The City and the City… and the city: space and the politics of seeing in China Miéville's novel

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Résumé. Cet article propose une lecture de *The City and the City*, roman policier procédural de China Miéville, fondée sur le système de l'espace selon Henri Lefèbvre. Il avance que le roman mène une expérience littéraire qui permet aux catégories abstraites de *La Production de l'espace* d'être incarnées et actualisées. Le « dévoir[1] » qui rend possible la coexistence des deux cités fictionnelles et de leurs habitants dans le même espace parce qu'ils refusent de reconnaitre la présence les uns des autres attire l'attention sur le caractère construit et arbitraire de la perception et démasque l'idéologie qui travaille à sa naturalisation. Grâce à la mise à nu de la « triplicité » de l'espace que seule la fiction spéculative peut accomplir, le lecteur, à la suite du détective, peut explorer l'espace conçu, l'espace perçu et l'espace vécu et faire l'expérience de leur entrelacs en tant qu'« abstractions concrètes » qui contrecarrent le réductionnisme de modélisations purement formelles.

Mots-clés : Miéville, Lefèbvre, Espace, Fiction spéculative, Détective

Abstract. This article proposes a reading of China Miéville's police procedural *The City and the City* based on Henri Lefèbvre system of spatiality. It argues that the novel conducts a literary experiment that allows for the abstract categories of *The Production of Space* to be incarnated and actualized. The "unseeing" that makes it possible for the two fictional cities and their citizens to occupy simultaneously the same space as they refuse to acknowledge each other's presence calls attention to the constructed and arbitrary nature of perception and unmasks the work of ideology that naturalizes it. Thanks to the laying bare of the "triplicity" of space that only speculative fiction can accomplish, the reader, like the detective, can explore conceived space, perceived space and lived space and experience their intricate layering as "concrete abstractions" that prevent the reductionism of purely formal modelisations.

Keywords: Miéville, Lefèbvre, Space, Speculative Fiction, Detective

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[1] La traduction est la mienne, le mot « dé-voir » permettant de jouer sur la notion d'obligation contenue dans « devoir ». La traductrice de la version française utilise le néologisme « éviser ».

The illusion of a transparent,
"pure", and neutral space – which,
though philosophical in origin, has
permeated Western culture – is being
dispelled only very slowly. (Lefèbvre,
2002 : 337)[2]

166   Born with the rise of urbanization, and the new type of social and spatial relationships it entailed, detective fiction is inherently associated with cities – in fact, it can be regarded as a new form to account for a new spatial configuration. In "A Defence of Detective Stories" (1901), G. K. Chesterton eulogizes the form as the "Iliad" of the city:

> The first essential value of the detective story lies in this, that it is the earliest and only form of popular literature in which is expressed some sense of the poetry of urban life. No one can have failed to notice that in these stories the hero or the investigator crosses London with something of the loneliness and liberty of a prince in a tale of elfland, that in the course of that incalculable journey, the casual omnibus assumes the primal colours of a fairy ship. The lights of the city begin to glow like innumerable goblin eyes, since they are the guardians of some secret, however crude, which the writer knows and the reader does not. Every twist of the road is like a finger pointing to it; every fantastic skyline of chimney-pots seems wildly and derisively signalling the meaning of the mystery. (Chesterton, 2004: n. pag.)

If detective fiction reveals the magic of urban space and turns it into a text whose surface hides depths that must be deciphered, its second spatial concern is with the location of the culprit, the criminal's identity being in fact defined by his or her occupying a precise spatial position at a certain time, to the exclusion of the other suspects. The Lockean principle of identity which holds that two objects of the same nature which coexist simultaneously in the same space are one and the same[3] comes with a twist in *The City and the City*, a detective story which toys with spatial impossibilities as two cities (and possibly a third one) coexist on the same ontological level, with bodies occupying simultaneously the same space. This spatial arrangement does away with the principle of identity, but this does not come at the cost of rationality – the material dimension of objects is replaced with their perceptual reality, which allows for an elegant if strenuous sidestepping of Lockean truth: presence is made culturally and poli-

2   his article proposes a Lefèbvrian reading of Miéville's *The City and the City* based on *The Production of Space.*
3   "For we never finding, nor conceiving it possible, that two things of the same kind should exist in the same place at the same time, we rightly conclude, that, whatever exists anywhere at any time, excludes all of the same kind, and is there itself alone" (Locke).

tically invisible. This disregard for formal logic aligns the diegetic universe of the novel with a Lefèbvrian reading of dialectics : Henri Lefèbvre claims in *La Production de l'espace* that the thirst for logic is an attempt to avoid the dialectical (Lefèbvre, 2002: 338); in a former work, *Logique formelle et logique dialectique*, Lefèbvre had argued that in contrast to formal logic, which simply states that there are contradictions, dialectics tries to seize the movement that creates and breaks them (Lefèbvre, 1947: 222).

Henri Lefèbvre's spatial dialectics has been particularly influential in British and American departments of geography and urban studies.[4] As opposed to many Marxian thinkers who deplore the waning of history that came with the "spatial turn" prophesized by Foucault in "Heterotopias" (Foucault, 1967), Lefèbvre emphasizes the transformational power of space. Not only the abstract locus of indiscriminate exchange of commodities of global capitalism, space for Lefèbvre is also marked by contradictions and concrete differences as they shape and result from social practices. He notes that literature accounts for the multiplicity of space as "described, included, projected, dreamed, speculated" (Lefèbvre, 1991: 15). To the geographical couple "space" and "place", Lefèbvre substitutes a system of three terms, "perceived space", "conceived space", "lived space" to highlight the triangulation of the interplay between the terms, their mutual and simultaneous influence, not to propose one as some kind of teleological synthesis of the other two. In the same vein, the title of the novel, *The City and the City*, is somewhat misleading: it suggests the narrative hinges on doubleness, while the quest actually turns out to be about a third space, a secret place the location and the ontological status of which are never clarified. Lefèbvre's framework is thus ideally suited to articulate the concern for concrete practices and folk mythology that is displayed in Miéville's exploration of multi-dimensional space.

Fuelled by the criminal investigation of a murder, *The City and the City* unfolds in the fictional space of some Balkanic city where two border states have located their respective capital, designated by two different names in two slightly different languages, Besźel and Ul Qoma. These two cities are populated by inhabitants who belong to either one or the other, the strict separation between the two being maintained by law and by culture. This division is first exerted through perception: locals must imperatively act as if the other party did not exist. They are taught from childhood to cultivate a truncated vision, more generally to ignore all the sensory information that could reach them from the other city and its counterpart inhabitants. Such selective perception takes a lot of training. This discipline of avoidance is called "to unsee", and any

4   Although he is absent from fellow Marxist Fredric Jameson's reading of postmodernism in relation to space, prominent urban theorists like David Harvey, Edward Soja or Mike Davis, who all inherit from Lefèbvre and his Marxian categories, have fuelled a general and ongoing debate on the relationship between the infrastructure and the superstructure, and they have included "representations" in their examination of space, something that Lefèbvre was the first to advocate. For a discussion of Lefèbvre's contemporary perception and influence in the Anglo-Saxon world and in Brazil, see Paquot and Younès, 2009 : 237- 239. For a discussion of Lefèbvre's prominence in US and British urbanism, see Merrifield. For a discussion of the relationship between Frederic Jameson's work and the spatial theory of Henri Lefèbvre, see Lungu.

trespassing of the perceptive border ("breaching"), is violently repressed by a parallel police force that transcends the political regimes ("Breach"), a brigade whose only mission consists in enforcing the perception borders, especially in "crosshatched" areas, spaces that are shared by the two nations. Intense institutional surveillance ("intrusive policing", 367) is thus the necessary corollary to the injunction of not seeing placed on the individual citizen. Crucially for the investigation, "breaching" constitutes a more serious offence in legal terms than murder. The investigation of *The City and the City* thus seeks less to identify the culprit than it tries to establish whether the murderer breached in displacing the body, in which case Inspector Borlú who has been assigned the case would be discharged and Breach, whose jurisdiction extends over the two cities, would take over. In the course of his inquiry, the detective is forced to address an anterior past, hard-boiled like, and the murder case is combined with a historical investigation, as the victim, an American archeologist/folklorist (her alternating disciplinary affiliation encapsulating the shifting ontological nature of the object of her investigation) was researching a third city, invisible mythical Orciny, an ancient city hidden in the interstice between the former two. The noir logic of the form is duly accomplished with the anticlimactic ending, when Orciny evaporates to remain purely as a memory, however haunting.

Generally (and legitimately, as is evidenced by the summary above) read as a political parable, China Miéville's *The City and the City* can also be approached literally. A tale that springs from the implications of territorial partition of a fractured city, like Berlin before the fall of the iron curtain or Jerusalem, this otherwise classic police procedural pushes to its cognitive limits the enforced dichotomy of space through the fantastic trope of literal metaphor.

As in *The Crying of Lot 49* by Thomas Pynchon, another allegorical detective fiction concerned with alternative spaces, it is visual perception itself that undergoes a specific fictional treatment to reveal its ideological underpinnings. The two Americas of Pynchon, one hidden within the other but at the same time visible for whoever chooses to remove their blinders, provide a blueprint for the embedded twin ("topolganger") cities of Miéville. In the two cases, the detective form, centered on the criminal investigation, with its acute attention to visual details and their spatial configuration (the magnifying glass of Sherlock Holmes springs to mind), comes as a challenge to deliberate non-perception.

At the same time, and this is where *The City and the City*'s riveting originality lies, the immaterial dimension of ideology[5] is given an extremely concrete incarnation in the later novel : ideology, paradoxically, does not try to pass for the truth, since the artificiality of the division is never naturalized, but openly acknowledged as conventional, a construct.

Using Lefèbvre as a framework to read *The City and the City* by China Miéville, who is a Marxist political science theoretician in his own right, this

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5   Although Lefèbvre claims that the term "ideology" is obsolete and unclear and should be replaced by "representation" (the addition of ideology and knowledge), I have chosen to use it here to avoid confusion with Lefèbvre's double treatment of representation as coming from "above" (representation of space or conceived space) or from "under" (space of representation or lived space). For a discussion of ideology, see Lefèbvre, 2002: 54-56.

article will examine the strategy of cognitive estrangement that is fostered by the novum[6] of the novel (what marks a brutal departure from the extradiegetic ordinary reality of the reader, here the practice of "unseeing" of the cities' inhabitants) as a means to dissipate simultaneously the two spatial illusions diagnosed by Lefèbvre (Lefèbvre, 2002: 36-39) the illusion of transparency of space as a medium for mental design ("dessein") to become urban design ("dessin"), and the illusion of opacity or realistic illusion, which posits space as a "substance" or natural material that resists the pressure of human action to shape it. To show that space itself is not an inert medium in which things happen but is being "produced", *The City and the City* conducts a literary experiment that forces the reader to see what is invisible.

Ideology made visible

Jameson has shown how late capitalism uses architecture and urban planning to erase landmarks, to foster a vertiginous incapacity to see precise limits, a disorientation that precludes any cognitive mapping and thus self-location, self-definition, and agency (*Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*). Nothing of the sort in the universe of *The City and the City*. On the contrary, boundaries are emphatically present, national identity is strictly defined thanks to visible signifiers, down to colors one is allowed to wear, individuals know exactly (neurotically) where they are (where they stand). Here, if ideology makes some things unseen, it stages itself in coded manifestations, in an inverted image of its classic Marxist definition as invisible and delusive. Marx famously uses an optical metaphor, the camera obscura[7], to account for its power of distortion:

> If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process. (Marx: I, A)

Commentators have generally emphasized the notion of illusion in connection with the camera obscura; regarded as a magnified eye, the optical device also lays bare the constant rectification that goes on in our brain to undo the upside down projection of objects on our retina. The fact that perception is also a discipline (that can be unlearnt) is exposed in *The City and the City*:

> The early years of a Besź (and presumably an Ul Qoman) child are intense learning of cues. We pick up styles of clothing, permissible

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6   These categories have been established as the defining features of science-fiction by Darko Suvin (Suvin, 1979: 16-18).
7   Light is filtered by a pinhole and projected across a dark closed space to a white plane. The objects thus revealed are inverted and upside down.

colors, ways of walking and holding oneself, very fast. Before we are eight or so most of us could be trusted not to breach embarrassingly and illegally, though licence of course is granted children every moment they are in the street. (80)

Citizens who have to go to the other city follow a sort of reverse training to help them negotiate the potentially traumatic experience of "unseeing all their familiar environs, where [they] lived the rest of our life, and seeing the buildings beside [them] that [they] had spent decades making sure not to notice" (161). Such apprenticeship is also undergone by outsiders to both cities to allow them to navigate the Besźel-Ul Qoma space; in the encyclopedic manner that is reminiscent of Swift's Menippean satire, the narrator exhaustively examines all possibilities, including the etiquette to be followed by tourists: after they are taught the "rudiments of unseeing" (93), they are expected to respect rules that consist not so much in unseeing proper as in acting as if they emphatically did not see the neighbor city and its inhabitants, a paradoxical display of "restraint" (94). The explanation given by Inspector Borlú, an otherwise very subtle narrator, reproduces the unlikely (impossible) combination of behavorial constraints in the periphrastic, hard-to follow syntactic construction: "We, and the authorities of Ul Qoma, expected strict decorum, interacting with, and indeed obviously noticing, our crosshatched neighbouring city-state not at all" (93). It amounts to denying the obvious, an inverted form of acknowledgement that emphasizes the perilous status of negation: it can only come after the affirmation, which is taboo in the first place. In addition, the visitors' outré indifference is meant for the locals to rest assured they will not have to react to possible breach. Again, it is the pretence of unseeing that is sought so that the authorities can pretend in turn there is no illegal "seeing" going on:

> [A]s long as they do not point and coo (which is why except in rare exceptions no foreigners under eighteen are granted entry) everyone concerned can indulge the possibility that there is no breach. It is that restraint that the pre-visa training teaches, rather than a local's rigorous unseeing, and most students have the nous to understand that. (94)

Common sense suggests that this masquerade is not sustainable if one is not born into it. When Borlú and his Ul Qoman colleague visit the archeological site where the victim worked with other international students, the chief guard candidly confesses that "there is breaching going on that we're not able to stop. These little sods breach all the damn time" (225). Fortunately those infractions cannot be proven, since "even Breach cannot watch for breach all the time" (226).

Beyond the unmasking of space as construct, the digressions about those embedded performances also point to the unstable nature of what can hardly be called mystification, since it involves a degree of awareness from all the parties

involved, and the role of practice in creating it and enforcing it; the "benefit of the doubt" (94) that is granted blunderous outsiders is reversible, and the phrase must be taken literally: for all the parties involved, it is better not to know. The complex simulation practices do not obscure reality so much as they invert it and turn it around, like the negative of a photograph.

In contrast to the stress placed on the artificial nature of camera obscura, Mitchell remarks that Locke had used the same metaphor for opposite purposes, namely to emphasize its objective rendering of reality (Mitchell, 1986: 168) and liken it to the working of knowledge. Quoting Marx returning to the optical metaphor about commodity fetishism, and the magic dimension of commodities "whose qualities are perceptible and imperceptible by the senses" (Marx, 1842: I, 72), Mitchell concludes that the forms of commodities, like the ideas of ideology, are like images, they are "there and not there" (Mitchell, 1986: 189). *The City and the City*'s intradiegetic code breaks down the shimmering complexity of images as ideology ; for a Besź citizen, an Ul Qoman body is there and not there, but there is no magic involved, nor is there some kind of fantastic oscillation, only the deliberate action that consists in refusing to acknowledge presence:

> An elderly woman was walking slowly away from me in a shambling way. She turned her head and looked at me. I was struck by her motion, and I met her eyes. I wondered if she wanted to tell me something. In my glance I took in her clothes, her way of walking, of holding herself, and looking.
> With a hard start, I realized she was not in GunterStrasz at all, and that I should not have seen her.
> Immediately and flustered I looked away, and she did the same, with the same speed. I raised my head, towards an aircraft on its final descent. When after some seconds I looked back up, unnoticing the old woman steeping heavily away, I looked carefully instead of at her in her foreign street at the facades if the nearby and local GunterStrasz, that depressed zone. (14)

The detective catches himself "breaching", looking at a potential informant across the boundary. Redirecting his gaze, he is forced to acknowledge the poverty of the "depressed zone", as if the contradictions of unseeing make possible a critical investigation. Later, now a guest in Ul Qoma to assist in the investigation that has moved there, Borlú evokes the feat of driving in a traffic where half the vehicles have to be unseen and avoided at the same time, and comments on the economic situation with his Ul Qoman colleague:

> When I was a kid first driving we had to get used to zooming past all these all bangers and stuff in Ul Qoma, donkey carts in some parts and what have you. That you unsaw, but you know… now later most of the unseens have been overtaking me. (233)

Low visibility is equated with the slower pace of the less prosperous area ; in the economy of seeing and not seeing, the direction of the gaze is not completely reversible between the two topolganger cities, even though Senior Detective Dhatt tries to comfort Borlú: "'Things go up and down', he said. 'Ten years from now it'll be your lot doing the overtaking again'" (233).

By also taking at face value, and not only allegorically, the spatial partition of the Besźel/Ul Qoma compromise, it is possible to explore space as "concrete abstraction", a Marxian concept to designate objects (like commodities) that are at the same time the material realisation of human labor and the abstract condensation of social relations presiding over their production. Lefèbvre does for space what Marx does for commodities: he shows that space shapes social actions as much as it is shaped by them.

Space as concrete abstraction

The word "geography" appears in the very first paragraph of the novel in reference to the crime scene, the yard between Soviet-era apartment blocks in a desolate crosshatched area: "This open ground between the buildings had once been sculpted. It pitched like a golf course – a child's mimicking of geography. Maybe they had been going to wood it and put in a pond. There was a copse but the saplings were dead" (3). This "geography", literally writing about the earth, is childlike, oversimplified, not only the parody of natural landscape that a golf course (evoked as a simile) is, but a twice-removed approximation of some long-lost Arcadia. The hole in the ground and the dead trees set the elegiac mood of the novel and provide the adequate background for the discovery of the corpse. They invite a reading that is at the same time literal and figurative – the peripheral neighborhood being at the same time a crosshatched place, shared by the two cities, and a de-industrialized area:

> Lestov itself was already almost a suburb, six or so k out of the city centre, and we were south of that, over the Yovic Bridge on a bit of land between Bulkya Sound and, nearly, the mouth were the river joined the sea. Technically an island, though so close and conjoined to the mainland by ruins of industry you would never think of it as such, Kordvenna was estates, warehouses, low-rent bodegas scribble-linked by endless graffiti. It was far enough from Besźel's heart that it was easy to forget, unlike more inner-city slums. (11)

Because of the economic desertification, the area occupies a middle ground between civilization and wilderness: the narrator uses terms borrowed from natural geography to describe it, and the "endless graffiti" of urban decay are echoed in the earth by converging traces of paws indicating that the body has been partly "mauled" (5) by a pack of wolves. In jurisdictional terms, this is a

border area, which raises the issue of breach if the body had been moved across from Ul Qoma to Besźel.

As he rides the tram back to the center, the detective describes a crosshatched neighborhood, one of the many intersections between the two cities – Ul Qoma being the more affluent version of its counterpart, a recent development that is the result of an "economic antiphase" (54) driving traditional Eastern Ul Qoma towards modernity while more Western industrial Besźel was caught in economic depression. The only Besź surviving businesses in those areas are, ironically, antique shops (16), evidence of this communicating vessels logic.

Crosshatching is a phrase that conflates the map and the territory; contrary to Borges-inspired Baudrillardian simulation, however, the combination shifts towards material incarnation in Miéville's novel. Crosshatched sections call for discriminate seeing, "ignoring, unseeing, the shinier fronts of the elsewhere, the alter parts" (53), but it also involves other senses, voices being drowned in a carefully cultivated "aural fade" (54). Politically, crosshatched areas are also borders where undocumented aliens are sorted out:

> Our borders were tight. Where the desperate newcomers hit crosshatched patches of shore the unwritten agreement was that they were in the city of whoever border patrol met them, and thus incarcerated them in the coastal camps, first. How crestfallen were those who, hunting the hope of Ul Qoma, landed in Besź. (69)

The configuration of this hybrid territory is complicated by expatriation: there is a "little Ul Qoma" in Besźel which is a legal imitation of the alien city; although "local", this community toys with its counterpart, like a safety valve of otherness:

> This is where pining Ul Qoman exiles come for their pastries, their sugar-fried peas, their incense. The scents of Besźel Ul Qomatown are a confusion. The instinct is to unsmell them, to think of them as drifts across the boundaries, as disrespectful as rain […]. But those smells are in Besźel. (66)

Passage from one city to the other must go to the official border located in Copula Hall, which is not crosshatched properly speaking but an interstitial space "externally in both cities; internally, much of it is in both or neither" (72) – as they cross this border into the other city, the same space they occupied previously is seen differently : "the trickle of visitor-badge-wearing Besź emerging into the same physical space they may have walked an hour previously,[…] now look[ed] around in astonishment at the architecture of Ul Qoma it would have been breach to see before" (159). Accelerated training is a computer-based visual stimulation that alternatively highlights and dims visual landmarks belonging to the two cities (160): it transforms perception to provide a Besź citizen with

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the sensorium of an Ul Qoman, fostering a sense of displacement in one's home country, in between the doubleness of the uncanny and the absence of trauma ("I held my breath. I was unseeing Besźel. I had forgotten what it was like; I had tried and failed to imagine it," 162; "the Besź buildings I couldn't help fail to completely unsee," 193) that is shared by the reader grappling with the syntax.

This state of affairs makes detective work, especially tailing a suspect, an arduous task; after a second student is murdered by a sniper shooting from Besźel as Borlú was trying to get her across the border, the latter chases the killer while still technically a visitor of Ul Qoma, which prevents him from seeing his hometown:

> Ul Qomans I shoved out of the way; Besź tried to unsee me but had to scurry to get out of my path. I saw their startled looks. I moved faster than the killer. I kept my eyes not on him but looking at some spot of other in Ul Qoma that put him in my field of vision. I tracked him without focusing, just legally. (284)

For all these technicalities, the chase is delayed breach: walkers in each city stare respectively at the fugitive and his chaser: "this was not, could not be, a chase. It was only two accelerations" (285). When Borlú eventually shoots the killer, trespassing the border, he is taken away by Breach.

Lived space: embedded interstices

Topology and topography do not coincide in the diegetic universe of *The City and the City*: the same physical space is granted different properties when claimed by one city or the other. Patches whose status has not been resolved are "dissensi" (as opposed to crosshatched areas, which are shared by the two cities, dissensi belong to neither). The existence of this "third space" is what makes possible the assumption of a secret third city, called "Orciny".

After the aim of the investigation has shifted from the identity of the murderer to the modus operandi to establish if breach has been committed, it turns to motive, since the victim and her associates had allegedly proven the myth of Orciny to be based on fact. The investigation is conducted by Inspector Borlú in three different jurisdictions which are three different spaces embedded into each other: his hometown of Besźel, where the body is found, Ul Qoma, when it is discovered that although the body was dumped (without breaching) in Besźel, the crime was committed in the other city, and a third space occupied by Breach after he commits breaching while running after and killing the murderer. As Borlú occupies this third interstitial space, his status, his identity even, changes, and he becomes a member of the Breach brigade.

If conceived space, the result of design and power, is a planned abstraction made visible by the prohibition of "breaching" as enforced by Breach in *The City and the City*, and perceived space, the human environment of social practices,

is maintained by the discipline of unseeing and its various appropriations, the "performance" of the "grammar" of the former, the third term, lived space, only gradually emerges in a more fragmentary and elusive manner.

In keeping with a Lefèbvrian reading of lived space, although he does not quote him alongside the authorities like Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch or André Breton that he puts forward as his predecessors, Miéville argues in the introduction to the collection of articles on *Historical Marxism and Fantasy* that Marxism should also engage in critical analysis of the cultural terrain and lists the following items as susceptible of being considered in relation to fantasy: "surrealism, sex and sexuality, folk traditions, dream analysis, fantasies of everyday life and utopianism as well as the analysis of genre literature" (Miéville, 2002: 39). The complexity of the organization of material space in legal and social terms of *The City and the City* is challenged by "Orciny", the third dimension that is exhibited intradiegically in the novel as a mise en abyme of what literature is all about for Miéville, the creation of a "mental space redefining–or pretending to redefine–the impossible" (Miéville, 2002: 45). Within the geography of the Besźel /Ul Qoma entity, Orciny is first defined in vague terms as the third city: "It's in the dissensi, disputed zones, places that Besźel thinks are Ul Qoma's and Ul Qoma Besźel's. When the old commune split, it didn't split into two, it split into three. Orciny's the secret city. It runs things" (61). The third term of what Lefèbvre called the "triplicity[8]" of space, Orciny is a space of representation, a legend forged by artists and popular culture:

> As if the two crosshatched countries were insufficient, bards invented the third, the pretend-existing Orciny… A community of imaginary overlords, exiles perhaps, in most stories machinating and making things so, ruling with a subtle and absolute grip. Orciny was where the Illuminati lived. That sort of thing. Some decades previously there would have been no need for explanations—Orciny stories had been children's standards, alongside the tribulations of "King Shavil and the Sea-Monster that Came to Harbour." Harry Potter and Power Rangers are more popular now and few children know those older fables. (62)

People who not only believe in it but actively militate for its recognition as a fact – folklorists posing as archeologists – are assassinated. It seems this space is tolerated only if it remains in the dark recesses of the collective unconscious. Thus it is experienced through images:

> Representational spaces embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, liked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art (which may come eventually

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8   Lefèbvre's "triplicité" (49) is translated by "triad" (39), which unfortunately prevents the inevitable pun on "city" that can be afforded in French.

to be defined less as a code of space than as a code of representational spaces). (Lefèbvre, 2002: 33)

As inhabitants are submitted to the mapping that strictly delineates which areas are "total" Besźel or Ul Qoma or "crosshatched", they also experience space in their imagination, as informed by fiction, history, myth, legend:

> How could one not think of the stories we all grew on, that surely the Ul Qomans grew on too? Ul Qoman man and Besź maid, meeting in the middle of Copula Hall, returning to their homes to realize that they lived, grosstopically, next door to each other, spending their lives faithful and alone, rising at the same time, walking crosshatched streets close like a couple, each in their own city, never breaching, never quite touching, never speaking a word across the border. (161)

The folktale about the parallel lives of the lovers simultaneously enforces breach (as the cause for their separation and the point of the story) and appropriates the breach material to experiment with it, pushing limits to its limits: for if the lovers duly obey the letter of unseeing, they clearly transgress its spirit. As Lefèbvre has noted it, the space of representation does contribute to the production of space while transposing the codes of represented space. The folktale is the code of a code. The lovers' perceived space (their practice of unseeing) is a performance of breach as conceived space (the realm of abstraction, of planning) for the children who are told the tale. It has the same function intradiegetically for the two lovers who incarnate breach. But their capacity to simultaneously put themselves in the place of the other dovetails with lived space (the realm of the imagination) which in *The City and the City* brushes against fictional space. In the same paragraph, Miéville nods at Palahniuk by quoting to a doubly fictional book, *Diary of an Insile*[9], in reference to "insiles", those who have escaped Breach's punishment and live a secret live in the interstitial spaces, mainly dissensi, that exist between the cities. Like a spatial "protub", the presence of an object or a part of the body which juts out from its city of origin to intersect with a forbidden zone, Pahlaniuk's novel, unsurprisingly illegal reading material in the two cities, transgresses ontological boundaries by migrating from the extradiegetic level to be read in Besźel and Ul Qoma. Also puncturing the membrane between reality and fiction, Orciny's status is close to that of the folktale for Besź and Ul Qomans who profess it does not exist. Outsiders, in contrast, address the possibility of its historical reality.

The victim of the first murder investigated by Borlù is an American student who had been intoxicated by *Between the City and the City*, a book that claims that Orciny is "a secret colony. A city between the cities, its inhabitants living in plain sight" (109) which has been around even prior to the Cleavage,

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9   Miéville revises Pahlianuk's original title *Diary* (New York, Doubleday, 2003). Pahlaniuk's novel features hidden rooms inserted in renovated homes by a job contractor.

the split between Besźel and Ul Qoma. Its author, an archeologist whose career was destroyed by the publication and who now works on the same Ul Qoman dig as she, is now dismissive of the book and declares his own hypothesis totally invalid ("I was a stoned young man with a neglectful supervisor and a taste for the arcane" 206) but he has eager followers in spite of his self-rebuttal. After a second victim, who also believed Orciny is real, is executed, and Borlú has killed her murderer, the investigation is displaced to a third place, precisely the place attributed to Orciny, and which is occupied by the members of the Breach brigade. It is a place without qualities: grey walls and furniture, vague clothes, expressionless faces, indeterminate gait that prevents Besź or Ul Qoman identi-fication. It dawns on the reader that it is particularly fitting or ironic that Borlú is invited by Breach to continue his investigation of Orciny, since the two places (Orciny and Breach) occupy the same unacknowledged space (his mentor in Breach tells Borlú "no one knows if they're seeing you or unseeing you. Don't creep. You're not in either; you're in both," 304) that is also a fantasized space, the "suture" (370) that brings together the edges[10] of a wound; now trained to adjust to splitting spaces that are also "grosstopically" the same, the reader cannot help toying with the idea that the occult couple constituted by Orciny and Breach ("that nowhere-both", 306, where one behaves like a "Schrödinger's pedestrian", 352) seems to shadow or duplicate the official couple composed of Besźel and Ul Qoma. If "Orciny" is myth, "Breach" admits that their role as a magnified Bogeyman figure essentially relies on the goodwill of the cities' inha-bitants, their cultural upholding of the value of unseeing ("we're only the last ditch: it's everyone in the cities who does most of the work," 370). This becomes clear when final chapters of the novel show an insurrection taking place, osten-tatiously led by "unifs", factions in the two cities who refuse borders, but actually initiated, to cover their tracks, by the foreign company which has been stealing the archeological artifacts that the young folklorist thought she was returning to Orciny. The riot is short-lived and after "martial Breach" (328) has restored order, unifs fail to "mobilize populations deeply averse to their mission" (334-335). The coda describes authorities setting up a "Vigilant Neighbours" pro-gram, "neighbourliness referring both to the people next door (what were they doing?) and to the connected city (see how important borders are?)" (367) and Borlú becoming a detective for Breach.

Conclusion

Lefèbvre keeps hammering the point that space is produced, in the respec-tive action of conceived space, perceived space, and lived space on the other two, but he also insists that this fabrication is naturalized. The triad of *The City and*

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10   In French the edges of the wound held together by the "thread" ("fil", a term also used for nar-ratives, as in English) of the suture are called the "lips" ("lèvres"): *The City and the City*'s con-cern for space organized with political, cultural, and narrative borders that separate and join the surface of actual territories suggests that this very operation also has to do with narrative secrets.

the City that belies its dualistic title reproduces a Lefèbvrian system of reciprocal fabrication and enforcement, but, somehow, replaces the Marxian emphasis on dissimulation (the work of ideology) by denudation or laying bare of devices[11]: "unseeing" becoming literally a means to "see" the production of space.

Miéville's fiction also goes beyond Lefèbvre's critical modelisation by including its own productive work into the mix through self-reflexive allusions. The emphasis on folklore and legend that work their way into the investigation, as well as the influential role of academic (pseudo)science as an element of motivation testify to the central function of the imaginary, and of fiction as fabrication, in the production of space.

Although Lefèbvre, being concerned that space should not be approached in purely abstract or "ideal" terms, suggests that literature might not be the most adequate place to examine "socially 'real'" spaces (Lefèbvre, 2002: 2), it is nevertheless in fiction that the constructing of space can simultaneously be accomplished and unmasked in a self-reflexive and critical way.

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11   The phrase" laying bare of devices" which is borrowed from Russian Formalism (Tomashevski, 1965: 94) refers originally to literary technique that attracts attention to itself; it is applied by analogy to the work of culture.

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