城市空间相遇时的纹理，捕捉这些遭遇激发的情感、记忆和感官印象的融合。它们提供了一种超越事实描述或客观分析的方式，来深刻表达我们与世界的互动。特别是城市小说，提供了一个独特的视角来考察思想与空间的相互作用。通过构建超出现实限制的世界，小说探索了那些通常无法接触的心灵和空间领域，探讨感知、身份和存在的边界。

解读城市空间涉及在有形与无形、客观观察与主观体验之间的互动。本研究采用跨学科方法，结合城市和文学分析，利用虚构叙事作为进入城市生活体验维度的窗口。研究假设通过探索城市小说中的角色和叙事，可以更深入地了解塑造人类心理和身份的城市空间的无形本质。在这种复杂的互动中，故事成为了捕捉和表达城市生活本质及其现象学深度的强大媒介——这是单靠观察方法无法完全捕捉到的情感景观。

本研究通过对埃德加·爱伦·坡的《人群中的人》和弗吉尼亚·伍尔夫的《街头漫游：伦敦冒险》及《达洛维夫人》的研究，考察了感知的前客观领域和身体互动。这些文本作为通往城市生活难以捉摸的维度的门户，揭示了城市环境如何影响身份形成和情感状态。通过整合像雅各布斯、怀特和林奇等城市理论家的见解，研究将直接观察与文学中发现的情感共鸣联系起来。它强调了个人叙事和情感联系在深化我们对城市空间理解中的作用，将它们从单纯的物理位置转化为复杂的生活体验。最终，研究通过现象学和文学叙事阐明了城市环境的丰富纹理和深度，强调了小说在丰富我们对城市作为一个动态且有意义的的生活体验的看法中的变革力量。

Fiction articulates the texture of our encounters with urban spaces, capturing the amalgamation of emotions, memories, and sensory impressions these encounters evoke. Urban fiction, in particular, presents a unique lens for examining the interplay between thought and space, exploring realms of mind and space that surpass factual descriptions or objective analyses. By constructing worlds beyond reality, fiction probes the liminalities of perception, identity, and existence.

This study employs an interdisciplinary approach, blending urban and literary analysis to use fictional narratives as windows into the experiential dimensions of city living. It examines the hypothesis that exploring characters and narratives within urban fiction provides richer insights into the intangible essence of urban spaces that shape human psyches and identities. Through this complex interplay, stories emerge as a powerful medium for grasping the lived essence and phenomenological depths of the city.

Focusing on Edgar Allan Poe's *The Man of the Crowd* and Virginia Woolf's *Street Haunting: A London Adventure* and *Mrs Dalloway*, the research delves into how urban environments impact identity formation and emotional states. Integrating insights from urban theorists like Jane Jacobs, William H. Whyte, and Kevin Lynch, the study links direct observation with the emotional resonance found in literature. It highlights the role of personal narratives and emotional connections in deepening our understanding of urban spaces, transforming them from mere physical locations to complex lived experiences. Ultimately, the research underscores fiction's transformative power in enriching our perception of the city as a dynamic and meaningful lived experience.

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INTRODUCTION

Architecture and urban studies increasingly incorporate literary analysis to unravel the complex dynamics of architecture, human activity, and transient experiences within urban environments. While scholars such as Klaske Havik and Katherine Shonfield had begun exploring connections between phenomenological approaches, lived experiences, and literary narratives, this investigation brings a fresh lens by adopting an interdisciplinary approach that systematically analyses fictional narratives to access the experiential dimensions of urban spaces. While the aforementioned scholars' works have provided a wealth of insights into the interactions between architecture, the urban environment, and literature, this study places emphasis on the phenomenological aspects of urban life as portrayed in fictional narratives. This research aims to delve further into the personal and subjective experiences, exploring how characters perceive and emotionally navigate urban spaces within the context of literature. It aims to uncover new dimensions of urban dynamics inspired by Jacobs' vivid depictions of "street ballet" (Jacobs, 1962, 163), Whyte's meticulous use of photography and Lynch's focus on subjective experiences. This foundation facilitates exploration into the nuanced complexities of urban spaces.

This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach that blends urban and literary analysis to investigate how urban environments and their inhabitants are perceived and experienced. It positions fictional narratives and characters as key tools for accessing and expressing the often-intangible aspects of urban life, such as sensory experiences and emotional landscapes. This approach aids in exploring the role of personal narratives and emotional connections in shaping urban experience, individual identities and mediating social interactions. It aims to offer insights into the dynamics and emotional landscapes of

intricate interactions of individuals within the urban setting.

BRIDGING ARCHITECTURE, NARRATIVE, AND EXPERIENCE

Urban studies have traditionally emphasised the observable physical aspects of urban life. However, emerging conversations among scholars such as Kevin Lynch, Klaske Havik, Jane Jacobs, and William H. Whyte have also begun to highlight empirical and psychological dimensions to complement this perspective. Lynch's exploration of city imageability integrates perceptual and cognitive elements, portraying urban environments as landscapes rich with memory and imagination. Havik introduces narrative methods to architectural and urban analysis, suggesting that literary techniques can uncover nuanced experiences of city dwellers often overlooked by conventional methods. Jacobs advocates for an observant approach to urban planning that values everyday interactions and the vibrant street life that characterises urban spaces, while Whyte's innovative use of direct observation and film has detailed the dynamic interactions between people and their built environments.

In her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1962), Jane Jacobs emphasised the need to "look closely... at the most common scenes and events" (Jacobs, 1962, 23) to understand the complexities of urban life and the behaviours of its people, suggesting that even the smallest details can reveal significant insights. She likened the movement and changes within city streets to an improvisational ballet, using vivid, "visual and anthropological" (Jacobs, 1962, 163) descriptions to depict how each community segment functions and interacts. She vividly illustrates an ordinary morning in her Hudson neighbourhood, described as "each day the scene of an intricate sidewalk ballet" (Jacobs, 1962, 61). The ballet begins just after 8 a.m.:

Jacobs steps outside to collect the garbage as students head off to school. Nearby, the owners of the local hardware store and a barber open their stores, setting the stage for the day's activities. Commuters emerge from their apartments, quickly dispersing in various directions to catch buses and subways. As they leave, the morning sun casts long shadows that soon dissolve into daylight, continuing the rhythm of the neighbourhood ballet. Jacobs discussed the limitations of her perspective noting "The heart-of-the-day ballet I seldom see, because part of the nature of it is that working people who live there, like me, are most gone, filling the roles of strangers on other sidewalks" (Jacobs, 1962, 62).

William Whyte's book and documentary, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (1980), observes in detail the use or abandonment of urban parks, squares and streets. In the film he used voice-over to explain what he was observing and speculated with imagination some possibilities beyond his sight. However, some behaviours were never decoded (Whyte, 1980, 22), underscoring the inherent complexity and depth of urban life that elude even the most observant lenses.

The methodologies of Jacobs and Whyte capture tangible fragments, and begin to highlight the importance of the area that was inaccessible to them, people's inner perceptions, experiences and emotion in terms of space-related interaction and perception.

The field of environmental perception began to take shape around 1960 (Lynch, 1995, 239), with Kevin Lynch integrating the subjective experience of the observer. His book *The Image of the City* (1960) not only considers the physical attributes of urban environments, but also emphasises the personal perceptions, experiences, and emotional connections that individuals have with these spaces. He positions the observer as central to the analysis of urban space, discussing the 'imageability' of a city (Lynch,

1960, 83-84). In particular, Lynch uses literary narratives to illustrate the profound impact of a city's physical form on the perceptions and emotional states of its inhabitants, emphasising that the understanding and experience of space are highly subjective and influenced by personal history and emotional state. For example, he utilizes Marcel Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann* (1913) to exemplify the connections individuals forge with their urban surroundings (Lynch, 1960, 128). Taking Proust's musings on the Combray church spire, Lynch explores how distinct urban characteristics become deeply ingrained in personal experiences and memories, thus becoming integral to the fabric of everyday life narratives.

Although Lynch's work is mainly focused on group images, his research findings on common perceptions and experiences are analysed and summarised by studying multiple individuals. Importantly, Lynch acknowledges the importance of emotional significance in urban perception (Lynch, 1960, 154). He notes that people's feelings and emotional experiences concerning these elements are crucial to understanding urban spaces. Familiarity with an element often suggests a memory or an emotional connection to the observer (Lynch, 1960, 125). Perception arises from the interplay between the observable world and the individual observer (Lynch, 1960, 128). This perceptual experience, whether singular or shared among many, manifests itself in the relationship between people and their spatial surroundings. Furthermore, the personal emotional bonds formed with the physical environment amplify the perception and experience of the urban landscape. This emotional connection also adds to the city's story, making it more vivid and meaningful.

Intriguingly, the observations, analyses, and descriptions of these urban scholars are, in a sense, related to urban stories. Jacobs uses the narrative skills of a novelist, tells the stories of "street ballet"

(Goldbard, 2010, 57), and tries to get the whole scenario to unfold. Whyte uses the camera to precisely frame the dynamics and details of the city and seeks the context of the story, trying to decipher motivations for actions. Lynch posits and interprets the image of the city through the observations and experiences of trained observers and relates the emotions of individuals to the environment from the perspective of the observer's narrative. It begins to illustrate how interpreting urban spaces involves navigating the interplay between the tangible and the intangible, blending objective observations with subjective experiences. Bridges the divide between the objective and the subjective, the concrete and the ethereal, the known and the unknown. Within this complex interplay, stories emerge as a powerful medium for grasping and articulating the essence of the city.

Although direct observation provides valuable insights into the immediate states of observable relationships between individuals and urban environments, it often fails to capture the intricacy, complexity, and variety of possibilities of urban life. This is especially true for the intangible or less visible aspects, such as the subjective experience of space. Here, the phenomenological approach becomes indispensable, emphasising lived experiences and personal perceptions of space. This method extends our understanding of urban spaces beyond the physical and observable to include layers of experiences, feelings, and meanings that define urban existence. This work explores how literary works like Edgar Allen Poe's *The Man of the Crowd* (1840) and Virginia Woolf's "Street Haunting: A London Adventure" (1927) and *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) depict characters navigating and perceiving urban spaces.

Sensory involvement plays a crucial role in how inhabitants understand and experience urban life, as "we build perception out of the perceived" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 27). Merleau-Ponty emphasises that perception is not simply a passive reception

of external stimuli but an active, embodied contact with the world in which perception and the perceived world are intricately intertwined (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 33-34). His phenomenological approach delves into the subjective realms of perception, emotion, and thought that characterise our experience of urban spaces. Phenomenology emphasises exploring human experience to articulate the myriad possibilities inherent in these dimensions.

Merleau-Ponty's "pre-objective" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 12) refers to the field of experience that precedes the classification and analysis typical of objective scientific observations. At this level of experience, things are not yet separated into discrete, analysable objects, but are part of an interconnected, living world. This pre-objective experience is fraught with ambiguity and is influenced by the context and relationships within which perception occurs (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 11-12). He linked the concept to direct observation, arguing that direct observation, may fail to capture the full depth of our perceived experience because it tends to artificially separate and categorise phenomena that are inherently fluid and ambiguous. To truly understand perception and experience, one must delve into this pre-objective realm and acknowledge the role of ambiguity, context, and relational understanding (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 12).

The pre-objective perspective, while not a term commonly used in classical phenomenology, can be understood as an approach that seeks to bridge the gap between subjective experience and the objective world. It aims to acknowledge and incorporate the complexity and richness of direct lived experience into our understanding of objective reality. This view posits that our engagement with the world, including urban environments, is not merely passive or observational but deeply interactive, shaping the reality we experience.

According to Merleau-Ponty,

we encounter the world at the pre-objective level, which forms the fundamental layer of human perception and experience (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 251-252). This dense, rich layer, where corporeality, sociality, and the pre-existence of the world converge, provides the essential groundwork for understanding the complexities of our existence and perceptions. It offers a starting point for explanations and addresses the problems of transcendence — how we move beyond our immediate experiences to broader understandings (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 457). Therefore, this layer has both thickness and depth, underscoring its foundational nature.

Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Louise Pelletier elaborate on Merleau-Ponty's concept, arguing that depth is not merely a third dimension, like height or width, but a fundamentally immersive experience that transcends ordinary spatial dimensions (Pérez-Gómez, Pelletier, 1997, 334-335). Challenging the traditional Cartesian concept of space as merely a measurable dimension, Merleau-Ponty presents depth as a multifaceted experiential phenomenon. He emphasises, "It's not just a matter of unmysterious spacing, as seen from an airplane, between these nearby trees and those that are farther away" (Merleau-Ponty, 1969, 274). Instead, depth involves intricate interrelations among objects, defining it not as a secondary attribute of space but as the fundamental dimension that underpins our perceptual understanding of reality (Merleau-Ponty, 1969, 275).

Merleau-Ponty argues that understanding urban life requires acknowledging the ambiguity and complexity inherent in the subjective realm of urban experiences. To enter "the thickness of the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 211) through the perception of experience is to explore the depth with an individual's living, emotional contact with the world.

In contemporary urban studies, the integration of literary analysis with architecture and urbanism has significantly enriched our understanding of urban dynamics. Katherine Shonfield, Matthew Taunton, and Klaske Havik have explored the complex interactions between urban space, architecture, and literature from diverse perspectives. François Penz (2003) and Zhang Yingjin (1996) explored connections between literary representations and Lynch's theories of urban legibility and imageability, however their focus was not specifically on emotional narratives.

Katherine Shonfield's *Walls Have Feelings* (2000) delves into the interplay between architecture and fiction to unveil the socio-cultural dynamics shaping urban spaces. Her approach integrates elements of Marxism and cultural studies, using novels and films to analyse how urbanism and architecture can reflect and perpetuate socio-economic forces and cultural taboos. She highlights the concept of "pollution taboos" (Shonfield, 2000, 1130), which dictate urban space usage and often lead to marginalisation. By examining how cities are portrayed in literature and cinema, she shows how fiction challenges dominant narratives, offering alternative perspectives that critique conventional architectural practices. Her work emphasises the need to consider the psychological and emotional dimensions of spaces, advocating for a holistic view of architecture that incorporates the diverse narrative forms influencing urban life and planning.

Matthew Taunton's *Fictions of the City: Class, Culture and Mass Housing in London and Paris* (2009) employs a multidisciplinary approach blending cultural history with literary criticism to explore urban development, mass housing, and class dynamics in literature and film. His work focusses on London and Paris using their distinct urban narratives to analyse how historical and cultural contexts shape representations of class and residential life. By juxtaposing fictional depictions

with urbanism and housing policy developments, Taunton reveals the critical role of narrative in highlighting social inequalities and the complex realities of urban life.

In her book *Urban literacy: Reading and Writing Architecture* (2014), Klaske Havik employs a phenomenological approach that integrates architectural insights with literary narratives. Havik's work looks at how literature can offer profound insights into the ways people experience, utilise, and conceive spaces. She combines literary analysis with architectural inquiry, to focus on how spaces are depicted in fiction and poetry to expose their rich sensory, social, and imaginative dimensions. By exploring the interactions between characters, readers, and spatial settings, Havik provides multifaceted insights into the architectural experience. From her perspective literature not only enriches our understanding of architecture but also illuminates its social aspects and the evolving uses of the built environment.

These theorists work provides distinct lenses through which the relationship between architecture, literature, and urban life can be examined. Their approaches encompass socio-cultural dimensions, historical contexts, phenomenological experiences, and analyses of how literary works, films, architectural spaces, building constructions, and class dynamics within housing are depicted.

My work aims to build on these foundations to delve into the sensory and emotional experiences within urban space. It seeks to uncover the nuanced dynamics and subjective realities that shape urban identity and spatial experiences. By taking a phenomenological approach, influenced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, it aims to uncover insights into the pre-objective experience of space. It employs an interdisciplinary approach that systematically analyses fictional narratives as windows into the experiential, liminal dimensions of city living. By examining how literature depicts the ways

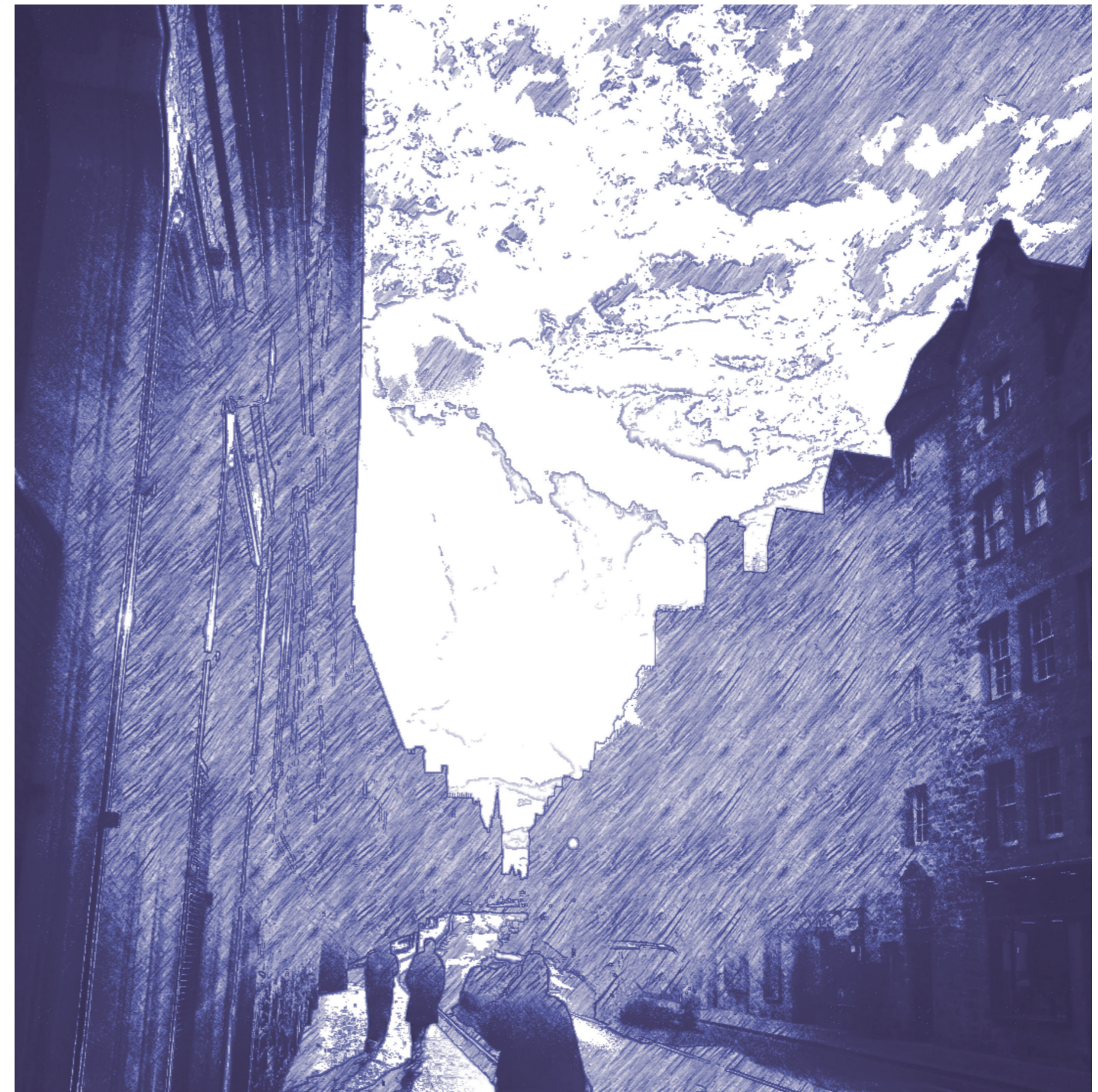


Fig.1 - Author: Yue Xin.

characters emotionally perceive and traverse boundaries between diverse urban environments, it hypothesises that richer insights can be gleaned into the intangible essence of urban spaces that shape human psyches and identities. Interpreting urban spaces involves navigating the interplay between the tangible and the intangible, objective observations and subjective experiences. Within this complex interplay, stories emerge as a powerful medium for grasping and articulating the lived essence

and phenomenological depths of the city; the emotive landscapes that observational methods alone cannot fully capture. Amin and Thrift suggest that "each urban moment can spark performative improvisations that are unforeseen and unforeseeable" (Amin and Thrift, 2002, 4). This exploration involves blending material structures with lived experiences and intertwining daily activities with emotions, providing a deeper interpretation of urban life.

The work emphasis narrative

and plot as focus for analysis. Jason Finch discusses how "literary plots are often structured around notions of what might be or could have been" (Finch, 2021, 8), allowing fictional narratives about urban life to venture beyond the confines of physical or tangible realities. They tap into the intangible interplay between mind and space, revealing how characters forge physical and mental connections to space. Fictional narratives thus serve as a gateway to realms that extend beyond the boundaries of physical

space, illuminating the complex communication and interaction between mind and space. These narratives demonstrate how fictional characters establish meaningful connections to these transitional spaces, offering profound insights into the fluidity and unpredictability of daily urban life.

According to Paul Ricoeur, narratives transform intricate stories into meaningful, known ones that contribute to personal identity formation, thereby becoming a means of understanding human life—an intrinsic aspect of our nature (Ricoeur, 1984, 74-75). Engaging with a narrative, as Ricoeur states, is an active process where “following a story is to actualize it by reading it” (Ricoeur, 1984, 76), emphasizing the “followability” (Ricoeur, 1984, 67) of stories that progress through events and twists to meet expectations at the narrative’s end.

Narratives are not merely accounts of experiences; they weave together individual perceptions, events, and encounters into a coherent whole, bridging the gaps left by direct observation, which often isolates phenomena from their lived contexts. This integration provides a continuous and integrated understanding of urban existence. Characters within these narratives often embody the intricate identities and experiences that define urban life, offering crucial insights into its personal dimensions. They serve multiple roles within the city: as witnesses to urban events, intermediaries navigating different urban elements, and observers reflecting on the nuances of urban life.

The movement of characters in fiction often symbolises their inner conflicts, desires, and evolving identities, illuminating the complex interplay between individuals and the broader urban context. These narratives enrich our understanding of the city, transforming it from a mere physical space to a lived experience where personal narratives and emotional connections profoundly shape

our understanding of the urban landscape. Narrative and character development across the length the work of fiction is therefore an important aspect of the analytic approach.

ANALYSIS

Literary works offer a distinctive perspective to explore the intricacies of urban spaces. The work of fiction selected for this research were chosen for their vivid depictions of urban life across different cultures and eras, to provide a rich tapestry of experiences. The work will begin with an overview touching on the writing of Dickens, Conrad, and then focus in more detail on Poe’s *The Man of the Crowd* and Woolf’s “Street Haunting”, then contrasting these shorter works of fiction with an exploration of Virginia Woolf’s novel *Mrs Dalloway*.

Literary critic and historian Ian Watt states that “the novel is surely distinguished from other genres and previous forms of fiction by the amount of attention it habitually accords to the individualisation of its characters and to the detailed presentation of their environment” (Watt, 1957, 18). Thus, in the novel, the characters become a vessel for human experience, with their etched traits and urban space journeys offering a window into the diverse spectrum of the human condition. The novel has maintained a unique connection with urban life since the early 18th century (Hawthorn, 2005, 28-29). The urban landscape and the structure of the novel share significant similarities. Both encompass a diverse array of characters and city dwellers, each interwoven into a network of mutual influence and dependence. Despite this interconnectedness, every individual, much like each character in a novel, harbours a unique set of personal ambitions and private reflections, highlighting the intricate balance between collective existence and individual identity both in the city and in narrative form (Baumgarten, 1999, 95-96). Such parallels between novels and urban life underscore the varied nature of urban experiences; just

as every character in a novel has a different story, the interaction of every person with the city is unique, shaped by their personal history, aspirations, and the complex web of relationships that define urban living.

The narrative structure of novels enables a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted nature of urban life, capturing both its grandiose aspirations and grim realities. This capability stems from the inherent flexibility and depth of the novel form, which allows for a nuanced portrayal of the complexities faced by city dwellers. The Polish-British writer Joseph Conrad described London in “Authors’ Notes” in his novel *The Secret Agent* (1920): “There was room enough to place any story, depth enough for any passions, variety enough there for any setting, darkness enough to bury five millions of lives” (Conrad, 2012, 275). This can also be adapted to describe the inclusion and tension of the novel narrative. In this way, the city becomes a canvas for countless narratives, each revealing different aspects of urban life. If the city is as a container loaded with countless novels, then it will present thousands of faces of the city, gathered into innumerable fictional stories, embedded in the nooks and crannies of the city.

This multifaceted nature of urban narrative, in which stories unfold in layers and dimensions, echoes the literary craftsmanship of Charles Dickens, as Raymond Williams pointed out. Dickens’ originality, in Williams’ view, lies in his ability to dramatise social systems and consequences that are not readily visible, bringing them to life with the vividness of real entities (Raymond, 1975, 156). “He takes them and presents them as if they were people or natural phenomena, sometimes as a black cloud or as the fog through which people are groping and looking for each other” (Raymond, 1975, 156). In this metaphorical black cloud and fog, the characters navigate the city, encountering myriad connections and layers, a metaphor for the complex web of character

relationships and events that novels bring to life, effectively mirroring the depth and complexity of urban life. This vivid portrayal in novels underscores their unique ability to capture the pulsating heart of the city, offering readers not just stories but lived experiences that reflect the everchanging tapestry of urban life. It also demonstrates how the dilemma, contradictory situation, and unknown state of the city are compellingly presented in the novel.

The central character conflict in these narratives is the conflict between the characters and the external world, which constitutes the essence of the story of the novel (Lukács György, 1971, 112). This conflict often manifests itself as a struggle between individual characters and the urban environment, underscoring the challenges, adaptations, and transformations they undergo. The urban setting thus becomes a crucible for character development, a place where personal aspirations, social pressures, and the raw energies of urban life intersect and collide.

Poe’s *The Man of the Crowd* narrative probes the psychological impacts of the urban crowd on individual identity. It masterfully captures the essence of the urban landscape as a backdrop for exploring themes of anonymity, isolation, and identity formation. It captures the fluid dynamics of the urban landscape through the interactions between an unnamed narrator and an enigmatic elderly man. The narrative commences with the narrator observing the diverse crowd from the detached confines of a London coffee shop. The narrator’s role transitions from passive spectator to active participant as he becomes intrigued by the old man’s mysterious demeanour, prompting him to leave his observational post and follow the figure through the bustling streets.

The relationship between characters and urban spaces is articulated through their movements across various city locales, mirroring the shifting

dynamics of their engagement with the urban fabric. The old man, as both a figure in motion and an object of observation, becomes intertwined with specific urban sites, embodying the transient essence of these places across different times and scenarios. Their journey, spanning bustling downtown cafes, secluded alleys, and desolate backstreets, culminates in a return to the vibrant downtown, symbolising not only the city’s diurnal rhythm but also its perpetual flow of urban life (Parsons, 2000, 223).

The incessant pursuit of the old man in Poe’s narrative, set against the backdrop ranging from bustling crowds to grimy, desolate outskirts, symbolises an unattainable quest for understanding the city’s elusive dynamism. His movements trace a narrative of vibrancy and desolation, fog and rain, revealing not just the physicality of London but also the solitude, mystery, and internal turmoil inherent in urban existence. This exploration of character and space, where the physical journey through the city parallels the inner development of the characters, offers a dynamic perspective on the interplay between individuals and the urban environment, shaped by the passage of time and their evolving interactions with the city. This incessant pursuit, set against a backdrop ranging from crowded centres to grimy outskirts, fog and rain, symbolises an unattainable quest for understanding the city’s elusive dynamism. The old man’s movements, through vibrancy and desolation, reveal not just the physicality of London but also the inherent solitude, mystery, and internal turmoil of urban existence.

Characters in the novel act as conduits between the objective, physical reality of the city and its subjective, experiential dimensions. They link the tangible aspects of urban landscapes, buildings, streets, bridges, with the intangible emotions, memories, and social constructs that define identity and alienation. Through their experiences, characters illuminate not only the emotional and psychological impacts of urban life

but also uncover the formation and articulation of personal connections to urban spaces. Their journeys embody the tension and potential inherent in myriad urban experiences, highlighting the importance of personal narratives in enriching our understanding of the urban landscape.

Woolf’s “Street Haunting” offers a meditative reflection on the sensory and emotional experiences encountered in the cityscape. It is a seminal narrative chosen for its distinct approach to urban exploration. The novel offers a compelling examination of urban spatial experience cleverly initiated by the simple act of purchasing a pencil. This seemingly trivial pursuit sets the stage for a profound exploration, as Woolf transitions fluidly between her private self and the public persona she assumes in the urban landscape. She begins her exploration with a sense of detachment, stepping out into the vast, anonymous crowd of the city, noting, “As we step out of the house on a fine evening between four and six, we shed the self our friends know us by and become part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers” (Woolf, 2017, 7). This observation underscores the transformation that occurs when one enters the city streets. By shedding her private identity, Woolf engages with the city not as an individual, but as part of a larger, indistinct mass. This shift highlights the dual nature of urban environments, where personal identities are both obscured and recreated through interactions within public spaces. Woolf’s narrative thus uses the act of walking through the city to explore how urban spaces serve as both arenas of anonymity and sites of profound personal transformation.

As Woolf navigates the streets of London, her narrative captures the rhythm of urban life through detailed sensory descriptions. She observes, “How beautiful a street is in winter! It is at once revealed and obscured” (Woolf, 2017, 8). This comment reflects the dual nature of urban spaces, both transparent and mysterious, offering a

simultaneous sense of revelation and concealment. Woolf traverses narratives of the various faces encountered in shops, theatres, and street corners, moving through spaces saturated with commerce and entertainment. She contrasts these vibrant scenes with the stark poverty just outside these venues, noting, "Not a stone's throw from the theatre" (Woolf, 2017, 12), where prosperity meets hunger and cold around the corner, the sound of a busker's organ faintly touches the "sequined cloaks and bright legs of diners and dancers" (Woolf, 2017, 12). Outside the glowing store windows, elderly and disabled people gaze upon luxurious sofas,

abundant fruit, and fine cutlery. These less fortunate souls reside in "the top rooms of narrow old houses between Holborn and Soho" (Woolf, 2017, 11), lodged within the "crevices and crannies" of the city. Laura Marcus highlights that Woolf's portrayal effectively illustrates the coexistence of contrasting elements within the urban landscape, where extreme wealth a dire poverty, beauty and decay are positioned side by side (Marcus, 2004, 65). These contrasts reveal the complex identity of the city, highlighting imbalances and deficiencies seen and unseen.

Merleau-Ponty's conceptualization

of perception emphasises it as an embodied engagement with the world, where the body plays a central role in experiencing and constituting reality (Muldoon, 2006, 119-120). This perception is related to the interactive processes through which people sense and interpret their surroundings. Merleau-Ponty posits that "the subject of sensation is a power that is born together with a certain existential milieu or that is synchronized with it" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 219), suggesting the central role of the body in shaping our perception. This view indicates that the body is not an object in the world, but a fundamental part of perceiving reality, thus becoming

the subject of perception (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 212). Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty asserts that "How the body inhabits space (and time, for that matter) can be seen more clearly by considering the body in motion" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 133). This assertion invites a deeper exploration of the interaction with its surroundings, highlighting movement as a fundamental aspect of experiencing reality. The way in which we occupy and experience space (and time) becomes more apparent when we consider movement, revealing the dynamic interplay between the body, its surroundings, and temporal flow. In exploring the nature of perception

and the inherent limitations of human understanding when interacting with objects, Ponty uses a metaphorical house to illustrate the complex levels of perceptual experience. He states, "The house has its water pipes, its foundation, and perhaps its cracks growing secretly in the thickness of the ceilings. We never see them, but it has them, together with its windows or chimneys that are visible for us" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 211). This example underscores his broader philosophical point that our perceptions are always incomplete. We can never grasp the full reality of an object because our views are limited to certain perspectives.

People need to have an infinite number of perspectives at once, akin to looking at an object through a thousand stares at once. Narrative is employed by both Poe and Woolf to express the observation and gaze of the city, the visible and invisible dynamics hidden from sight. Within Poe's novel different perspectives brought by tracking the old man enable him to experience countless complex spaces in London, the contrast between the city centre and the edge, the different atmospheres between spaces, and the faces he has never seen before. Woolf, as she wanders, compiles stories of what the eye sees and does not see, stories that are

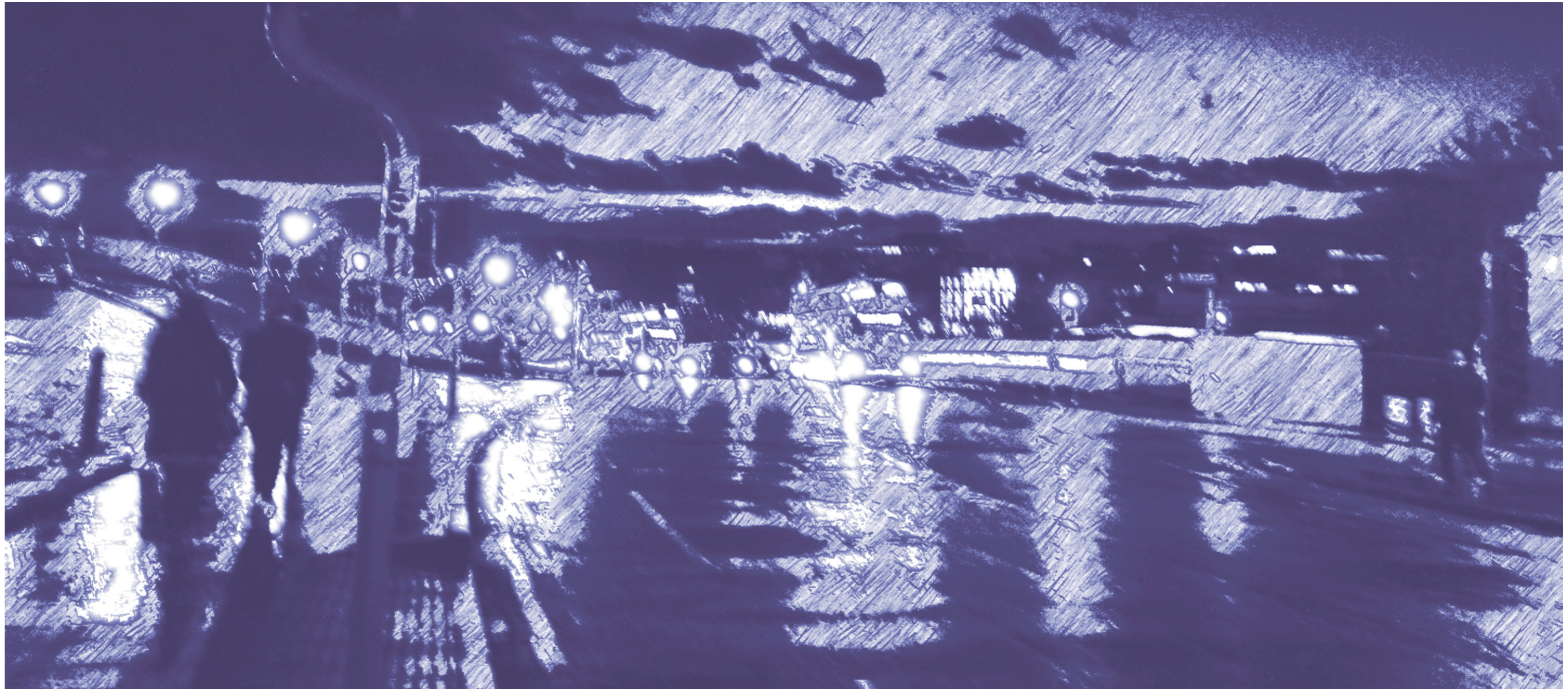


Fig.2 -Author: Yue Xin.

parallel, that echo, that converge, that diverge, like the streets of a city that separate and meet. She needs to walk in the streets of London, she needs to write stories for various strange faces and different lives on the streets in the crowd, and connect the gaps between space and space with her gaze, exploring the details of the junction between brilliance and darkness. Because there are stripes between them, there are variegations (Marcus, 2004, 65), a spectrum of contrasts and nuances that form the intricate, ever-changing landscape of urban life. This dynamic interplay of light and shadow, wealth and poverty, beauty and decay can only be fully understood through the multifaceted lens of personal experience and narrative exploration. The narratives of the novels reveal the profound depths, textures, and complexities that shape the urban environment and the lives of those who inhabit it.

Virginia Woolf's fourth novel *Mrs Dalloway* is set in 1923 amidst a period of significant cultural and political shifts. It foregrounds themes of identity, memory, and the passage of time. Woolf intertwines the lives and activities of her characters over a single day in post-World War I London, offering a detailed snapshot of city life and the diverse experiences of its inhabitants. Through the length of the novel Woolf delves into the intricacies of identity, and societal complexities through documenting a day in a life of a woman of high society, Clarissa Dalloway, and the preparations for her evening party. The work rotates around her reflections on the past and present within the urban setting. Concurrently, the narrative portrays Septimus Warren Smith, a former soldier grappling with psychological scars of war. Set against the city's bustling and lively backdrop, this highlights his profound sense of isolation amidst urban connectivity. The inner lives of other significant characters are played out within the city fabric. The text joins Peter Walsh, Clarissa's former lover, upon his recent return to London and his nostalgic and introspective journey through the city streets,

as he wrestles unresolved feelings and what-ifs. Clarissa's husband, Richard Dalloway, engagement with the city in contrast underscores his adherence to social roles and the emotional restraints they entail. Meanwhile, her daughter Elizabeth's exploratory venture into the city reveals her uncertainty.

Woolf captures the city's varied landscapes through the experiences of these characters perceived through their individual inner lives from intimate living rooms to wide streets, from private spaces to public spaces. The text showcases the characters' urban experiences as seen through their inner lives.

Through embodying the distinct experiences and emotional journeys of its populace the novel reflects broader societal shifts of the era. Woolf's narrative intertwines characters with their environments, revealing deep insights into their experiences, emotions, and identities through their interactions with specific locales. Clarissa's reflections, interwoven with her movements through the city, offer a rich exploration of her inner world and her interactions with the urban landscape. This narrative allows Woolf to delve into the themes of survival, memory, and the search for meaning in the everyday, set against the backdrop of a city that is both familiar and constantly changing.

The unique expansion of the character development of the novel, interwoven with a complex plot, distinguishes it from other genres and emphasises its genre's ability to explore subtle aspects of the human experience as discussed by Ricoeur (Ricoeur, 1990, 8-9). This distinct aspect of the novel facilitates an in-depth examination of the fluid relationship between characters and their surroundings. Character movement through space often mirrors the evolving dynamics of their engagement with the urban environment. When engaging with diverse urban spaces, the essence lies in movement, offering a perspective that merges with shifting landscapes and unfolding events.

CONCLUSION

Physical experience in urban environments significantly shapes spatial narratives, illustrating how interactions with the city contribute to personal and collective stories. Merleau-Ponty's insights into embodied perception suggest that navigating urban spaces is a deeply personal and active experience. This engagement allows for a unique interpretation and experience of urban spaces, where streets, buildings, and public squares become part of a larger narrative of life.

These works of fiction illuminate the dynamic interplay between characters and their urban environments through diverse narrative techniques and representations. The movement of characters through space not only reflects the changing dynamics of their relationships with the urban fabric but also highlights the importance of sensory engagement and embodied experiences in shaping our understanding of urban life. Within these narratives characters act as conduits between the objective, physical reality of the city and its subjective, experiential dimensions. They weave together the tangible aspects of urban landscapes, building, street, bridge, spatial features, with the intangible, emotions, memories, and social constructs defining identity and alienation. Through their experiences, characters not only illuminate the emotional and psychological impacts of urban life, but also uncover the formation and articulation of personal connections to urban spaces. Their journeys underscore the importance of personal narratives and emotional bonds in enriching our understanding of the urban landscape.

This exploration through literary narratives points to the profound capacity to uncover the complexities of urban existence through an interdisciplinary approach looking to literary analysis. It offers a deeper appreciation of the role of movement, perception, and sensory engagement in defining urban

experiences. These narratives enrich our comprehension of the city, transforming it from a mere physical space to a lived experience where personal narratives and emotional connections profoundly enhance our understanding of the urban landscape. This methodological to urban analysis appears to hold the potential to open other realms of understanding. Framed by the confluence of direct observation, phenomenological insight, and narrative depth, it seems to offer the potential to transcend traditional urban analysis by offering a richly textured understanding that bridges the tangible and the intangible. This article emphasis the crucial role of narrative and character within this approach. Fictional narratives provide a unique perspective on the complexities of urban life, illuminating their dynamic nature.

This exploration highlights the depth and thickness of urban space, which is rich with complexity and layered with meaning. These spaces, explored and interpreted through fictional narration, allow us to delve into their dense, layered essence, enhancing our understanding of the city as a lived experience. By merging phenomenological perspectives with empirical observation and literary analysis, we advocate a deeper engagement with the subjective dimensions of urban life. The narratives we weave about cities, embodied most expressively within novels, play a crucial role in shaping our collective and individual perceptions of urban environments. This nuanced approach not only broadens the academic discourse on urban environments but also enhances our appreciation for the complex layers of meaning that define our cities and our place within them.

The paper calls for ongoing exploration into how urban spaces are perceived, experienced, and represented, fostering a dialogue between urban studies, phenomenology, and literary criticism, and contributing to a nuanced and empathetic understanding of urban life.

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