Urban Space in Contemporary British Fiction

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Sveučilište u Zadru

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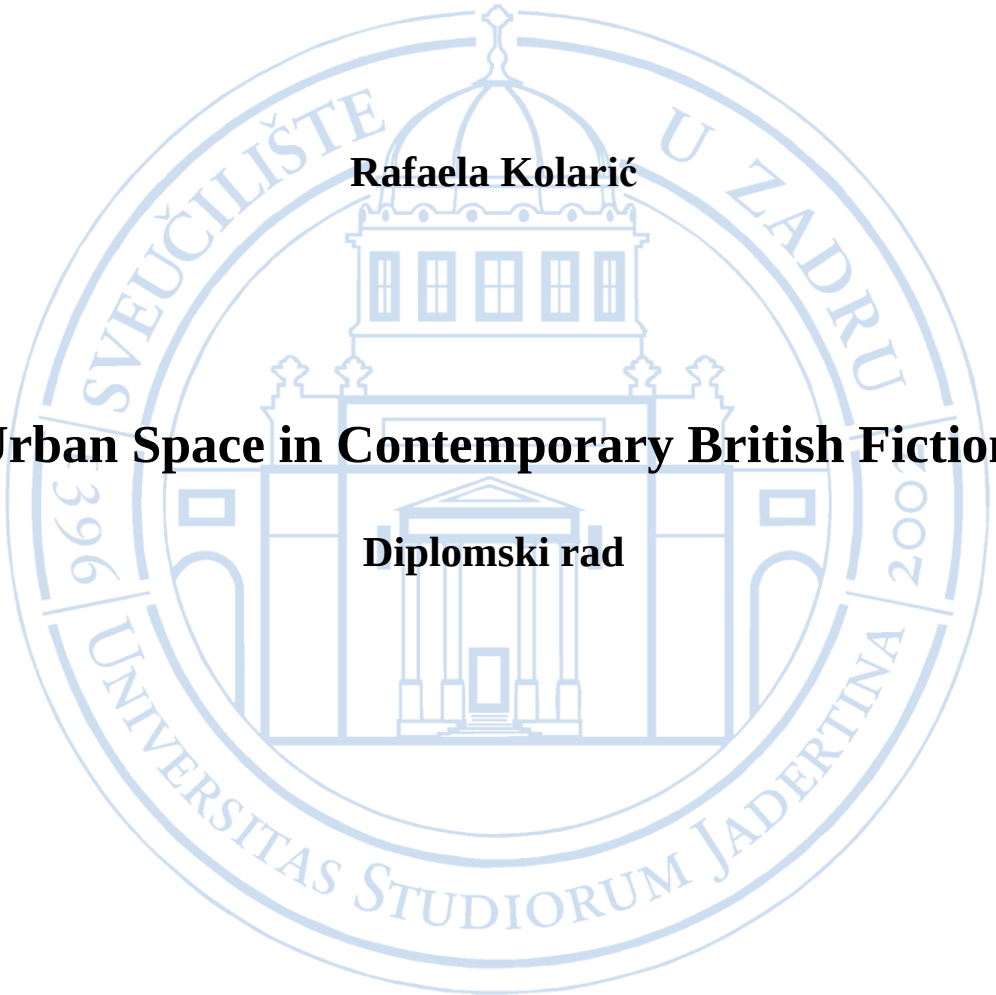

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Ja, **Rafaela Kolarić,** ovime izjavljujem da je moj diplomski rad pod naslovom *Urban Space in Contemporary British Fiction* rezultat mojega vlastitog rada, da se temelji na mojim istraživanjima te da se oslanja na izvore i radove navedene u bilješkama i popisu literature. Ni jedan dio mojega rada nije napisan na nedopušten način, odnosno nije prepisan iz necitiranih radova i ne krši bilo čija autorska prava.

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Urban Spaces in Contemporary Britain

In the words of McNamara, city literature fundamentally portrays how the city affects the thoughts and behaviour of its residents (5). The rise of the city is also inseparable from novel development and subsequent narrative modes such as realism, naturalism, modernism, and postmodernism. Contemporary British literature portrays and deals with various urban and suburban spaces shaped by complicated histories, both private and public. In their novels, modern British writers address public history by depicting actual events. As a result, they provide a perspective on them or satirise these events. For example, Hanif Kureishi, in *The Black Album*, writes about the burning of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. Kureishi draws inspiration from several real burnings of Rushdie's novel. According to Lustig et. al., in their article "Salman Rushdie and a War of the Word", the first burning happened on December 2nd 1988, in Bolton, two months after its first publication. In the late eighties and early nineties, the book was a reason for growing tension between Islamic and Western countries.

Controversial events, such as the book burning, occur in public and, more importantly, urban spaces, shaping the public view and the personal histories of all the people who witness them. People then influence the urban space through their choices. Urban centres, like Glasgow, Edinburgh, and London, are the setting of many novels where protagonists navigate their daily lives. This paper will thus focus on five novels set in urban spaces: *The Comfort of Strangers (1981)* by Ian McEwan, Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia (1990)* and *The Black Album (1995)*, Janice Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing (1989)*, and James Kelman's *How Late It Was, How Late (1994)*. Each novel illustrates a different urban space observed from a unique perspective. The main characters in *The Comfort of Strangers* are tourists, and they see the city for the first time. In Kureishi's novels, the protagonists are second-generation

immigrants who observe the city from a bicultural perspective. The two Scottish novels, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* and *How Late It Was, How Late,* offer a female and male working-class perspective of the city. In both cases, the protagonists go through severe trauma, both mental and physical, and are trying to accept their new reality in the urban space that surrounds them.

In *The Comfort of Strangers*, set in Venice, the protagonists Colin and Mary meet another couple. At first, they experience an exciting, sensual revival of their romantic relationship. However, their involvement with the couple they meet ends in a brutal murder. The new environment makes the protagonists clueless, disoriented, and vulnerable. The peaceful Mediterranean setting beautifully contrasts the dark topics explored in the book, like domestic violence, obsession, and murder.

Karim, the main character in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, is a mixed-race adolescent. His strong desire to leave the suburb of South London and go to the city influences his identity formation. The second significant contributor to his identity formation is his complicated family background. *The Black Album* and *The Buddha of Suburbia* share many similarities. A young male protagonist in *The Black Album*, Shahid, moves to London in search of his new identity. However, Kureishi depicts urban space in *The Black Album* in a dramatic rather than comical manner. Shahid moves to Kilburn, north-west London, in order to go to university and is trying to adapt to his new social circles. Shahid must decide between religious fanaticism and the contemporary British lifestyle. The character behaves differently depending on the space he is in.

In Janice Galloway's novel, the female protagonist is in a state of depression after her boyfriend's sudden death. Consequently, her sense of space and belonging is extremely fragile. Joy tries to navigate her existence after this personal tragedy. This novel focuses on the

individual's domestic space and how deeply it influences the protagonist's mental state. The diploma paper will also explore other places in the novel, like the mental hospital, grocery store, housing estate, and a road to Bourtreehill, primarily through Joy's observations.

How Late It Was, How Late is narrated from the point of view of a man who suddenly goes blind. Sammy Samuels is a Glaswegian drunk struggling to understand his new reality. The total dependence on every other sense, besides eyesight, completely shifts the character's attention to his surroundings. The descriptions Sammy uses in the novel are unique. They rely on Sammy's senses of smell, hearing, and touch. The only visual recounts stem from his memories.

This paper aims to explore various spatial aspects portrayed in the mentioned novels, especially representations of urban space. My focus will be on examining the relationship between urban space and the individual. In my analysis, I will use two concepts related to space: non-places and psychogeography. Additionally, I will read the selected texts in light of literary urban studies.

Psychogeography and Flaneurs

My analysis of psychogeography will be based on two works written by Merlin Coverley: *Psychogeography* (2006) and the article "The Art of Wandering: Arthur Machen's London Science" (2015). According to Coverley, psychogeography was born in the middle of the twentieth century as part of the Situationist International movement (*Psychogeography* 10). The concept of psychogeography explores the relationship between urban environment and human behaviour. Coverley describes psychogeography as the "study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals, and, in broad terms, psychogeography is, as the name suggests, the point at which

psychology and geography collide, a means of exploring the behavioural impact of urban place" (Coverley *Psychogeography* 10). Oppositions are the most straightforward way to understand psychogeography. In "The Art of Wandering: Arthur Machen's London Science," Coverley lists the following examples: suburban area to centre, rural environment to urban environment, practice and literature, aestheticism, and politics (104). He suggests that in the 1950s, the term had multiple meanings and was associated with literature and politics (*Psychogeography* 9).

In *Psychogeography*, Coverley points out that, after some time, psychogeography moved away from artists and art and attempted to move towards empirical science; however, that attempt failed (89–100). Nevertheless, the movement managed to spur alluring ideas that may be useful for the analysis of urban environments. English literature and texts about London are traditionally known for the recurring theme of an imaginary journey of observation and exploration of the city. As Coverley argues, Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* is the prototype of psychogeographical inquiry (*Psychogeography* 62). The text successfully established plague-ridden London as a model for later representations of the urban centre within the gothic genre. The author refers to the city as an urban labyrinth, as the observers had to navigate the streets through their observations. Coverley highlights in *Psychogeography* that the flaneur's true importance lies in his ability to navigate the complex, unknown passages of the urban jungle (62). The urban jungle represents not just the urban space, but also the protagonist's mental state.

Defoe's Robinson Crusoe is an important character in psychogeography. Coverley says that Robinson Crusoe is a key literary figure in psychogeographical research and a prototype of an urban wanderer, called Robinsonner (*Psychogeography* 15). Robinsonner deals with themes of mental voyage and isolation. At first, Crusoe perceives the island as his prison. Once again, we can draw parallels between space and the mind. According to Peck, the place is more than a setting; it is an active force contributing to the development of the personal identity (21).

Staying in one place entails self-identification with that place as well as the grounding of personal views and opinions. In order to conquer the island, Crusoe must first conquer his personal desires. Like Crusoe, many characters in contemporary English literature explore the environment in order to mature and find themselves. For example, Karim Amir, in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, as a teenager, perceives his life in the suburbs as a metaphorical prison of dullness. By moving to the city and finding his way to success, Karim simultaneously matures and acknowledges that the city he idealised in the past is not so perfect.

Like Karim Amir, people project their own conscious ideas, thoughts, and desires onto a space and transform them through their actions. As Gregorová claims, a sense of place, or genius loci, refers to a relationship between person and place (12). It can be argued that if psychogeography observes the effect the urban environment has on the human mind and behaviour, then while discussing a sense of place, we observe how the human mind, more precisely their perception, affects the space around them. I will also explore the sense of place in the selected novels. Domestic space, for example, is a projection of the people who live in it. In *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing*, Joy's depression affects her perception of her home. Due to her fragmented self-image and financial struggles, Joy is unable to adapt to this environment to reflect her personal wishes and desires, so her depression worsens in that space. In *The Comfort of Strangers*, Robert's house reflects his obsession with the past, as it is filled with old family heirlooms.

According to Coverley, the word flaneur is a French word that entered English literature through Baudelaire's translations (20). Moreover, the author lists other types of literary figures. Some are "the mental traveller, the flaneur, and a stalker" (*Psychogeography* 11). Flaneuse emerged in the first half of the 20th century in Paris in a radically different role from a male flaneur. In *Psychogeography*, Coverley claims that, unlike the male observer, female flaneurs were prostitutes (72). Even though female characters in selected novels are not prostitutes, they

are sometimes characters on the margins of urban society. For example, Joy Stone is a character who lives in a housing estate on the edge of town and struggles to survive, both mentally and financially. Female and male flaneurs wander around urban spaces, following their inner impulses rather than reason. The Freudian id guided avant-garde flaneurs, influencing their unconscious impulses to pursue the female as the ideal of beauty, as well as transforming the urban environment into a place of sexual desire (Coverley, *Psychogeography* 21). Sexual desire is a prominent impulse for some of the characters in the selected novels, like Karim and Shahid. In the Scottish novels, both Joy and Sammy are addicts, so their addiction drives their desires.

Non-places and anthropological places

Before analysing the non-places in the chosen novels, we should explain the difference between an anthropological place and a non-place. In his work *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Augé defines anthropological places, or rather, places, as "places of identity, of relations, and of history" (51). How do we define spaces that are not historical, relational, or concerned with identity? Augé speaks about temporary spaces for people passing through. They are not places, but non-places. According to Augé, non-places include transport vehicles and their routes, places of commerce and consumption, like supermarkets and shopping malls, and the endless networks intended for communication (78–79). Furthermore, words such as history, relationships, and identity all evoke a sense of community. The people who live in an anthropological place all share those characteristics. Augé says that non-places, on the other hand, divide people based on their aims, contrasting with places that bring people together (94). Understanding the interaction between people and non-places is one of the crucial issues we will attempt to analyse in this paper.

As I argue that non-places feature significantly in some of the chosen novels, I will attempt to explore how authors portray non-places in their works. Because non-places are not

connected to a character's identity, relations, and history, it is interesting to observe their behaviour in these spaces. I also argue that the way characters behave in non-places contributes to the way events in the novel play out, and that some events in the novel that happen in non-places are very important for the plot. For instance, Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia* frequently strolls the city and meets people at railway stations. Colin and Mary, the main characters in *The Comfort of Strangers*, spend a lot of time in their hotel room and behave differently than they do at home. Another proof that non-places are important is that they sometimes appear in the characters' subconscious mind through their dreams; for example, the train station in Mary's dreams. Another example is in *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing,* where Joy dreams about her past and future while riding the bus and also sees her deceased boyfriend on the bus. She also spends a lot of time in supermarkets, department stores, and grocery shops, which is a direct reflection of her relationship with food.

Seduction and Murder in Venice

Mary and Colin are British tourists in Venice on vacation, and they spend their days sightseeing. During the night, the city changes from a romantic destination to an alluring, mystical place. While strolling around the streets, Mary and Colin befriend Robert. Robert and Caroline are a local couple who conceal a dark, violent side to their lives and their relationship. The urban space conceals a dark, twisted side filled with violence, which reflects on the locals and attracts visitors.

Flânerie and Murder

In the words of Coverley, the three predominant characteristics flâneurs share are subversive walking, overcoming the everyday banality, and strong irony and humour (*Psychogeography*

12–13). Firstly, for a flaneur, walking is not just an act but rather an act of defiance. Coverley argues that "this act of walking is an urban affair, and, in cities that are increasingly hostile to the pedestrian, it inevitably becomes an act of subversion" (Psychogeography 12). The plot unravels in *The Comfort of Strangers* when characters take a spontaneous turn into a dark alley, where they encounter a stranger pretending to be a helpful Samaritan but who is, in fact, a dangerous individual with deadly intentions. Mary and Colin behave like *Little Red Riding Hood*, who takes a wrong turn in the forest and stumbles upon the bad wolf, who is no less cunning than Robert. Colin and Mary arrive in Venice on vacation. After sightseeing, they desire to experience something authentic. Coverley mentions that the flâneur walks to find something undiscovered in everyday urban life (*Psychogeography* 13).

Finally, they go to Robert's bar and manage that. As quoted in the novel:

> Then, despite the absence of food, and helped on by the wine, they began to experience the pleasure, unique to tourists, of finding themselves in a place without tourists, of making a discovery, of finding somewhere real. They relaxed, they settled into the noise and smoke, and they in turn asked the serious, intent questions of tourists gratified to be talking at last to an authentic citizen. (McEwan 17)

This episode is important for two reasons. On one hand, Colin and Mary yearned for an authentic experience. On the other hand, this experience highlights how urban space and the atmosphere lure the characters towards danger. It also causes them to make poor decisions.

Although the narrator in *The Comfort of Strangers* never explicitly confirms Venice as the setting, we can infer from the references to canals that it likely is. This ambiguity in the

setting is intentional rather than accidental. Malcolm claims that omitting the concrete name of the place points to Robert and Caroline's deceitful nature (75). The city is also dramatically different during the day and at night. Usually, writers portray Venice as a romantic setting. However, in *The Comfort of Strangers*, Venice is also a mysterious and dangerous environment, especially at night. The story starts off during the day. The city is a warm, welcoming space filled with people, traffic, tours, and shopping sprees. At night, the city changes. The stone streets and squares overflowing with tourists are vacant. Without the other tourists, the place resembles a mysterious web. The alleys are dimly lit or dark, with no signs to follow. In other words, at night, the city becomes a confused place where something dangerous but also alluring is just waiting to happen.

Fazili and Zeffer emphasise that the claustrophobic and threatening atmosphere of the city, along with the accompanying discomfort, contribute to the desire for relief and the willingness to hand over personal responsibilities to others (2304). The city puts the protagonists in a desperate and vulnerable position, having to rely on the 'hospitable' strangers they are about to meet. According to Giles, the urban landscape at night becomes a place to seek pleasure, which means it awakens suppressed and unconscious urges, leaning towards violence and grotesqueness (115). Stumbling upon something dangerous is expected. Lehan writes that Dionysus represents the force of chaos in the city, which roams the city streets at night, searching for the fulfilment of its desires (6). Naturally, Robert meeting Colin and Mary in the ally is a manifestation of Dionysus. Lehan also notes that Dionysus can occasionally appear as a mysterious stranger (20). In *The Comfort of Strangers*, meeting Robert in the alley has deadly consequences. Giles asserts that in fiction, the suppression of Dionysus results in either literal or metaphorical death (115).

The Venetians in the novel obviously facilitate, or are at least used to facilitate, violent behaviour, especially towards women. This nonchalant attitude towards domestic violence is congruent with the questionable morality of some of the characters in the novel. Robert is a character obsessed with his family, despite his father's violent temper. His house is a family museum filled with old heirlooms. Robert finds himself trapped in his childhood, just like Caroline finds herself imprisoned in their house. Robert will not leave because of his obsession, just as Caroline cannot. Roberts asserts that the environment has a significant impact on the prevalence of violence and the behaviour of those who engage in it (14). Passing by the palace in the city, Mary and Colin briefly comment on the feminist posters suggesting castration as a method of punishment for rapists. Mary deduces from the poster that the locals use as a tactic to take rape more seriously. In other words, sexual violence is a very present issue in this community. Finally, the violence in the novel culminates with the murder of Colin that transpires in the gallery of Robert and Caroline's home. The noises of the outside world contrast with the silence in the gallery.

Non-places: Spaces of Violence and Romance

Often, the non-places are reminders of Mary and Colin's past mistakes, as well as warning signs of impending danger. While strolling around the city, they observe the mannequins in the shopping windows. Department stores and furniture stores display dummies in their windows, creating a foreboding atmosphere. Malcolm states that they represent the failure of Mary's first marriage (17). Additionally, they may also represent Mary and Colin's docile behaviour. It is almost as if they have relinquished control of their lives, like puppets. The train station is another interesting non-place. Unlike the stores, the train station is not a representation of their past but a warning about their future. Despite not appearing in the book, it is still an important non-place. In the opening pages, Mary is waking up after a nightmare. In

her nightmare, she argues with her children about the meeting at the train station. Gregorová mentions that railway stations appear in urban novels as implications of possible movement or as a possible dead end (Gregorová 51). The non-place is deep into the characters' subconscious mind. The unsettling dreams are a warning about a tragedy that is about to occur. Later in the novel, while lost, Mary proposes that she and Colin depart the city by train. The train is a possible escape; however, Colin's bad judgement resolves with them staying and his eventual death.

Colin and Mary's hotel room is an important setting in the novel. Fudacz argues that the hotel is an archetype of a non-place precisely due to its uniformity and potential to exist anywhere in the world (129). This characteristic smoothly translates into the already loosely established setting in *The Comfort of Strangers.* The hotel room is a space where the protagonists take on tourist identities. Non-places tend to divide people (Augé 94). In their hotel room, Mary and Colin are not speaking to each other. They are lying in separate beds. Colin showers alone, as the duet *Mann und Weib*[1] is in the background. Mary is constantly anxious because of the nightmares she experiences. However, after meeting Robert and Caroline and visiting their home, they rekindle their relationship and fall in love again. The author emphasised the radical shift in the atmosphere by repeating the *Mann und Weib* motif. Except for this time, Colin and Mary are in the shower together, sharing the moment. Also, Colin and

[1] In German, *Mann und Weib* translates to man and woman. The duet is based on Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. The duet symbolises the union of two lovers. Also, it references both male and female features in Colin's appearance. In the novel, he is described as 'beautiful' rather than handsome, as well as having a womanly neck and dressing in a female nightgown (Malcolm 84). The piece is important because it highlights the physical and mental closeness of the couple in the novel.

Mary create erotic fantasies in their hotel room, involving violent acts that reduce them to objects. Roberts explains that non-places are seductive to travellers looking for adventurous experiences because of their transformative nature. They inspire people to transcend into a different state of being ("The Violence of Non-places" 26).

In conclusion, the urban space in this novel is both an ideal tourist destination and a community filled with gender-related violence. Therefore, one may say the concealed darkness in the urban space comes out in the minds and acts of the locals and tourists alike. As the travellers are away from home, the non-places serve as reminders of the past or indicate danger ahead.

Karim Amir's Playground

Karim Amir is a boy living with his Indian father, English mother, and little brother in the London suburbs. He desires to move to London. His life drastically changes due to his father's affair, and he moves with his father Haroon, his father's lover Eva, and her son Charlie, with whom Karim is in love. Karim leaves the suburbs without an identity; he is only a boy born into a biracial household. In London, he finds friends, a career, and his first relationship. On one hand, the city in this novel is Karim's playground, his true home, and the place where he discovers who he wants to be. On the other hand, urban space is a place where different cultures and different people collide, with Karim in the middle. As Karim matures, the urban space around him gets progressively larger. He moves to New York for work, and after the breakup of his relationship, he decides to stay in America for a couple of months. Eventually, he realises that he is happier in London, and he comes back.

Observing the Suburbs

In Psychogeography, Coverley defines a flaneur as a person attempting to overcome the banality of every day (12). Karim wants to overcome everyday life in the suburbs and broaden his horizons in the city. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the change of setting triggers character development. Glabazňa defines migrancy as a circumstantial experience that results from relocating from one environment to another (65). Karim experiences extreme unhappiness in the suburbs. He explains that "things were so gloomy, so slow and heavy, in our family, I don't know why" (Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* 3). People see their home as a space that represents themselves. Karim's sense of place in the suburbs is lost; he cannot relate to it, which is why he desires to move away to London. In the suburbs, Karim is an idealistic teenager. He imagines his future in the city as a complete contrast to his current life, a life full of promiscuity, experimentation with substances, and intellectual discussions. In the suburbs, Karim does not care about other people's opinions. He is more confident and reckless than later in life. On the other hand, while growing up in the city, Karim begins to mature and starts caring about his image.

According to Karim, in the suburbs, people do everything to impress others.

> This was the English passion, not for self-improvement or culture or wit, but for DIY, Do It Yourself, for bigger and better houses with more mod cons, the painstaking accumulation of comfort and, with it, status—the concrete display of earned cash. Display was the game. (Kureishi, *Buddha of Suburbia* 75)

The novel emphasises finding yourself. The residents of suburbia hide their true individuality and desires behind suburban communal identities. A good example is Karim's father, Haroon, a chronically unhappy office clerk. Haroon is appeasing his English neighbourhood by parodying his culture of origin. Karim's father is not the only person in the suburbs putting on a show. Karim's mother Margaret is an artist who sells shoes; his brother Amar uses the

pseudonym Allie to hide from disparaging remarks and assimilate better. Karim fantasises about the idea of becoming an actor.

Observing the City

The novel's second part, *In the City*, starts with migrancy. Karim has mixed feelings about his new life. On one hand, London becomes Karim's spiritual home. After his real home breaks apart, he describes London as a house with five thousand rooms.

> The city blew the windows of my brain wide open. But being in a place so bright, fast and brilliant made you vertiginous with possibility: it didn't necessarily help you grasp those possibilities. I still had no idea what I was going to do. I felt directionless and lost in the crowd. I couldn't yet see how the city worked, but I began to find out. (Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* 126)

Karim describes London as, as opposed to the suburbs, which are dull and the same, all different, with people from all classes of society coexisting and mingling with each other. Once again, Coverley explains that the simplest way to talk about psychogeography is to analyse space as a series of oppositions ("The Art of Wandering: Arthur Machen's London Science", 104).

Kensington is an area where rich women shop, and close by is Earls Court, a place where prostitutes and addicts gather. Karim's father and stepmother Eva move with Karim to West Kensington, an area between Kensington and Earls Court, where people stayed until they could move somewhere else. One may argue that West Kensington, as an in-between space, reflects Karim's bicultural background and his struggle and inner conflict to identify with each culture.

Azeem, Muhammad, et al. discuss the two extremes of his diasporic identity and the self-conflict they instill in him. In the outside world, he is perceived as an Indian because of his appearance; however, his connection with Indian culture is through "eating traditional Indian dishes, yoga practices, dresses, and spicy foods" (162). Karim respects his Indian heritage but identifies himself as an Englishman and speaks only English fluently. Karim engages more with the city itself than with his family. He distances himself from his old life to start a new life in London. Wandering about London becomes his way to deal with the negative emotions he experiences while dealing with his parents' divorce.

Sometimes he feels nostalgic about his life in the suburbs. Besides his bicultural identity, his previous life in the suburbs affects how he observes the people he meets in the city. That is why, after moving to London, he becomes more sceptical of its residents. "Maybe I was just a provincial or something, but I began to see that I was among the strangest audience I'd seen in that place" (Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* 129). Moreover, after Shadwell forces him to play his role with an exaggerated accent, he feels disappointed and desires to return to South London. Nevertheless, while he is visiting his mother in the suburbs, he vividly expresses his discontent with the place, claiming it trumps all fear of an unknown future in the city. Nostalgia is a recurring motif in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, which occurs often when Karim encounters an unfamiliar situation. As he overcomes the fear and adapts to his circumstances, the feeling abandons him. The motif of nostalgia is important because it sheds light on humanity and the depth of Karim's character. Karim's reaction is a natural and very common coping mechanism people use to deal with stressful new environments.

It is interesting that the more mature Karim becomes, the more space around him expands. Initially, he is in the suburbs, and he is only a boy dealing with his father's affair. When he arrives in the city, he begins to explore new worlds, wander around, and discover himself and his career. After some time in London, he matures enough to see the ignorance in

some of the people around him, and he migrates to New York to work with Pyke. At first, as an Englishman he feels intimidated by its size and culture. He refers to himself and his friends as English provincials. After Pyke humiliates him, Karim feels a strong desire to return to London, just as he did previously when Shadwell forced him to exaggerate his accent. Moreover, the same way Karim wanders around London to deal with his depression after his parents' divorce, he wanders around New York to deal with his heartbreak. After his actor colleagues go back to London, he rips his ticket and decides to stay in New York to wander around aimlessly for six months. Coverley argues that one of a flaneur's three characteristics is subversive walking (Psychogeography 12). It might be argued that Karim's refusal to come back home is an act of subversion. "In New York I could be a walking stagnancy without restraint" (Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* 249).

Upon his return to London, he is nostalgic again. He enthusiastically describes strolling around Cheyne Walk. Walking around Central London, he longs for how the city used to be and considers the current state ugly. This complicated relationship between Karim and London can be associated with Baudelaire's concept, known as the flaneur's problem. Tso describes the flaneur's problem as the observer's unrealistic belief that, regardless of how internal his observations are, the flaneur is still able to look at the city objectively (16). Nostalgia, which is a result of his previous experiences and memories, has an influence on his perception and internal vision of the city. "The ugliness was in the people, too. Londoners seemed to hate each other" (Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* 258). In the end of the novel, Karim decides to stay in London, and he describes feeling happy and miserable at the same time, with a dose of optimism that things may get better further on. In other words, we may agree that he observes and accepts the imperfect reality of his city and life as well.

To sum up, as Karim matures, so do his observations about the city. As a teenager, he sees the space around him in an immature fashion and with childlike curiosity, with the suburbs

being bad and dull opposed to the city being promising and good. When he moves to the city, he starts to mature and recognise that the space around him is more complicated and nuanced than he had previously imagined. The complexity of the city draws Karim in, mirroring his own complex identity. Karim, a nostalgic flaneur, allows nostalgia to influence his observations throughout the novel.

Between Religion and Desire

The Black Album is a novel about a young student named Shahid, the child of immigrants from Pakistan, who enrols at a small college in London. On the one hand, the urban space in this novel is a place of infinite possibilities. However, in other urban spaces in this novel, the socio-economic disparity is so prominent that we can talk about elements of dystopia. In these two spaces, two different identities and two different mindsets emerge. The two sides are fundamentalism and liberalism, and Shahid must decide between them. Riaz is a Muslim fundamentalist and charismatic leader of a young group of students who are leaning towards the radical practice of Islam. Shahid befriends this small community of religious outcasts. On the other hand, there is Deedee Osgood, his eccentric post-modern teacher, who encourages students to study their interests. Her life of promiscuity and pursuit of desire is in complete contrast with the rigid constraints imposed on Shahid by his friends.

Two Cities

Shahid admires the city and believes that London is the place where he can shape his identity. Similarly to Karim Amir distancing himself from his friends and family in the suburbs, Shahid idealises London as a place where he can have a fresh start and distance himself from his previous life. “Shahid wanted a new start with new people in a new place” (Kureishi, *The*

Black Album 16). Before moving to London, Shahid imagines a perfect life in a perfect city. After moving to London, this fantasy quickly breaks down, as Shahid expresses that this is not the real London because he feels invisible here. Karim Amir has a similar experience in the suburbs, fantasising about his intense future life full of mysticism, alcohol, sexual promiscuity, smart individuals, and experimenting with drugs. I argue that this experience establishes both Shahid and Karim as flaneurs or mental travellers. Coverley mentions that the mental traveller is somebody who reimagines the city according to their own ideas (*Psychogeography* 41). He goes to the cinema, the theatre, and to erotic bars, only to find them to be boring and too expensive. Lehan suggests that the flaneur, as an observer, seeks inspiration from crowds and potential love and friendship, but often feels discontent and undervalues the city's authentic experience (Lehan 74). This description fits perfectly with Shahid's experience.

While observing the city, Shahid describes two very different realities of the people living in the same city. Just like Karim Amir in *The Buddha of Suburbia,* who describes London as a house with five thousand rooms, Shahid also sees London as a place of limitless possibilities. On the other hand, London is also a place with many unresolved social issues. While driving through the city in a cab, Shahid describes the view as limitless and shapeless. The description resonates with his future potential. As the cab moves through the city, so do the socio-economic boundaries; the clothes are shabbier, and the cars are older. The exquisite portrayal of urban space in this novel allows the reader to explore the city on many levels through Shahid's eyes, as if becoming a flaneur themselves. Shahid points out that this area of the city is where the tourists do not go. From there, we can say that Shahid enjoys the idea of discovering something that other people do not have access to. Shahid uses several types of vehicles to move around town, such as cabs, the tube, and sometimes Chili's car. The tube takes him from his present in the city to his past in the village. The landscape transitions from the city to the suburbs, then further into the countryside. This short trip is significant because he

returns to the place where his father is no longer alive. While travelling on the tube, Shahid immerses himself in his personal history.

Even though *The Black Album* is not a dystopian novel, I would argue that there are some dystopian elements in the novel's descriptions of urban space. In *The Black Album*, London sometimes appears as a utopia and sometimes as a dystopian space. Tso claims that derelict dystopia visions, particularly those of London, are essential to literary psychogeography (14). As already mentioned, a mental traveller, in this case Shahid, idealises London and imagines it as a sort of utopia. When Shahid wanders around London on foot, poverty becomes more apparent. He describes one street as being filled with glass. A child crashes into a wall with a bicycle while another man is eating out of the garbage. A woman is yelling obscenities. He is passing by homeless people covered in newspapers and cardboard (Kureishi, *The Black Album* 16). These descriptions allude to the shattering of Shahid's utopian image of London. In the novel, the street resembles a dystopian city. While describing some dystopian novels, Latham and Hicks mention cramped spaces, never-ending waiting in lines, imposed privatisation, scarcity, and terror, along with the blurred boundaries of private and public space (169).

Shahid also observes chaotic events, like the bomb explosion at Victoria Station. Just like with the burning of *The Satanic Verses*, the explosion described in *The Black Album* refers to a real event. Campbell mentions in his article "Man killed, 38 hurt as IRA switches target to stations" that the explosion occurred on 18 February 1991, disrupting people's everyday commutes and creating utter chaos in the city. In *The Black Album*, the omniscient narrator describes the chaos in the city:

> Apparently, they were bringing the bodies out, no one knew how many. The injured were being ferried to hospitals in the area. It was said that the station was burning, but

> it was too dark to see, since a dismal cloud had fallen over the city. In the rain the police erected barriers, directing people up one street and then down the same street, shouting through megaphones. Helicopters circled above. One thing was clear: no one knew anything. (Kureishi, *The Black Album* 102)

Shahid, a flaneur, finds himself amidst this chaos and, rather than fleeing, finds himself drawn to it. The bomb explosion is significant because it portrays a real-life event that had consequences for individuals as well as for the British society in general.

Shahid and the other commuters experience communal emotions of anger and confusion in the urban space. I would argue that this event is also important because it testifies to the dark consequences of a narrow-minded belief system. Furthermore, this event testifies to the relationship between space and identity. The perpetrators use terrorism as an extreme demonstration of power against anyone who does not share their beliefs. The explosion at Victoria Station was committed by the IRA; however, Shahid's fanatic friends do resort to similar measures towards the end of the novel. Shahid disagrees with such measures; the extremists see his rejection as betrayal and decide to punish him. I would argue that his rejection of such extreme methods is a turning point for Shahid. While witnessing the book burning on campus, Shahid thinks to himself, "How narrow they were, how unintelligent, how... embarrassing it all was" (Kureishi, *The Black Album* 225). These thoughts are a sign of more mature and decisive thinking. In *The Buddha of Suburbia,* Karim Amir expresses a similar feeling of disgust towards ignorance and one-sided points of view. I would argue that these strong opinions are a sign of maturation for both Shahid and Karim.

Shahid's Two Identities

Especially at the beginning of the novel, Shahid's position in society is that of an outsider who searches for a stable identity in the place where he truly belongs. It is particularly interesting to observe the influence of urban space on Shahid and how his behaviour and identity change based on where he is in the novel. Durkheim suggests that each city develops a particular way of thinking in the inhabitants of that city and, through its urban culture, instills norms of behaviour in the citizen's disposition (qtd. in Lehan 7). We can suggest that the urban space in *The Black Album* acts as bait. Shahid engages with two opposing factions operating within distinct urban areas, and he finds himself equally captivated by both. Riaz leads the first group of religious fanatics, with whom Shahid interacts on campus. Deedee represents a contemporary, but also hedonistic, lifestyle. These two lifestyles, or life philosophies, provide Shahid with two different possible identities or life paths. Riaz, as a master manipulator, establishes rapport based on Shahid's loneliness in a new environment, and he uses comfortable, nostalgic spaces to do it. Riaz takes Shahid to a familiar Indian restaurant and comforts him with the words, "Naturally you miss such food. You are my fellow countryman" (Kureishi, *The Black Album* 2).

Shahid, lacking a sense of belonging and having recently lost his father, finds himself drawn to the prospect of a new family and a new father figure in his life. According to Bell and Valentine, emigrant family members often use food to express nostalgia for their homeland (66). Riaz also believes that their parents' assimilation into the English society results in them gaining a more financially stable life while simultaneously losing the spiritual grounding of their country of origin and their sense of self. Shahid, by extension, adopts some of these beliefs. "But in this place, there was no God, political belief or spiritual sustenance" (Kureishi, *The Black Album* 136). Shahid, on the other hand, strongly disagrees with Riaz about viewing England as a home. Riaz declares that England will never be his home, while Shahid believes that he could not feel more comfortable anywhere else. Another place important to Shahid's

fundamentalist friends is the mosque. In Shahid's words, the mosque is a space where the sense of community transcends social barriers such as race, class, and language. As opposed to the city, Shahid describes the atmosphere in the mosque as peaceful, meditative, and without unnecessary competition. In the mosque, Shahid feels like he has regained his innocence and deems his experiences with Deedee to be corruptive and wrong.

In fact, his convictions are so strong that he considers breaking up with Deedee because of her lifestyle. Deedee lives a materialistic, self-indulgent contemporary British lifestyle that clashes with the rigid lifestyle of Shahid's fanatic friends. She spends her time in underground clubs, consumes drugs, and obsesses over pleasure. Shahid observes these spaces as exciting and seductive. Unlike Riaz, who uses nostalgic spaces to gain Shahid's trust, Deedee takes Shahid to places unfamiliar to him to find himself. She encourages him to seek pleasure and experiment with substances. After spending time with her, Shahid describes the city as follows:

> Beneath the banality and repetition of this ordinary day there ran, like the warm inhabited tube tunnels under the city, flirtation, passion and the deepest curiosities. (…) The platform of Baker Street Station was Arcadia itself. He had had no idea that the extraordinary would be alive and well on the Jubilee Line. Today he could see and feel the lure. (Kureishi, *The Black Album* 124-125)

Shahid follows Deedee to underground bars, which are like a parallel dimension in the same city, with rooms lit with kaleidoscopic lights and half-naked dancers. Shahid experiences a drug-induced trance. He observes the other dancers through ultraviolet haze and golden mist. To him, everyone appears beautiful. He feels a sense of euphoria akin to an intense religious encounter. In comparison with the calm, blissful atmosphere in the mosque, this space is just as, or even more, alluring to Shahid. On ecstasy, Shahid experiences not only feelings of elation but also an overwhelming sense of despair and suicidal thoughts. While trying to fight them, he

thinks to himself, “But what on the list could be comparable to the feeling of this drug” (Kureishi, *The Black Album* 63)? In other words, the hedonistic identity Shahid builds with Deedee is completely different from the identity he builds in the company of his fanatic friends. Shahid cannot fully agree with Deedee’s way of life but has even more trouble accepting his friends' narrow-minded views. In the end, he decides to follow his inner curiosity as his primary guide.

All things considered, urban space in *The Black Album* is a contradictory place, with religious fundamentalism and traditionalism on one side and a modern identity of desire and curiosity on the other. On one side, modern British identity and Deedee offer Shahid endless self-discovery and hedonism, but on the other, they lack peace and spiritual sustenance. When Shahid spends time with his friends, he feels a sense of community, loyalty, and friendship, but he also finds their lifestyle strict and narrow-minded, which repels him. In the end, Shahid chooses to follow his own curiosity instead of somebody’s beliefs.

Spaces of The Mind

The Trick Is to Keep Breathing is a novel about a Scottish drama teacher, Joy Stone, mourning the sudden loss of her boyfriend, Michael. Irvine, North Ayrshire, serves as the setting for the novel. She resides on a council estate that does not belong to her, which is also isolating her from the city. Often, urban space in the novel represents the physical barrier between Joy and the rest of the world. She self-medicates with alcohol and pills and prefers roaming about shopping malls and grocery stores instead of dealing with other people. Her relationships are either completely shallow and not personal, like with her doctors and colleagues, or they are intense, sexual, and violent, like with friends and family. All these factors contribute to her extreme discomfort, which further aggravates her crippling state.

Psychogeography Of The Body

As we will see in this novel, Joy's immediate surroundings, the domestic interior, often reflect her mental health. Her body as space is heavily intertwined with the space of her home. When it comes to a sense of belonging, the cottage is the only place Joy considers home. The cottage is eaten by mould and mushrooms. Regardless of how well she decorates the space, it deteriorates from the inside out. The same happens to Joy after Michael's accident; she starts to physically deteriorate. According to Ellard, the positive emotions we have towards our home depend on our ability to control it with regard to our needs and wishes (73). The cottage was Joy's attempt to create an identity of her own, and when she loses that control, one aspect of her identity disappears, as does her love for the home. The same happens to her mental state; unable to control her life through the tragedy, her self-esteem crumbles. The comparison between the setting and Joy's mental state is probably far from accidental, as there is a constant comparison between space in the novel and Joy's mental or physical predicament. Joy, left out of the mourning process during the funeral, feels erased into nothing: "He'd run time backwards, cleansed, absolved and got rid of the ground-in stain. And the stain was me" (Galloway 79).

After the breakdown, Joy begins her self-destructive behaviour. It is almost as if she is trying to dissipate into nothing. Her comparison to a stain separates her from the rest of the living; she is closer to an object than to a human being, an inanimate part of space. Joy systemically treats her body as an object. First, she claims to be watching herself from the corner. She does not actively move but rather moves pieces of her body, almost like a piece of furniture in the room. Instead of using her body to perform actions, her daily routine controls her. She scrubs the kitchen until her hands swell and resemble ham. The descriptions of how she cleans her body are not so different. "Boxes and bottles on the bedroom floor: creams, fluids, cotton, and paper. Moisturiser. To keep in the juice. Glutinous stuff for my elbows, knees, and knuckles in case they're rough. I pluck my eyebrows and the single hair on my upper

lip" (Galloway 47). Understanding Joy's relationship with objects around her, by extension, means understanding the way she treats her body. Ng claims that by controlling objects, Joy attempts to gain control over her own collapsing reality and life (241).

By treating her body as an object, she extends that control to keep her body functioning despite her physical and mental state. Bell and Valentine claim that the slim body represents a false sense of successful psychological self-restraint over the undisciplined body (30). Eating disorders are yet another attempt to control her environment and space. The authors state that anorexia is an attempt to control the body's need for food to the point of self-destruction, which achieves a transcendental split between the body and the mind of the individual (Bell and Valentine 38). We can observe both anorexia and the rigorous cleaning of her body as ritualistic practices aimed at cleansing and absolving guilt and shame. Augé suggests that the body transforms into a network of places for religious anointing or purification (Augé 61). While observing her uterus on the ultrasound, she describes herself as the green cave, an empty space, and a black hole with nothing inside. The description refers to her reaction to finding out she is not pregnant, but it is a good way to describe her self-worth. Not only does she not have anyone inside, but she also feels empty of life. Another time, Joy says it is she who has no real substance, nothing underneath her exterior. Her emptiness represents her diminished personhood.

Non-Places And Memories

As a little girl, Joy experienced a recurring nightmare about herself at a bus stop. Inside the bad dream, she is a grown woman who realises she is alone on the wrong bus. The bus has no driver and is heading for a wall. Clearly, Joy has experienced self-doubt since an early age. The non-place in the dream indicates her struggle to retain control over her own life, as well as the fears she faces. In the mental hospital, she starts to acknowledge the desire to get better, and

that desire terrifies her. One of the examples she lists is that she "sees" Michael in vehicles passing by, such as cars and buses. Her memory is starting to allow the painful memories to come out, which means she is starting to deal with her reality. Consequently, non-places deal with Joy's sub-conscious and conscious self-realisations. Her life passes by, and her refusal to acknowledge that reality comes at the expense of her own sound mind and body. She mentions a bus station right outside of the cottage she used to live in. Being able to leave whenever she wants makes her feel free. By contrast, when she needs to return every day to her estate, she feels extremely uncomfortable.

Stedman categorises the housing estate in *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing* as a non-place because it represents a peripheral area devoid of community and roots (84). Joy works in the city but lives on the estate, called Bourtreehill. The estate's residents, who share nothing but a common identity, refer to it as Boot Hill. Joy describes her living place as "an annexe of nowhere and besides, I don't like to wish myself on anyone" (Galloway 37). An annexe means an addition or extension. An extension to nowhere is meaningless and pointless. However, it provides insight into Joy's way of thinking. The isolation she experiences on the estate aggravates her depression and makes her feel less valued. She says that the area's misfits—a surplus of unwanted population—were the reason behind the place's construction. The place for "undesirables" (Galloway 13) signifies Joy's perception of her status in the city. Joy barely identifies the place as her own, as depicted in the novel, the first time she arrives at her residence. She explains that she always wanted a red door, yet the doors are green. The nameplate on the door says it is her late boyfriend's, not hers.

This is not her home in any sense of the word; she feels trapped inside it. As she enters, the space around her feels threatening. While entering the porch, her body begins to shiver. She shivers a little while later as she reminisces about the event at the pool. This indicates that the

trauma from the accident is still alive, and she has just begun to mourn her loss. With Michael's death, Joy has no more reason to stay on the estate, yet she is paralysed by grief and depression to leave it, as well as financially unable to. The route to Bourtreehill is complicated. The twisted roads appear to slow down vehicles and prevent accidents. However, Joy points out that barely anybody in the estate owns a car, and the children seem to enjoy taunting the drivers by playing on the road. Stedman argues that, as thoughtful as the design of the road is, it fails to fulfil the needs of estate residents as it further complicates their everyday transport (81). Moreover, the complicated route deepens her solace from co-workers and other residents. Her colleagues are driving her to the bus station, and during the ride they do not engage in conversation with her.

The emotional distance between Joy and her colleagues reflects the physical distance between Bourtreehill and the city. Joy's emotional world interacts more with the space around her than with people. She comes to the supermarket to observe and let her mind rest. The abundance of produce and its orderly display on the shelves delight her. She mostly buys magazines and alcohol. Augé claims that the words that prescribe, prohibit, or give out information to people inside non-places are important parts of the non-places. The information enables the individual to interact with the place they are in without interacting with other people (96). One may argue that Joy craves human connection, but because her current state is crippling her ability to connect with people, she trades that for the visual pleasure and comfort she receives in the supermarket. The colours, the orderliness, and the smell of food allow her to experience joy without guilt or anxiety. The signs in the supermarket are the one-sided communication she needs. Because of that, she enjoys leaving for the supermarket in the afternoon when there are fewer people (24).

Augé renames non-places as places of memory, and he describes the world of supermodernity as one in which people are born in clinics and die in hospitals (Augé 78). Inside

and outside of such institutions, there is a constant inflow and outflow of people. The identity of the people is irrelevant; they are all patients, and they are there for a specific temporary purpose. The same actions repeat every day. Mental issues and recovery are some of the central themes in this novel. For Joy, the hospitals and clinics in the novel are places of constant (re)traumatisation, as she is forced to constantly recollect the painful memories of the accident. "We try to be at ease and go through the routine about the pills, the anxiety, the sleeplessness, etc. There is no consensus, no conclusion. No answer" (Galloway 53). Eventually, the protagonist realises that the psychiatrists can only help her if she wants to change. People "do not visit the unsick" (Galloway 200), which links her fear of health to her fear of loneliness. Putting this quote into the perspective of space, the verb visit is particularly interesting. It is not 'love' or 'appreciate' healthy people, but specifically, visit. This can be another reference to Joy's deep alienation from other people and how lonely she really is inside her space.

To summarise, the novel explores Joy's sub-conscious and conscious self-realisations through non-places, which serve as places of memory. Joy's grief dehumanises her perception, objectifying herself and treating herself as part of space, which matches her inner world closely.

Losing Sense In Glasgow

The setting of *How Late It Was, How Late* takes place in Glasgow, an industrial city that serves as a home to numerous members of the working class. One of these members is Sammy Samuels, an ex-convict and drunkard who lives on the fringes of contemporary society and lives off of government help programs. He wakes up half-drunk in an alley and gets into a fight with the police, which causes him to lose his eyesight. From that point on, Sammy's urban space transforms from a familiar place to a space filled with barriers that he must deal with in order to survive. Even his home, which belongs to his missing girlfriend Helen, is now a

stressful environment. In the novel, spaces designed to support and assist individuals like Sammy with these issues complicate Sammy's life by neglecting to acknowledge his health issues. His conflict with the police exacerbates into a relentless witch hunt, where the police accuse him of alleged involvement in his girlfriend's disappearance. The police harass him to the point where he decides to abandon the city and move to London or Texas. Eventually, he succeeds with the help of his son, who comes to visit him.

Glasgow: Purgatory of the Working Class

Class, especially the working class, has always been associated with urban space in British literature. According to Keunen and Droogh, the concept developed in the second half of the nineteenth century, as the city transformed into a space where the elite and middle class observe the city and its promenades, theatres, and boulevards, while the working class wanders the streets in hopes of reminding the world of its existence (99). In other words, the difference between the classes became more prominent during this period. Although the setting of *How Late It Was, How Late* takes place in the nineties, I contend that Sammy experiences the consequences of that same transformation. In the beginning of *How Late It Was, How Late*, there is a group of tourists or businessmen observing Sammy waking up dirty and half-drunk. He puts on a smile to deceive them. "But these sodjers, man if ye're no a fucking millionaire or else talk with the right voice, they don't give a fuck" (Kelman 4). On his way, he meets policemen, or 'sodjers'. Sammy solidifies his position as an outsider, both with his social status and his Glaswegian dialect. The linguistic aspect of Sammy's characterisation in the novel is also complex and related to the urban space. On one hand, speaking in dialect gives Sammy a strong sense of identity, related exclusively to the working class.

McGlynn, on the other hand, states that the Glaswegian dialect is a questionable identity marker because it is not a natural occurrence but rather a constructed result of Irish

immigration or immigration in general (74). The way Sammy speaks makes him stand out more. Keunen and Droogh say that the working class in literature shares a communal non-identity, described as subversive, unhygienic people void of morality (101). The socio-economic outsider is the character who challenges this point of view. Keunen and Droogh argue that the purpose of the socio-economic outsider, or underdog, is to show the truth of their destitute existence, the truth that does not overlap with the perspective of the elite and middle class (102). Sammy Samuels is a perfect outsider. According to McGlynn, Kelman sees Sammy precisely as the type of character that never amounts to anything more than being a supporting character (54). Already despised as a member of the working class, an ex-criminal, and a drunk, after losing his eyesight, it becomes apparent that there is no place for him in Glasgow, both literally and figuratively. His situation is ironic because, even though he is blind, his humanity becomes invisible to those around him. Because of his disability, the once-familiar city becomes a dangerous zone full of obstacles as Sammy struggles to find his way.

Coverley says that Robinsonner, in this case Sammy, is a mental traveller with the ability to survive in a threatening environment (*Psychogeography* 68). Sammy's suffering is bearable because of his hopes and fantasies to escape the city and to start again in Luckenbach, Texas. This is a common motif in urban literature. According to Coverley, a flaneur is a nostalgic figure, a symbol of both the destruction of his previous home and the birth of a new place he will explore (*Psychogeography* 20). Consequently, Sammy's accident can be analysed as an event leading to the destruction of Glasgow as Sammy knows it and the birth of a new city where he is no longer welcome. His suffering gives him the ability to find comfort in his memories, which remain the only visual stimuli he is able to experience. Gregorová says that blinding Sammy achieves perfect overlap between geographical space in the novel and Sammy's mind (56). The entire novel reads as that of a repentant sinner going through a cathartic experience. The transformed streets of Glasgow play the role of purgatory in Sammy's

life. He himself confirms this: “He had fucking reached it now man the fucking dregs man the pits, the fucking black fucking limboland, purgatory; that’s what it was like, purgatory, where all ye can do is think” (Kelman 172).

Feeling The City

Sammy’s blindness allows him to make observations unlike any other flaneur. Lehan discusses Hume’s idea of an identity reduced to sensations in a world where physical objects are only colour, smell, and texture in the mind of an observer (129). He uses his memories of the city, as well as his other senses, to navigate his way around Glasgow's streets. Furthermore, Lehan argues that the individual, imprisoned in his own subjectivity, transforms the city into an isolated experience (129). Because of Sammy’s blindness and his mental instability, it is difficult to discern reality from Sammy’s guessing and imagination. The city in Sammy’s mind is reduced to whatever he can touch, smell, or hear at the moment, which makes him vulnerable. According to Kó´vesi, Glasgow in the novel decomposes into walls, streets, and buildings, from the abstract idea to the concrete parts (143). His awareness that his imprisonment is a result of his own mistakes makes the punishment even worse. The uncertain time and place further emphasise the limbo-like atmosphere. Lehan mentions that characters in urban novels inevitably see the space around them as part of themselves, and when they see more than they can handle, they turn away or inward (Lehan 129).

Sammy’s blindness aggravates his declining mental health and makes him more susceptible to provocation and conflict. The vulnerability makes him more childlike and emotional. According to Gregorová, Sammy’s condition makes him paranoid and keeps him trapped and defiant (56). After Sammy’s world becomes so hostile towards him, he sees no other option than to flee the city. The constant physical and mental exhaustion causes Sammy to frequently wander in and out of consciousness, whether it is from beatings or simply passing

out. This confuses not only Sammy but also the reader, who cannot be certain of Sammy's whereabouts or the time but needs to rely on Sammy's estimations. The feeling of confusion comes from not only blindness but also a drunken state. McGlynn argues that this confusion is intentional, as it forces the reader to experience the same space as Sammy from a blind perspective (64). By default, the reader metaphorically becomes a part of Sammy's consciousness, or a cellmate in the prison of his reality, which allows the reader to feel empathy and understanding for the character.

Sammy Samuels Against Glasgow

Sørensen lists bars as settings where the characters experience existential musings, nervous breakdowns, and epiphanies (Sørensen 96). In *How Late It Was, How Late*, "Sammy couldnay talk. He felt bad—nervous—really nervous—like he was gony have a fit of shaking, something like that" (Kelman 42). Immediately after this, Sammy looks for a pub. This reflects his previous life and how much time he used to spend in these spaces. Pubs are sanctuary places for Sammy in stressful situations. Due to his inclination towards alcohol consumption, he frequently visits pubs as a way to decompress. Sammy Samuels goes to pubs for the same reason Joy Stone goes to a grocery store: to find hope in short-term ritualistic consumption of alcohol and to be able to share his troubles. Sammy describes a similar experience when coming to a pub named *The Blazer*: "He felt like sitting down. Sharing a drink with somebody. Just telling them the score. No that he had ever liked *The Blazer* much. (…) But ye didnay really want to see them, no unless ye needed something. Even then ye had to be wary. Ye pay for everything in this life" (Kelman 45). The relationships he develops in pubs are superficial and non-fulfilling.

In places like Central Medical, there is an overwhelming sense of alienation. Every person is out for themselves. While listening to another person describe his life journey, Sammy makes the following comment:

> [S]o they all knew how hard he was, how hard his life was, where he came from. Then ye think of the other folk sitting roundabout, how ye know fuck all about them, what like their lives were. It made ye laugh; the young guy, if he had the fucking brains to think it, about them – he wouldnay fucking talk so loud. One thing ye learned; there was aye somebody worse than yerself. (Kelman 90)

Furthermore, the majority of communication in these spaces consists of basic information transactions. Friendly communication, if any, is brought down to a minimum, and if it occurs, it is with the purpose of manipulating Sammy into saying more information that can be used against him. He does not even know who he is talking to until after the fact. For example, during his conversation with the preliminary officer, he questions Sammy in a very professional manner, until Sammy becomes reluctant to reveal some information. Then, he starts talking to him about personal matters, until Sammy softens and unintentionally shares the information.

Sammy is enraged by these situations because, in addition to his newly acquired disability, he must contend with the entire bureaucratic system. He also feels inferior to the middle-class people he encounters in these spaces. For example, in the doctor's office, he speaks to a nurse, but she ignores him. He comments that: "They talk to ye and ye're allowed to reply but ye cannay speak unless spoken to" (Kelman 216). I argue his entire interaction with the doctor is ridiculous; the doctor refuses to acknowledge his blindness and uses general language that does not confirm nor deny anything. This behaviour drives Sammy mad, and he throws a fit of rage. I suggest that in these non-places, like the doctor's office and Central Medical, his general sense of place is frustration and helplessness to improve his situation. The

people around him are either patients who are as clueless as he is, or they are medical professionals who have no desire to help him in any way. The general sense in these non-places is apathy, which says a lot about the urban space in this novel, about Scotland and Glasgow in the nineties, and the relationship between different social classes.

To conclude, Sammy's accident causes him to struggle in his environment. The cruelty of urban space seems to worsen simultaneously with the deterioration of Sammy's mental state. Space and time depend on Sammy's perception, which means that they are sometimes indiscernible. The descriptions of urban space in *How Late it Was, How Late* are reduced to Sammy's remaining senses which are not always credible. In the similar fashion, Sammy has a hard time discerning who he can or cannot trust which is why he struggles to maintain a lot of meaningful relationships.

Conclusion

In the novels I have analysed in this paper, urban space features prominently, and their main protagonists are always explored in the context of an urban setting. I have also analysed many of the protagonists as flaneurs. In the paper I have used psychogeography to analyse the relationship between an individual's behaviour and urban space. Additionally, I have also used Marc Augé's concept of non-places in order to portray spaces that bear no connection to identity, meaning, or history. These spaces offer a distinct viewpoint on the urban landscape, enabling us, as readers, to scrutinise the actions of characters in environments not intended to be intimate. What tends to happen, however, is that when characters find themselves in impersonal spaces, they attempt to personalise them with memories and desires.

For example, Mary and Colin in *The Comfort of Strangers* visit Venice for the first time. Behind the façade of a romantic, hospitable destination suited for perfect love, there is a twisted darkness that hides decades of generational trauma and domestic abuse. Non-places like the furniture store and a railway station in Mary's nightmares are warning signs of the violence that awaits them in the novel. Kureishi's novels, *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*, both feature a young flaneur with a hybrid identity. Similarly, in both novels, urban spaces are complex environments where radical socio-economic differences coexist near each other. Eventually, the main protagonists in both novels mature enough to accept the dissonance between their expectations about their surroundings and reality. This understanding allows them to become independent thinkers instead of taking other people's opinions as their own. In Janice Galloway's *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing,* depictions of urban space reflect the mental state of the observer, Joy Stone, who is suffering from reactive depression, several eating disorders, and alcoholism. The isolated urban space in *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing*, like Bourtreehill, where she lives, deepens and worsens Joy's mental issues.

Some non-places in the novel, like bus stations and vehicles, serve as memory places, forcing Joy to recall painful events. She engages in alcohol abuse and retail therapy to deal with her issues, which is why she enjoys visiting supermarkets and shopping malls. These non-places allow Joy to seemingly stay in touch with society without the obligation to maintain serious and meaningful relationships. Urban space in *How Late It Was, How Late* goes through a radical transformation. Glasgow becomes a threatening environment full of obstacles that blind Sammy needs to tackle in order to find his new place in the city. Unlike the protagonists in *The Buddha of Suburbia, The Black Album,* and *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing*, Sammy's attempts to cope with his circumstances are unsuccessful, ultimately forcing him to escape the city. In both *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* and *How Late It Was, How Late,* non-places that provide health services, like the mental hospital and Central Medical, are described as dysfunctional to a

degree, with apathetic staff. However, in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, Joy receives the help she needs, whereas Sammy needs to survive on his own.

In conclusion, we have seen how the urban space has an enormous impact on the protagonists in the novels. Their interaction with the space around them is significant because it sheds light on their self-perception as well as their relationships with other characters in the novels. This paper aims to demonstrate the application of psychogeography and the concept of non-spaces in analysing the co-dependent relationship between the individual and the space that surrounds him.

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Urban Space in Contemporary British Fiction

Abstract

This diploma paper analyses urban space in five selected novels: Ian McEwan's *The Comfort of Strangers*, Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*, Janice Galloway's *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing*, and James Kelman's *How Late It Was, How Late*. The paper uses the concepts of psychogeography and non-places to demonstrate the relationship between the individual and the urban setting and the protagonists' perceptions of urban space. The paper explores issues such as flânerie, identity formation, male-female relationships.

Key words: psychogeography, non-places, identity, urban space, flânerie

Urbani prostor u suvremenoj britanskoj književnosti

Ovaj diplomski rad analizira urbani prostor u pet romana suvremene britanske književnosti. Romani su *Utjeha u naručju neznanaca* (Ian McEwan), *Buddha iz predgrađa* i *Crni Album* (Hanif Kureishi), *Trik je nastaviti disati* (Janice Galloway), *Kako je kasno bilo, kako kasno* (James Kelman). U diplomskom radu koriste se pojmovi psihogeografije i nemjesta kako bi se prikazao ne samo odnos između pojedinca i urbanog okruženja, već i percepcija protagonista na urbani prostor. Rad istražuje flaneriju, izgradnju identiteta te problematiku muško-ženskih odnosa u kontekstu urbanog prostora.

Ključne riječi: psihogeografija, nemjesta, identitet, urbani prostor, flanerija