Urban Reality as the main Motive in China Miéville's Posthuman Aesthetics

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Our aim in this text is to analyse Miéville's work, both theoretical and fictional, through the perspective of posthumanist sensitivity, which involves critically reassessing the human condition and embracing perspectives that extend beyond the human and more-than-human. We regard posthumanist thought as transcending the notion of an autonomous, rational subject being the sole ethical and meaningful agent, instead positioning humans within a broader network of life that necessitates interaction and negotiation with other non-human actors and forces. This shift in perspective in Miéville's work can be observed in relation to Lefebvre's theme of urban reality. We consider the relationship to the city as a non-human element central to the aesthetics of Miéville's fictional universes. The foundation for examining his fictional worlds is the assertion that Miéville's writing stems from a catastrophe of modernity and a subsequent radical rupture with it, suggesting that his thinking emerges post-catastrophe from a broken and fragmented world. In this context, he explores a future not based on any predetermined plan but arising from ongoing struggles – failures and renewals – in the pursuit of a future. Its aim is to challenge our present – specifically, the reader's present – who may still inhabit a world overly centred on human existence. | *Keywords: Miéville, Posthumanism, Weird Fiction, Fictional Worlds, Hauntology*

1. Introduction

China Miéville is a novelist, political thinker, and literary critic whose works encompass a broad spectrum of genres, ranging from science fiction to literary criticism, fantasy to deconstruction, horror to post-Marxism, and detective fiction to philosophy. His fluid, spontaneous, and unanchored writing style challenges both readers lacking a theoretical background and those seeking to analyse his works critically. Anita Tarr describes Miéville's style as "posthumanist-Marxist-fantasy-Gothic-horror-Young Adult Novels" (Tarr, 2018, p. 249); for many, he exemplifies hybrid, radical, postmodern writing characterised by genre fluidity and experimentation. In the initial part of this

study, we explore Miéville's engagement with the hero archetype and elucidate how this figure facilitates access to fictional urban environments. The subsequent section discusses the relationship between Miéville's fictional compositions and his theoretical frameworks, with particular emphasis on his Marxist critique of urban life as depicted in his novels. The third segment examines his fictional urban environments, which serve as the foundational settings for his universe. Finally, we analyse this universe from utopian and hauntological perspectives, paying particular attention to its boundaries, which are perpetually rooted in the past while simultaneously anticipating future apocalyptic events, thereby signalling the emergence of otherness, of unforseen and uncontrollable phenomena.

2. Hero's Journey

The hero is the most direct way to enter Miéville's multi-genre fictional city-worlds. Miéville built the prototype of his urban hero already in his first novel, *King Rat* (1998), and a similar narrative structure can be found in most of his other books. This applies not only to Saul Garamond, who inhabits fictional London in the *King Rat*, but also to Inspector Borlu living in the twin cities in the novel *The City & the City* (2009), Sham ap Soorap inhabiting the *Railsea* (2012), Avice living in the alien city-world of *Embassytown* (2011), Zanna and Deeba diving into the depths of *UnLundun*, and others. The trope of the hero is common in fantastic and adventure stories; its archetypal example is Tolkien's hobbits. Miéville's hero or heroine initially lives unknowingly and naively within a familiar reality that, however corrupt, ensures their unhappy existence. In this context, Miéville's characters and their entire universe distinguish themselves from the pastoral realm of Tolkien's hobbits, whose initial lived environment is inherently orderly, captivating them with adventure yet ultimately guiding them back to their secure world. In Miéville's works, it is not primarily the desire for adventure that motivates the hero's journey; rather, it is the intrusion of crime or accident that disrupts an already disturbed reality. In this context, the characters merely survive, compelled into actions they would prefer to avoid and with which they are not entirely satisfied, because the original reality from which they originate is harsh and fractured by conflict. In this sense, they are no longer rural heroes of the past but rather dwellers of our kind – residing in a world characterised by political, ecological, and moral chaos, fully aware that it is rooted in injustice, cruelty, and violence, of which they are inherently a part. The narrative framework of the heroes consistently follows a similar pattern: a stable, albeit often discontented, position in the world is disturbed by an event that involves crossing a threshold, thereby separating naive, untroubled reality from an unfamiliar, unknown realm. Subsequently, a transformative journey begins, during which the hero undergoes a profound change, emerging as an individual receptive to a wholly different world. They must relinquish the current order and their present identities, undergo a thorough transformation, as they would otherwise be unable to survive in the new reality. They face moral dilemmas that are not clear-cut choices between good and evil; they themselves become corrupted, start to harm, deceive, and kill, because a world

full of conflicts and contradictions has opened up before them, a world dedicated to war, constantly threatened by collapse, and bounded by an apparently insurmountable horizon of mysterious and elusive fate.

This transformation, namely becoming a hero, invariably entails a transition from the original individual human actor to an extended entity integrated into a new world. Saul Garamond becomes a rat, a pack-like human-animal, forced to adopt a different kind of life, a different language, a different type of movements, and a completely different identity, wider and stranger than his original one. Avice becomes partially *Arieikei* and additionally serves as a living metaphor, an event that disrupts an alien way of life. Inspector Borlu, originally a principled police officer, becomes a protester against the system and is eventually compelled to work with the very coercive apparatus he initially opposed. Although the hero or heroine does not directly transform into a different kind of being, they become something other than a traditional liberal individual. Their circumstances evolve such that their destiny abruptly no longer remains within their individual control. They become participants in supra-personal and collective events, entangled in the destinies and politics of the entire city. They are incorporated into a transcendent, more-than-human element in which objects, animals, and other entities are animated, forming part of a shared fate, collective memory, struggle, and pursuit. Their personal identity ceases to be solely human; their humanity comes into direct contact with beings and elements beyond humans. The original individual, characterised by their work, family, and self-interests, transforms into a collective entity, forcibly extracted from a prior existence reminiscent of Neo's awakening within *The Matrix* (1999). Similar to him, they are summoned to contend for the remnants of a disintegrating reality, to pursue escape, salvation, or justice.

Following the initial impact, which signifies the transition from naïve to awakened existence and the entrance into a realm beyond the visible world – city beyond city – there occurs the first movement. This is subsequently followed by immersion into a new world-city organism possessing its own ecology, along with an exploration of it's political sphere, a domain characterised by conflict and struggle among various clans, parties, and factions. During this second movement, the hero/heroine assumes the role of an unintended catalyst for revolutionary events, emerging as a quasi-messianic figure, around whom all the conflicting forces of the newly emerging world converge. They come to realise that their identity is not solely their own; rather, it is intertwined with powers connected to events far beyond their individual fate. They are participants in a much larger narrative, which depends on every decision they make. Simultaneously, they forfeit their autonomy because the destiny they adopt is not exclusively their own. The third type of movement, a synthesis of the preceding two, is identified as metanoia. According to Laing, metanoia is described as a process emerging from a psychotic episode that may result in a breakdown, a breakthrough, or both concurrently – involving the disintegration of the former personality structure, followed by its comprehensive reorganisation, which entails

a change in self-perception and perception itself (Laing, 1967). Such metanoic processes confront Miéville's characters, and their essential aspect involves a shift in perspective – a comprehensive transformation of perception, sensitivity, and understanding. Within the previously solely human and individual viewpoint, entirely new perspectives emerge, including those of a rat, a spider, a bird, an alien, an insect, a friendly one, and a hostile one. In this manner, Miéville's fictional worlds operate, and the significance of his more-than-human fiction resides in this: it concerns multi-perspectivism, the impossibility of perceiving and thinking in a single manner. This can be interpreted as a threat, because multi-perspectivism persistently endangers the disintegration of a unified perspective, the dissolution of the illusion of a singular reason, and the breakdown of shared humanity. Miéville's work is, in this context, a chaotic symphony of perspectivism, which continually adopts new and unexpected forms.

3. Manifesto

Miéville's construction of fictional urban worlds draws not only from literature but also from leftist oriented culture of urban resistance. It is literally a dialectical synthesis of influences from below and above, a combination of radical, high-minded leftist philosophy, the popular culture of London's suburbs, and musical counterculture. Such development stems from leftist political activism, encompassing London's daily life and concern for the impoverished and the challenging conditions faced by the working class. It also arises from urban popular culture, the vibrancy of London's club scene, various genres of minority music, and a persistent inability to reconcile with the state of post-industrial and late-capitalist society, which, instead of victories for democracy and increasing prosperity, offers ever-deepening inequalities, cultural wars, expanding surveillance measures, growing societal divisions, nationalism, terrorism, hostility, and the indifference of ruling classes towards public affairs. Simultaneously, it originates from a comprehensive absorption of Marxism and socialism, familiarity with post-structuralist, contemporary materialist, and posthumanist philosophy, as well as avant-garde art and modernist literature.

Miéville's novels and short stories are closely linked to his critical theoretical ideas. Here, we wish to examine only two brief quotations from his work on international law. First, the assertion that "The international rule of law is not counterposed to force and imperialism: it is an expression of it" (Miéville, 2005, p. 8). International law, like law in general, is subject to a paradox. The fundamental principle of law inherently involves violence, as demonstrated by Derrida in *The Force of Law* (1992) and by Agamben in *Homo Sacer* (1998). The act of establishing law, or the sovereign, must stand outside the bounds of law and is therefore inherently arbitrary; it cannot be enforced by law, only by violence. Miéville's analyses further elucidate the material and historical conditions shaping the international legal system, which ultimately functions as a system of power rooted in violence. His novels can also be interpreted, among other perspectives, as a study of power dynamics in circumstances where there is no neutral superior arbitrator, but rather a contest over the perception of reality.

The second statement is reflected similarly in his novel work:

> The title to this book comes from Marx's observation that 'between equal rights, force decides'. At first sight, this might look like a cynical claim that power politics are the only ultimately determining reality, that equal rights collapse before force. In fact, as I try to show, though it is quite true that 'force decides', the 'equal rights' it mediates are really, and remain, truly equal. This is precisely the paradox of international law: force is determining but determining between relations that cannot be understood except as equal in fundamentally constitutive and constituting ways. The equality and the force determine each other: the equality gives determining force its shape; the force – violence – is equality's shadow. (Miévillle, 2005, p. 8)

In Miéville's fiction, there is no transcendental right, measure, reason, or deity, as it is entirely anarchic, founded on conflicts between factions and tribes, cities and races, each centred on their own satisfaction and pleasure. Everyone longs for their own power and salvation; all worship their respective deities. The only entity that transcends all is the promise of the future – a promise of a world devoid of suffering, differences, and conflicts, which, however, manifests in a terrifying form of flood and fire, erasing all distinctions. This ultimate reconciliation bears a close resemblance to nothingness or chaos. It is a promise of revolution intended to overthrow the old order and liberate from the unjust old world, yet it invariably fails and ultimately becomes a new conflict.

The second decisive political theoretical source for understanding Miéville's fictional worlds is his interpretation of the *Communist Manifesto* (Miéville, 2022). However, it is not that we should interpret his novels as some form of political agitation, but rather that we should understand the style of his writing, which is based on polysemy, metaphor, paradox, performativity, and the fractal generation of meanings, as reflecting qualities that Miéville finds precisely in the *Communist Manifesto*. We suggest that his writing about the Manifesto should therefore be read primarily as a reflection on his own writing, as an analysis not only of Marx and Engels but also of Miéville's style. The significance of the Manifesto, as well as the significance of the images and fictional worlds in Miéville's novels, cannot be confined to a single interpretation; on the contrary, they aim to evade clarity, premeditated order, to transcend genre boundaries, the limits of any pre-planned schedule, and any programme-based politics.

When Miéville explains his interest in the Manifesto, he emphasises that he does not understand it so much as a guide to action, but rather as a projection of people's own social horror, anger, and dissatisfaction. Much of what unfolds in his novel cities is nothing other than images of social horror. This social horror, this abductive call of a world in ruins, constitutes the fundamental source of his writing and the central element of his stories – pervasive conflict within the urban fabric, injustice, violence, and the apparent impossibility of escaping that world. The answer to these existential problems is his leaning towards leftist thinking. However, he emphasises that he does not find hope in any Marxist orthodoxy, which he ironically refers to as apophatic Marxism – an adjective derived from apophatic theology,

that is, theology convinced of the possibility of a rational and positive interpretation of God. Apophantic Marxism thus refers to a scientific, logical, and analytical approach. In contrast, cataphatic Marxism pertains to negative theology. This association with theology is deliberate. Concepts such as hope, salvation, and liberation are motifs that intertwine Marxism and religion. Miéville illustrates this connection in his novels with notable engagement, yet also with an undercurrent of cynicism.

From this dialectical perspective, the relationships between the rational and the irrational, between solidarity and desire, suffering and liberation are examined in the reading of the Communist Manifesto. For Miéville, it is a 'ur-manifesto' – a performative act that merges the strategies of the modernist avant-garde, blurring the line between thought and politics, experimental art and resistance. The Manifesto, that is Miéville, does not fear paradox and accepts contradictions; he provokes, is serious, and makes jokes. "It oscillates between registers" (Miéville, 2022, p. 15). The Manifesto offers no set of precise propositions to be verified. Likewise, Miéville offers no precise sociological analysis. He is concerned with literature as a performative activity, with the creation of fictional city-worlds that, like the Manifesto, move between registers and across genres, dialectically overcoming them towards what we can call new weird fiction.

If one seeks a definition of revolution in the Manifesto or a definition of genre in Miéville, such a pursuit is inherently unproductive, as every definition risks leading to fascism. Any rigid fixation or apophatic explanation constrains potential future developments; it represents a pathway to totalitarianism and terror. Suppose we use the poetics of the novel *Kraken*, in which various forces vie to control the giant dead kraken, which embodies the coming of the apocalypse. In that case, that is, the destruction of the old and the heralding of a new world, then all those who want to possess and control this world-destroying force wish to use it for their own purposes and are ultimately doomed to failure. In relation to the issue of revolution in the Manifesto, the same applies to *Kraken* as to revolution:

> One may certainly argue that revolution has a particularly important sense, a centre of gravity in this text. But what it doesn't have is a single, precise meaning. No language does, whether we are conscious of that fact or not. All texts are always to a various degree contradictory, multifarious, polysemic. (Miéville, 2022, p. 19)

4. Metropolitopoiesis

It should be clear thus far that the primary non-human element in Miéville's novels is a city. The foundational setting of his entire fictional universe is London. His surreal vision of London, which he combines with Istanbul, where Miéville spent several years and which also served as a source for his urban imagination, is expressed in a short textual and photographic essay titled *London's Overthrow* (2012). This essay is titled after a painting by the British artist John Martin, who is also the creator of two other significant works that aid in interpreting Miéville's conception of the city – *The Fall of Babylon* and *The Great Day of his Wrath* (1951). Miéville is a poet who regards

the city as an organism, conceptualised as Babylon before, during, and after its decline. The fall represents a condition wherein residing within the city becomes arduous, if not unfeasible, due to its excessive division, inherent contradictions, antagonisms, inequality, and injustice. For Miéville, London is a city affected by the disaster of late capitalism. "For all of us. Everyone knows there's a catastrophe; the few can afford to live in their own city. It was not always so" (Miéville, 2012, p. 24). London, like many major urban centres around the world, is evolving into a place where the majority of residents find it increasingly unaffordable to live. It is characterised by overcrowding, deterioration, abandonment, and a sense of being unmanageable, while simultaneously experiencing a rise in wealth. It is a city long tested by various calamities and disasters: "Scrappy, chaotic, inexepert, astounding [...] shattered under a fusillade from heaven, rampaged through armies, mobs, strange vengeance. It is traumatised and hurt" (Miéville, 2012, p. 3). It is a city where the wealthy thrive, and in which others are condemned to a chaotic struggle to maintain their desperate existence:

> London is more unequal than anywhere else in the country. Here, the richest 10 percent hold two-thirds of all wealth, the poorest half, one twentieth. A fifth of working residents of the London boroughs of Brent, Newham, Waltham Forest, Barking and Dagenham earn less than a living wage. Unemployment in the city is above 400,000 and rising. Almost a quarter of Londoners are out of work. A wretching 40 percent of London children live in poverty. The numbers mean death. Travel the Great Jubilee line. Eight stops, east from Westminster to Canning Town. Each stop, local life expectancy goes down a year. (Miéville, 2012, pp. 6–7)

London is characterized by a juxtaposition of socio-economic issues and development projects: on one side, it faces challenges such as prostitution, crime, drug abuse, and suburban poverty; on the other side, it features extensive construction initiatives aimed at erecting additional buildings, exemplified by the 2012 Olympic Games, which symbolize efforts that ultimately contribute to form sort of undead London:

> Of London's dead landscapes, there are few like the Heygate Estate, ruin on a Martin scale. A dizzying sprawl of concrete in Southwark, a raised town, great, corridored blocks, walkways over communal gardens. Slabs of buildingness. It's all but empty. It's to be demolished. Even were it not stuffed with asbestos, that would take a long time. (Miéville, 2012, p. 21)

London is also a city of protests and resistance, and total police surveillance. It is precisely this collapsing city that constitutes the primary nonhuman element within Miéville's novels. The city is, of course, more than merely a location; it transcends a simple aggregation of structures. It serves as an environment for both human and inhuman entities; it functions as a medium in the sense outlined by F. Kittler.

> Ever since it has become impossible to survey cities from a cathedral tower or a castle, and ever since walls and fortifications have ceased to contain them, cities have been traversed and connected by a network of innumerable networks, also (and especially) at their margins, points of tangency, and frayed edges. No matter whether these networks convey information or energy –

> that is, whether they are called ‘telephone,‘ ‘radio,‘ and ‘television,‘ or ‘water supply,‘ ‘electricity,‘ and ‘highway’ – they all are information. (Kittler, 2013, p. 139)

Miéville’s city cannot be overlooked in its entirety; it is uncontrollable, living its own life as a strange creature; it is more a creation of space than a place. Looking at the city is like “peering into the interior of some mysterious metropolitopoiesis” (Miéville, 2010, p. 253). It is interconnected through transportation and other networks, continuously evolving and expanding into an autonomous entity. It constitutes a network of lives and processes, a magical being, a tangled organism, an urban element in Lefebvre’s terminology, or a magical urban fabric or urban reality: “The urban fabric grows, extends its borders, corrodes the residue of agrarian life. This expression *urban fabric* does not narrowly define the built world of cities but all manifestation of the dominance of the city over the country” (Lefebre, 2003, pp. 3–4). It is

> [a] global process of industrialization and urbanization … the large cities exploded, giving rise to dubious value: suburbs, residential conglomerations and industrial complexes, satellite cities that differed little from urbanized towns. Small and midsized cities became dependencies, partial colonies of the metropolis. (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 4)

Urban reality is an inescapable aspect of our environment, encompassing us and shaping the context in which our lives unfold, thereby influencing us as non-human elements. Miéville’s fiction unfolds within this urban reality, which transcends being merely a city to become a way of life and a means of communication, constructed not solely through buildings but also through media, languages, and perspectives. It is a second nature that has absorbed and integrated what was once a separate natural world, as in the world of *Railsea* (2012), which emerged after a distant catastrophe of a previous industrial civilisation, or as in the pirate city in *The Scar* (2002), where human and non-human structures intertwine with marine forms of life. It is a world from within which we live, speak, and think, but which we can no longer grasp or overlook.

In this context, Miéville’s depiction of urban reality can be understood through what Lefebvre calls the blind field. An overly comprehensive, all-encompassing urban reality is transparent; it is not visible because it permeates us and makes us part of itself, leaving us with no distance from it. Lefebvre, in this context, asks:

> Is the unconscious the substance or essence of a blind field? […] It would be more accurate to speak of the unrecognizable. However, these terms are unsatisfactory. Why do I (or we) refuse to see, to perceive, or conceive something? Why do we pretend not to see? How do we arrive at that point? These blind fields are mental and social. To understand them, we must take into account the power of ideology and the power of language. There are blind fields wherever language fails us, whenever there is a surfeit of redundancy in a metalanguage. (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 31)

In the detective novel *The City & The City*, there are two parallel cities, Besźel and Ul Qoma, which occupy the same space. They once existed as a single, connected city, but after a distant, now-forgotten war, they split into two. The residents of both cities live in the same places and walk the same streets,

but from childhood, they are conditioned to 'unsee' the other city; they are instructed to be blind to the city located behind their own, yet within it. Both cities exhibit distinct architecture, fashion, languages with different alphabets, and religious practices. It is strictly prohibited for residents of either city to perceive or acknowledge the existence of the other. Any violation of this regulation – regardless of intent – constitutes a breach, leading to detention by the secret police and subsequent disappearance. The blindness Lefebvre refers to is the lack of awareness in daily life regarding the influence and ideological characteristics of urban reality, which is founded upon growth and controlled by those in authority, who manage capital and dictate the rhythm of daily activities. The rulers influence the daily reality of the city and compel its inhabitants to perceive – or rather, not perceive – certain aspects in a particular manner. The hero's journey in Miéville's novels consistently involves the necessity of unlearning this blindness, eliminating ignorance of the power and ideological structures that govern the city, exploring all its layers, and unveiling its concealed face – the other city.

The motif of breach, furthermore, extends well beyond political motives and resides at the core of Mieville's strange fictional universes.

> The all-encompassing Breach in *The City & The City* offers a culmination of one of Miéville's most sustained literary interests. Across his fictions, breach recurs as a way of naming the contact point between entities – whether physical, viscous, phylogenetic, conceptual, or ontological. (Edwards, Venezia, 2015, p. 11)

> In addition to the physical, military, and legal specificity of particular breaches, breach also suggests the profound ontological implications of boundary-crossing. In his 2008 essay, Miéville extends a philosophical reading of the literary Weird as that which refuses to cede to Manichean binaries of good or bad by extending what he calls a 'morally opaque tentacular'. (Edwards, Venezia, 2015, p. 13)

In this sense, the Weird may be understood as the literary equivalent of breach:

> [the] moment when disparate and wholly incompatible entities are yoked together into a bastardized assemblage which cannot be reconciled into any form of union, but jostle uneasily. Such a breach transgresses taxonomies, linguistic parameters, species boundaries, and philosophical precepts. (Edwards and Venezia, 2015, p. 14)

5. Beyond the City – Line of Escape

According to Lefebvre, it is necessary to reconsider our understanding of urban reality in comparison with that of industrial cities. Urban reality encompasses cities, yet on a far broader scale; it is global in nature, superseding the prior concept of nature and generating a new form of it. This signifies the cessation of traditional notions regarding the essence of being human.

> These events are succeeded by the urban. […] During this new period, what once passed as absolute has become relativised: reason, history, the state, mankind. We express this by saying that those entities, those fetishes, have died. There is something true in this claim, but fetishes do not all die the same death. The death of man affects only our philosophers. (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 36)

Miéville and other authors associated with the so-called new weird fiction serve as evidence that the demise of the concept known as humanity is of interest not solely to philosophers, provided that by the term 'human' we refer to the traditional humanist and anthropocentric notions of a universal self-aware subject who, equipped with reason, will, morality, and technical abilities, is distinguished from the rest of nature. Although for many people, even today, questioning the superiority and privileged position of humans remains controversial, for authors of the new weird fiction genre, it has become an integral part of the canon, paralleling its role in posthumanist philosophy, aesthetics, and art.

Contemplating the death of Man signifies that the human perspective is no longer our initial point of reference; it is not the focal point of our consideration, as we are engaging in thought from an alternative standpoint. Firstly, this entails contemplating from within the situatedness of a more-than-human world, and, according to Lefebvre, from within the differential time-space of urban reality. Secondly, it involves thinking from beyond the space-time in which we are embedded.

"To define these properties of urban differential space (time-space), we need to introduce new concepts, such as isotopy, heterotopy, and utopia" (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 37). Isotopy concerns a conception of place that defines it as the same location, specifically a topos, unified with its surroundings into a recognisable whole. Nonetheless, each isotopic urban entity consists of various components – including streets, quarters, squares, stations, parks, factories, and roads. Isotopy is established through the relationships among these components, which differentiate the unified space-time into numerous neighbouring, interconnected, yet occasionally conflicting areas. "This difference can extend from a highly marked contrast all the way to conflict, to the extent that the occupants of a place are taken into consideration." (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 38).

Miéville's fictional city-worlds are, in this sense, strictly heterotopic. An excellent example is the Armada from the novel *The Scar*. The Armada is a floating city composed of ships and shipwrecks, connected to marine ecosystems. In terms of size, it is not very extensive; however, internally it is complex, made up of a constantly increasing number of ships and many layers stacked over, above, and below each other, with decks and lower decks linked by hundreds of miles of bridges, gangways, walkways, and riggings. The Armada is also divided into several larger districts, each inhabited by a different race or a mixture of races and controlled by various, usually conflicting interests. All these districts clash, trade, and fight among themselves for dominance and for decisions about where the entire floating city will go, what its future will be, and who will determine its politics – whether it will continue its relatively safe and tested piratical activities, which are the primary source of its wealth and knowledge, or whether, as some wish, it will set out to hunt the legendary giant sea monster called Avac, or whether, as a few conspirators desire, it will head towards the very Scar, the mythical source of infinite power and energy, where the known physical and psychological laws cease to apply.

The scar refers to the third moment, which, from the viewpoint of the organization of urban reality, is regarded by Lefebvre as utopia. "Now, there is also an elsewhere, the non-place that has no place and seeks a place of its own. Verticality, a high erected anywhere on a horizontal plane, [...] place characterized by presence-absence: of the divine, of power, of the half-fictional, half-real, of sublime thought" (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 38). This utopian place, according to Lefebvre, is entirely real and constitutes the core of urban reality. It functions as the motivating force for the city's continual development, representing an ideology that emanates from within the city – originating from its temples, libraries, archives, universities, and from the minds and dreams of all its inhabitants. These inhabitants project this ideology into a remembered, mythic past and an anticipated future, into a space that is both placeless and timeless, which, paradoxically, serves as the origin of space-time production.

> Within urban space, elsewhere is anywhere and nowhere. It has been this way ever since there have been cities, and ever since, alongside objects and actions, there have been situations, especially those involving people associated with divinity, power, or the imaginary. This is a paradoxical space where paradox becomes the opposite of everyday. (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 38)

In Miéville's fictional worlds, this utopian non-place – non-time – assumes various metaphorical forms. It remains a subject of debate, legend, and myth; its nature eludes complete comprehension, as it contradicts conventional everyday experience. Consequently, the majority do not believe in its existence, aside from fantasists, dreamers, clergy, and scientists. In the novel *The City and the City*, the mysterious third city of Orciny is the subject of speculation by archaeologists, anthropologists, and dissidents. Orciny is a city between two warring and mutually inaccessible cities. "The secret city. It runs things" (Miéville, 2010a, p. 51). It is supposed to be the original city, which was at the beginning, even before the division and before the war, when the world was still in order. "That beginning was a shadow in history, an unknown record effaced and vanished for a century on either side. From that historically brief, quite opaque moment came the chaos of our material history, an anarchy of chronology" (Miéville, 2010a, p. 51). It is posited that Orciny is concealed somewhere within a breach or possibly behind it, situated between two real cities, through which it traverses reminiscent of an ancient legend. It resides within both cities as a parasitic entity, governed by clandestine overlords who purportedly oversee them as puppeteers. However, at the conclusion of the novel, it is disclosed that Mahalia, the young woman whose murder was the catalyst for Inspector Borlu's story, was killed not because of her belief in Orciny or even her discovery of it, but because she ceased to believe in it. The utopian construct, which in the novel functions as a symbol of resistance against the prevailing unjust order and as an object of desire for those seeking to escape it, ultimately reveals itself to be an ideological project supported by the secret police, employed to uphold the entire political and economic framework of control over the inhabitants of both divided cities.

A similar promise of power and salvation is also present in the legendary Scar depicted in the eponymous novel. This scar is described as a fracture in the world characterised by peculiar geophysical properties situated in the ocean's centre, to which all its currents converge. Its approach is associated with the promise of inexhaustible power. The Scar is purported to be a site of pure virtuality, that is, a location where all unrealised possibilities coexist simultaneously and can be accessed through mystical means. "That's the Scar. Teeming with the ways things weren't and aren't but could be" (Miéville, 2013, p. 531).

Another remarkable depiction of utopia is the place in the harsh and bloody realm of Railsea, a world conceived after an ancient catastrophe of industrial civilisation, consisting of an infinitely tangled ocean of tracks and waste. There is a legend that one track, the last line of escape, leads to a place beyond the tracks. Most inhabitants of the *Railsea* do not believe such a place exists; a few who have seen old maps think it hides a great treasure or a forgotten prosperous city. In the novel Kraken, however, the utopia does not pertain to a physical location but rather to the remnants of an ancient sea deity – specifically, a giant squid whose preserved remains were magically stolen from the British Natural History Museum. The entity possessing these remains holds the power to summon or halt an apocalyptic event.

Kraken, *Scar*, a location behind the tracks, or *Orciny* represent, within Miéville's fictional worlds, the ultimate manifestations of the posthuman condition. It is consistently an elusive phenomenon that defies the metrics of daily existence, representing a source of power with a numinous quality – simultaneously awe-inspiring and revered. Concurrently, it possesses a spectral nature; it remains perpetually inaccessible, emerging from an unfathomable past while concurrently influencing the future actions of all involved. It constitutes a form of radical otherness, chaos, or virtuality, embodying the simultaneous presence of all possibilities. Following M. Fišerová's deconstructive interpretation of the (photographic) image problem, we may regard this borderline event as both a revenant and an arrivant. According to her, revenants "return repressed fragments of memory" and arrivants "do not fulfil the expectations of memory, only promise them" (Fišerová, 2019, p. 129). Miéville's border events are always echoes of an ancient catastrophe, long forgotten, that manifests as a future expectation no one believes in, but which never fully materialises. Instead, it manifests negatively, nullifies itself, or disappears. This event is inherently ungraspable, transcending all interpretative frameworks, yet simultaneously infiltrating them, thereby rendering human actions susceptible to the unrepresentable and spectral elements that threaten destruction while also offering the possibility of salvation. Encounters with this numinous and transcendent object of desire invariably return the protagonists of Miéville's narratives to the struggles of daily life, compelling them to persist in their existence. Nevertheless, these characters are transformed by the impossibility of remaining within the realm of the incomprehensible event; through this process, they also come to recognise that the frameworks of everyday reality

are not immutable, that they were not always as they are now, and that the future holds the potential for change. No perspective or status quo is ultimately final, as all are reflected in the inaccessible image of the Other.

6. Conclusion

The posthumanist aesthetics of China Miéville is grounded in a shift of perspective. This transformation occurs as a metamorphosis of the hero, who transitions from an isolated, individual actor to becoming an integral part of a vast urban reality. In Miéville's work, this reality manifests as an unstable, multilayered fabric, within which the original human subject is situated in a decentralised tangle comprising numerous competing interests and perspectives. This tangle is not governed from above by a set of laws but constitutes an anarchic space-time where various claims to power compete, extending beyond purely human ones. The capacity to act extends from the individual human actor to encompass the entire environment, including non-human beings, objects, and the comprehensive urban assemblages that comprise them. From the borders and within this heterotopic urban environment, a utopian verticality emerges – a promise of the future that transcends daily existence yet simultaneously poses a threat of its ultimate disruption. Miéville's revolutionary aesthetic thus precisely fulfils the role of art as articulated in Dadejík's essay:

> Art is a peculiar kind of deliberate derailment from the track of habit [...] it invites us to step beyond the routine patterns of our behaviour [...] it disrupts the established plane of usefulness, the level of performing daily intentions and goals [...] and at the same time restores the natural expressiveness or ecstasy of things, the receptivity to the ambiguous, multifaceted, and ever-changing world around us. (Dadejík, 2022, p. 102)

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