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## “A Tourist Guide to Beszel and Ul Qoma”:

# Unseeing, the Brutality of Borders and the Re-interpretation of Psychogeography in China Miéville’s *The City and the City*

**ROB O’CONNOR**

The epigraph to China Miéville’s novel *The City and the City* (2009) reads “deep inside the town there opens up, so to speak, double streets, doppelganger streets, mendacious and delusive streets”. The quotation is taken from the story “The Cinnamon Shops” (1934) by the Polish writer, Bruno Schulz and is an interesting introduction to a text primarily concerned with the psychogeography of urban environments. The inclusion of “mendacious” and “delusive” alludes to the deceptive nature of cities and their ability to not tell the truth. Also, in light of Miéville’s political writing, it is impossible to ignore the allusions to the act of disassembling the streets, the reality of our streets lost behind a cover of social and political falsehoods. Given that Schulz himself was murdered for appearing in the wrong quarter of Nazi-occupied Drohobych during WWII, Miéville’s choice of epigraph highlights the political control of border spaces and the brutality that this can involve.

The definition of psychogeography is extremely fluid, with influence from a wide aspect of sources, including politics, cultural studies, architecture and literature. Short stories and novels by a range of authors such as Charles Dickens, Edgar Allan Poe, Oscar Wilde and Virginia Woolf, all started to explore the urban landscape as being intrinsically connected to the psychology of their protagonists, who were primarily walkers traversing the streets. Postmodern writers such as J G Ballard also explored this connection in the late twentieth century, this time in connection to the growth of the capitalist cityscape. In recent decades cultural commentators such as Will Self and Ian Sinclair began exploring the ability of the walker to recapture urban stories from the architectural signifiers that surrounded them, in turn reclaiming the lost meanings of the cities in which they operate. Psychogeography also became a political stance of the Lettrist and Situationist International movements in France during the mid-twentieth Century. Their objective was to claim back urban landscapes for their inhabitants. The political radicalism of examining urban environments, the exploration of how the art of walking affects our perception of urban space, and the constant reassessment of our personal and social relationship with the cities in which we live all correspond with Merlin Coverley’s useful definition of the term psychogeography as “the point at which psychology and geography collide, a means of exploring the behavioural impact of place” (10). Therefore, we can associate Miéville’s work, which is so heavily influenced by urban space, with psychogeography. *The City and the City* is a highly-politicised novel that uses an exaggerated examination of space, zones and border control as a way of assessing the psychology of individuals that inhabit modern urban environments. Miéville uses the motifs of crime fiction and elements of the fantastic as a methodology for exploring contemporary theories regarding urban space.

However, Miéville's relationship with psychogeography is problematic. Though his work can be examined using the lens of psychogeographical theory, he also shows an insightful wariness to engage with the movement fully. He is suspicious of the recent "celebritisation" of psychogeography, which he refers to in his essay entitled *London's Overthrow* (2012) as "a lazy label for hip decay tourism" (58). He is aware how psychogeography has developed beyond its roots as a tool for social and political examination and needs to be re-evaluated. In *London's Overthrow* and in interviews Miéville argues that psychogeography's political message has been misunderstood by the most recent generation of practitioners and that it is time to refocus our gaze upon contemporary urban landscapes and their need for a new method of political and cultural examination.<sup>1</sup> This is an important consideration in a time of social and economic disparity and psychogeography needs to adapt to reflect this social change.

Miéville explores new methods of examining urban landscapes in both his fiction and non-fictional work. His socialist affiliations inevitably focus his attentions towards the city, as much of the political power-struggle that interests Miéville is visualised in the urban landscapes that are growing in size and stature across the contemporary world. Cities are intrinsically connected to political, social and economic climates and constantly metamorphose to reflect changes within these climates. Cities are ideal conduits, or metaphors, for social, political and economic commentary. This also includes the depiction of their inhabitants, their behaviour, and psychological responses. Miéville's writing makes us ask questions about these new unexplored strata of the contemporary urban landscape, seeking to infuse psychogeographical study with new political and social focus.

What makes *The City and the City* (2009) illuminating in relation to psychogeographical theory is the seemingly-fantastical nature of the novel's setting. Inspector Tyador Borlú of the extreme crime squad in the city-state of Beszel is assigned the case of a homicide involving a disfigured girl found on the outskirts of the city. The crime fiction or police procedural plot serves as a useful narrative device within which to frame Miéville's psychogeographical exploration. Crime fiction and urban landscapes share many similarities regarding shifts in perspectives, as Lucy Andrew and Catherine Phelps explore in their book *Crime Fiction in the City: Capital Crimes* (2013):

Unlike their rural counterparts, cities are in a constant state of flux through decay and regeneration and many crime writers find themselves acting as literary cartographers of an authentic but rapidly changing urban space. (1)

In other words, both urban crime fiction and psychogeography examine the multifaceted and ever-changing nature of the city and how the urban landscape affects the psychology of those people that inhabit these spaces. In urban crime fiction, the mystery is solved by walking the streets looking for the clues. Psychogeographers apply similar techniques to their own examination of the urban. The only difference is that the mystery they aim to solve is not a crime, but the socio-political meaning of the visual signifiers present in the landscape of the city.

In *The City and the City*, Beszel shares the same geographical space with the “twin city” of Ul Qoma but via the volition of their citizens they are perceived as two different cities. From childhood, residents are taught to recognise elements of the other city and then immediately forget their existence. To not comply is known as “breaching” and is punishable (45-46). The result is an indoctrinated method of “unseeing” architecture and people from the other city which is policed by a secret force known only as Breach (14).

In *The City and the City* the protagonist is a detective, literally “walking the beat” in order to solve the crime at the centre of the novel’s plot. In Miéville’s urban landscape, Borlú is a walker, experiencing the city in a primal way from the ground up, assimilating himself into the urban landscape. This is reminiscent of Michel de Certeau’s reflection of New York as a city of voyeurs and walkers whose opposing perceptions of the city are controlled by the dominant urban feature of the skyscraper. The voyeurs, who look down upon the city from the viewing platforms and hundredth-floor windows, are completely separated from the walkers on the streets: “The ordinary practitioners of the city live ‘down below,’ below the threshold at which visibility begins. They walk - an elementary form of this experience of the city: they are walkers” (93). De Certeau’s “walkers”, as well as the detective protagonists of police procedurals (Borlú included) are representative of the figure of the flâneur, an integral element of the socio-political movement of psychogeography.<sup>2</sup> Although there are automobiles in the twin cities depicted in *The City and the City*, which also have to negotiate the problematic topography, most of the movement in the novel is carried out on foot. Therefore, walking becomes a central factor for deciphering the codification of the twinned urban landscapes in *The City and the City* because of the ability to become more intimate with each city’s unique features and explore the interstitial zones that exist between different urban zones. Borlú is not just a walker, but also a flâneur, divining meaning from the architecture and social structure of both cities as he wanders through their streets.

Miéville shows a keen interest in the concept of the flâneur throughout much of his work, exploring how specific zones affect our personal psychology and what exists in the space in between. In Wasson and Adler’s book *Gothic Science Fiction 1980 - 2010*, Roger Luckhurst reflects upon how Miéville’s work is able to cross genre boundaries and expectations through its direct examination of complex zones and topological concerns:

These interstitial zones, opening at random, shifting and disappearing from the purview of organized space, recur across Miéville’s work... The interpenetration of zones becomes the motor of the plot in *The City & the City*... Miéville’s zones are “impossible” non-Euclidean spaces in which, as Laura Salisbury argues, “generic transgression is figured in terms of topological complexity”. (29-30)

In terms of psychogeography, this is reflected in Miéville’s interpretation of contrasting urban zones and the emotional effect that these zones have upon their inhabitants. The interpretation of physical areas and the spaces between them becomes central to Miéville’s generic considerations. His ideas regarding the blurring of genres are

replicated in his work through psychogeographic exploration of physical space and the way in which topological boundaries can also be blurred.

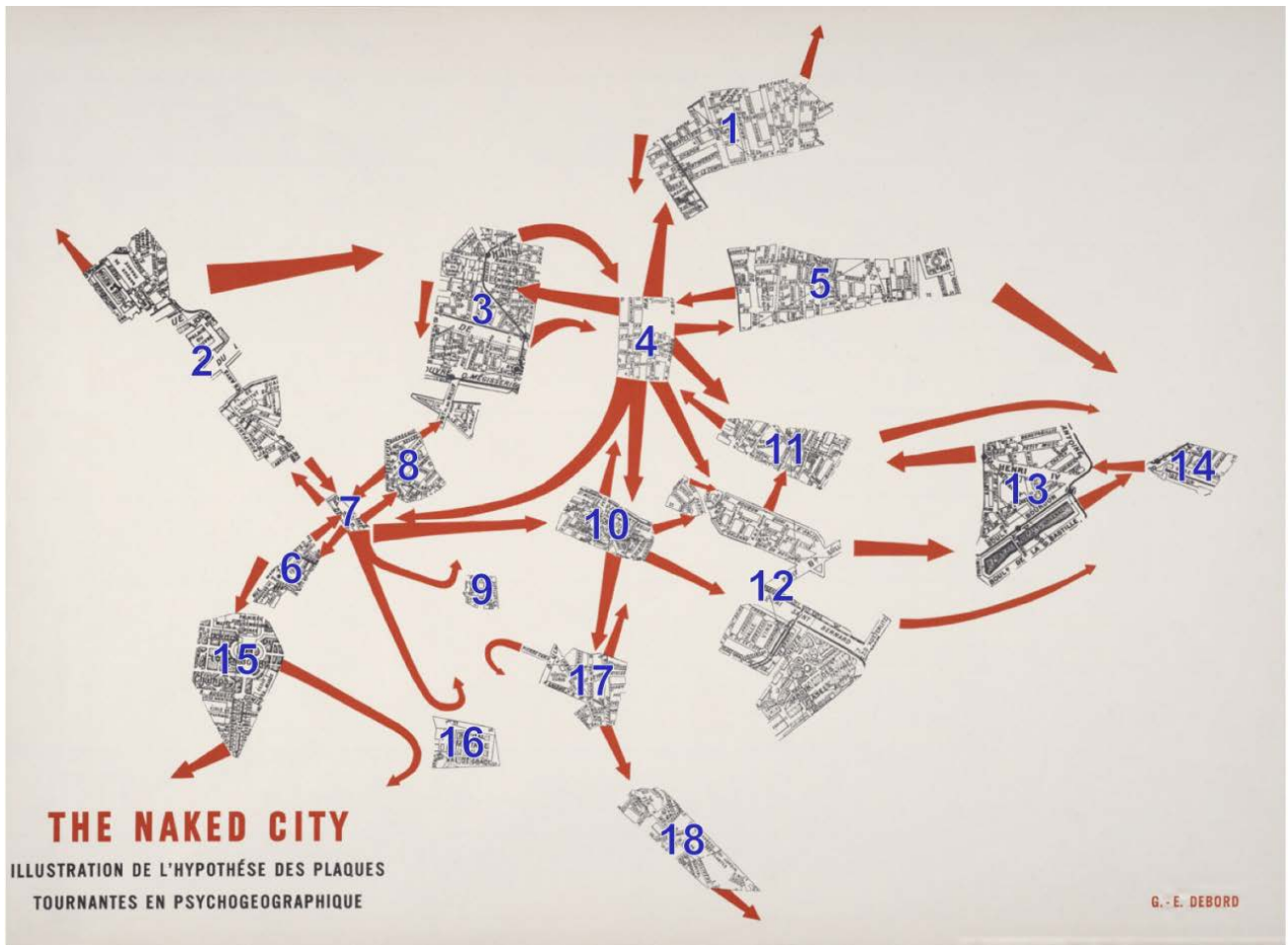


Figure 1. *The Naked City*.

The psychogeographical concept of emotional zones was explored by the Lettrist and then the Situationist International movements as a possible future method of town planning and construction. An early example is Ivan Chitchevlov's *Formulary for a New Urbanism* (1958) which calls for a new type of architecture that reflects an emotional engagement with its inhabitants; to reconstruct cities into specific psychological zones. Guy Debord, the figurehead of the Situationist International, posited an interpretation of the city as a collection of zones, each with a specific emotional response:

The sudden change of ambience in a street within the space of a few meters; the evident division of a city into zones of distinct psychic atmospheres... In fact, the variety of possible combinations of ambiances, analogous to the blending of pure chemicals in an infinite number of mixtures, gives rise to feelings as differentiated and complex as any other form of spectacle can evoke. (10)

Debord likens psychogeography to the pure sciences, highlighting the skill at distilling the various emotional ambiances present within any given urban environment. In fact, Debord takes this a stage further, producing a map of Paris centred on this idea. *The Naked City* (Fig. 1 above) presents the capital as a collective of nineteen

sections seemingly dispersed at random. What the arrows on Debord's map suggest are possible routes for the users to follow according to the emotional context they experience within a particular zone. This psychogeographical concept of emotional interaction between people and space is also expressed by Miéville's depiction of "zonal attitudes" within *The City and the City*. Due to the indoctrinated practices of the inhabitants of these twinned cities, they are taught to "unsee", or consciously ignore, the visual signifiers, architecture and people associated with the opposing city. The resulting etymology expresses this detachment, as the zones of each city are described in one of three ways: "alter", "total" and "cross-hatched" (285). Inhabitants of Beszel and Ul Qoma develop a deep-rooted psychological understanding of the different zones within the shared city, able to identify which zone a street exists in with a very quick glance:

Most of those around us were in Beszel so we saw them. Poverty deshabed the already staid, drab cuts and colours that enduringly characterise Besz clothes - what has been called the city's fashionless fashion. (21)

The result is confluence of psychology and geography; an instinctive and intrinsic awareness of place and surroundings. "Total" zones exist entirely within the inhabitant's city and share no physical space with the other. Within these zones the population can act and move freely without worry of retribution. "Alter" zones exist entirely within the other city and, therefore, are off limits and must be completely avoided and ignored. Zones of "crosshatch" are the most interesting to consider. These are streets or public areas that exist within both cities and therefore denizens from both walk side-by-side. It is in these zones where the law of "unseeing" is hardest to maintain as inhabitants must be aware of their distinguishing cues at all times. Borlú's momentary glances at Ul Qomans must be instantly "unseen" and forgotten. These zones are completely a psychological manifestation, with inhabitants making a deliberate, albeit enforced, decision to disengage with the other city. If we apply this to Debord's map *The Naked City* we could imagine it as a cartographic representation of either Beszel or Ul Qoma and the "emotional wandering" of the walker in that particular urban space. The other city does not exist on the map at all.

Miéville's social commentary through the use of "unseeing" is multi-layered. "Unseeing" reflects a prominent condition present in our own contemporary urban landscapes: the conscious and unconscious detachment from our surroundings. It is something that we do every day: the avoidance of the homeless on the street; our disengagement from acts of racism or violence which we witness; our unwillingness to explore the spaces in between our familiar spaces of existence. There is an array of zones and spaces within our urban landscapes that we distance ourselves from. By following Borlú's investigation, and witnessing what he "unsees", the novel forces us to ask the very personal question "what things do I unsee?" As part of the investigation Borlú is granted a pass to enter Ul Qoman zones in order to follow up on leads:

It was a busier city than Beszel at night: now I could look at the figures at business in the dark that had been unseeable shades until now. I could see the homeless dossing down in side streets, the

Ul Qoman rough sleepers that we in Beszel had had to become used to as protubs to pick our unseeing ways over and around. (171)

For a while, Borlú is forced to “unsee” his home of Beszel, to leave behind the familiarity of his city and become a “temporary citizen” of the other. Borlú is forced to observe everything which previously he had “unseen”; a direct psychological shift from normality. The suggested social commentary here is an invitation for the reader to do the same, to engage with the elements of society that we would normally ignore. As a result, *The City and the City* becomes a text rooted in contemporary urban commentary. Borlú’s indoctrinated “unseeing” of Ul Qoma mirrors the elements of the modern city that we do not witness or choose to ignore. The signs of social and economic disparity become lost amongst the barrage of capitalist signifiers in the postmodern city, just as Borlú becomes aware of the Ul Qoman rough sleepers who, until then, had been invisible due to his indoctrinated perception.

This concept of “unseeing” is not an original one in the history of science fiction or fantasy literature. Jack Vance’s *The Dying Earth* (1950), a collection of interwoven short stories, is the first in a series of works depicting an Earth in the very distant future. The Sun is dying, threatening to extinguish itself at any moment. Technology is ancient and discarded and magic has returned, once again, as a dominant force. Civilisation, for the most part, has collapsed and mankind is dwindling. The relevant story to this debate is entitled “Ulan Dhor Ends a Dream”. In this story the titular protagonist is entrusted with a quest by his uncle, Prince Kaldive, to obtain the magic contained within the tablets of the magician Rogol Domendonfors which are lost in the catacombs of the ancient city of Ampridatvir. When Ulan Dhor reaches the city, he finds two opposing factions - Pansiu and Cadzal - each claiming ownership of the streets. What is significant is that the Pansiu are dressed in green robes and the Cadzal dressed in gray and neither faction acknowledges the existence of the other. Ulan is befriended by Elai - a Gray - who helps him to negotiate the streets of Ampridatvir. Ulan soon realises that the greens and grays do not interact:

Some wore green, others wore gray, and Ulan Dhor saw that there was no intercourse between the two... He saw two groups of children, one in green rags, the other in gray... A ball of tied rags rolled from the Gray children into the scuffling group of Greens. A Gray child ran over, picked up the ball from under the feet of a Green child, and neither took the slightest notice of the other.

“Strange,” muttered Ulan Dhor. “Strange.”

“What’s strange?” inquired Elai. “I see nothing strange...” (Vance, 50-51)

The scenario that Vance depicts is clearly very similar to Miéville’s world in *The City and the City* and Miéville’s concept of unseeing likewise echoes the phenomenon occurring in Vance’s short story. The Greens and the Grays subconsciously choose to ignore the presence of the other, referring to them only as “ghosts” and “demons”. In Vance’s world, this conditioning is once again enforced, as monstrous creatures called Gauns, who appear from the shadows much like Breach, whisk away citizens that violate the social system. In Vance’s story the barriers between Greens and Grays collapse and they consciously perceive each other. However, instead of social utopia,

the result is conflict, as the two factions confront each other, rioting on the streets. Although not a direct inspiration for Miéville's novel, he has acknowledged (in his interview for the website *BLDGBLG*) the similarities between Vance's world, and others, to his own depicted in *The City and the City*:

I should say, also, that with the whole idea of a divided city there are analogies in the real world, as well as precursors within fantastic fiction. C. J. Cherryh wrote a book that had a divided city like that, in some ways, as did Jack Vance. (Manaugh)

In both texts, the imagined utopia is always out of reach. The psychological and emotional perception of geographical zones, and the people who inhabit these spaces, is central to the concept and plot of both Miéville's novel and Vance's story. The application of various emotional zones is also the central process in establishing how "psychology and geography collide", as defined by Merlin Coverley (10). This "collision" is instigated by our emotional response to the environment we are in and architectural changes within urban zones can dramatically affect this.

The exploration of zones automatically creates gaps in between that also become matters of theoretical interest. In *The City and the City*, Miéville embodies these interstitial spaces with a sinister undertone. If a citizen disregards the controlled zoning of either city - intentionally or not - then they are taken by the shadowy avatars of Breach. "Breaching" becomes a violent act, associated with brutality. People who breach are torn away from their existence, disappearing into the policed interstitial space in between, sometimes never to be seen again. Crossing the border and being in the wrong zone becomes punishable. In *The City and the City* the first step into the interstitial spaces of Breach is a sensory overload for Borlú, as everything that he has been indoctrinated to "unsee" suddenly becomes visible:

Sound and smell came in: the calls of Beszel; the ringing of its clocktowers,; the clattering and old metal percussion of the trams; the chimney smell; the old smells; they came in a tide with the spice and Illitan yells of Ul Qoma, the clatter of *militsya* coptor, the gunning of German cars. The colours of Ul Qoma light and plastic window displays no longer effaced the ochres and stone of its neighbour, my home... We moved through the crosshatched morning crowd. "In Breach. No one knows if they're seeing you or unseeing you. Don't creep. You're not in neither: you're in both". (303-304)

What before was a limited perspective has been replaced with an awakened perspective; seeing and experiencing everything that once was unconscious. What Miéville explores here are the theories of repression. What Borlú describes here is, in actuality, very familiar to his schema of reference. In his essay "The Uncanny" (1919), Freud describes *das Umheimliche* as "in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (833). Although Miéville is keen to distance Weird fiction from Freud's description of the uncanny he does adopt this examination of the relationship between repression and the uncanny in *The City and the City*.<sup>3</sup> Miéville's



approach to uncanniness is much more aligned with the sources for Freud's essay, the work of German philosophers Ernst Jentsch and Friedrich von Schilling. In "The Uncanny" Freud reflects upon Jentsch's essay "On the Psychology of the Uncanny" (1906) and his definition of the uncanny as "something one does not know ones way about in. The better oriented in his environment a person is, the less readily will he get the impression of something uncanny in regard to the objects and events in it" (826). Moving on to discuss the relationship between repression and the uncanny, Freud considers Schilling's definition from the 1856 essay "The Philosophy of Mythology":

This reference to the factor of repression enables us, furthermore, to understand Schilling's definition of the uncanny as something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light. (833)

The actions of Breach and the restrictions of "unseeing" are much more aligned with these interpretations. When Borlú enters Breach, his feeling of uncanniness diminishes as he becomes "better oriented" within his newly perceived environment. The concept of Breach, with the other twin city moving from unconscious to conscious perception, perfectly reflects Schilling's interpretation of the uncanny. The other city feels uncanny because the person realises that it should "remain hidden". The control of the borders between Beszel and Ul Qoma has led to the enforced repression of the other city's existence, resulting in an unsettling feeling of unnerving familiarity when people do breach to the other side.

Freud also alludes to three systems which Miéville explores too. These are the conscious, the unconscious and the preconscious, the latter being the system which operates as a potential gateway between the other two. It is described by Anthony Easthope as: "something you know but are not actually thinking about has to be somewhere else, where you can get hold of it when you want" (25). Unseeing and breaching represent Freud's three systems working in unison. Borlú, when in "total" zones, does not think about Ul Qoma, meaning that it is in his unconscious. When travelling through "crosshatch" areas, his cognition of Ul Qoma moves to preconsciousness as he automatically and skilfully represses any signifiers from the other city. When he does become a member of Breach, his cognition shifts again as Ul Qoma becomes a conscious reality. It is Miéville's exploration of this psychological shift that produces the sense of topological uncertainty and the novel's traits of *fantastika*. It is also the most significant examination of psychogeography within the novel, as a resident's behaviour within a particular zone is controlled by their conscious or unconscious association with it and the repression of the other urban space in question.

Miéville's examination of emotional zones and interstitial spaces is grounded in psychogeographical theory. The spaces in between these zones of ambience present the opportunity to gain a real understanding of our urban landscape, to see our cities as a whole instead of a "breached" environment. It is within these spaces, Miéville's work suggests, that the reality exists. Luckhurst describes Miéville's interstitial spaces as "impossible" and upon first viewing he is partly correct (29-30). They seemingly play with topology, presenting alternative

planes of existence that at first glance seem steeped in fantastical construction. However, Miéville's generic skill and political understanding ensure that these spaces remain firmly rooted within social and political realism and act as important commentary about our own contemporary attitudes and power struggles. The political message of indoctrinated societies - the driving force behind the concept of unseeing - is what *produces* the traits of fantastika that are present in the novel.

Another psychogeographical concern that Miéville utilizes for social and political commentary is the concept of borders and how to police them. Borders create geographical space and zones, encouraging an emotional connection and response from the people who inhabit them. They are areas of geographical space that can become fiercely contested, fundamentally changing the psychological behaviour of the citizens who exist within those spaces. Populations become controlled by the policing of borders, not only in their physical movements around those spaces but also through indoctrinated behaviour enforced through the use or promise of brutality.

"Breaching" becomes an interesting etymological choice. The word "breach" has roots in the Old English word *bryce*, meaning to break or fracture. Contemporary definitions refer to concepts of infringement and fragmentation. The overriding sense of the word 'breach' is one of disruption and chaos, a far-cry from the indoctrination that Breach wish to implement in *The City & the City*. In Miéville's novel, the actions of Breach result in a fragmentation of not only physical space, but the very activity of monitoring the borders that they are policing actually fragments the psychological behaviour of the citizens under their control. The objective of Breach, to ultimately control the behaviour of both populations, is inevitably flawed due to the fractured nature in which these populations exist. By enforcing the psychological separation of the two populations, yet still keeping them within a shared physical space, Breach have created a landscape which no one is able to explore to its full potential. Elements of the psychogeographical experience are always missing.

"Breach" also conjures up the imagery of "breaching the defences", adopting a military connotation of invasion and conquering of space. It becomes a violent act, associated with brutality. Borders take on psychogeographic properties and the people inhabiting border spaces become highly politicised. The threat of brutality creates mass indoctrination of the population concerned. The geography which they inhabit, and the brutal control of its borders, directly affects their psychological condition. "Unseeing" is Miéville's embodiment of this idea. The decision of the citizens of Beszel and Ul Qoma to consciously "unsee" the opposing city is a conscious choice made because of the threat of retribution by Breach. In other words, the physical geography of these two cities is crafted by a dominating force that enforces psychological compliance from the general populace. Both populations are stripped of all sensory interaction: it is not just "unseeing" that is enforced; it also stretches to other senses. Breach, although deployed as a policing force for the borders of these zones, actually have become a dominant imperialist force that explicitly controls the perception of both populations. Their brutal control of the borders has resulted in the perception of Breach becoming fractured itself. Their original role of zonal monitors has become lost and replaced with imperialistic connotations.

In 2013 Miéville visited the West Bank as a guest of the Palestine Festival of Literature. His essay, “Exit Strategy”, published in *Guernica*, the online magazine of art and politics, describes his trip through the border point between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Although written after *The City & the City*, this essay has many connections with the political commentary of the novel. Miéville starts “Exit Strategy” with a reference to the Mohammed Al-Durra incident in 2000, when a 12-year old boy was caught in the crossfire between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian security forces. Caught on camera, the boy was killed as his father waved his hands in surrender. Suggestions that the boy died at the hands of friendly fire were later put forward. What Miéville highlights with this initial reference is the very real brutality of border control and the methods used to ensure that it remains “unseen”. To counteract the opposing views of Israeli and Palestinian forces that the boy’s death had been fabricated, his father, Jamal Al-Durra was forced to open his son’s grave. As Miéville asserts, the objective of his father here was “to prove that this thing we saw happen happened, that the boy we saw die died” (*Guernica*). The father’s actions act as a crucial counterpoint to the enforced “unseeing” performed by the military as they attempt to manipulate the perception of the controlled population, shifting blame and attempting to construct their own “truth”. These real-life occurrences reflect the action of Breach in *The City and the City*, who, through the threat of brutality and punishment, manipulate the visual signifiers of each population in a similar manner to contemporary media communications. Social and political agendas are constructed and controlled through the population’s indoctrinated perception of the landscape that surrounds them. The true picture is never revealed; a whole socio-political narrative existing within the other urban landscape remains forever hidden.

A second comparison is the harsh physicality of the Jerusalem/Bethlehem border, which is reflected through Copula Hall in *The City & the City*. A vast building “much larger than a cathedral”, Copula Hall is the official border checkpoint for passage between Beszel and Ul Qoma (85). A thoroughfare for traffic and pedestrians between the two cities, Copula Hall is a militarised checkpoint such as those seen in destabilised nations around the world, “the waist of an hourglass, the point of ingress and egress, the navel between the cities. The whole edifice a funnel, letting visitors from one city into the other, and the other into the one” (85). The people within this thoroughfare are in a state of limbo, awaiting clearance and “stamped permissions-to-cross” in order to exist again as tourists and visitors to the other city (85). In this initial description of Copula Hall Miéville reveals the inherent problems when indoctrinated “unseeing” is combined with strict border control:

If someone needed to go to a house physically next door to their own but in the neighbouring city, it was in a different road in an unfriendly power... But pass through Copula Hall and she or he might leave Beszel and at the end of the hall come back to exactly (corporeally) where they had just been... a street they had never visited before, whose architecture they had always unseen, to the Ul Qoman house sitting next to and a whole city away from their own building, invisible there now they had come through, all the way across the Breach, back home. (86)

To visit an Ul Qoman neighbour, a Besz citizen would have to pass through Copula Hall and then return to the exact same spot as a tourist, unseeing their own city and their own home in order to avoid the wrath of Breach. To not pass through Copula Hall, to not obtain the correct stamps and authorisation, is a punishable crime. Although an extreme exaggeration, Miéville cleverly highlights the absurdity that such militarised border control inevitably creates, using the concepts of unseeing, breaching and Breach to comment upon the political control of borders that we witness across the contemporary world:

It is based on the absurd idea of Borders - that infinitely thin line that can kill you. On one side of it, your actions are punishable by law, while a few centimetres over you are fine. It is wholly absurd... The novel is an uncanny exaggeration of real-life politics; it is intended as an uncanny extrapolation of the political logic of borders. (Schmeink)

However, he is also keen to highlight that *The City and the City* does not represent an analogy of contemporary political border control but is rather an extreme fictionalised account of it. Initiatives put forward to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have suggested a “Two States in One Space” approach virtually identical to that shown in *The City and the City*.<sup>4</sup> However, Miéville does highlight that in a real-world context such an idea is “completely demented. I don’t think that it would work at all, and I don’t think Israel has the slightest intention of trying it” (Manaugh). After all, Ul Qoma and Beszel are fictional cities, and to apply their municipal structure in real life is absurd. Miéville’s novel is political, but *not* allegorical. In terms of psychogeography, this is an important distinction. Miéville’s exploration of borders, although political, is more focused upon the psychological effect they have upon the populace. Borders take on psychogeographic properties. In other words, the enforced psychological compliance that is policed by Breach is a direct outcome of the politics of border control. Geographical concerns vastly affect the populace and their psychological and sensory experiences.

The imaginative concept of “unseeing”, however, is essentially an anti-psychogeographical idea. The indoctrination of the twin populations in the novel produces a psychological conditioning for individuals to ignore architecture and inhabitants from the opposing city. At its roots, this is an enforced, but conscious decision to disengage with the surrounding environment, which is the opposite message of urban engagement present in previous incarnations of psychogeography. Miéville creates a new form of psychogeographical thought in *The City and the City*. Whereas historically, psychogeography has developed into various different strands over time, Miéville is redefining it for contemporary use by combining the important elements of previous incarnations. The “neo-psychogeography” that Miéville embraces is centred on a political examination of modern urban culture and is one which analyses the unconscious actions of urban dwellers. By assessing the modern city and its inhabitants using psychogeographical techniques, visualised through the lens of fantastical construction, Miéville is able to show us the political uncertainties and troubles that exist in contemporary urban society.

## Notes

- 1 One such example of Miéville's views on modern psychogeography was his 2011 interview for the BLDGBLG website:

Some really interesting stuff has been done with psychogeography... I mean, re-experiencing lived urban reality in ways other than how one is more conventionally supposed to do so can shine a new light on things—but that's an act of political assertion and will. If you like, it's a kind of deliberate—and, in certain contexts, radical—misunderstanding. Great, you know—good on you! You've productively misunderstood the city. But I think that the bombast of these particular—what are we in now? fourth or fifth generation?—psychogeographers is problematic.

Presumably at some point we're going to get to a stage, probably reasonably soon, in which someone—maybe even one of the earlier generation of big psychogeographers—will write the great book against psychogeography. Not even that it's been co-opted—it's just wheel-spinning. (Manaugh)

- 2 Charles Baudelaire's often quoted definition of the flâneur figure, in his work *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863), expresses its primary intention: "He is looking for that quality which you must allow me to call 'modernity'; for I know of no better word to express the idea I have in mind" (12). Baudelaire's flâneur uses the act of walking to identify with the burgeoning modernity of the nineteenth century city. Miéville's intention with *The City and the City* is that his flâneur, Borlú, makes us consider the social structures of the postmodern city.
- 3 In his seminal essay entitled MR James and the Quantum Vampire, published in the journal *Collapse IV: Hauntology*, a category positing, presuming, implying a "time out of joint"... estranges reality in an almost precisely opposite fashion to the Weird: with a radicalised uncanny – "something which is secretly familiar, which has undergone repression and then returned from it" rather than a hallucinatory/nihilist novum... The Weird is not the return of any repressed... this recruitment to invented cultural memory does not avail Weird monsters of Gothic's strategy of revenance, but back-projects their radical unremembered alterity into history, to en-Weird ontology itself. (112-113)
- 4 Mazal Mualem's article "Can Israel, Palestine Exist in One Space?" summarises the "Two States in One Space" debate very effectively.

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