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TRACING SPECULATIVE REALISM IN CHINA MIÉVILLE'S *KING RAT* AND *THE CITY & THE CITY*

MASTER OF ARTS THESIS

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DEDICATION

To the part of me that trusted ambition as a compass, and to those who walked forward despite the pressure of unseen hands, and claimed a path of their own.

ABSTRACT

TRACING SPECULATIVE REALISM IN CHINA MIÉVILLE'S *KING RAT* AND *THE CITY & THE CITY*

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In the field of contemporary speculative fiction, China Miéville's novels challenge the conventional norms of perception and reality through layered worlds that resist simplification. Two of Miéville's works, *The City & The City* (2009) and *King Rat* (1998) are explored under the light of the philosophical framework of Speculative Realism emerged in 21st century as a response to the limitations of anthropocentric thought. Speculative Realism provides a theoretical lens to analyse how Miéville's fiction dismantles correlationist assumptions and engages with the withdrawn dimensions of reality that escape human understanding and control. This study aims to reveal the interrogative features of the two novels which question the reliability of perception and the constructed nature of identity and reality by examining spatial division, ontological transformation and ideological control. The critique of correlationism by Quentin Meillassoux and Object-Oriented Ontology by Graham Harman are primarily used in this thesis as central theoretical frameworks, while to further contextualize and nuance the discussion, the philosophical insights of Iain Hamilton Grant and Ray Brassier are also included. Through this approach, the study explores how Miéville's fiction reimagines the limits of human access to reality and draws attention to what is withdrawn, independent, and beyond human understanding.

Key words: China Miéville, Speculative Realism, Object-Oriented Ontology, Correlationism

ÖZET

CHINA MIÉVILLE'İN *KRAL FARE* VE *ŞEHİR & ŞEHİR* ROMANLARINDA SPEKÜLATİF REALİZMİN İZLERİ

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Çağdaş spekülatif kurgu alanında, China Miéville'in romanları sadeleştirilmeye direnen çok katmanlı dünyalar aracılığıyla algı ve gerçekliğe dair geleneksel normlara meydan okumaktadır. Bu tezde Miéville'in iki eseri olan *Şehir & Şehir* (2009) ve *Kral Fare* (1998), insan merkezli düşüncenin sınırlarına karşı 21. yüzyılda ortaya çıkan Spekülatif Realizm felsefi çevçevesi ışığında incelenmektedir. Spekülatif Realizm, Miéville'in kurgusunun korelasyoncu varsayımları nasıl parçaladığını ve insan anlayışının ve kontrolünün ötesinde kalan, gerçekliğin geri çekilmiş boyutlarıyla nasıl ilişki kurduğunu analiz etmek için teorik bir mercek sunar. Bu çalışma mekansal bölünme, ontolojik dönüşüm ve ideolojik kontrol temaları üzerinden söz konusu iki romanın algının güvenilirliği ile kimlik ve gerçekliğin temel doğasını sorgulayan yönlerini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Tezin kuramsal çerçevesini büyük ölçüde Quentin Meillassoux'nun korelasyonizm eleştirisi ve Graham Harman'ın Nesne Yönelimli Ontoloji'si oluşturmaktadır; ancak tartışmayı derinleştirmek ve bağlama oturtmak amacıyla, Iain Hamilton Grant ve Ray Brassier'ın felsefi yaklaşımlarından da yararlanılmıştır. Bu yaklaşımlar doğrultusunda çalışma, Miéville'in kurgusunun, insanın gerçekliğe erişiminin sınırlarını nasıl yeniden tasavvur ettiğini ve insan anlayışının ötesinde kalan, bağımsız ve geri çekilmiş olana nasıl dikkat çektiğini ortaya koyar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: China Miéville, Spekülatif Realizm, Nesne Yönelimli Ontoloji, Korelasyonizm

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Reality is not as stable as it seems in fact what is seen, known, and believed to be true is shaped by perception, controlled by invisible forces, and sustained by rules that often remain unquestioned. These rules may be enforced through many entities such as; law, or they could be embedded in social structures, or exist as something more elusive, yet they dictate the way the world is experienced and understood. *The City & The City* (2009) and *King Rat* (1998) written by China Miéville explore these limitations through cities that function as more than plain settings, instead, they act like systems that shape movement, identity, and knowledge. In *The City & The City*, perception itself is policed, forcing citizens to "unsee" what is in front of them in an obvious way. *King Rat*, on the other hand, uncovers a hidden London ruled by forces that exist outside human perception. Both novels challenge the idea of a fixed reality, showing that the world is shaped just as much by what remains unseen as by what is acknowledged.

In examining these entities that shape perception and reality beyond human awareness, the view of Speculative Realism will be used. Miéville's cities are not just backdrops but active forces that govern existence, reinforcing the idea that reality is structured by forces outside individual cognition. The artificial laws which are enforced in *The City & The City* or the influence of hidden non-human entities in *King Rat* highlight the limitations of human perception which shape the world. Whether reality is dependent on human thought or if it exists beyond what can be perceived is a question that has been asked by many philosophers since the beginning of time, which Speculative Realism seeks to address by challenging the idea that reality is restricted to human perception. It is possible to analyse how Miéville's fiction uncovers the unseen structures that dictate movement, knowledge, and identity within these urban landscapes by applying the framework of Speculative Realism.

Speculative Realism is a 21st century philosophical movement challenging the idea that reality is dependent on the human perception and cognition. Philosophers associated with Speculative Realism disagree with the assumption of human perception is the absolute measure of reality. In fact, these key figures in Speculative Realism such as Graham Harman, Iain Hamilton Grant, Ray Brassier and Quentin Meillassoux develops the view of reality exist independently of human perception, however, they approach this independence differently. In this thesis, the primary focus will be on the ideas of Graham Harman and Quentin Meillassoux, whose theories will be explored in depth, while also drawing on the perspectives of Iain Hamilton Grant and Ray Brassier to illuminate a broader speculative framework. Quentin Meillassoux suggests that events or states of existence that occurred before the human consciousness, such as the formation of earth, the birth of stars, or evolution of life which are the events that were present before humans are impossible to perceive or interpret. Meillassoux mentions that "Consequently, there is no sense in claiming to know that contradiction is absolutely impossible, for the only thing that is given to us is the fact that we cannot think anything that is impossible" (Harman, 2018, p. 184). This philosophical view suggests that the universe has an objective existence that long before human consciousness emerged, thus exists independently of it and challenges the traditional anthropocentric assumption that human thought shapes our understanding of reality.

While Meillassoux emphasizes that reality is independent from human cognitive limits, Ray Brassier takes a more scientifically grounded approach as demonstrated in his book *"Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction"* with his following observation:

> Thus it is precisely the necessity of an originary correlation, whether between knower and known, or Sein and Dasein, that science's ancestral statements flatly contradict. For in flagrant disregard of those transcendental conditions which are supposed to be necessary for every manifestation, they describe occurrences anterior to the emergence of life, and objects existing independently of any relation to thought. (2007, p.53)

Brassier highlights the revolutionary capacity of science to challenge and disturb settled metaphysical assumptions. His observation highlights how science directly contradicts the originary correlation which is the idea that the relationship between the knower and known, or the being and its perception is necessary for any manifestation of reality. Brassier points out that scientific ancestral statements, such as the movement of tectonic plates, the formation of earth or the emergence of stars

describe events that occurred long before human existence or consciousness. Occurrence of these events independently of any observer, directly challenge the notion that reality depends on its relationship to human thought or perception. Brassier's ideas about the independence of reality from human perception and cognition can be observed in: "Thus plate tectonics, thermonuclear fusion, and galactic expansion (not to mention undiscovered oil reserves or unknown insect species) are as much autonomous, human-independent realities as the accretion of the earth" (2007, p. 75).

Brassier (2007) argues that science, especially the empirical science about the physical universe provides a view for aspects of reality that goes beyond human perception. In his view, the reality which cannot be reached by human experience is accessible through tools and methods that reveal dimensions of existence. The concept of the *arche-fossil* which was coined by Meillassoux (2008, p. 10) is particularly relevant here, since it represents the material evidence of events that occurred before human existence. Brassier emphasizes phenomena occurring before the emergence of life and after the extinction of thought to highlight the objectivity of scientific truths. These truths do not rely on human perception but are grounded in empirical methods that extend beyond human sensory and cognitive limitations.

Brassier's argument parallels with the aims of Speculative Realism to set philosophical inquiry free from the anthropocentric forejudges exist naturally in *correlationism*. However, his approach uniquely relies on the scientific view of the world using empirical sciences not only to access reality but also as a standard for philosophical precision. Science, through fields like cognitive neuroscience, astrophysics, and evolutionary biology reveal terms of reality beyond human experience. This idea moves past the correlationist view presenting science as the best way to understand non-human aspects of existence. Brassier focuses on science and underlines its power to reshape how one can see his/her position in the universe. By understanding the independence of physical processes and entities, he challenges the idea that reality is limited to human thought and experience. Instead, Brassier encourages humans to embrace a cosmos that exists independently, but can be understood thanks to scientific study. As Brassier highlighted during the *Speculative Realism* conference held in 2007 at Goldsmiths, University of London:

> I think that arguably the most significant philosophical development of the twentieth century is the emergence of a science of cognition: that is, the idea that the process of cognition can be re-integrated into the realm of objective phenomena studied by the empirical sciences (as cited in Harman, 2018, p. 15).

Brassier (2007, p. xi) supports the idea that the reality is an independent entity beyond human cognition. However, in a later work, he (2011) argues that to understand the independent entity, scientific methods are necessary such as empirical observation, neurobiological studies, and cognitive neuroscience. Empirical observation provides a basis for understanding reality beyond human perception by refining the manifest image through a self-correcting scientific process. As Brassier states, "Science itself grows out of the manifest image precisely insofar as it constitutes a *self-correcting* enterprise" (2011, p. 9) Brassier values the cognitive authority of empirical science, especially in fields such as neurobiological science and cognitive neuroscience. He highlights neurobiology as a key discipline which investigates the biological structure and function of the brain, thus contributing to understand how subjective experience emerges (Brassier, 2011, p. 10). These disciplines examine human cognition as an objective phenomenon rather than a subjective experience.

His approach is also deeply formed by a nihilistic view of existence. Unlike traditional philosophical approaches that try to find meaning within the universe, Brassier's nihilistic opinion is that the universe does not have an innate purpose serving people to understand it. This perspective aligns with the emphasis on scientific knowledge, since Brassier argues that science reveals a reality with no inherent meaning or purpose centred on humans. For Brassier, it is the key point to understand this unconcern for human significance to see that reality is an objective world that exist independent from any human ideas of meaning or value.

Iain Hamilton Grant is also one of the philosophers contributing to Speculative Realism. His views are heavily inspired by works of German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling viewing nature as an active, dynamic, self-organizing and generative force rather than as a passive background for human activity. In *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*, Grant (2006, p. 150) argues that nature is formed of an active and complex series, and this idea contrasts with the traditional philosophical separation between thought and world. Grant benefits from Schelling's argument that "An original antithesis of forces in the ideal subject of nature appears necessary to every construction" (Schelling, as cited in Grant, 2006,

p. 160). This idea reflects Schelling's understanding of nature as dynamic, driven by opposing forces that shape its creativity. Grant builds on this idea of dynamic opposition to portray nature as an active, self-organizing force rather than a passive background for human activity. He challenges traditional views of nature centred on human perception, emphasizing its complexity and independence. In Grant's words: "We [must] accept that there's something prior to thinking, and that there are several layers of dependency amongst what is prior to thinking. It's not just one thing, it's an entire complex series of events" (2007, p. 334). Grant supports the idea that nature itself has unending, independent layers of cause and effect which constantly produces new forms and ideas rather than being limited to human concepts and purposes.

Grant's philosophy of nature differs from naturalistic or materialistic views by viewing nature as a "*productive*" force rather than a simple background or environment for human existence. This aligns with Schelling's philosophy as interpreted by Heidegger, who stated "The perimeter dividing organic from 'anorganic' nature be eliminated as naturalistically untenable and philosophically vicious, in order that organization become not an exception to a mechanistic natural order, but rather the principle of nature itself" (2011, p. 189). For Grant, nature is not only a basis of which everything must be reduced, it is the source from which everything emerges. This speculative approach allows Grant to see nature as an active, multi-layered entity contrasting reduction of natural phenomena to mechanistic explanations or human-centred interpretations.

While Grant emphasizes the generative force of nature and its independence from human-centred interpretations, Graham Harman argues another distinct approach within Speculative Realism with *Object-Oriented Ontology* (2018). Harman's philosophy takes focus from productivity of nature to the autonomy and independence of all *objects* instead of considering only human and nature, but everything including inanimate objects to human or non-human entities. However, in order to clarify a significant point; it is safe to say that the most common mistake while trying to understand OOO is to interpret it as a "materialistic" approach as Harman highlights in his work *A New Theory of Everything* (2018, p. 258). As oppose to the traditional metaphysics that often assumes objects as meaningful only when their relationship or efforts are relying to human experience, Harman views the

essence of every object that is inaccessible to other objects. This means that objects are partially "*withdrawn"*[1] cannot be fully understood or completely accessed.

Harman (2018), highlights his perspective on the weird:

> As yesterday's Lovecraft conference title indicated, realism is always in some sense weird. Realism is about the strangeness in reality that is not projected onto reality by us. It is already there by dint of being real. And so it's a kind of realism without common sense. (2018, p. 120)

This observation highlights Harman's view which the reality contains elements of strangeness and autonomy existing independently of human perception or interpretation. This concept of Weird Realism aligns with the unsettling themes of weird fiction and supports Speculative Realism's challenge to the idea that reality revolves entirely around human experience. By emphasizing the independence of reality, Harman underlines the potential for realism to reveal the unfamiliar and uncanny aspects of existence beyond human-centred frameworks.

As Harman (2018, p.120) suggests, weird fiction draws attention to the strange, autonomous concepts of reality in which elements exist independently of human perception and understanding. This approach to realism parallels with the central challenge of Speculative Realism to correlationism which is the assumption that reality is fully open to be acknowledged or structured around human experience. Thus, Harman's notion of "*Weird Realism*" offers a valuable framework for exploring the layered and uncanny realities presented in various narratives, including those in China Miéville's novels.

Since Miéville's novels, *The City & The City* and *King Rat* embody Weird Realism with the worlds presenting dimensions beyond common human perception which are not easy to interpret, Speculative Realism sheds light through the examination of these novels. As Speculative Realism challenges the anthropocentric frameworks of thoughts, it directly questions the philosophical foundation of correlationism. This rejection is not limited to literature, in fact; it reaches philosophy and the core of it and how reality is understood in it. Harman's notion of Weird Realism reflects this by emphasizing the strange and independent nature of reality that resists to human-centred frameworks. Building on this rejection, Quentin

[1] "The technical way of making this point is to say that all objects are mutually 'withdrawn', a term taken from Heidegger (1889–1976)" (Harman, 2018, p. 258)."

Meillassoux extends the discussion by examining the philosophical implications of a reality that exists entirely independent of human thought. This perspective opens the way to exploring both the origins of correlationism and its critique within Speculative Realism.

The City & The City and *King Rat* are chosen for this study because they explore the ideas of Speculative Realism in different but connected ways since both show how there can be realities beyond what humans can see or understand. The constructed world that is deeply entangled in institutional and perceptual control in *The City & The City* illustrates how human perception does not fully grasp the world's true structure, and how powerful systems reinforce a limited version of reality. The novel becomes a reflection on how much of what is considered "real" is constructed, and how unseen powers enforce that construction making it especially relevant to Speculative Realism's critique of correlationism and its interest in what exists beyond what is perceived. The layered geography and strict perceptual codes used in the novel create a setting where reality is not merely hidden, it is structured in such a way that humans are conditioned not to see it at all, mirroring the Speculative Realist critique of human-centred epistemologies. In contrast, *King Rat* approaches the same philosophical terrain from a different angle. Rather than focusing on constructed institutions or perceptual training, this novel deals with the unravelling of human identity in the face of hidden, animalistic, and mythic forces. London, in *King Rat*, is not a city to be unlearned or unseen but one that must be descended into, with layers of filth, sound, and subversion that exist beyond social consciousness. Saul's transformation into something not entirely human is not only bodily, but also ontological which disrupt the stable categories of identity, species, and agency. In this way, *King Rat* complements *The City & The City* by shifting the focus from perceptual discipline to bodily and mythic rupture, both of which challenge the centrality of the human subject. Together, these novels provide two ends of a speculative spectrum. *The City & The City* explores how reality is limited by external social mechanisms, while *King Rat* explores how reality escapes internal, human-centred definitions of self. One deals with spatial and institutional boundaries, the other with biological and narrative boundaries. By examining both, this thesis is able to engage with the broader concerns of Speculative Realism, especially the idea that reality is not reducible to what humans think, see, or define. This dual analysis allows

a more layered understanding of how fiction can engage with realities that are weird, inaccessible, and independent of human correlation.

1.1. Correlationism and Its Rejection

Quentin Meillassoux (2008, pp. 5-6) introduced the term *correlationism* to describe the idea that reality is always perceived through the relationship between human thought and the world which makes it impossible to access the reality as it exists independently of human perception. In his book titled *After Finitude*, Meillassoux describes the notion of correlationism as follows "By 'correlation' we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other." (2008, p. 5). This definition highlights that one can only access reality as it appears to us through perception, language, systems of thought such as scientific paradigms, cultural narratives, cognitive structures rather than how it exists independently. Meillassoux accepts both the strength and limitations of correlationism:

> I insist on this point – the exceptional strength of this argumentation, apparently and desperately implacable. Correlationism rests on an argument as simple as it is powerful, and which can be formulated in the following way: No X without givenness of X, and no theory about X without a positing of X. If you speak about something, you speak about something that is given to you, and posited by you. (as cited in Harman, 2018, p. 160)

This highlights the core idea of correlationism which suggests the idea that our understanding of reality is always related to how it is perceived, making reality itself unreachable.

The pioneer of Quantum Mechanics, Werner Heisenberg mentions in one of his works illustrating a similar perspective: "…since the measuring device has been constructed by the observer, and we have to remember that what we observe is not nature in itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning." (1958, p.58). This quote highlights that there is a relationship between the observer and the observed. In the understanding of correlationism it is argued that the understanding of reality among people is shaped by their perspective and the concepts which are utilized to interpret it. These concepts include cultural narratives such as societal norms and values that are dictated, scientific paradigms that provide frameworks for understanding natural phenomena, philosophical approaches that explore the nature of existence and knowledge, and personal experiences that influence individual

understandings. His statement underlines the relationship between the observer and the observed, aligning with the central focus of correlationism; that knowledge of reality is understood only through the frameworks used to perceive and interpret it.

Correlationists, a term introduced by Quentin Meillassoux (2008, p. 49) to describe philosophers who assert that reality can only be understood through its correlation with human thought, suggest that scientific paradigms challenge the rooted collective knowledge and discoveries of previous researchers, establishing frameworks for human beings to understand and interpret the natural world. Meillassoux himself questions this perspective, asking, "Moreover, what is it that incites us to break with the circle of correlation?" (2008, p. 9). For instance; Newtonian physics are known for its measurability and the ability to predict the motion of objects with precision supporting the idea that the universe appears the same to all observers no matter where they observe; however, Einstein's theory of relativity challenged this idea with a different perspective. Unlike Newtonian physics which suggests that time and space are unchanging, Einstein introduced that time and space are not absolute but they can change due to the factors as gravity and space. This means that two people can experience time and space differently depending on where they stand or how they move. This paradigm shifts prove that scientific frameworks evolve by challenging previous collective knowledge and reshape the interpretation of reality for humans. Einstein's ideas are an example of perception and interpretation which are the key focuses of correlationism, shaping human's understanding of the natural world and underline the notion of reality, as it exists independently and remains out of human reach.

Correlationism provides an explanation for the relationship between perception and reality, however, it has faced many criticisms due to its limitations. By arguing that reality itself is unreachable, correlationism restricts human understanding to an anthropocentric framework, by limiting the potential for an objective or independent perception of the world. This limitation has been a central point of discussion for Speculative Realists such as Meillassoux who suggests to break with the circle of correlation. Speculative Realism challenges the view that reality is always perceived by human thought and perception encouraging people to find ways to conceptualize a world that exists independently of human perception and thought, thus it criticizes correlationism for compressing reality into a

framework, which is tied to human perception and thought inevitably. Correlationism ignores the possibility of accessing an independent world beyond these limits of concepts by insisting that reality is always interrelated with human cognition. According to Speculative Realists, this concept creates a limitation for thinking philosophically and keeps in focused only on humans, rather than reality itself. Speculative Realism argues that philosophy should pass beyond restrictive correlationism and the idea that reality is only meaningful within bounds of human experience, since considering the existence of a world that operates autonomously, regardless of human interpretation is the core idea of Speculative Realism.

Correlationism faces significant challenges with philosophers who argue for a reality that is independent of human perception even though it offers a framework for understanding the relationship between human thought and reality. Speculative Realism critiques the anthropocentric limitations of correlationism such as the subjectivity of knowledge which limits the ability to acknowledge truths or objects that are outside of human experience or perception. Moreover, it also critiques the tools that are helpful to interpreting the world such as the independence of human frameworks for culture and language. It seeks to free from its *circle of correlation* and explore the autonomy of a world that exists beyond human perception. The turn of Speculative Realism away from correlationism introduces new philosophical perspectives that engage with the independent and generally strange nature of reality beyond human-centred frameworks. This philosophical divergence forms the foundation for the rejection of correlationism.

The rejection of correlationism centres on the argument that the dependency of reality on human perception and thought imposes limitations on the philosophical explorations. Quentin Meillassoux (2008, p. 10) critiques correlationism by coining the term *ancestrality* which refers to events or phenomena that happened before the existence of human consciousness. These events challenge the central principle of correlationism by underlining the existence of a reality that is entirely detached from human perception or interpretation. For the first statement of ancestrality, Meillassoux introduces the term as “I will call ‘ancestral’ any reality anterior to the emergence of the human species – or even anterior to every recognized form of life on earth” (2008, p. 10).

Meillassoux expands on this idea for a speculative approach by suggesting *absolute contingency*, meaning that everything in the universe exists without necessity and may unpredictably change, thus everything is governed with the accordance of contingency rather than established laws or human-centred frameworks. Meillassoux asserts that philosophy can access a reality independent of human subjectivity by breaking free from the circle of correlation. This shift aims to understand the world as it is, recognizing its independence and uniqueness without binding it to human experience.

Meillassoux's notion of *ancestrality* functions as the foundation for emphasizing realities and events that exist independent of human thought including the foundation of Earth, the origins of universe or phenomena date previous from any form of life, upon which Meillassoux's concept of *absolute contingency* built. This perspective not only disrupts the reliance on subjective frameworks, but also shows the capability of philosophy to explore the independence and uniqueness of reality. Meillassoux seeks to establish a discourse that recognizes the universe's radical openness and independence through this lens, thus rejecting the limitations of correlationist idea.

By introducing the concepts like *ancestrality* and *absolute contingency*, Meillassoux opens pathways for philosophy to refer realities that exists autonomously. These ideas challenge traditional, established metaphysical assumptions and reveal new methods of philosophical researches. The focus is to acknowledge a reality beyond such limits rather than connecting the thought and being. In a dynamic universe which resists to human understanding and its complete independence, this point of view suggests that philosophy serves as a tool for understanding and reimagining the place of humans. Speculative Realism reshapes philosophy by rejecting correlationism, with a focus on the unexpected possibilities and independent realities allowing humans to explore the borders of thought and knowledge.

1.2. Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO)

OOO is developed by Graham Harman (2018, p.9) who argues that all objects, whether human or non-human, exists equally and have their own existence independent of human perception and thought. In the context of Speculative Realism,

OOO can be seen as a transformative philosophical approach that moves the focus from human-centred frameworks to the object autonomy. OOO challenges the traditional, fixed anthropocentric view by highlighting that all entities, regardless of what they are, exist with their own unique reality. This perspective both reshapes the role of humans in understanding the world and encourages for a deeper questioning into the relationships between objects on their own without human intervention or interpretation. In *The Quadruple Object* (2011), Graham Harman introduces the core tenets of OOO, especially underlining the independence and depth of objects beyond their relations. He asserts that "entities not usually regarded as 'tools': for even colors, shapes, and numbers all have a reality that is not fully exhausted by the exact way in which a thinker considers them" (2011, p.50).

Harman underlines the *Withdrawal of Objects* which means that the true essence of any object cannot be accessible fully, either to humans or to other objects. This view helps ontological field to involve the interactions of non-human entities significant equally, moving beyond anthropocentric limitations. As Harman mentions this concept in his work named *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* emphasizing that:

> Furthermore, since reality is always radically different from our formulation of it, and is never something we encounter directly in the flesh, we must approach it indirectly. This withdrawal or withholding of things from direct access is the central principle of OOO. (2017, p.7)

Harman introduces the idea of "Weird Realism," which aligns with the core principles of Object-Oriented Ontology in order to elaborate the concept of the *Withdrawal of Objects*. He connects the concept of *Weird Realism* with Object-Oriented Ontology, underlining the depth and mystery of reality that is resistant to be fully explained or directly accessed. As he explains in *Speculative Realism: An Introduction:*

> When OOO speaks of weirdness, it is trying to capture the gap between reality and its explicit manifestations, one that is found not only in the writings of Lovecraft but in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, in nearly anything written by Edgar Allan Poe, and in a wide range of other literary classics. (2018, p. 120)

Harman draws attention to the ways of reality which consistently goes beyond human understanding and remains complex despite the efforts to define or categorize it. This perspective strengthens OOO's aim to take the focus away from anthropocentric framework since Harman argues that objects have their own unique

existence independent from human interaction or perception; while anthropocentric view supports the notion that the human perception or thought is the centre of understanding the reality which are completely in contrast to each other. He emphasizes the strange nature and autonomy of reality beyond human comprehension by rejecting the idea that reality can be reduced to what is directly observable or scientifically measurable which means that reality is always more than what is accessible to human perception. Through Weird Realism, Harman engages more with the unknown and uncanny aspects of reality by challenging traditional approaches that put human-centric interpretations of the world first in line.

This view on the independence and complexity of objects, which are the foundation of Object-Oriented Ontology, leads Harman to introduce a new way of understanding the objects in his book; *"The Quadruple Objects",* a concept that divides objects into four components:

> The two great figures of phenomenology are united once and for all. While there may be an infinity of objects in the cosmos, they come in only two kinds: the real object that withdraws from all experience, and the sensual object that exists only in experience. And along with these we also have two kinds of qualities: the sensual qualities found in experience, and the real ones that Husserl says are accessible intellectually rather than through sensuous intuition. This yields four distinct poles in the universe. (2011, p.62)

This model explores how objects exist and interact with each other both in the relationship and beyond. Harman's exploration for real objects, sensual objects, real qualities, and sensual qualities can be seen as fundamental framework in order to analyse the existence of objects in and out of their relations. This concept underlines that objects have a deeper reality remaining from which is withdrawn out of experience. Furthermore, it would not be enough to define them only looking at their interactions or appearances. The Quadruple Objects broadens the core principles of OOO, therefore; examining the coexistence of these four components opens new ways of exploration of the autonomy and interrelations of objects beyond human perception and interaction. Each four components serve as unique perspectives on how objects exist and interact in reality. These distinctions help human mind to understand the complexity and autonomy of objects beyond their plain appearances or functions in human experience (Harman, 2011).

Real objects are the basis of Harman's Quadruple Objects, since they refer to the main existence of an object. These objects are independent of human perception and interaction, they withdraw from direct experience. It means that their true essence

cannot be fully acknowledged or captured by human senses or with scientific analysis. Harman explains real objects as:

> Just as a real object is irreducible downwards, it is also irreducible upwards to its palpable qualities […] Physical particles try to undermine and overmine objects at the same time, but fall victim to their own weapons: for objects are both deeper and shallower than material elements can ever be. (2011, p. 22)

As a supporting point for Harman's view above, an example of a tree would be helpful in order to understand the division of objects into four categories. A tree's real object is not limited to its visual appearance or its role in an ecosystem. It includes a deeper reality that exists even when no one observes it. This withdrawal emphasizes that objects have a hidden autonomy that remains inaccessible even though humans show effort to understand them fully.

Sensual objects on the other hand, represent how things appear in an interaction and relation with observer in contrast to real objects, which withdraw from all forms of experience. Harman differentiates real objects and sensual objects as "Real objects exist whether or not they currently affect anything else, while sensual objects exist only in relation to some real object" (2018, p.7). Harman differs sensual objects from others as existing only within experience and it makes them dependent on the interaction between observer and observed. However, while they may seem more accessible than real objects, they do not have the deeper, withdrawn reality of the object itself. This division highlights how objects present more than one layers of existence, since they resist limitations to either their core essence or observed attributes.

The example of a tree would apply here; the tree's sensual object is how it appears to the observer such as; its green leaves, rough bark, or sunlight filtering through its branches. These effects can only exist only through interaction highlighting the natural relation of sensual objects. However, comparing the sensual object and sensual qualities. In order to show the difference between these two, Harman's quotation would be helpful; as he underlines the view that:

> In all phenomenal experience, there is a tension between sensual objects and their sensual qualities. The ocean remains the same though its successive waves advance and recede. A Caribbean parrot retains its identity no matter how exactly its wings currently flap, and no matter what curses or threats it now utters in the Spanish language (2011, p.35).

Sensual qualities refer to the specific attributes or characteristics observed during an interaction. While sensual objects are dependent on their nature of relational existence within experience, sensual qualities highlight the temporal and dynamic features that align with interaction. This quote sheds light to the difference between the stable nature of sensual objects and the changeable nature of sensual objects. For instance; in the example of the parrot, it remains as consistent sensual objects while it flaps its wings or curses. The parrot shows sensual qualities that continuously shift, similarly the ocean remains as an object while the advancing and receding waves illustrates its sensual qualities that constantly change. Applying sensual qualities to the example of a tree, the tree itself as a sensual object conserves its identity in the observer's experience. However, its sensual qualities such as the shifting layers of green colour on its leaves, the varying textures of the bark under different lighting are the changing conditions in due time of interaction. This distinction between sensual objects and sensual qualities provides a better understanding of how objects are layered and experienced within, thanks to their sensual attributes providing a dynamic area and interaction.

Real qualities are the final articles to be explained in Harman's Quadruple Object model. As Real objects; real qualities serve as deeper attributes of an object that exist independently of observation or interaction. These qualities cannot be accessed directly through perception, since they are part of the object's withdrawn essence. Harman describes this concept by stating; "Real qualities withdraw from direct access no less than real objects do" (2011, p.43). This underlines that as real objects remain hidden in the deep beyond experiencing them, their qualities cannot be accessed fully. In order to clarify, the example of a tree as an explanation here can be applied once again. Real qualities represent deeper aspects of the tree that cannot be directly observed but can only be understood intellectually. This may include the cellular composition, or the capacity of photosynthesis.

As a collection of the example of a tree, all four components of Harman's Quadruple Object can be understood together to illustrate how objects exist on multiple levels. Real object serves as the tree's core existence beyond perception. On the other hand, the sensual object is how the tree appears during an encounter made specifically such as touching, observing or seeing it, for instance the shape and colour of the tree or the strength of its wood. The real qualities include deeper structural

aspects like the biochemical processes happening in its roots and branches which can be understood intellectually. Finally, the sensual qualities refer to the observable features of the tree that shift and change such as the varying shades of green of leaves. Together, these four elements which serve as layered and complex understanding of reality emphasize how objects exist and interact beyond perception.

In summary, Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology enhanced thanks to the Quadruple Object framework which offers a suggestive model for understanding the independence and complexity of objects. How objects possess a deeper, autonomous reality that exist beyond human perception have been brought to light by Harman. By dividing objects into real objects, sensual objects, real qualities, and sensual objects Harman introduced that this layered view of reality challenges anthropocentric thinking, thus, this view encourages humans for philosophical approach where the essence of objects is not bounded to human-centred knowledge or sensory experience. Therefore, The Quadruple Object broadens the area of OOO by suggesting a structured method for examining the autonomy, depth and interactions of objects, moreover it redefines how reality can be conceptualized in philosophical discourse.

The main aim of this thesis is to examine how reality, perception, and identity are shaped and challenged in China Miéville's *The City & The City* (2009) and *King Rat* (1998), using the perspective of Speculative Realism. These two novels are chosen not only for their philosophical depth and unconventional narratives, but also for the way they turn cities into complex systems that affect how people see, move, and understand the world. *The City & The City* presents two cities which are divided and controlled by strict rules of perception and separation, while *King Rat* reveals a hidden London ruled by mythic and non-human forces that lie beyond ordinary human understanding. Together, the novels explore different but connected ways of asking whether reality exists on its own, outside of what humans can think or sense which is an idea at the heart of Speculative Realism, especially in the works of Quentin Meillassoux, Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant, and Graham Harman.

CHAPTER II

THE CITY & THE CITY (2009)

2.1. An Introduction to China Miéville's *The City & The City*

Chapter II focuses on *The City & The City* and explores the two cities which are shaped by perception, law, and hidden systems of control. The divided urban space of Besźel and Ul Qoma, though physically overlapping, is separated by strict rules that force citizens to "unsee" what is right in front of them. Breach, an invisible but powerful force that punishes those who cross perceptual boundaries is the authority that maintains this strange division. Through the lens of Speculative Realism, it can be understood that it is the systems proving that reality is not only shaped by what is seen, but also by what must be actively erased from awareness, in other words "unseeing". How these structures reflect a world that exists beyond human thought is explained and it is underlined how places like Copula Hall and the city itself act as withdrawn objects meaning real but never fully accessible to human mind. The chapter argues that *The City & The City* reveals a layered reality built on both presence and enforced absence, governed by systems that blur the line between the real and the imagined.

China Miéville, born in 1972, is a British author known for his works which are mainly focused on fantasy, science fiction, and political themes. His fiction contradicts traditional understanding of reality and perception which makes his work relevant to Speculative Realism and OOO, as he creates worlds that resist straightforward interpretation. Miéville is also known for his contributions to the Weird Fiction, as he states in an interview with Joan Gordon, "I always say that what I write is weird fiction" (2003, p. 359). His works inviting readers to question the reality and perception, as *The City & The City* (2009), offer a compelling framework for discussion through the perspective of Speculative Realism. Miéville's academic

background has shaped much of his writing. His work frequently engages with power structures, ideology, and the hidden systems that govern human existence thanks to his PhD in International Relations from the London School of Economics. His cities are rarely just settings, they are active, oppressive, shifting forces that shape the lives of those within them. Themes of urban space, perception, and unseen control run throughout his novels which makes them a convenient ground for philosophical analysis.

Miéville's first novel, *King Rat* (1998), established his reputation as a writer who reimagines urban areas through myth and the supernatural. He gained wider recognition blending steampunk aesthetics with intricate world-building in *Perdido Street Station* (2000), *The Scar* (2002), and *Iron Council* (2004b), which is called as Bas-Lag trilogy by fans, however, never announced as trilogy by Miéville even though all the three books have the same settings. His later works highlight his skill in creating complex worlds, such as *The City & The City* (2009), *Embassytown* (2011a), and *Railsea* (2012), all of which proving his ability to construct layered realities where perception and language shape existence itself. Miéville has also contributed to political and literary criticism other than fiction, including *Between Equal Rights: A Marxist Theory of International Law* (2004a) and *October: The Story of the Russian Revolution* (2017).

The City & The City merges the elements of detective fiction, political allegory, and speculative fiction which makes it a genre-blending novel. In that way, Miéville builds a world that defies the rules of traditional understandings of reality and provides a pathway for readers to question the existence of hidden structures shaping the world. The novel follows Inspector Tyador Borlú's investigation of the murder of Mahalia Geary, who is a young Canadian archaeology student. Her body is found dumped in an urban area of Beszél, what initially seems to be a routine homicide case, but soon reveals that it actually is an entangled complexity. Mahalia's connections to Ul Qoma, her research on ancient artifacts and the myth of Orciny raise suspicions. The idea of Orciny's existence challenges the fundamental laws of government making Mahalia's murder a sensitive case for police.

2.2. The Elaboration of Power and the Unseen Forces

In *The City & The City*, Miéville presents a layered story that uncovers the mechanism behind the systems controlling Beszél and Ul Qoma. In the novel, firstly the strict rules of the two cities are introduced showing them as separate, then it unveils this illusion and reveals that the hidden forces keep them divided. The reader experiences the novel through Inspector Borlú's investigation which begins in the first chapter of the novel; Beszél, then the contrasting world of Ul Qoma. The last two chapters of the novel are titled after the high power that governs both cities, The Breach, as Borlú steps beyond the cities' rigid boundaries and confronts the mechanism that sustain their cleavage. This reveal of the cities' true nature both builds suspense and deepens the novel's exploration of perception and control. Cities created by Miéville are more than just backgrounds, not only the places where incidents happen, but also, they shape how people live, think, and interact which makes them active forces in the story rather than just settings.

When Schmeink asks why his urban environments in his novels almost seems like characters rather than being just a backdrop of where the story takes place (Schmeink, 2014, p. 1) Miéville explains that this is not an intentional choice, but rather an outcome of his lifelong experience in cities. He describes cities as having a great presence in people's lives, shaping their daily experiences wholly. This sense of agency reflects in his fictions making cities feel like active participants in the narrative rather than passive locations (Schmeink, 2014, p.1). This is evident particularly in *The City & The City*, since Beszél and Ul Qoma, as well as Orciny even though its true nature remains elusive to readers, have quite different characteristics and govern the lives of their citizens. Gary Genesko described these locations as "Cities overlap like quantum waves. One serves as substratum for the other and vice versa, with interstratic mixes in the middle, the so-called third city of Orciny, that may or may not exist" (2016, p. 241).

The novel includes an epigraph page featuring a quote from Bruno Schulz: "Deep inside the town there open up, so to speak, double streets, doppelganger streets, mendacious and delusive streets" (as cited in Miéville, 2009, p. 9). This passage foreshadows the environmental mechanism of the novel, as two cities occupy the same space yet still remain separate because of the strict legal and social

boundaries. The blurred yet strict division of Besźel and Ul Qoma can be seen in culturally mixed areas in each city, such as the Ul Qoman expatriate neighbourhood in Besźel. Borlú describes how this district mirrors the aesthetic of Ul Qoma yet remains as a part of Besźel:

> With the particular colours and script of its shop fronts, the shape of its facades, visitors to Besźel who saw it would always think they were looking at Ul Qoma, […] But with a more careful eye, experience, you note the sort of cramped kitsch to the buildings' designs, a squat self-parody. You can see the trimmings in the shade called Besźel Blue, one of the colours illegal in Ul Qoma. These properties are local (Miéville, 2011b, p. 65).

This passage is one of the examples of the paradox of the cities' separation, how they are divided and connected at the same time. The Ul Qoman neighbourhood in Besźel is an imitation, a layered reproduction of Ul Qoman identity rather than an authentic expression of the city itself. This underlines how the borders between the cities are both strictly enforced and inherently unstable. Slavoj Žižek's concept of the "mask" provides a view for understanding this paradox. As he argues, "The mask is not simply hiding the real state of things; the ideological distortion is written into its very essence. The paradox of a being which can reproduce itself only in so far as it is misrecognized and overlooked" (2009, p. 25). In Miéville's description the Ul Qoman neighbourhood in Besźel functions as a parody of Ul Qoma, however, it still remains fundamentally Besź. This parallels how Žižek describes the ideology of the mask which is not covering something real but actually is itself part of the illusion. The people in the Ul Qoman neighbourhood believe they are preserving their traditional roots and cultural identity within Besźel which is evident in using the Besźel Blue on the buildings. Like in real-world examples such as China Town in London and other major cities, or Little Italy in the U.S., there is an effort to sustain a cultural identity within a foreign system, but this identity is always filtered through the dominant structures of the host country shaping the walls around the residents. They are hybrid spaces where cultural elements are selectively preserved, even if they are imitations of their real essence. Žižek's idea that "a being can only reproduce itself in so far as it is misrecognized" (2009, p.25) applies here as the Ul Qoman neighbourhood in Besźel can only exist as an Ul Qoman space because people misrecognize it as such, even though its actual essence is still tied to Besźel's laws, economy and structure. This view is reflected in Borlú's observation about the smells in cities, which is also a paradox since people try to "unsmell" the scent: "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. […] But those smells are in Besźel" (Miéville, 2011b, p. 66). This observation mirrors the ideological contradiction of the Ul Qoman neighbourhood. The exiles try to recreate customs of Ul Qoma such as food, scents, and objects, however; those things still exist in Besźel, not Ul Qoma. Confusion of identity is represented through the confusion of scents making exiles to question themselves whether they are in Ul Qoma or Besźel which is constructed as Ul Qoma. The Ul Qoman neighbourhood in Besźel functions as Ul Qoman only as long as the collective belief permits it. The moment one recognizes it as part of Besźel, the division dissolves just as Žižek describes the mask not as a disguise, but as an illusion that sustains itself through misrecognition (p. 25). However, this attempt to access Ul Qoma through atmosphere and imitation eventually reveals the limits of boundaries which are based on perception. Later in the novel, when Borlú crosses into Ul Qoma not through official channels but by following clues from his investigation, the supposed solidity of the border begins to break down. His growing understanding that the cities are constructed illusions, maintained only through collective enforcement, comes to a head when he is absorbed into Breach. At that point, he no longer sees the cities as separate but as co-existing layers of ideology, maintained not by physical distance but by constant misrecognition. The illusion only survives as long as it is not directly questioned. Once Borlú sees beyond it, he is no longer part of either city. This collapse of the mask mirrors Žižek's claim that ideology sustains itself only through not being fully seen because once it is recognized, it unravels.

The fragile balance of perception and reality is challenged when Borlú goes to the Ul Qoman neighbourhood in Besźel, blurring the boundaries between the two cities in his search for understanding. Borlú takes Corwi to the Ul Qoman neighbourhood in Besźel as part of his investigation into Mahalia Geary's murder. Since Mahalia was deeply involved in Ul Qoman studies and thus, had connections to people searching for hidden truths about the cities, Borlú hopes that spending time in an Ul Qoman environment will help him better understand her world. Even though they are still in Besźel, this neighbourhood offers a version of Ul Qoman culture shaped by Besźel's laws and restrictions. As he tells Corwi, "We're here, because I'm trying to soak up the atmosphere. I'm trying to get into the spirit of Ul Qoma." (Miéville, 2011b, p. 66), it shows that identity and space in *The City & The City* are

not just about geography but about perception. Borlú is physically in Besźel, yet by stepping into this neighbourhood, he is trying to experience Ul Qoma rather than just investigate it.

One of the most fundamental mechanisms that maintain the distinction between the cities is the difference in language and perception. Each city has its own language; and these linguistic boundaries shape how its citizens experience their world. Ul Qoma's language is Illitan and Besźel's language is Besź as stated in the novel. These languages are not just communicative tools, but parts of the ideological framework that maintains the cities' separation. Miéville also states that Borlú reads Besźel Journal to keep his English language skills practiced (p. 30) which underlines that English language is also commonly spoken among people except for their mother tongue. However, this does not blur the borders because meaning itself is shaped, and at times restricted, by the dominant languages of each city. As every other language in the world, there are differences in modes of articulation in each language in the novel. One of the most striking linguistic distinctions between Besźel and Ul Qoma is that their languages not only sound different but are also written in distinct scripts. As Miéville describes, "Illitan and Besź sound very different. They are written, of course, in distinct alphabets" (2011b, p. 50). Besź, the language of Besźel, has thirty-four letters and is written left to right, with a clear phonetic structure, consonants, vowels, and demivowels marked by diacritics. Miéville notes that "It looks, one often hears, like Cyrillic (though that is a comparison likely to annoy a citizen of Besźel, true or not)" (2011b, p. 50). Illitan, the language of Ul Qoma uses the Roman alphabet, thus, it supports the idea that Ul Qoma is more modern and globally connected than Besźel. These differences in writing make the division between the two cities feel even stronger. These differences in how the two languages look and sound strengthen the idea that each city lives in its own separate way of thinking and seeing the world. Yet, at the same time, the novel hints at the limits of language. One of the key ideas in Speculative Realism that one can never fully grasp reality through perception or language, because both give us only a limited and sometimes misleading version of the truth (Harman, 2018, p. 38). This idea is reflected in the novel since it shows that language does not just mirror reality; it also shapes and restricts how people understand it.

One particular example highlights that how language reinforces the ideological separation between the cities: “Rain and woodsmoke live in both cities, the proverb has it. In Ul Qoma they have the same saw, but one of the subjects is ‘fog’” (Miéville, 2011b, p. 66). The proverb acknowledges that certain natural elements such as rain and weather conditions exist in both cities inherently, however; Besźel’s version uses “woodsmoke” while Ul Qoma’s version replaces it with “fog”. This replacement suggests that even shared realities must be framed differently in order to sustain the division between the two societies. This small linguistic shift reflects how perception is shaped by language even though the two cities experience the same weather, yet their different use of words for it underlines the idea that citizens think that they belong to separate worlds. Another example Miéville provides is Borlú’s memory of an accidental Breach when he was fourteen years old; “[…] protubs, that is the Besź for those protuberances from the other city. There is an Ilitan term too, but I do not know it” (2011b, p. 80). This quote shows that there are many words Ul Qomans use differently from Besź citizens. Language itself acts like a mask, shaping the way people understand reality.

Žižek explains Marx’s formula as “They do not know it, but they are doing it” (2009, p. 27), highlighting that ideology persists not only through laws and institutions but also through unconscious participation of people. According to Žižek’s terms, one can say that ideology does not just conceal reality; it creates an entirely new one that only works if everyone continues to believe in it. The citizens of both cities do not constantly question the division; instead, they reinforce it through the act of unseeing, a habit so deeply ingrained that it becomes second nature. This internalized ideology is reflected in Borlú’s moment of transgression when he looks at Ul Qoma with full awareness of what he is doing. He describes the experience, saying, “I turned back to that night-lit city, and this time I looked and saw its neighbour. Illicit, but I did. Who hasn’t done that at times? There were gasrooms I shouldn’t see, chambers dangling ads, […]” (Miéville, 2011b, p. 49). This passage captures the fragility of the ideological separation. The division between the cities exists because people choose not to see the other. However, the system momentarily collapses the moment Borlú looks directly at Ul Qoma. His question, “Who hasn’t done that at times?” suggests that everyone, at some point, has experienced a similar moment of doubt but immediately suppresses it. In Žižek’s

terms, this is where ideology both reveals itself and reinforces its hold. Even when people recognize the artificiality of the system, they continue to follow its rules because the system can only function if everyone collectively upholds it. This moment also reflects Žižek's concept of misrecognition. Borlú knows Ul Qoma is right there, but the ideology he has internalized dictates that it must remain unseen. The division between the two cities is not just a legal or political structure; it is a belief that shapes reality itself. This aligns with Žižek's view that ideology is not simply an illusion hiding the truth but the very structure through which people perceive the world.

The division between Besźel and Ul Qoma is not only about perception; it shapes the way they live and move through their cities. People are trained to "unsee" the other city, but this is not just a mental habit, it affects how they interact with their surroundings. Despite the strict separation, the two cities physically exist in the same location. Some areas belong entirely to one city or the other, but others are "crosshatched", meaning residents from both cities walk the same streets while being legally required to ignore one another. The same contradiction appears in shared infrastructure, where trains, buses, and public spaces serve both populations, yet everyone acts as if they belong to only one side. These shared spaces show how weak the division really is. No matter how strictly people follow the rules, the two cities still exist in the same place. Looking at these crosshatched areas and shared spaces shows how law, habit, and belief have worked together to turn a single city into two. This fragile separation is occasionally exposed when someone unknowingly breaks the unspoken rules of unseeing. Miéville illustrates this with an example: "Very occasionally a young Ul Qoman who does not know the area of their city that Ul Qomatown crosshatches will blunder up to ask directions of an ethnically Ul Qoman Besź dweller, thinking them his or her compatriots" (Miéville, 2011b, p. 66). This moment highlights how arbitrary the division truly is. The fact that an Ul Qoman can mistake an Ul Qoman-looking resident of Besźel for someone from their own city suggests that the distinction between the two is not based on inherent differences but on learned behaviour. Misrecognition is deeply ingrained in the system, as the young Ul Qoman only realizes they have broken a rule. However, Breach is merciful at those times since their mistake is not just seeing someone who looks like them, but assuming that appearance determines where a person belongs.

Crosshatched areas shape how people experience the city in everyday life. The rules enforce movement, but over time, people internalize them so deeply that they do not even question them, however, for all the effort put into maintaining the separation, the cities remain physically connected, and some entities such as traffic, need some coordination since it is uncontrollable. People are supposed to exist in two separate realities, but they still share the same roads, sidewalks, and transport systems. No matter how much they "unsee" each other, they still have to navigate the same physical space. To prevent chaos, the Oversight Committee steps in, making sure that despite the ideological divide, both cities follow similar traffic rules. Borlú describes how traffic operates in crosshatched areas as:

> Though the traffic cultures are not identical, for the sake of the pedestrians and cars who have, unseeing, to negotiate much foreign traffic, our vehicles and theirs run at comparable speeds in comparable ways. We all learn to tactfully avoid our neighbour's emergency vehicles, as well as our own (Miéville, 2011b, p. 114).

The more they follow the rules, the more they show how connected the cities really are. The division between Besźel and Ul Qoma does not only include laws or geography, its greatest basis is belief. The novel suggests that reality is not just something people see; it is something they help create. Even as they try to maintain the illusion of two separate cities, their daily actions reveal how impossible that separation truly is. The way traffic works in crosshatched areas shows just how blurred the distinction between the cities really is. People are taught to unsee each other, but at the same time, they have to move in ways that keep everything running smoothly. Pedestrians and drivers may only be supposed to follow their own city's traffic laws, but in reality, they adjust to the flow of both cities without even thinking about it. Cars slow down at the same intersections, people walk at the same pace, and everyone instinctively avoids the other city's vehicles, even if they are pretending not to see them. In crosshatched areas, movement becomes an unspoken coordination, where people follow the rhythm of the streets together without ever acknowledging it. The rules say the cities are separate, but the way people move through them tells a different story.

Nowhere is this contradiction more apparent than in Copula Hall, the very heart of the cities' crosshatched spaces. Unlike streets or shared infrastructure, which citizens must navigate while carefully adhering to unseeing, Copula Hall is a place

where the boundaries between Besźel and Ul Qoma are constantly shifting, redefined not just by law but by its very architecture.

> It sat across a considerable chunk of land in both cities. Its inside was complicated — corridors might start mostly total, Besźel or Ul Qoma, become progressively crosshatched along their length, with rooms in one or other city along them, and numbers also of those strange rooms and areas that were in neither or both cities, that were in Copula Hall only, […] (Miéville, 2011b, p. 157).

Copula Hall is not just a building; it is a concrete example of the unstable division of the instability of the cities' separation. While some hallways and rooms clearly belong to Besźel or Ul Qoma, others exist in an ambiguous in-between state, neither fully in one city nor the other. This shifting space forces those who enter to engage with the city's division in a way that feels more unstable and unpredictable than anywhere else. Unlike the rest of Besźel and Ul Qoma, where strict behavioural conditioning keeps people in line, Copula Hall's structure makes it impossible to fully maintain the illusion of separation. The hall's confusing layout disrupts the clear-cut categories of the cities, creating zones that defy classification. In most parts of Besźel and Ul Qoma, people know exactly where they stand literally and figuratively. However; in Copula Hall, a single corridor can begin in one city, blend into the crosshatched space, and then end in an area that belongs entirely to the other. It reinforces the fact that the division of the cities is not natural, but something breakable which is sustained only because people believe in it, follow the rules, and let it enforced upon them. This makes Copula Hall more than just a border crossing; it is a loophole in the system itself. The strict separation of the cities which shapes the citizen's lives starts to unravel here, that turns the building into the perfect place for those who know how to take advantage of its grey areas. Smugglers, spies, and black-market traders use its confusing structure to slip between jurisdictions without getting caught. At the same time, the very fact that this space exists proves how fragile the cities' division really is. If they were truly separate, there would be no need for Copula Hall at all. Because it belongs to both cities and neither at the same time, Copula Hall embodies the novel's biggest paradox. It is a space where the strictest rules are enforced, yet it is also where those rules fall apart the most. It shows how much Besźel and Ul Qoma depend on each other, even while pretending to be completely separate. Copula Hall is the ultimate crosshatched zone.

Borlú's investigation takes a turn when he sees the footage of Mikyael Khurusch's white van in which Mahalia Geary's body was transported before it was

dumped (Miéville, 2011b, p. 132). At first, the van's movements seem normal, but then Borlú notices something strange. It had passed through Copula Hall, crossing legally from Besźel into Ul Qoma and then back again. This raises questions about how Copula Hall can be used as a loophole because of the grey areas inside it, while it is supposed to be the only official border, carefully monitored to control every movement in and between the cities. This incident raises the possibility that if a van carrying a murder victim could pass through unnoticed, other illegal activities could also take place under the cover of legal crossings. The hall's confusing jurisdiction makes it possible for people to take advantage of the system while following the rules on the surface. This moment hints at how easily the space could be exploited. Further description about Copula Hall's architecture highlights the loophole which can be exploited: "Copula Hall like 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" (Miéville, 2011b, p. 86). The metaphor of the hourglass for Copula Hall here is important, since it can be seen as the thin passageway that connects Besźel and Ul Qoma. Just like sand flowing through an hourglass, people pass through Copula Hall entering from one side and exiting from the other side. The structure is designed to maintain order, but at the same time, it exposes the unavoidable flow between the two cities. This is what makes Copula Hall both a barrier and a passage. It is meant to keep the cities separate, but its very existence shows that people are always moving between them. If the division between Besźel and Ul Qoma were truly absolute, a controlled crossing would not be needed. The existence of this area underlines the idea that the cities are not as independent as they claim to be. The hourglass image also suggests a cycle just as sand continues to flow, people continue to move between the cities, whether legally or through hidden means. Because of this, Copula Hall is not just a border checkpoint but a place full of contradictions.

The possibility of Copula Hall to be used as a trafficking hub for smugglers is also demonstrated in the novel. People can follow the rules on the surface while still transporting illegal goods, proving that the hall is not just a border crossing but a weak point in the cities' division. Movement between Besźel and Ul Qoma never really stops regardless of the strict rules. This fragile structure is made clear in the

novel, where even the strictest laws can be bypassed as long as movement happens through the right channels. As Borlú describes:

> Throw felid or cocaine or guns from your Besź rear window across a crosshatched yard into an Ul Qoman garden for your contact to pick up — that is breach, and Breach will get you, and it would still be Breach if you threw bread or feathers. Steal a nuclear weapon and carry it secretly with you through Copula Hall when you cross but cross that border itself? At that official checkpoint where the cities meet? Many crimes are committed in such an act, but breach is not one of them (Miéville, 2011b, p. 134)

This passage reveals a fundamental contradiction in how Breach operates. Throwing even the smallest object across the invisible city borders is considered a violation, but smuggling something as extreme as a nuclear weapon through Copula Hall is not. The issue is not what is being transported, but how and where it happens. The rules are less about stopping crime and more about protecting the illusion that the cities are separate. What truly matters is that people continue to believe in the division. Copula Hall is supposed to regulate movement, but in reality, it creates opportunities for those who know how to use the system. As long as someone follows the official procedures, they can commit serious crimes without getting caught by Breach. This contradiction makes it clear that the cities are not as independent as they claim to be. The existence of these loopholes proves that the rules are not meant to keep the cities safe as they need to be, but to ensure that people continue to follow the rules of unseeing. This also reinforces Copula Hall as a place where control and disorder exist side by side. It is meant to keep the cities apart, yet it also provides a way for people to slip through the cracks. Smugglers, criminals, and even regular citizens who understand the system can take advantage of these gaps. If Besźel and Ul Qoma were truly separate, there would be no need for such strict regulations in the first place.

The paradox becomes even more evident when the novel directly challenges the assumption that smuggling is always a violation of Breach. As Borlú reflects: “Smuggling, they regularly insist, for example. Smuggling is breach, yes? Quintessentially, yes? But no” (Miéville, 2011b, p. 134). This statement reinforces the idea that Breach is not about preventing crime but about enforcing the illusion of separation. Smuggling might seem like the ultimate violation of the cities’ borders, yet as long as it happens through the proper legal channels, such as Copula Hall, it is not considered a breach at all. The real crime is not the movement of illegal goods but the act of acknowledging the other city in the wrong way. This paradox further proves that the division between Besźel and Ul Qoma is not absolute but rather

something that relies on strict obedience to rules instead of physical barriers. The aim of the system is not to prevent people or goods from crossing, instead as long as the crossings are done in a way that keeps up the illusion of separation, it is never a problem for those in Breach. Copula Hall becomes the perfect loophole, a place where people can break the law as long as they do it the "right" way. Copula Hall's entity shows the fragility of the division between the cities. Keeping this illusion alive takes more than legal restrictions or physical barriers, since rules alone cannot stop people from realizing that Besźel and Ul Qoma occupy the same space. To make sure no one questions this, something stronger is required; Breach.

Breach is not just a police force. It is the reason people continue to believe in the separation. As Žižek (2009, p. 25) explains in his mask theory; ideology does not simply cover up reality; it shapes how people experience it. In the same way, Breach does not just punish those who step out of line. It makes seeing itself dangerous. People in Besźel and Ul Qoma are not just avoiding stepping into the other city. They have been conditioned to believe they must not even acknowledge its existence. This belief is so deeply ingrained in their minds from the childhood that it shapes how people move, dress, talk, or even think. Breach is the foundation that keeps the whole system running rather than just being an enforcing authority. Its very presence proves that the division is not natural, but something that must be continuously sustained through ideology, control, and fear. A stronger force is needed to ensure its sustainability. That is the reason why Breach plays a crucial role. Breach not only enforces rules and authority; it is the mechanism that ensures people continue to identify the cities as separate. Žižek describes ideology as something that is not merely a disguise but a distortion embedded within reality itself. Breach functions in the same way. It does not exist outside the system but is the very structure that sustains it.

The Breach, an authoritarian policing force ensures that any violation of this separation is met with immediate consequences, moreover; these consequences are often enigmatic and incomprehensible. These violations vary, however; the most evident ones include stepping into the other city without proper authorization, failing to "unsee" something happened in opposite city, or even acknowledging its existence in an unlawful way. The strict enforcement of these rules makes Breach a legal authority and a psychological structure shaping the citizen's lives. The power and the

capability of Breach is imposed from an early age in these two areas which is evident in how children involve Breach into their games as:

> As kids we used to play Breach. It was never a game I much enjoyed, but I would take my turn creeping over chalked lines and chased by my friends, their faces in ghastly expressions, their hands crooked as claws. I would do the chasing too, if it was my turn to be invoked (Miéville, 2011b, p. 46)

This passage shows how Breach is more than a law enforcement entity, rather, it is a deeply embedded ideological apparatus that conceptualizes building a structured behaviour and perception from childhood ensuring that the separation between two cities is internalized long before adulthood. Although they do not fully understand the mechanisms of these governing rules, the citizens are trained to fear from transgressing the invisible boundaries between the two cities from their childhood. By turning the Breach into a game, children try to see the consequences of certain acts, primarily violation of passing the border. This underlines the psychological views of children which is to meet the results in punishments unintentionally. This condition goes beyond simply obeying rules, it shapes how individuals perceive and interpret reality itself. The rules of seeing and unnoticing are not just regulations, they become second nature for the living. This form of learned perception ensures that citizens do not question the city's division, just play safe, since their ability to interpret their environment has already been moulded by social expectations. It is illustrated in another childhood memory:

> As kids we would assiduously unsee Ul Qoma, as our parents and teachers had relentlessly trained us. [...] We used to throw stones across the alterity, walk the long way around in Besźel and pick them up again, debate whether we had done wrong. Breach never manifested, of course. We did the same with the local lizards. They were always dead when we picked them up, and we said the little airborne trip through Ul Qoma had killed them, though it might just as well have been the landing (Miéville, 2011b, p. 86).

The death of the lizards is a symbol of the unseen forces in the novel. No matter how the lizards die during the process, whether from impact upon landing or due to their passage through Ul Qoma, it shows the children's deep interpretation of how the Breach is known in their worldview. Even without experiencing a direct punishment, the fear of transgressing still exists, demonstrating that Breach has a major role in shaping their understanding starting from childhood. Another part where it is evident that the children in Besźel and presumably Ul Qoma internalized to follow strict rules of separation is described by Miéville as, "We pick up styles of clothing, permissible colours, ways of walking and holding oneself, very fast. Before we were eight or so

most of us could be trusted not to breach embarrassingly and illegally…" (2011b, p. 80). Children in Beszél and Ul Qoma instinctively acknowledge the unspoken rules by mirroring the behaviours of the ones around them. One of the key concerns of Speculative Realism which is the disconnection between appearances and reality is reflected with this experiment conducted by children out of curiosity about the death of the lizards. The children's dilemma about whether the lizards die from falling or from crossing into Ul Qoma shows that not everything can be clearly seen or explained, moreover; it points to the limits of what people can know just by observing events. It suggests that not all events can be clearly traced or explained through perception or reason alone. Instead, there is always a gap between what happens and how it is understood. This idea is supported with what Quentin Meillassoux might describe as the "facticity" of the world, where cause operates without needing to be accessible to human thought (2009, p. 53). In the novel, the lizards become more than symbolic casualties; they embody the unknowable processes that exist beneath the visible which reinforces the Speculative Realist claim that objects and events retain a withdrawn dimension, irreducible to interpretation or ideology.

The role of Breach in *The City & The City* shows that power structure is not necessarily obvious to human eye. Instead, it often works through deeply internalized rules that shape how people think, move, and even notice the world around them. The division between Beszél and Ul Qoma does not lean on any physical barrier, rather it is enforced by belief, habit, and fear which are the things so ingrained that they no longer feel like rules at all. Miéville's narrative reveals how reality is not simply something that exists on its own but something that is actively shaped by systems people cannot always see or understand. These systems shape how individuals experience the world without fully understanding it. The next chapter turns the lens to Speculative Realism in order to underline how these invisible forces work such as; legal, social, or something stranger. Miéville's fiction opens the door to that question, exposing the limits of perception and showing that what lies beneath often has more power than what is visible.

2.3. The Exploration of Perception of Reality and the Limits of Knowledge

The rules shaping the way of people's move through Beszél and Ul Qoma are not only about laws or official systems. As Borlú's investigation continues, it

becomes clear that the forces that work behind the scenes, shaping how people think, act, and understand the world around them control even perception. Breach starts to feel more like a part of reality rather than an authority. In a layered setting, the idea of a third city; Orciny breaks the logic of separation. Even though no one can be sure its existence, the fear and belief surrounding it give it real power. It becomes one of those unseen things that still shape how people behave and what they believe is possible. Even if Orciny cannot be confirmed or fully perceived, its presence is still felt. It becomes one of those unseen forces, in this way, Orciny reflects a deeper idea that reality is not made up only of what can be seen or known, but also of what remains hidden or outside human reach. In his theory of Object-Oriented Ontology, Graham Harman argues that objects always hold something back from access or full understanding. No matter how closely we observe or describe something, a part of it remains withdrawn (2018, p. 38). Orciny can be read as a metaphor for this withdrawn quality of reality, since it cannot be fully entered to, named or proven; however, it still shapes actions, beliefs, and the structure of the cities.

This uncertainty can be acknowledged in Borlú's conversation with Mahalia's mother: "It is not so really like the Breach, Mrs. Geary. Breach is real. A power. But Orciny is…" (Miéville, 2011b, p. 98). His hesitation reflects the tension at the heart of the novel with the idea that Breach operates within the system, as an enforcing and feared entity, while Orciny floats at its edges as an undefined and possibly unreal city. Yet its vagueness does not reduce its influence. Later in the same conversation, Orciny is described as "A secret. Fairy tale. Between the other two" (p. 98). Even though it is dismissed as a fantasy, the act of speaking about it, fearing it, or chasing it gives it life. Orciny is more than a rumour for Mahalia and others. It is an open gate to explain the gaps in the system as the feeling that something larger and more hidden is still pulling the strings behind the curtains challenges who is after Orciny. Whether Orciny is real or made up does not matter, the matter is how it shapes what people believe and how they act. As with the withdrawn objects described by Harman, their invisibility does not make them powerless. Its unknowability is precisely what gives it strength.

Quentin Meillassoux's perspective also aligns with Harman's view of the withdrawn. In *After Finitude*, Meillassoux (2008, p. 10) argues that reality exists independently of human perception, and that the world has truths, such as; fossils,

ancient cosmic events, or the formation of matter which were existed long before human thought and will continue regardless of it. He refers to this as the “Great Outdoors,” the part of being that lies completely outside the correlation between thought and world (2008, p. 7). Orciny can be understood as a fictional expression of this idea. It exists, if it exists at all, entirely beyond what the citizens of Besźel and Ul Qoma are able, or allowed, to know. Like Meillassoux’s “Great Outdoors”, Orciny represents a space outside the boundaries of perception and meaning, one that reminds readers that what cannot be known may still have real consequences, since it is not something that can be seen or verified. Its very uncertainty gives it weight, much like how Meillassoux claims that the most powerful truths may be those that lie beyond human access (2008, p. 9).

This tension is visible even in a quiet moment when Borlú watches the river and asks himself; “Water—does it crosshatch with itself?” (Miéville, 2011b, p. 171). The question appears as a simple, even rhetorical dilemma, but it mirrors the deeper uncertainty that defines the entire system. The river flows freely through both cities, untouched by the rules of unseeing, however, it is observed differently depending on who is looking and from where. Borlú’s hesitation suggests a growing awareness that some things resist categorization that even something as natural and continuous as water may challenge the ideological and perceptual boundaries the cities rely on. This moment can be read in accordance with Iain Hamilton Grant’s philosophy of nature. In contrast to traditions that treat nature as passive material to be shaped or known by human thought, Grant insists that nature is productive, dynamic, and self-generating which is not defined by human access but existing in its own active becoming (2006, p. 150). Regardless of how it is interpreted or divided, the river, in this sense, continues to flow and transform. It is not only seen as a backdrop where events happen around it; rather, it carries its own momentum and vitality. Much like Orciny, the river suggests that reality resists containment not because it is hidden, but because it remains active, shifting, and beyond the limits imposed by human systems of control.

A similar kind of energy appears in Copula Hall, the shifting space that both connects and divides Besźel and Ul Qoma. Its structure is never fully stable, it moves between the two cities, sometimes clearly belonging to one side, sometimes the other, and often to neither. This unstable behaviour of Copula Hall can be read as a function

within the system but it resists being fully known or mapped. In this way, Copula Hall mirrors Iain Hamilton Grant's view of nature as an active, generative force. Instead of seeing reality as a passive entity which is ready to be shaped by human thought, Grant argues that it has its own power to create and transform, independent of how it is perceived (Schelling, as cited in Grant, 2006, p. 197). Copula Hall, like the river, refuses to stay within the categories imposed on it. It continues to shift, suggesting that even the most regulated systems must bend around something more powerful; something that is always in motion and never fully under control.

Copula Hall's quality also parallels with Graham Harman's concept of withdrawal in *Object-Oriented Ontology*, in which the core idea is that objects are never fully accessible or exhausted by their relations or appearances. No matter how much is known about an object, a part of it always remains hidden, withdrawn from view and untouched by interaction (Harman, 2018, p. 12). Therefore; Copula Hall is not simply a transitional space for citizens, it is an object in its own right, which cannot be fully understood by the legal or perceptual systems trying to define it. It operates within the logic of the cities, yet also exceeds it. The hall's resistance to stable classification reflects the withdrawn nature of objects in OOO which can be explained as; always partially inaccessible, yet constantly shaping the world around them. Among the four dimensions outlined in Harman's Quadruple Object Model, Copula Hall most clearly reflects the real object, a presence that cannot be fully accessed, mapped, or reduced to appearance. It operates within the cities' legal and spatial systems, but it never fits neatly into either one. At times it is part of Besźel or Ul Qoma, but often it does not fully belong to either. This shifting nature makes it difficult to define or fully understand, as Harman states: "To be more specific, it was a matter of real objects –withheld, inaccessible, concealed – vanishing from the scene while their qualities remained visible, accessible, and always revealed" (2018, p. 149). Copula Hall does not correspond to the other three categories in the same way. It is not a sensual object, because its meaning is not limited to how it appears in experience. It is also more than a collection of real qualities, such as walls, hallways, or doorways, because these elements cannot explain its unpredictable nature. Nor is it simply made up of sensual qualities like atmosphere or perception. Copula Hall functions as a real object because it holds back part of itself while still shaping how people move and behave. It is more than a setting; it is an active force that resists

being fully known, reminding the reader that some parts of reality always remain outside the reach of human thought.

If Copula Hall can be seen as a real object through its stable yet unknowable presence, Orciny pushes this idea even further. It does not just resist being understood; it is barely even confirmed to exist. If we were to assign Orciny to one of the four dimensions in Harman's model, it would also belong to the real object category, but in a different way. While Copula Hall exists in the cities and physically affect them, Orciny remains entirely outside the systems of movement, governance, and perception. It is never directly seen, entered, or experienced, yet it exerts real pressure on the narrative and on the characters. This kind of withdrawn presence fits Harman's (2018, p. 258) view that the real object is always hidden from view, inaccessible to full comprehension, and withdrawn even when its effects are felt.

Unlike sensual objects, which exist through how they are experienced, Orciny never enters the realm of appearance. It is only known through rumour, fear, and speculation. Nor can it be reduced to a list of qualities, it has no confirmed features, architecture, or geography. Even its sensual impact, the emotional tension it creates, does not fully capture what it is. Its influence comes not from what it reveals but from what it withholds. Orciny works in the novel as a pure real object; one that shapes the structure of belief without ever becoming visible. In that sense, it becomes a perfect literary expression of Harman's concept of withdrawal: a thing that can never be touched or explained, but whose presence is always felt just beyond the edge of understanding. He gives a hammer as an example of this:

> This is the route of saying that presence fails because it is merely a translation of an absent real object that can never appear in the flesh without becoming something other than it really is. The real hammer never becomes present even when it breaks or when we deliberately stare at it, since breaking and staring are both relations to the hammer, and the hammer in its own right is something non-relational (2018, p. 201-202).

Like the hammer, Orciny is never encountered directly. It cannot be separated from the system it influences, but it also refuses to fully enter into it. The belief in Orciny becomes a form of relation, a way of "staring" at it, but never actually reaching it. The more characters search for it or fear it, the more it slips away while remaining outside the frame of the visible and the knowable. This makes it a plot device and a metaphor, moreover, it is a representation of something fundamentally unreachable, an object that shapes meaning precisely because it remains untouched.

Crosshatched areas of the city are where this tension between visibility and invisibility is most clearly embodied in the novel. Unlike Orciny, which remains entirely withdrawn, crosshatched zones are shared spaces where the presence of both cities overlaps physically, yet citizens are trained to perceive only one. These areas are not hidden, but misrecognized, forming the everyday setting where the illusion of separation is constantly rehearsed. What makes crosshatched spaces unique is that they challenge the sensory boundaries of the characters; they walk the same streets, use the same infrastructure, but are required to "unsee" the other city's people, architecture, and events. In Harman's model, crosshatched areas can be examined within the framework of sensual objects which are exist through the way they are experienced, structured by perception, habit, and social training. Their essence is not fixed in physical form, but in how they are interpreted. They are a kind of object that exists as long as it is believed in a certain way. Like Harman (2018, p. 77) underlines that objects are not the sum of their appearances, but something that sparks new appearances each time they are encountered. The crosshatched areas perform this role: they are never the same for any two people, and their reality is tied to the act of seeing and more importantly, not seeing.

This system of misrecognition resonates Slavoj Žižek's reading of ideology, particularly his reference to Marx's formulation which was mentioned before in Chapter 2.1: "They do not know it, but they are doing it" (2009, p. 27). In the world of *The City & The City*, citizens do not openly acknowledge the presence of the other city, yet their daily behaviour is structured entirely around this denial. They follow the ritual of unseeing not because they are forced to acknowledge a lie, but because they are so deeply embedded in the system that the lie becomes the structure of their experience. Crosshatched areas, then, are ideological zones where perception is trained to ignore what is plainly visible. These areas highlight that the separation between the cities is not just physical or legal, but deeply ideological which is maintained by collective belief and unconscious participation. The citizens do not truly unsee the other city; rather, they have been conditioned to act as though they do not. This kind of behaviour illustrates what Žižek describes as the core of ideology, not in what people think, but in what they do, in the social rituals and habits that establish a certain worldview. Crosshatched areas are the stage where this ideology takes part; people move as if borders exist where none can be physically drawn, and

they stick with a reality that relies on their willingness to look away. Thus, these zones become perfect examples of how objects and spaces are shaped not only by material boundaries, but by ideological ones as well.

While Harman's model is helpful to understand the sensory structure of crosshatched spaces, the ideas of Meillassoux and Brassier add another dimension by questioning the relationship between perception and reality. Meillassoux's (2008, p. 7) concept of the "Great Outdoors" refers to a world that exists outside of human thought and remains unaffected by it. Crosshatched areas can be understood in this way; they exist independently of how they are seen, but they gain their meaning only through the act of perception. Whether a street is part of Besźel or Ul Qoma does not depend on its physical structure, but on how it is interpreted by the citizens. In that sense, these zones echo Meillassoux's view that reality does not depend on the human mind, but that our understanding of it often does. With a more nihilistic conclusion by Ray Brassier this reading deepens as in *After Finitude*, he explores the implications of "facticity" which is the idea that there is no ultimate reason for anything to be the way it is, and that everything, including the very structures of reason and meaning, could collapse. He writes: "Everything could actually collapse: from trees to stars, from stars to laws, from physical laws to logical laws... by virtue of the absence of any superior law capable of preserving anything" (2008, p. 53). In this light, crosshatched areas take on a more precarious character. Their reality depends on a collective act of unseeing even though they are materially present. If this social performance were to falter, what would remain is not a deeper or truer city underneath, but an undefined, empty zone stripped of structure and meaning. Brassier's translation and engagement with Meillassoux shows that not only is meaning fragile, but its collapse would not necessarily reveal truth, in fact; it might reveal nothing at all. In this way, crosshatched areas become symbolic of a deeper philosophical anxiety, the possibility that meaning is not built into the world, but imposed upon it, and therefore always at risk of dissolving.

Crosshatched zones, then, are not just contested spaces of sight and belief, they are pressure points where the system is most vulnerable. Their stability depends entirely on how well the ideological illusion is maintained, but when someone accidentally sees what they should unsee, or steps where they should not, the structure falters. This is where Breach appears as more than just an enforcer of rules.

It works to hold together the gap between what people see and what they are expected to accept. Breach is there to keep the system in place, even when reality starts to slip. It acts not only to stop rule-breaking, but also to protect the structure of meaning from falling apart.

Breach is a control mechanism that its presence is deeply felt by citizens. People act as if they are always being watched, even when no one is there to observe them. Michel Foucault's notion of panopticism highlights this, since it explores the possibility of being watched becomes enough to regulate behaviour. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault describes modern power as:

> The Panopticon is a marvellous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogeneous effects of power. A real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation. So it is not necessary to use force to constrain... All that is needed is that the separations should be clear and the openings well arranged (1995, p. 202).

Breach works through a similar logic. It does not need to be everywhere; it only needs to be believed to be everywhere. This internalized fear-based behaviour is seen clearly in the games of children as they play about Breach. They chase each other across chalk lines as they pretend to catch and punish rule-breakers not because they fully understand what Breach is, but because they've already learned to fear it. The institution's influence shapes their behaviour before they even enter adulthood. As one character reflects, "Before we were eight or so most of us could be trusted not to breach embarrassingly and illegally…" (Miéville, 2011b, p. 80). In this way, Breach becomes more than a group of enforcers; it is a structure that builds itself into the very perception of space and identity.

As Michel Foucault explains, "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power […] he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (1995, p. 202). This idea helps explain how Breach controls the citizens of Besźel and Ul Qoma. Breach does not need to be everywhere, nor does it need to show itself often. Its power works because people believe they are being watched. The fear of Breach is so deeply ingrained that citizens adjust their own actions automatically. They avoid eye contact, change their walking paths, and even suppress their thoughts just to avoid the consequences which they do not even know. This is not only about surveillance but about shaping behaviour from within. People do not simply follow rules to avoid punishment; they become part of the system that controls them. Breach succeeds by turning visibility into self-

discipline. Like Foucault's concept of the panopticon, Breach does not need constant force to maintain order. Instead, the idea of Breach is enough. People live as if it is always there, which turns them into their own regulators. This is why Breach is not only a force of law but a force that organizes perception, behaviour, and belief. It becomes part of how reality itself is structured in the cities.

Foucault's theory of biopower also offers insight into Breach's function. Biopower can be explained by Foucalt's words as: "Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would acquire over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself" (1978, p. 142). Rather than punishing only through violence, Breach governs by shaping how people live in general; how they walk, where they look, and how they define themselves in relation to others. Breach does not only control movement; it controls imagination. It makes people think what they believe is possible. Citizens know that crossing into the other city without permission is dangerous, but more importantly, they believe that such a crossing is unthinkable. The threat of Breach does not just enforce the rules or consequences, mainly it produces them within the minds of the people. As Borlú's investigation advances, his interactions with Breach show that it is not simply a force responding to crime; it is the foundation of the cities' division. Its job is not just to correct mistakes, but to stop people from seeing the system as fragile. When Orciny is considered as a representation of the invisible unknown, and if crosshatched areas represent the uncertain boundary, Breach is the force that makes these boundaries feel solid. It basically fills the gaps with fear by enforcing both space and belief.

Biopower theory of Foucault also offers insight into Breach's function in the novel. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault says that "For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question" (1978, p. 143). Breach exemplifies this shift. It does not govern primarily through violence or explicit punishment. Instead, it regulates everyday behaviour and it shapes both action and imagination. Breach creates an internal system of control that makes certain possibilities unthinkable. Breach enforces this belief system, producing the very conditions of obedience before any rule is broken. As Borlú's investigation goes further, it becomes clear that Breach is not simply a

reactive force, in fact; it is the infrastructure that sustains the cities' ideological separation. Its function is not only to intervene but to prevent disruption by ensuring that people do not perceive the system as fragile. If Orciny represents the invisible unknown, and crosshatched areas represent the ambiguous boundary, Breach is the mechanism that renders those ambiguities invisible.

While Meillassoux's concept of the "Great Outdoors" has already shown how reality may exist beyond perception, this idea becomes more graphic when applied to Breach. Though shaped by internalized control, Breach also functions as a force beyond human access which is something real, but not entirely knowable. This stress between perception and independent reality becomes most apparent when the character of David Bowden creates a superposition. His moment of equipoise offers a narrative image of the philosophical struggle to think beyond correlation. David Bowden, who is a professor in *The City & The City* is one of the main figures whose theories about the cities' odd structure and the Cleavage offer a view for understanding their duality. He represents the ambiguity between the perception and reality, especially in the part where he walks "with equipoise" between *Besźel* and *Ul Qoma*, not fully being part of either city. This moment captured in Miéville's description as:

> Bowden would not likely attack either Dhatt or Corwi: do so and he would declare himself a criminal, in Besźel or Ul Qoma. Attack both and he would be in Breach, which, unbelievably, he was not yet. He walked with equipoise, possibly in either city. Schrödinger's pedestrian. (2011b, p. 352)

Bowden's existence which is referred to as "Schrödinger's pedestrian", exemplifies the liminal state of superposition, where his reality depends on how he is perceived rather than on a definite or established truth. His actions show how perception defines boundaries and identities in the cities, much like correlationism insists that reality is always perceived through human thought. Moreover, Bowden's liminal state is also an attribution toward Speculative Realism's critique of correlationism. It is seen that this argument is clear in the concept of the Breach, which operates beyond human perception in order to maintain and enforce the distinct boundaries between the two cities.

Breach, then, becomes a literary gesture toward what Meillassoux calls the "Great Outdoors" which is the world that exists independently of human perception. Meillassoux defines correlation in *After Finitude* as "By 'correlation' we mean the

idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other" (2008, p. 5). According to this view, modern philosophy denies access to reality itself, claiming one can never think outside the correlation between subject and object. Yet Breach defies this logic. Though it cannot be fully seen or understood, it remains active and authoritative, suggesting a reality that exists in excess of human access. In this way, Miéville's novel does more than represent the limits of knowledge, moreover; it imagines a world that persists regardless of whether it is perceived.

This ontological ambiguity which is discussed in this part as Breach being real but not fully knowable via Meillassoux, and Bowden's superposition, where reality depends on perception, also resonates with Graham Harman's OOO. Harman (2017, p. 7) argues that all objects withdraw from total access; their true nature can never be fully grasped through interaction or perception. In his Quadruple Object model; Breach aligns most clearly with what Harman defines as the real object. It is central to the functioning of the cities, but it remains ontologically withdrawn which means neither fully seen nor fully understood. Citizens react to it, fear it, and shape their lives around it, yet Breach itself escapes their comprehension. Like Harman's real object, it acts independently in relations it enters to by structuring the world while remaining inaccessible. Thus, Breach is not only a political or disciplinary force, but a deeper ontological presence whose withdrawn reality shapes perception, behaviour, and belief without ever revealing itself fully.

In conclusion, thanks to the fragmented and uncertain vision of reality presented in *The City & The City*, it can be explored that meaning is shaped as much by what is unseen as by what is known. Through the elements of Breach, Orciny, Copula Hall, and crosshatched spaces, the novel sheds light on how perception, belief, and control are able to interact to maintain the illusion of separation. These elements construct the logic by which its world operates since each one plays a role in showing how systems of meaning are built not on certainty, but on perception, repetition, and constraint. In *The City & The City*, reality is never something given, rather it is something enforced, believed in, and constantly negotiated. The novel suggests that what people believe to be real can be shaped by unseen pressures, hidden structures, or the limits of what can be acknowledged. In this way, Miéville

allows readers to understand how reality can be managed, imagined, and controlled through both visible and invisible entities.

CHAPTER III

KING RAT (1998)

3.1. An Introduction to China Miéville's *King Rat*

Chapter III examines *King Rat* and focuses on how the novel reveals a hidden version of London that exists outside normal human understanding. The story follows Saul as he is pulled into an underground world ruled by mythic creatures like King Rat, Anansi, and Loplop. These beings live beyond the limits of human perception and represent a reality out of human mind. As Saul begins to change after meeting with King Rat, who controls the rat world underground, he no longer fits into the human world. However; he also refuses to fully become something else. This transformation challenges the idea of fixed identity and shows how being can exist in between categories. The novel presents a city full of invisible powers, strange music, and forgotten truths. Miéville shows in the novel that Saul's journey is not only about his perception of world, it also contains the challenges about who he is. *King Rat* suggests that identity, like the city, is not fixed, rather, it is mixed, always changing, and shaped by hidden forces that people cannot fully understand or control.

King Rat (1998) by China Miéville, carries the characteristic of being his debut novel into fiction, by introducing many of the themes that would come to define his later work, such as; urban space, the unseen, and the collision between myth and modern life. This early novel set in a gritty and supernatural version of London is stylistically different from *The City & The City*. However; it shows Miéville's interest in layered realities and forces that lie beyond perception. *King Rat* blends urban fantasy with folklore, reworking the Pied Piper myth into a contemporary story of identity, transformation, and hidden networks of power. As his first published novel, it signals Miéville's

move toward what he would later call “weird fiction,” where genre boundaries blur and familiar settings become sites of ontological uncertainty.

Miéville recreates the long-known legend, Pied Piper a mysterious figure who uses his music as a tool of control. His influence reaches the mythical creatures by luring them into submission with the irresistible urge to dance to rhythms, except for the protagonist, Saul Garamond, who is immune to the Piper’s manipulation. This resistance is rooted in his hybrid identity since he is the result of a violent sexual encounter between his human mother and King Rat himself. Saul, therefore, belongs to both the human and animal worlds, yet fits fully into neither. This liminal status makes him an anomaly in both societies existing in the middle of the conflict that has been ongoing for years. As Saul is pulled deeper into the city’s underground, both literally and metaphorically, he tries to confront legacy of his origins, the violence of the Piper, and the question of where his loyalty and identity truly lie.

In an interview with Geoff Manaugh, Miéville describes London in *King Rat* as “[…] *King Rat*, for all its flaws, is a book very much to do with its time. It’s not just to do with London; it’s to do with London in the mid-nineties. It’s a real, particular London, phantasmagorized” (2009, para. 63). By “phantasmagorized,” Miéville suggests that the city grounded in the mid of 1990s London, is transformed into something more surreal and mythic, in fact; a version of London where hidden layers of folklore, danger, and the uncanny bleed into the everyday landscape. Characters such as Anansi, Loplop, Pied Piper, Cat Master, Bitch Queen support Miéville’s idea of blending folkloric and mythical figures with the contemporary landscape of London.

With a collection of ancient myths, urban decay, and personal transformation, King Rat introduces a dreamy version of London. Themes explored in the novel such as belonging, power, and resistance through its reimagining of the Pied Piper legend and the creation of a hidden society of animal figures hint Miéville’s early focus on hidden networks under the city and the deeper ideas about reality and philosophy that appear in his later works. King Rat thus stands both as a supernatural thriller, and as an early expression of Miéville’s commitment to challenging traditional boundaries between the real and the imagined.

3.2. The Elaboration of Hidden Powers, Identity and the Mythic Forces

The cities in Miéville's novels are crafted as active characters in the story rather than passive settings, however, he highlights that it is not a conscious decision: "[…] that is not really a conscious choice, in the sense that I say: 'Now to make the city a character'" (2014, p.1). London in *King Rat* is one of those cities that becomes an active agent playing a role in Saul's journey of discovering the underground world. Miéville also notes that: "All I can do is post-facto theorize, but I suppose it is because I am a city creature" (p.1), meaning that his portrayal of a city as an active force emerges instinctively rather than a deliberate plan. His personal connection to urban environments naturally shapes the characteristic of cities in his novels in terms of action, influence and transformation.

This characteristic of London can be observed within the narrative as Saul's understanding of the city shifts and enriches. London in Saul's mind transforms into mysterious place where danger and hidden forces live in it. He reflects after talking to King Rat: "So what is London? he thought. If you can be what you are, what's London? What's the world? I've had it all wrong. Do werewolves and trolls lurk under bridges in parks? What are the boundaries of the world?" (Miéville, 1999, p. 54). Here, London is no longer a passive setting, it evolves into a living entity whose boundaries and rules are unstable and redefined. The hidden layers, mythic dimensions, and unseen realities of London are revealed parallel to Saul's own transformation.

This idea is supported later in the novel, when Saul starts to understand the city not just as a place but as something more alive and resistant. Saul reflects; "It was only when it was seen from these angles that he could believe London had been built brick by brick, not born out of its own mind. But the city did not like to be found out" (Miéville, 1999, p. 257). Saul's view prove that London feels as if it is a conscious creature wanting to keep its secrets hidden. The idea of a familiar, knowable city disappears. London starts to act as a force that shapes Saul's experiences rather than existing as a plain setting. This is another example of how Miéville generally creates cities as unstable and layered with mystery, shaped by imagination and belief in terms of roads and buildings. London in *King Rat* becomes part of the story itself, always shifting, always just out of reach. Saul's encounter with

London is personal and confrontational. Miéville, just like Saul, invites readers to look at the city differently to see it as alive, alert, and unwilling to be fully known. This shift in perspective continues as Saul begins to see London for what it truly is:

> Even as he saw it clearly for the product it was, Saul felt it square up against him. The city and he faced each other. He saw London from an angle against which it had no front, at a time when its guard was down. He had felt this before, when he had left King Rat, when he had known that he had slipped the city's bonds; and he had known then that he had made of it an enemy. The windows which loomed over him reminded him of that (1999, p. 257).

With the last confrontation, Saul does not arrive at clear answers. Even when he sees London without illusion, the city remains distant and difficult to grasp. He views it from an unfamiliar angle, one that offers no clear front or fixed shape. London is out of reach for being fully understood. This moment suggests that Miéville did not only create a physical space, but instead, he imagined London as something active, layered, and elusive. For Saul, it becomes a reflection of his own transformation. The novel leaves the sense that some aspects of the world resist explanation, and that certain truths may always remain just out of reach. At a certain point in the novel, Saul no longer sees London as a neutral place. He begins to see it as an enemy from which he has defied or escaped. London becomes a force that watches, judges, and resists Saul's departure. The presence of the city applies pressure, holds grudges, and responds to betrayal in Saul's opinion. This personal framing gives London the traits of an antagonist. It suggests that urban space in *King Rat* is more than background. It is something that reacts when challenged, something Saul must confront and survive. His journey is not just through the city, but against it.

This tension between Saul and the city can be seen in a quiet but illustrative moment: "London slept, fat and dangerous and blithely unaware of what had happened in the Elephant and Castle. The crisp ignorance of the city refreshed him. It carried on whatever, he thought. There was a great comfort in that" (Miéville, 1999, p. 308). This personification of London made by Saul here shows his complicated mix of fear, resentment, and familiarity with the city. The city is described as bloated and indifferent, dangerous yet comforting in its continuity. London simply shows continuation instead of mourning or resisting the changes in it. This duality mirrors Saul's own struggle with a world that seems to exist beyond his control. Even as he tries to reject or escape it, he still finds its steady, unbothered presence as a confrontation. This moment shows how Saul sees London; sometimes it feels like a

threat, other times it feels like home. Even when he wants to escape it, its steady rhythm is what he leans on. London is more than a place, since, for Saul, it watches, it waits, it shapes Saul's path without ever speaking.

This uneasy bond between Saul and the city is shown before Saul starts his transformation as a rat, when he is left on his own on the street by King Rat. Without him by his side, Saul feels like the world he starts to understand begins to fade. "With King Rat by his side, Saul had seen a new city. The map of London had been ripped up and redrawn according to King Rat's criteria. Alone, Saul was suddenly afraid that the city no longer existed" (Miéville, 1999, p. 104). This line captures how deeply Saul's understanding of London is tied to his guide; King Rat. He basically opened up a hidden map, a secret version of the city which is layered underneath the ordinary one. When Saul is left alone, he fears not just the loss of his companion, but the disappearance of that entire reality. It is as if the new London he is introduced only exists through King Rat's eyes. The fear of losing here highlights the flexibility and fluidity of the city in the novel. In Saul's experience, London is something that can change, shape, disappear, or even turn against himself. It is not solid or safe. It is alive and it chooses when and how to reveal itself.

This shifting relationship with city and Saul is the beginning of a deeper change in Saul himself. The city transforms from a known, familiar place to something strange and alive which also keeps secrets. Saul's identity begins to unravel and take shape at the same time. His disconnection from a familiar world mirrors his idea of not being who he thought he was. What once started as a confusion and fear starts to shift into an unwilling curiosity which is an openness to the other side of his existence. His perception of space is reshaped by the city's hidden layers which draw him closer to the forgotten, inhabited parts of himself. This transformation is not simply physical or supernatural, it is ontological and dimensionless since he realizes that he can fit tiny holes or jump through long pipes which is tied to his sense of being, belonging, and the blurred boundary between human and animal.

King Rat acts as Saul's guide into a world that does not follow the usual rules of space. In an early moment, he opens a manhole not through strength, but by slipping his fingers into infinitesimal gaps between the seal and its shaft. Miéville

describes the moment as “It was like sleight of hand: Saul could not see what had happened, or how the fingers had fit, yet they were there, pulling, in the gaps” (1999, p. 84). The opening is too small for human fingers, yet King Rat manages it with ease. It is revealed that rats in the novel are not bound by ordinary dimensions since King Rat's effortless action can still handle the manhole. As if they do not fully belong to the physical world, they move through many spaces in ways that seem impossible for a human being. As Saul follows King Rat while learning a path underground his transformation into something similar begins. He is no longer fully human, but not yet fully rat. This moment shows the beginning of that shift, where perception and identity start to loosen and change. The fact that Saul can fit through the “infinitesimal” gap without extra effort shows that he is no longer bound by the ordinary human limit, marking the beginning of his transformation. He starts to slip into another level of existence that does not follow the usual rules of space or perception.

After being underground and introduced the new urban world of the city, Saul walks through Marylebone Road one day, however people around him walking near him seem indifferent. A passing man glances at him momentarily but with no interest or recognition, his eyes quickly returning forward. Something about the carelessness of that man triggers a silent outburst in Saul’s mind: “Look at me! Saul shouted in his head. I’m a rat! Can you tell? Can you smell?” (Miéville, 1999, p. 106). The desperation in this moment is not merely emotional, in fact, it signals a deeper ontological crisis. Saul’s transformation has reached a point where he no longer feels himself on the same category with the people around him. He walks among them, but no longer within the same perceptual or conceptual register. This is a moment of ontological dislocation, where Saul is present and physically altered, yet no longer visible within the world’s ordinary systems of recognition. He has become something that does not quite fit into the existing categories of human or animal, self or other, surface or depth. His existential crisis of which the result is a silent shout in his mind is not just a plea for attention. It is a demand to be acknowledged within a reality that no longer accommodates his form. This inability to be recognized reflects the novel’s broader exploration of hidden existences and dimensionless identities that elude stable perception.

Miéville underlines Saul's change by marking the culmination of Saul's ontological transformation with these words: "He was shedding his humanity like an old snakeskin, scratching it off in great swathes. It was so fast, this assumption of a new form inside" (1999, p.83). By using the metaphor of shedding skin, Miéville evokes the idea of physical mutation and a total reconfiguration of identity, which means he is no longer tethered to the human condition he once assumed as natural. The speed and violence of the act emphasize that this shift is not gradual or negotiable; it comes from within, an instinct of a conscious that has always been hidden, waiting beneath the surface. Saul, by shedding his skin, splits himself from the limits of human dimensionality both spatially and perceptually. The boundaries of space, species, and selfhood blur as Saul begins to move through the city in ways impossible for humans. This shedding is part of a detachment from the social and physical rules of London for Saul, in fact his existence aligned with the hidden, slippery logic of the urban underworld. Saul's new form, undefined by stable dimensions, mirrors the city itself as mysterious, layered, and resistant to total understanding. The last line of the quote "It was so fast, this assumption of a new form inside" mirrors the pathological quality of Saul's transformation. Miéville choosing such a word as "assumption" implies the adoption of a new identity with almost effortless internalization of it. Saul does not resist or construct this transformation with conscious intent; in fact, it unfolds immediately suggesting that the new form he experienced during his journey had already been embedded within him. The speed with which this shift occurs disorients the boundary between choice and inevitability, in other words, blurs the line between change and revelation as if the human identity has always been temporary waiting to be shed. Miéville presents this moment to readers not as a rational evolution, but as a moment of internal awakening, where the boundaries of self are redrawn. The transformation is framed as organic, almost biological which are parallel to Saul's adaptation not only with the rats who inhabit the city's unseen pathways, but also with the city itself. This reveals its true form only in glimpses which is unpredictable, fragmented, and never entirely understandable. This idea of a transformation that was always there, just beneath the surface, becomes clearer when Saul reflects on how quickly everything has changed:

> Three days ago, he thought as he jumped to the ground, I was heavy and human. And now, he thought as he moved out of the graffitied darkness toward Ladbroke Grove itself. I'm rat and I can travel how I like. I woke up so fast (Miéville, 1999, p. 108).

The contrast between being “heavy and human” and now being “rat” points not just to physical change, but to a shift in how he experiences space and movement. He is no longer bound by the boundaries that once defined his body or his sense of place. When he says, “I woke up so fast,” it echoes the earlier moment of shedding humanity which can be represented as something inside him suddenly coming alive. This is not a transformation that was built step by step. It happened all at once, as though this other version of himself had always been waiting to come to the surface. What Saul wakes up into is not just a new form, but a new way of being, one that moves through London differently, sees differently, and no longer belongs to the ordinary world. Just like the city, he has become something layered, hidden, and impossible to fully explain.

His new way of existence and life is not limited to how Saul sees or moves through the city, also his bodily instincts and his relationship with space are reshaped on the most primal level. Miéville writes, “Literally, sometimes, as he had discovered the pleasure of pissing his strong-smelling piss against walls and knowing that that corner was now his. His piss was changing, just like his voice” (1999, p. 147). Miéville underlines with this words that, for Saul marking his territory in this way signals more than animal behaviour, it reveals how deeply Saul's transformation has rooted itself in his body. This act, once unthinkable within the codes of human civility, becomes a source of satisfaction and ownership. It is no longer enough to move differently or think differently; his body now acts according to a logic that belongs to a different species altogether. In the same way the reference to his voice changing at the same time and his scent reinforces this embodied shift which shows that his transformation touches not just how he thinks or moves, but how he exists physically and sensorily. These changes are not cosmetic or symbolic in the novel, rather they are material. Saul is not mimicking a rat; he is becoming one, in form, habit, and instinct. The distinction between the human and the nonhuman collapses further here, and the city he now inhabits responds not through language or recognition, but through unspoken codes such as; smell, territory, and presence. This moment captures how far Saul has drifted from ordinary human life, not through alienation, but through integration into something older, stranger, and rooted deep within the hidden infrastructure of London. This embodiment of change continues even in the most mundane pleasures. Saul’s bodily transformation does not erase his

former habits entirely, but reshapes them through his new rat-like instincts. The following quote can be used as an example of his sensory change:

> Saul's sweet tooth had survived his passage to rat-hood. The extra richness which rot lent to fruit was a pleasure he was still indulging in as often as possible. He dug into the bag and pulled out a peach whose surface was one seamless bruise (Miéville, 1999, p.157).

The fact that he still craves sweetness connects him to his former human self, however; the way that craving is satisfied has shifted. He no longer seeks clean, fresh fruit, as normal human beings, but finds pleasure in the decayed and the spoiled. As a sensory change, the rot becomes part of the pleasure. What once would have been repulsive is now desirable. His palate, like his voice and scent, has been reconfigured to match his new ontology. Even enjoyment is now filtered through the logic of his transformed body. Even though this is a brief moment, it can be read as; the change Saul undergoes penetrates every part of his being; what he enjoys, what he craves, and what he accepts as normal. His identity is no longer human trying to survive in a rat's world; he is something in-between, remade from within, finding comfort and satisfaction in places the human Saul would have rejected.

Saul's transformation is not confined to his inner world, it starts to radiate the other rats affecting them in a way of seeing him as someone similar to their main King Rat. He no longer simply follows the teaching of King Rat, he begins to embody a similar presence, one that the others instinctively recognize. As his form and instincts shift, his role within the larger rat community also changes. Miéville describes the scene: "Rats simmered around her, looked up at Saul, made sounds of supplication, sought approval" (1999, p.165). These are not neutral reactions; they are signs of recognition. The rats do not see Saul as an outsider who imitates their ways, they feel like he is something familiar, almost kin. His culmination of transformation in terms of his new body, instincts, and behaviour allow them to begin to treat him as a figure of authority, perhaps even as a reflection of King Rat himself. The act of waiting for approval from Saul shows that the transformation has reached a peak moment. He is no longer just becoming a rat; he is becoming a rat with power. The lines between biological change and social recognition blur here, as Saul's altered ontology begins to carry influence. The city's hidden inhabitants respond to what he has become, not through language or rational choice, but through a kind of intuitive allegiance that mirrors the logic of the underworld he now inhabits.

At this stage of the novel, Saul's transformation reaches a point of no return even though he can still sense human emotions. What began as disorientation and gradual detachment from the human world has now become a complete restructuring of how he exists, perceives, and relates to others both human and nonhuman. Each element explored so far; his shifting perception of London, his ability to move through spaces that defy human logic, the changes in his voice, scent, and taste, and finally the recognition he receives from the rat community builds toward the realization that Saul is no longer simply crossing a boundary; he has embodied it. His transformation is not metaphorical or symbolic, in fact, it is deeply material, affecting every sense, instinct, and social relation. The world no longer reads him as human, and he no longer operates within the frameworks that governed his previous identity. Even the city seems to respond to him differently since he has become part of its hidden structure rather than a stranger passing through it. This culmination reflects Miéville's broader speculative approach in which identity is porous, perception is unstable, and reality is shaped by what lies beneath the surface of both cities and selves. Saul's journey is not a return to selfhood, but a descent into another kind of being altogether, unfixed, dimensionless, and irreversibly transformed.

When Saul takes Deborah, the homeless woman, to his home, the Pied Piper suddenly appears and because of the anger he feels for Saul, he violently attacks and kills Deborah. As the scene escalates, Loplop arrives to intervene but quickly falls under the control of the Piper's music. When Loplop attacks Saul under the influence of the Piper's music, Saul acts instinctively by clapping his hands violently around Loplop's ears which results as deafening him during the attack (Miéville, 1999, p. 189). The act is sudden and brutal, but it reveals something important about Saul: even in extreme situations, he is capable of making quick, decisive, and violent choices when survival is at stake. However, this capacity for decisive action does not result as an override in his emotions. When he sees Deborah being killed, he screams her name in agony (p. 187). Despite all the transformations he has undergone, Saul's emotional response in this moment is deeply human. He cannot protect her as he promised back in the street, and as a result his failure pierces him. This tension between his cold, almost animal-like reaction to Loplop and his raw grief for Deborah highlights the unresolved paradox within him. He lives like a rat, but he still feels like a human. This inner conflict erupts not only in grief but in violent desire.

Watching Deborah die does not leave Saul numb; it fills him with uncontrollable rage. Miéville writes:

> He wanted to bite out the Piper's throat and then he wanted to beat him, to smash his head, pummel him methodically with his fists and then he wanted to claw at his stomach, he wanted to gut him with his sharp claws (1999, p.195).

This passage makes it clear that Saul's emotions are not dulled by his transformation, on the contrary, they are intensified and distorted by it. The lines between human anger and animal instinct collapse in his urge to both beat and gut, to use fists and claws. His grief is not silent or frozen; it becomes physical, almost a demand for revenge. This moment again highlights the paradox at the core of Saul's existence. Even in his most inhuman state, his emotional sensations are fully human, for example; love, guilt, and the helplessness of witnessing someone he cared for being murdered.

After Saul's transformation reaches its peak, the novel begins to shift its focus from body to sound. What remains for Saul now is not the question of who he is, but what he will do with what he has become. In this world which is built on hidden spaces and layered realities, music becomes another form of power; one that moves through the city as forcefully as rats or memory. Jungle music, with its fragmented beats and restless energy, is not just a soundtrack. It becomes part of the novel's myth. Like Saul, it is born from the underground, shaped by tension, speed, and resistance. As the battle between Saul and the Pied Piper intensifies, music begins to carry meaning beyond sound. It becomes territory, control and rebellion.

In an interview, when asked why he chose drum'n'bass and jungle music as the sonic foundation of *King Rat*, Miéville responds with both clarity and passion: "I chose it because I love it. It's rhythmically, thematically, aesthetically powerful" (Gordon, 2014, p. 360). He continues by describing jungle as "a mongrel of a hundred snatches of stolen music," (p. 360) a form built through sampling and repetition, through the act of piecing together fragments to form something fierce and new. This description offers more than just a stylistic preference, in fact; it provides a key to understanding the deeper structure and mood of the novel itself. Miéville admits that his decision was not entirely conscious, saying, "Consciously, I was trying to mimic the rhythm of the music" (p. 360). Yet even when unintentional, this aesthetic choice shapes the novel on a fundamental level. Like jungle music, the novel loops and

layers motifs such as violence, myth, movement, rhythm by building a narrative that refuses smooth resolution. It moves in bursts and fractures, pulling from different cultural registers, just as jungle music pulls from reggae, hip-hop, dub, and electronic traditions. What results is a literary form that echoes the music's structure; fragmented but forceful, chaotic yet intentional.

Miéville also situates jungle music within a specific social context. He notes that "Drum'n'bass is a music born out of the working-class and unemployed culture in London" (Gordon, 2014, p. 361). While he emphasizes that his use of the genre was not primarily political, the music's roots in marginalized urban spaces mirror the novel's attention to those pushed to the edges like Saul, the rats, the homeless, and the mythic creatures beneath the city. Jungle becomes a sound of resistance, a vibration that runs parallel to the lives of those who exist outside dominant systems. Its energy matches Saul's transformation in terms of both of them being unpredictable, layered, and impossible to control. As *King Rat* progresses, jungle music is not just something characters listen to, it becomes a mythic force. It even becomes a battleground, especially in contrast to the Pied Piper's use of music as a tool of domination. In this way, jungle music becomes more than a cultural backdrop.

It moves with the same urgency as the city's hidden currents and carries the histories, the weight, and the energy of the people who made it. Jungle music in *King Rat* is never treated as something separate from the place it comes from. It beats through council estates, underground clubs, pirate radio stations which make it a sound that belongs to the streets as much as to the speakers. There are broken rhythms and layered samples in it, they carry with it a sense of resistance. It is the sound of communities trying hard for a space to live in a city that often tries to push them aside. In the novel, jungle is not something that can be neatly defined or written down. It is not polished or clean, it is alive, restless, chaotic, and full of tension. Miéville offers a vivid in-text definition of the genre:

> This was Jungle. The child of House, the child of Raggamuffin, the child of Dancehall, the apotheosis of black music, the Drum and Bass soundtrack for a London of council estates and dirty walls, black youth and white youth, Armenian girls. The music was uncompromising. The rhythm was stolen from Hip Hop, born of Funk. (1999, p.59)

It is possible that Miéville chose jungle music because it does not speak for just one voice, but for many. It is built from other music, other lives, other moments that are pieced together from what came before. It can be considered as a music of collision

since dancehall, hip-hop, funk, dub all run through it, and so do the lived realities of those shaped by class, race, migration, and struggle. Jungle does not try to smooth those things over. It holds them all together in conflict, and that is where its rhythm comes from. In *King Rat*, Jungle also reflects the shape of London itself which is layered, hidden, uneven entity, moreover; it reflects Saul, as well. His identity, like the music, is not whole or pure, in fact, it is fractured, rewired, rebuilt. Jungle becomes the sound of what has been forced underground. The sound of what refuses to be silenced.

The Pied Piper tries to get inside the jungle music instead of destroying him. When he meets Natasha and she introduces Jungle, he sees how powerful it is, how far it can reach, and how deeply it unsettles the order he believes he controls. Jungle is not his creation, and that is what makes it dangerous yet attractive to him. He realizes that there is a music of genre that spreads on its own, fast and unpredictable, built from the streets, from lives that exist outside the smooth surfaces he prefers. So instead of shutting it down, he looks for a way to turn it into something he can use. He does not want jungle music to speak for itself, he wants it to speak for him in order to take mass control. The way he steps into it feels like an attempt to take ownership, to bend something wild into something obedient. It is not about sharing space in view of Pied Piper, it is about control. That is where the deeper conflict in the novel starts to show between a sound that rises from what is buried and fragmented, and a force that demands everything move in perfect, polished unison. The roots of Pied Piper's influence are in his music which is a medium that he uses to control and perform corruption. As Miéville writes:

> As soon as the Piper got his flute to his lips, or even pursed his lips to whistle, or perhaps even hummed, one of them would be commandeered, one of them would be taken over to the other side. His eyes would glaze and he would start to fight against his allies, his ears stuffed with the enticing sounds of food and sex and freedom (1999, p. 146).

This is not music that invites or inspires, rather; it dominates, overwhelms the listener's senses with promises of pleasure and liberation, not to awaken autonomy but to suppress it. What appears as liberation is, in fact, a loss of autonomy. The Piper's sound hijacks the body and turns it into a vessel for his command by transforming individual will into unthinking obedience cloaked in illusion. Yet this mechanism fails in the presence of Saul. Unlike those who are defeated, Saul's does not give the same respond like others. The seductive force of the Piper's flute cannot

access him because of his hybrid-being which was once perceived as a liability is now his greatest strength. The music flows past him, unable to latch on. In this resistance, Saul does not merely remain himself; he becomes something the Piper cannot assimilate. Considering himself as the Lord of the Dance, the voice, Pied Piper is not happy with the result as he was planning this carnage for twenty-five years. He calls Saul as "abortion and half-and-half" by showing his ungratefulness caused by Saul's hybrid existence (p. 188). This confrontation can be seen as another turning point in the novel where the war is no longer just between individuals, but between different ontologies. Saul who was born of filth and hunger, becomes a figure of becoming, an untamed entity and in flux. His declaration is philosophical; "I'm not rat plus man, get it? I'm bigger than either one and I'm bigger than the two. I'm a new thing. You can't make me dance" (Miéville, 1999, p. 301). He is not the sum of identities but a disruption of them, a being that resists being-for-others. In Speculative Realist terms, Saul becomes a hyperobject in the Piper's world, a presence too entangled, too expansive, and too contradictory to be reduced or controlled. He is not a synthesis of opposites, not a compromised median between rat and man, but, as he asserts, "a new thing." This assertion is more than self-affirmation; it is a rejection of the Piper's totalizing narrative. The Piper wants control, wants rhythm and identity to be legible, malleable. Saul, by contrast, becomes unreadable, an entity that refuses categorization, that slips between the cracks of both domination and liberation as defined by the Piper. Saul embodies a third space, an unplaceable being that disrupts the binary logic of control and resistance which makes the situation a superposition.

3.3. The Exploration of Hybridity, Control, and the Disruption of Identity

How identity is understood in traditional frameworks is radically challenged by Saul's transformation in *King Rat* with his declaration; "I'm not rat plus man, get it? I'm bigger than either one and I'm bigger than the two. I'm a new thing. You can't make me dance" (Miéville, 1999, p. 301) These words are not simply an act of defiance; it marks a complete ontological rupture. To contextualize this moment through contemporary identity theory, it is useful to consider the distinction outlined in the article "What is Identity, as We Now Use the Word?":

> I argue that 'identity' is presently used in two linked senses, which may be termed 'social' and 'personal.' In the former sense, an 'identity' refers simply to a social category, a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features or attributes. In the second sense of

> personal identity, an identity is some distinguishing characteristic (or characteristics) that a person takes a special pride in or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable (Fearon, 1999, p. 2).

Within this framework, Saul's initial identity which used to be perceived as a young man, a falsely accused prisoner, a son falls under both categories of socially labelled and personally internalized. However, these constructions do not offer the adequate information in terms of his ontological shift. As he uncovers his rat-nature, he does not simply exchange one label for another. He instead enters a liminal space where both social and personal definitions collapse under the weight of something more primitive and unresolved. Since he neither adopts the rat identity offered by King Rat nor clings to the human identity imposed by society, Saul's hybridity becomes radical. Instead, he becomes an ontological disruption that refuses coherence. In terms of social identity, Saul actively resists being categorized by the standards of either species. He refuses the Pied Piper's attempt to manipulate and control him by reducing him to a legible, obedient figure, and equally rejects King Rat's effort to subsume him into an ancestry of urban filth and vengeance. The binaries that once seemed fixed such as; human versus animal, victim versus monster, order versus chaos, become irrelevant. Saul abandons any sense of stable, unchanging characteristics that once anchored him. He is not a blend of man and rat, but a combination of which is something new, a being that cannot be fully understood or acknowledged by any of the sides. In this sense, Saul represents a speculative rethinking of identity not as a possession, a history, or a category, but as a site of contradiction and becoming that undermines the very logic of control.

The instability of Saul's identity can be read within postmodern and psychological framings of crisis, and ultimately calls for a different vocabulary that moves beyond social construction or personal disorientation. Speculative realism provides this shift. Rather than treating Saul's hybridity as a symbolic site of identity tension, Speculative Realism treats it as an ontological disturbance; a being that exceeds the frameworks designed to name it. Saul does not merely illustrate a crisis of selfhood; he materializes the gap between being and legibility. This gap, where neither species, narrative, nor memory can fully anchor the self, aligns with the speculative realist concern for what exists outside human-centered structures of access. In this way, Saul becomes a speculative figure because he embodies the unrepresentable which can be explained as the real that cannot be domesticated by

correlation, classification, or coherence. His transformation opens a space in which identity is no longer defined by what it is, but by what it cannot fully become.

Fearon emphasizes the classical definition of identity in the second edition of Oxford English Dictionary (1989) which underlines the permanence and unity: "The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality" (1999, p.7). This understanding assumes that identity is an unchanging, continuous, and consistent across time and space which exists as a stable core. When he discovers his hybrid nature, and begins to reject both the human and rat aspects of his previous understanding of self, thus becomes something resisting this traditional framing. Saul's transformation in *King Rat* fundamentally challenges this view. His body changes, his desires shift, and his loyalty for those used to be around him blurs. At the end of the transformation, what emerges is not the preservation of a self but the emergence of a new ontology. Saul cannot be said to remain "the same person in all circumstances," nor can his identity be reduced to individuality in the conventional sense. Instead, his very being becomes a site of flux and contradiction which makes him a no longer "himself" in any fixed way, but a becoming, a disruption of fixed identity altogether.

This breakdown of the classical definition mirrors more contemporary understandings of identity as constructed, contingent, and unstable. As James D. Fearon (1999, p.10) argues, identity today is used in two interlinked senses: social and personal. Neither is rooted in fixity, but rather in perceived belonging and internalized traits that are subject to pride, crisis, or resistance. Saul's rejection of both inherited categories and fixed traits such as loyalty, morality, and dilemma of species reflects precisely the kind of rupture that characterizes modern identity discourse. Erik Erikson's influential concept of the "Identity Crisis" supports this view: "The condition of being uncertain of one's feelings about oneself, especially with regard to character, goals, and origins, occurring especially in adolescence as a result of growing up under disruptive, fast-changing conditions" (1979, as cited in Fearon, 1999, p. 8).

Saul's transformation does not fit the older mould of identity as continuity, but exemplifies this modern crisis as an individual who becomes more than the sum

of his parts by refusing to stabilize, refusing to be one thing or another. He is no longer a clear or continuous story of growth, but a place where things break apart and clash. In this sense, Saul's very existence resists the logic of traditional identity categories, where unity and permanence are expected. As Madan Sarup explains, "[...] In order to be anything, there are other things which one cannot be. What is important in identity is not only what it cannot say, but also what it cannot be" (1996, p. 24). Saul's hybrid state violates this logic. He becomes a figure who is not defined by rejection or limitation, but by overflow, since he is not simply what is left when dualities are rejected, but something entirely new. This identity which has emerged cannot be said, cannot be fixed, and cannot be reduced to either side of the opposition. In rejecting the limits of what identity must not be, Saul becomes a speculative being of pure becoming, one that challenges the language of identity itself.

This speculative disruption of identity can be better understood through Quentin Meillassoux's concept of the "Great Outdoors" which was mentioned in *After Finitude* (2008, p. 7). As it was explained in this thesis previously, Meillassoux criticizes the belief that we can never access reality outside our relationship to it, that we can only know the world as it appears to human thought which he calls "correlationism" (2008, p. 5). What disturbs this logic is Saul's transformation. He does not just slip between categories like man and rat; rather, he steps outside them. He becomes something that cannot be fully known or named, instead he transforms into a being that does not fit to the systems of meaning that try to define him which puts him into a superposition. In this sense, Saul resembles something that exists without needing to be interpreted through human frameworks which is the kind of reality Meillassoux examines. His refusal to be one thing or another is not just personal rebellion, it is a sign of a deeper ontological shift. Saul is not just defying identity; he is becoming something identity cannot hold. Like the "Great Outdoors," he represents a world that does not ask to be understood, only acknowledged as real.

This ontological break where identity dissolves into something beyond the categories of human knowledge can be further understood through Iain Hamilton Grant's philosophy of nature in which he argues against the reduction of nature to a passive object awaiting to be understood by human mind. Instead, he reclaims nature as an active, generative force, nature as "Naturphilosophie" as Schelling mentions in his work named "On the History of Modern Philosophy", where becoming is prior to

being, and where all forms emerge from a deeper, pre-individual dynamism (Schelling, as cited in Grant, 2006, p. 197). In Saul's case, this dynamic is not just metaphorical. His transformation is not the result of a stable identity coming into realization, but rather the unfolding of a deeper, more primal force of becoming. Philebus' theory of kinds by Plato suggests that "By nature [kata physin], production always leads, and the generated product follows" (as cited in Grant, 2006, p. 43), suggesting that identity is not a fixed outcome but an emergent process within a greater field of energetic flux.

Saul's being, in this view, is not a hybrid or a duality, it is an eruption of generativity that refuses all previous categorical limitations. Saul's body, his instincts, even his memory, begin to follow a logic of becoming rather than of stability. He is not an identity resulted as a breaking, but a process of becoming that pushes beyond the limits set by society and biology. King Rat and the Piper both attempt to reduce Saul to forms they understand: heir or enemy, animal or traitor, however, Saul exceeds this, aligning more closely with Grant's understanding of nature. In this way, Saul becomes less like a character and more like a field where a powerful transformation takes place and a new kind of being begins to emerge. Grant's view of nature as an active principle challenges the very foundation of identity discourse. Identity presupposes form, boundaries, and persistence, but in Grant's ontology, these are not beginnings; they are outcomes. As such, Saul's transformation is not a movement toward clarity, but toward primal intensity. He is no longer a "who," but a "what" in flux which can also be called as an existence in uncertainty. He is no longer to be understood through the human categories of history, morality, or even rebellion, but through the speculative force of becoming that precedes all such determinations.

This new existence of Saul which escapes both form and finality, does not occur in silence. Saul's transformation is not only visible on his body but also can be observed in the sounds that surround him. If identity is no longer a stable ground, but a field of conflict, mutation, and emergence, then the musical landscape of *King Rat*, particularly its jungle music, functions not as background, but as an ontological force in its own way. Jungle Music does not accompany Saul's transformation, however; it mirrors and drives it. Just as Saul refuses to be one clear thing, man or rat, jungle music works through broken rhythms, unexpected beats, and sudden shifts. It resists

order and speaks in pulses, glitches, and loops, since it is a chaotic rhythm that belongs to no single culture, no traditional history, or a defined being. Therefore, Jungle Music becomes more than an aesthetic tool used in the novel, it becomes metaphysical which expresses a world that is in motion, unstable, and alive. The speculative energies that trigger Saul's transformation also moves through the Jungle Music, turning it into an entity of resistance and transformation. To further explore jungle music's role in *King Rat*, it is useful to approach it through Graham Harman's theory of the Quadruple Object which was discussed in this thesis previously. In this way, jungle music exists not as just a type of music, but as a layered object with many sides. While it contains all four aspects Harman describes, it is the sensual qualities of jungle music that stand out the most in *King Rat*. The broken rhythms, fast beats, and sudden shifts are not just sounds; they are experiences. These qualities affect the ear with intensity, creating a sense of urgency, instability, and rupture. The pulsing chaotic energy in transformation of Saul can also be observed in Jungle Music which feels unpredictable and alive. It does not offer resolution or harmony like any other music, it represents tension and movement. This activeness also mirrors Saul's refusal to fit into a fixed identity. As such, its sensual force becomes central to the novel's atmosphere since it both reflects Saul's change and participates in it.

Other mythic figures in *King Rat* such as Anansi and Loplop serve as more than side characters or allegorical entities, so the concept of being withdrawn also applies to them. In *King Rat* they exist as ontological disturbances since they are strange and irreducible presences that cannot be fully understood. Through the lens of Graham Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology, both align most clearly with the notion of the real object; withdrawn from full access, acting upon the world while never being fully present within it. Anansi, the spider-trickster from West African folklore, does not arrive in the story as a symbol of cultural tradition. Instead, he leaks into the urban space of London as something unstable, hybrid, and difficult to place. His presence is playful, dangerous, familiar yet uncanny. He represents an ancestral memory that refuses domestication which makes him a being whose intentions remain hidden. His characteristics lie in this ambiguity. He is not just a trickster; he is a force that slips between categories, just as Saul does. As a real object, Anansi cannot be limited to the relations he enters; he manipulates, jokes, and disrupts, but his core remains untouched by interpretation. His stories follow him,

but they never fully reveal him, except for the time when he expresses his feelings about Pied Piper: “Him call me in with him piccolo, and my mind was gone, and him rough me, mash me up, hurt me bad. And all the lickle spiders them saw” (Miéville, 1999, p. 132). This quote unfolds the anger inside him against Pied Piper, thus his demand for revenge. This moment shows that there is a deep personal history behind Anansi’s playful and humorous mythical figure. This is not just about Anansi’s, a trickster’s pride; it is about a psychic scar that fuels his unpredictable energy throughout the novel. His laughter, then becomes a mask for pain, a method of coping, and a form of resistance for readers. However, he still remains hidden even though his story is shared since it is still not fully known. Like Harman’s real object, what we encounter is not his essence, but only what surfaces through his relations. Rage, humor, vengeance are the deeper parts of him that stay hidden and untouched.

On the other hand, Loplop is a figure in Max Ernst’s surrealist artwork, especially in his collage novels like *A Week of Kindness* (1934) and *The Hundred Headless Woman* (1929). He often referred to Loplop as the “Superior of Birds”, as Miéville also does (1999, p. 189), a kind of alter ego or symbolic guide who appears in dreamlike, bizarre scenes making him an entity that breaks from realism entirely. In the novel, he speaks in riddles, appears without logic, and represents a kind of broken narrative or shattered image of world supporting the idea that Loplop is not a figure with actions but a phenomenon that disorients the reader and his introduction of himself clarifies this idea; “Loplop presents Loplop” (Miéville, 1999, p. 125). He does not move the plot forward like a normal character, instead, his presence distorts the narrative. As Miéville writes, Loplop is considered insane by Saul because of his uncanny behaviours:

> He would peer at the bird, then briefly up at Saul or whoever observed him, and smile in satisfaction. He would glance back at the bird, imperious suddenly, and bark a command at it, upon which it would seem to cringe and give obeisance, bobbing its head and bowing. And then Loplop would become a good and just king all of a sudden, with no time for such puerile displays of power, and he would murmur reassuringly to his subject, and jettison it, watching it disappear with a look of noble benediction. (1999, p. 148)

His scenes feel like breaks or cracks in the story where reality and meaning become unstable. Under Harman’s model, Loplop's sensual qualities, his fragmented speech, strange posture, and dreamlike movements are vivid, but the core of who or what he is remains unreachable. This withdrawal gives him a strange power because we

cannot fully understand him. He brings a sense of discontinuity into the world of *King Rat*, serving as something like a surreal mirror held up to Saul.

Apart from Anansi and Loplop, the mythical figures used in the novel to disrupt the continuity in the plot, when it comes to the Pied Piper, he represents a different kind of danger because of his dedication to control and seduction. In *King Rat*, Anansi is used to disrupt and Loplop to confuse, however, the Piper seeks to dominate the world. His music is not wild like Jungle; it is precise, manipulative, and deeply tied to systems of order, yet, as soon as he understands that Saul is not affected by it, he wants to conquer his being by using Jungle Music. He uses sound not to awaken, but to command. Through this, he becomes a figure of pressure, a force that tries to reduce others to obedient roles. In contrast to Saul's becoming or Anansi's withdrawal, the Piper represents the very structure that these other figures resist; a symbolic power that demands submission. When King Rat describes Pied Piper to Saul, he chooses these words: "Not just Ratcatcher, you know, bwoy. The one want you, him the Ratcatcher and the Birdcatcher and the Spidercatcher and the Batcatcher and the Humancatcher and all tings catcher" (Miéville, 1999, 124), implying that his demand for submission is not for only Saul, but for any entity exist in the world.

The Pied Piper does not withdraw from meaning, instead he enforces it, unlike Anansi or Loplop. He plays to command, to be obeyed, and to impose a fixed role on others. In doing so, he becomes the opposite of what Meillassoux calls the "Great Outdoors". For Meillassoux, correlationism is the belief that we can only ever know the world as it appears to us, never in itself (2008, p. 5). The Piper acts as a correlationist figure within the novel since his power relies on creating closed systems of meaning through sound, on forcing beings like Saul to fit into the roles he assigns them. While Saul, Anansi, and Loplop move through uncertainty, change, and hidden meanings, The Pied Piper stands against everything represent. He tries to make everything clear and controlled. He uses music not to inspire or confuse, but to command others. His power depends on forcing people to play the roles he assigns them. These characteristics of him proves that he is the opposite of what Quentin Meillassoux calls the "Great Outdoors". In Meillassoux's terms, the Piper is a correlationist. He wants the world to match his version of it, moreover; he believes meaning must come from him, and others must follow it. That's why he tries to take over even Jungle Music, trying to turn it into something he can use to control Saul.

However; this does not work. Saul stays outside the Piper's system because of his hybridity and superposition. Jungle music stays wild since the Piper's power is limited, because not everything can be reduced to a fixed meaning.

From the perspective of Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology, the Pied Piper refuses to accept the withdrawn nature of other beings as he wants to create new embodiments obeying him. In Harman's terms, every object, whether human, nonhuman, idea, or sound, has a hidden core that cannot be fully accessed or reduced by its relations (2018, p.9), but the Piper ignores this. He treats others not as independent beings, but as tools to be used, controlled, and understood completely. He enters into relations not to explore or respect them, but to dominate them. In this sense, he stands as the opposite of a withdrawn object; he acts as if the inner essence of others is fully available to him. This is what makes his power so dangerous in the novel. He tries to collapse the gap between surface and depth, relation and being. Unlike Saul, Anansi, Loplop, or even Jungle Music, which all of whom carry something mysterious and unreachable inside, the Piper believes nothing is beyond his control, however; in the world of *King Rat*, where being often exceeds meaning, this belief becomes his weakness.

In conclusion, *King Rat* helps readers to experience a world where identity is not bound to traditional structure of origin, species, or what society views. Through Saul's transformation, Miéville dismantles the logic that separates human from animal, self from other, and control from chaos. Thanks to the figures such as Anansi and Loplop who deepen this ontological rupture by refusing to be understood, Miéville echoes these elements with every fractured rhythm. Even the Piper, with all his force and precision, cannot force order onto a world shaped by withdrawal, hybridity, and emergence. What this novel presents is not a search for a true identity, or the result after a transformation, instead; it aims for a confrontation with the impossibility of fixing being at all. Instead of resolving the contradictions between the characters, the mythic figures, and the systems they resist, Miéville lets them remain open and unfolding rather than closing. In this chaotic area, identity becomes not something to possess, but something to survive, resist, and reimagine. The focus shifts from defining what Saul is to exploring what kind of being can emerge when identity itself begins to unravel.

The Introduction of this thesis summarizes the philosophical background which is necessary to study Miéville's novels beyond human-centred thinking. It begins by questioning whether reality is truly stable and highlights how perception shapes what is believed to be true. Along with a concise overview of Speculative Realism, the chapter then outlines the challenge of movement to correlationism, which is the idea that thought and being are always mutually dependent (Meillassoux, 2008, p. 5). Under the title it is explored how figures such as Meillassoux and Brassier turn to ancestrality and scientific knowledge to conceptualize a world that exists without or before human thought. Grant's philosophy of nature and Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology are also introduced as key tools for interrogating the autonomy of non-human entities and the layered, withdrawn nature of objects. Overall, the chapter shows how Miéville's fiction creates space for philosophical questions since cities, myths, and objects resist being fully grasped by human cognition and instead reveal the deep structures that underlie perception and power.

CONCLUSION

China Miéville's fiction can be effectively studied through the lens of Speculative Realism because his novels question the limits of human perception in general and show that reality exists beyond what can be seen, known, or controlled. His writing includes hidden forces, layered urban settings, and characters who undergo deep transformations that challenge the idea of stable identity or fixed reality. Miéville uses elements such as weird fiction, fantasy, and noir and blends them by creating complex narratives that resist easy explanation. The backgrounds he builds are often unfamiliar, or hidden spaces. These areas face unseen systems of control which reflects the idea that the world is shaped by forces outside of human understanding. His storytelling is rich in metaphor, structure, and philosophical depth, making his work especially suitable for exploring questions raised by Speculative Realism.

The City & The City and *King Rat* have been chosen for this thesis because they strongly reflect the key concerns of Speculative Realism, such as the independence of reality from human thought, the limits of perception, and the presence of non-human or withdrawn forces. In this study, these two novels were analysed to explore how Miéville's fiction opens up unordinary pathways to understand the world beyond anthropocentric thinking. Speculative Realism was not only used as a tool to read these novels but also as a concept that gained new meaning through their analysis. This study highlights that Miéville's works offer a suitable framework in order to discuss philosophical ideas about reality, perception, and identity. His unique blend of genre, structure, and philosophical themes makes his fiction an important contribution to both speculative literature and contemporary thought.

China Miéville constructs a layered urban space governed by unseen control, perceptive rules and different languages in *The City & The City*. The novel's settings

which are the coexisting cities of Besźel and Ul Qoma, serve as a metaphorical and material framework for unfolding the reality as something maintained by habit, fear, and ideological belief rather than by physical boundaries. Through the use of narrative strategies such as disruption, suspense, and spatial ambiguity, Miéville challenges conventional notions of city, identity, and governance. He chooses to present the city as a complex system, where citizens are trained to "unsee" the visible, thus he opens a philosophical exploration into the limits of human perception and the power of internalized control. Miéville's background in political theory is clear in how the novel uses Breach, Copula Hall, and Orciny not just as parts of the story, but as key elements that show how hidden power shapes city life.

The suitability of the novel with the ideas of Speculative Realism, especially with its portrayal of objects, systems, and realities that exist beyond human access highlights its alignment with the central concerns of the philosophy. For instance; Breach emerges as a withdrawn force that governs both cities without being fully understood or visible by embodying the object-oriented ontology proposed by Graham Harman. Similarly, the ambiguous presence of Orciny can be considered as a philosophical metaphor for the outside perception but nonetheless shapes reality. The crosshatched zones and Copula Hall challenge the distinction between the two cities by presenting spaces where the illusion of separation loses its influence and where reality appears more as an effect of belief rather than of fact. These narrative and spatial elements show how Miéville constructs a speculative world in which the boundaries of the knowable are constantly tested. In this way, the novel does not only tell a detective story, but stages an ontological investigation into how worlds are structured, sustained, and sometimes broken by what cannot be seen or said.

Ultimately, it is underlined that *The City & The City* is not only rich in narrative complexity but also offers a unique philosophical field in order to analyse through the lens of Speculative Realism. Miéville's ability to blend political allegory, urban theory, and speculative fiction allows him to explore how reality is manufactured through collective misrecognition and disciplinary power. Two cities become living objects which are active participants in shaping identity, behaviour, and perception thanks to the unseen government forces. On the other hand, elements like Breach and Orciny remind the reader that control often lies not in what is present, but in what must remain absent. This interplay between visibility and absence,

material structure and ideological enforcement, puts *The City & The City* in a significant literary case for examining how the unseen governs the real.

King Rat questions the notions of identity, perception, and power and how they really work by mixing the elements of myth and speculative fiction. At the centre of the novel is Saul's transformation, which challenges traditional ideas of what a person is supposed to be. Miéville presents London not as a familiar city, but as a strange, shifting place where unseen forces affect both the world and the people in it. As Saul begins to reject fixed categories such as; human versus animal or reality versus myth, his identity starts to split from traditional social labels. His change affects his body, his senses, and the way he moves through the world which proves that his transformation is not just mental or symbolic. By doing so, Miéville underlines that identity cannot be easily defined or must be stable. Instead, it is fragile and can fall apart when it comes into contact with the unknown or the things that cannot be fully understood.

Mythic figures such as Anansi, Loplop, and the Pied Piper, each embodying distinct inner perspectives that counter dominant ways of life, contribute to this exploration and expand it through their presence in the narrative. Anansi and Loplop represent objects that resist full interpretation, aligning with Graham Harman's concept of withdrawn entities that act upon the world without being fully present. Meanwhile, the Piper stands as a force of correlationist control who demands obedience, and aims to reduce beings to roles, and manipulate sound as a totalizing force. Saul's immunity to the Piper's music and his ontological superposition rejects the logic of total control, allowing jungle music, the chaotic, fragmented, and rooted in resistance entity, to emerge as a counter-force. Jungle becomes more than a cultural aesthetic; it is an active philosophical medium through which resistance, hybridity, and transformation are expressed by music.

Eventually, questions about identity, perception, and reality are explored through the lens of Speculative Realism with the way *King Rat* offers to explore. Saul's journey from passive citizen to ontological rupture reflects Meillassoux's "Great Outdoors" and Grant's philosophy of nature, in which being is not predetermined but continually generated. Miéville allows Saul's identity to remain unstable, contradictory, and irreducible instead of meeting his superposition and

hybridity into harmony. London, like Saul, becomes a withdrawn object, which is a layered, alive entity beyond comprehension. The chapter shows how Miéville transforms both body and city into speculative fields where power, myth, and resistance blend into each other. In this space, existence is no longer something to be defined, it is to endure, and reimagine outside the systems that once claimed to control it.

In conclusion, this thesis has explored how the novels *The City & The City* and *King Rat* by China Miéville offer rich and layered narratives with the characteristics of challenging stable understandings of space, identity, and reality. By focusing on the theories of Speculative Realism, particularly the works of Meillassoux, Harman, Brassier and Grant, it has been shown that Miéville's fiction resists human-centred thinking and opens up philosophical questions about what lies beyond perception. In *The City & The City*, the focus is on how urban structure, language, and ideological control shape lived reality, while *King Rat* extends the discussion into the realm of transformation, hybridity, and resistance through a more mythic and sensory narrative. The idea that reality is not fixed or fully knowable, and that identity can become fragmented, unstable, and deeply affected by forces that remain unseen revealed thanks to the unique narrative used in novels. Through this analysis, it becomes clear that Miéville is not only telling stories, but also staging philosophical experiments in how we understand being, space, and power in a world that always holds more than we can grasp.

In this thesis, speculative fiction used as a framework for testing ground for realities and identities that remain unfinished, unstable, and beyond human meaning, which highlights a direction for future works in both literary and philosophical studies. Rather than positioning fiction as a passive reflection of theory, it is suggested that speculative texts can actively generate and experiment with concepts that philosophy alone cannot fully capture. This opens space for future research to explore literature as a site where Speculative Realism's challenges to anthropocentrism can be extended, reimagined, and tested against new forms of narrative.

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