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REVEALING SPATIAL REPRESENTATION THROUGH WALKING ALONG THE CULTURAL CORRIDOR IN YOGYAKARTA

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ABSTRACT

Background: Spatial representation typically focuses on physical dimensions overlooking the relationships between subjects and objects encountered during urban navigation. By reframing cinematic interpretation from a visual arts perspective to one of urban legibility, however, we can more effectively examine spatial representation within actual urban contexts.

Aims: This study aims to examine how walking experiences shape the subject-object relations in cultural corridors. Furthermore, the study aims to translate these narratives through montage analysis to reveal aspects of public space that influence cinematic experiences.

Methodology and Results: This study uses a qualitative, single-case study approach to investigate the elements of urban space that attract domestic tourists. Forty-one tourists shared their interests, and their spatial narratives presented nine distinct episodes. The study reveals that static objects enhance the visual landscape, while temporary objects facilitate movement and create intermezzo moments.

Conclusion, significance, and impact study: These findings demonstrate that spatial narratives offer valuable insights into how sequences of events in a particular urban corridor can shape cinematic experiences. The study's impact lies in showing that pedestrian-based spatial narratives can be a practical design tool for visual route planning, preserving cultural identity, and enhancing walkability in historic urban corridors.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Cities hold diverse stories that captivate their visitors. The way visitors navigate urban environments reflects their interactions with the built landscape, revealing the essential dynamics between observer and space [1]. Furthermore, exploring urban legibility emphasizes the importance of how individuals mentally map and experience environments [2]. This underscores the importance of preserving visual pathways that are integral to the pedestrian's experiences and narratives when navigating the city.

Architectural and urban forms construct temporal and narrative contexts [3]. Spatial narrative has been widely explored in film and architecture. However, its application in real-world urban environments remains understudied. Previous studies tend to treat spatial narrative as solely a descriptive tool, rather than recognizing its potential to enhance design methodology [4], [5], [6]. This research aims to broaden the discourse on urban cinema, particularly in Southeast Asia and Indonesia.

In tourist destinations like Malioboro, the interplay between visual elements and cultural identity has a profound impact on pedestrian experiences, offering valuable insights for corridor design. Much research has been conducted on the Malioboro corridor. For instance, a recent study emphasizes the interactions between urban space and community, highlighting the role of tourism photography in preserving cultural heritage [7]. Additionally, the components that comprise the city's image include the morphological elements of tourist spaces, such as cultural tourism, shopping, and culinary experiences [8].

The concept of cultural corridors further explains their role as a visual 'mediators' that unite spatial fragments into a cohesive urban structure at various scales [9]. Additional findings mention the empathetic relationship between urban governance and residents, showing how urban functions emerge through reciprocal social and spatial engagement [10]. However, despite these insights, few studies have examined how walking experiences along the corridor generate sequential narratives that can be translated into design-relevant knowledge. This creates a critical gap that the present study seeks to address.

Moving through urban environments is closely linked to the motivations that influence whether individuals pause or continue walking [1]. Walking is the basis of this study's exploration because it allows observers to connect with memories of place and spatial identity [11], [12]. Advancing walkability pathways and visually appealing public spaces is essential for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 11 in urban sustainability. This can be achieved through inclusive

design, preserving cultural heritage, and adopting low-emission mobility, including pedestrian movement [13]. Thus, walking functions as a foundational spatial practice that links human motivation, place identity, and sustainable urban design.

There is a notable gap in the scholarly discourse on spatial narrative techniques for investigating urban environments, especially in city corridors. This discrepancy prompts a series of inquiries: How does walking practice shape the relationship between the subject and object, and how does it influence spatial narratives? This study explores spatial narrative methodologies for analyzing the visual representation of Malioboro. The findings are poised to enrich urban design paradigms by offering a novel perspective on preserving urban narratives.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 The Materials

Yogyakarta’s spatial planning model prioritizes concentrating pedestrian activity within designated corridors and directing development and regulation toward areas identified as strategic by the government [14]. The study analysis highlights the essential segments that define the city’s character. Segment 1 (SG1) features iconic landmarks, such as the historic train station and the bustling central mall, which serve as vital activity hubs. Meanwhile, Segment 2 (SG2) takes us to the traditional Bringharjo market, and the city node known as “*Titik Nol Kilometer Yogyakarta*”. Figure 1 below illustrates part of the imaginary north-south axis traversing Yogyakarta. This figure provides a spatial representation that emphasizes narratives deeply rooted in culture-based tourism.



Fig. 1 Depiction of walking scenes in the morning and at night
Source: Wardhani, cited from Regional Regulation’ map [15], 2025

The informants were purposely chosen to provide detailed insights that were consistent with the research objectives. This approach reflects qualitative research principles that value participants who can illuminate the phenomenon rather than offering statistical representativeness [16]. In this study, the informants were tourists walking along Malioboro because they offered new perceptual insights. Local daily walkers were excluded because their familiarity with the area could diminish their sensitivity to unique spatial cues and narrative features. This follows case study logic, which prioritizes individuals with direct but non-habitual interactions with the study area [17]. Forty-one tourist narratives were used to achieve data saturation, which occurred when tourists repeatedly identified the same locations or sights.

2.2 The Method

The method used in this research is exploratory and utilizes a case study approach. This research is grounded in an interpretive paradigm, which posits that reality is subjective and shaped by individual human experiences [16], [17], [18]. A case study method is considered appropriate for examining complex, context-dependent architectural phenomena [19]. Furthermore, the emphasis on understanding how these phenomena occur, supported by detailed descriptive exploration, reinforces the case study approach's suitability for comprehensively capturing spatial experiences.

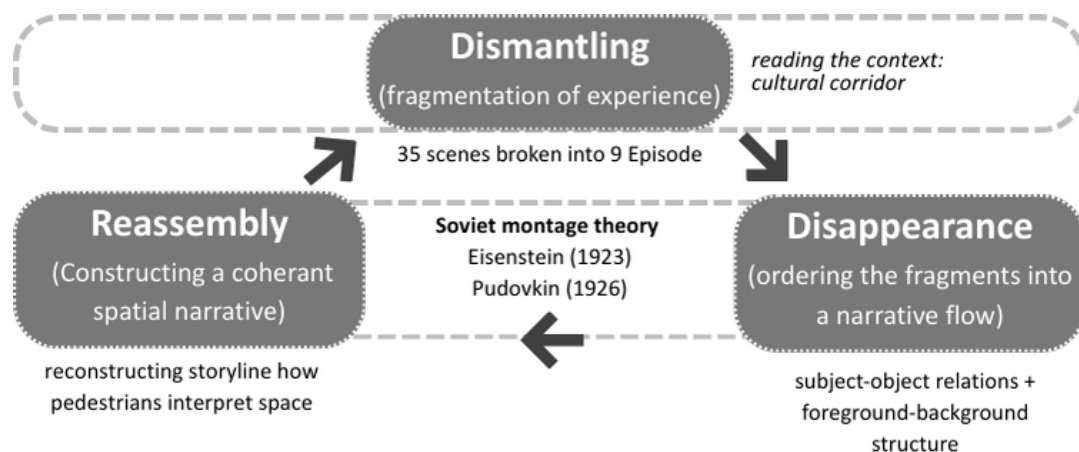


Fig. 2 The principles of montage

Source: Wardhani, 2025

This study employed three data collection methods: direct observation, narrative interviews, and visual mapping. Montage was applied to analyze spatial and temporal aspects, enabling the identification of meaningful spaces based on pedestrian preferences. Montage enables us to reject rigidly defined forms and offers freedom from routine analysis. It also

provides the dynamic ability to take any form [20]. In this context, montage refers to an experimental methodological process and an editing technique. Specifically, it involves assembling disparate visual or narrative elements to create new relationships and narrative forms. It is often used as a creative practice in the visual arts, design, and communication [21].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cinematic thinking is a useful tool for exploring urban design. Our experience of exploring a city can be viewed as a sequence, much like the plot of a film. This concept is like various filmmaking techniques, such as framing, which focuses on specific elements within a scene. It is also similar to transitions and narrative flow, which ensure a coherent storytelling experience [22]. Furthermore, "...urban planning and design as knowledge oriented towards space can be closely linked to the series of urban spaces in films..." [23]. There are opportunities to explore urban spaces through filmmaking by using visual presentation techniques to integrate diverse visuals and create a cohesive spatial narrative.

The experience of walking in the city is a fundamental part of tourism and can be an important aspect of urban planning. These narratives can serve as the initial steps in design [24]. Furthermore, space acquires narrative characteristics because it demonstrates social and cultural conventions [12]. This study primarily examines urban spaces through spatial narratives with a focus on tourism-oriented environments. This study will analyze various elements that shape urban spaces, such as street furniture, signage, landmarks, nodes, and colonial historical buildings that often serve as backdrops for photographs of visitors.

3.1 Breaking the Scene: Dismantling the Urban Experience

To construct the spatial narratives, we will follow the informants' narratives without imposing our own perspective, thus avoiding bias and placing the researcher outside the research model. We will build the sequence by tracing the points mentioned by the tourist and distinguishing between subjects and objects. The final product will be a transcript capturing all the words tourists use within their narratives.



Fig. 3 The existing scenes are based on the sequential arrangement captured by the researcher (Above). Some scenes disappear according to the informant's point of interest (POI) (Below).

Source: Wardhani, 2025

The authors compiled 35 scenes to create a complete observation fragment (figure 3). These scenes demonstrate that the original sequence had a consistent binding value. This refers to the visual or thematic connection that runs through the scenes. After selecting the preferred scene, they divided the fragment into nine smaller episodes. Each episode was chosen to separate the background, or static elements, from the foreground, or active or changing elements.

Each scene has three attributes: a stationary object, a temporal object, and subject movement. The nine scenes represent points of interest. These scenes capture the spatial experiences that tourists focus on when moving through the corridor. Dividing the scenes into episodes establishes a foundation for an urban design method that employs montage techniques. In this context, montage refers to the process of dismantling, removing, and reassembling scene components to create new spatial experiences.

3.2 The Sequence Unfolds: Mapping Subject-Object Relations

The relationship between cinema and architecture can be described as a user experiencing space within an architectural object. This is similar to how viewers experience a series of sequences in a movie theater [25]. In this second step, the analysis focuses on identifying nine episodes depicting subject-object interaction. These interactions illustrate sequential attributes, including stationary objects, temporal objects, and subject movement. Stationary objects, such as Dutch heritage buildings and street signs, form the background. Temporal objects, such as parked horse-drawn carriages (*delman*) and pedicabs (*becak*), as well as temporal events and traveling

food vendors, form the foreground. The pedestrian-based spatial narrative illustrates sequential visual routes. These walking-based interactions become the main idea for constructing a sequential episode.

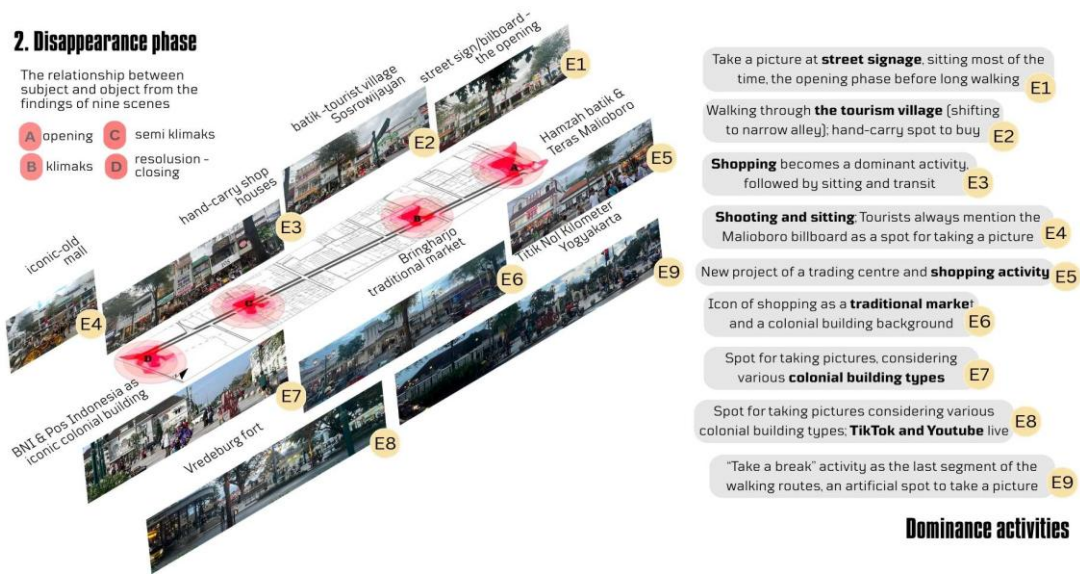


Fig. 4 The relationship between subject and object in nine scenes

Source: Wardhani, 2025

Analysis of the nine scenes reveals that static features, such as historic colonial buildings, shophouses, iconic signage, and street furniture, serve as reliable visual anchors in the urban landscape. These elements facilitate spatial orientation and serve as popular photography backdrops, enhancing their significance in the urban experience. Conversely, temporal elements, such as pedicabs, horse-drawn carriages, street vendors, informal activities, and passing vehicles, introduce a dynamic rhythm to the scenes, enriching the area with a sense of vitality and movement. The interplay between static and temporal elements fundamentally alters the cinematic landscape.

As Figure 4 illustrates, the variation in dominant activities within these episodes, which span shopping and transit (Scenes E3, E4, and E5), exploratory walking through narrow alleys (Scene E2), mixed work and leisure patterns (Scene E5), iconic photographic moments (Scenes E1, E4, E7), and vibrant social interactions catalyzed by informal activities across multiple scenes. Interactions between subjects and objects reveal that tourists engage with fixed visual cues and situational events, which inform their preferred walking routes and memorable experiences. A summary of the subject-object dominance patterns in each scene is provided in the following table.

Table 1 Comparative findings of each episode

Episode	Episode main findings	Object dominance	Subject dominance	Subject and Object Relationship Pattern
E1	Opening: Initial hustle and bustle, orientation before the long walk	Static (signage, street furniture, colonial buildings)	Tourists and informal actors	Subject stops: sits, and takes a photo at a visual anchor
E2	Narrowing corridor, exploring tourist villages	Static (shophouses, signage, bollards)	Travelers and local communities	Slow motion: orientation guided by spatial form
E3	Transit and shopping area, traditional modes dominant	Temporal (horse-drawn carriages, pedicabs, buying and selling activities)	Tourists, traders, and drivers	Intense interaction: shopping and transit
E4	Iconic landmark. photo spot	Static (mall and iconic billboard)	Traveler	Stop for a photo: focused attention
E5	New shopping center, organized space	Static (controlled)	Tourists and traders	Repeat purchases: structured flow
E6	Traditional markets, socio-economic interactions	Temporal (high)	Tourists, traders, drivers	<i>Zig-zag</i> motion: dense interaction
E7	City nodes, colonial setting	Static (colonial buildings, street views)	Travelers and runners	Stop, photo, and observation
E8	<i>Vredenburg</i> Fort, digital activities	Static + Temporal (heritage + live content)	Local tourists and officers	Photos and broadcasts: temporal enrichment
E9	Closing node, Rest	Static (nodes, furniture, buildings)	Tourists, artists, and road users	Stop, rest, and take a photo

The walking experience in the Malioboro corridor has a consistent and sequential episodic structure. It begins with an opening phase characterized by visual orientation and increased temporal activity (E1–E2). This phase transitions into a middle phase displaying a balance between economic activity and transit (E3–E5). The experience peaks in a segment dominated by historical landmarks and high social interaction (E6–E8). Finally, the journey concludes with a resolution phase, which is marked by a city node that facilitates pausing, reflecting, and forming memories (E9). Throughout this trajectory, static objects serve as visual anchors and spatial landmarks, while temporal objects regulate the rhythm, intensity, and direction of the subject's movement. This pattern illustrates that the pedestrian experience in Malioboro is narrative and cinematic, not linear. Each episode transitions logically to the next, contributing to a coherent and meaningful urban cinescape.

The nine episodes illustrate how walking is a primary means of exploring urban form and the cinematic experience. The findings illustrate how stationary objects, such as Dutch colonial

facades, and temporal objects, such as vendors, guide pedestrian movement and focus attention. This increases urban legibility, in line with node or landmark theory [2]. The study also supports the concept of walking as a spatial practice of 'enunciation' in urban contexts [1], where pedestrians actively make real-time decisions that 'edit' their experiences. The interplay of movement, perception, and the built environment reveals the complexity of urban experience.

3.3 Assembling the Story: Reconstructing the Spatial Narrative

This study advances the concept of montage in architectural design [20], [21], [26] by framing it as a mediated dialogue that translates lived experiences into walkable routes. Studies in environmental behavior and walking-based tourism emphasize the importance of involving visitors in data collection because they are more likely to recall sensory cues, focal points, and experiential sequences that inform spatial narrative construction and support cultural corridors emphasize authenticity and visitor engagement [16], [17], [18].

The informants' narratives strongly support the findings of the depictions of the nine episodes. In the opening episode, the corridor's dense and dynamic character is reinforced by repeated references to crowding and intense temporal activity. As T1 explains, "the crowds... the corridors are already conditioned for pedestrians, making it comfortable to walk," illustrating how interactions with traditional transportation modes and street vendors provide the initial stimuli that shape movement rhythms, as reflected in Episodes E2 and E4.

The transition into the middle segments further illustrates how spatial scale and streetscape composition direct visual attention. Informant 4 notes that "*the streetscape concept is interesting, and the priority given to pedestrians is quite high,*" which supports the findings of Episode E1 through E3 that narrow spatial configurations and continuous façades sharpen movement orientation and visual focus.

T3 observed that "*Malioboro Mall is an icon in Yogyakarta,*" and T2 commented that "*the facades are interesting...especially the historical buildings.*" These tourist accounts reinforce the constituent elements of Episodes E4, E7, and E9, regarding the importance of colonial facades and visual landmarks as memory cues and photographic backdrops. Furthermore, temporal experiences, such as lighting transitions, crowd flows, and spontaneous interactions, enrich the narrative layer. T5 illustrates this with the statement: "*romantic atmosphere..., bustling atmosphere..., friendly and welcoming people...*" Furthermore, T1 added that walking at night offers a "*comfortable and calming atmosphere...*," reinforcing the idea that temporal shifts significantly alter the spatial atmosphere of nighttime scenes.



Fig. 5 Assembling the Story

Source: Wardhani, 2025

The alignment between the findings of the various episodes and the informants' accounts indicates that walking in Malioboro is an interconnected series of spatial scenes forming a continuous, linear sequence (see Figure 4 above). Each episode functions as a distinct scene with varying visual and social intensity. Tourists remember and retell both aspects as they engage in walking practices. This direct narrative demonstrates that Malioboro's cinematic urban landscape emerges through the interaction of static elements, temporal activity, and the perception of walkers. These aspects are key contributions to advancing narrative-based approaches in architecture and urban design.

These findings affirm cinematic theories that view the city as a sequential, movement-based experience. Analyzing nine episodes reveals that walking unfolds as a series of scenes structured by shifts in perspective, activity, and pause. This pattern aligns with cinescape, urban montage, and serial vision [12], [27], [28]. Unlike views that frame temporality as disruptive or the city as passive [29], this study finds that static urban elements, such as colonial facades, landmarks, and nodes, act as active narrative anchors. Temporal factors also enhance spatial continuity. The study demonstrates that spatial legibility emerges from the interplay of architecture, activity, and temporal atmosphere. Montage-based spatial narrative provides a framework linking cinema theory, walking, and urban design.

We can use the concept of spatial narrative in urban design to analyze and improve pedestrian movement. By studying the flow of spaces, designers can identify areas where people pause, linger, or move through, and pinpoint places lacking visual interest or functionality. This approach reveals that factors such as activity levels, lighting, and crowd density influence pedestrian behavior. Using spatial narrative techniques helps designers prioritize design choices,

such as where to place signs, highlight key areas, optimize views, and manage activity patterns in urban spaces.

4. CONCLUSION

This study presents evidence that walking along the Malioboro corridor creates a series of spatial experiences influenced by the interplay of static architectural elements, temporal activities, and pedestrian movement. Through montage-based analysis, the study reorganizes these fragmented moments into nine spatial narrative scenes. The findings suggest that the legibility and meaning of a heritage corridor stem from the perceptual transitions experienced while moving through it.

The study introduces cinematic techniques, such as sequencing and framing, as analytical tools for understanding how visitors interpret and navigate significant urban corridors. Additionally, the study advances architectural and urban design discourse by proposing a methodological framework driven by experience that translates walking practices into insights relevant to the design process. By applying montage principles, the study offers a novel method for identifying visual routes and perceptual thresholds.

The study acknowledges its limitations, noting that the interpretation of urban space through montage techniques has not been widely implemented in urban design education, particularly in Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia. Opportunities for future research include capturing montage scenes through methods other than walking, such as cycling or riding traditional forms of transportation like rickshaws and horse-drawn carriages.

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