

**Identity and the Architecture of invisible borders in
China Miéville's *The City & The City* (2009)**

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Date: 03.31.2025

1. Introduction

1.1. About the Author

China Mieville was born in 1972 in Norwich England. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Social Anthropology from the University of Cambridge Master's and PhD in International Relations from the London School of Economics (LSE). His PHD thesis at the London School of Economics was titled *Between Equal Rights: A Marxist Theory of International Law* (2005).

Mieville is often described as one of the leaders of the “weird” and “New Weird” movements in literature, by straying away from conventional genre boundaries and tropes. His works are an eclectic mix of literary fiction, speculative fantasy, sci-fi with a dominating backdrop of social and political commentary. Melville classifies himself as a “weird” writer with a Marxist edge. His political ideology plays a key role in his academic work and his fiction, where regardless of the dominating genre of the work, themes of power, inequality, urban decay, class struggle, and resistance are often discussed through surreal plots lines and world building that make the readers think critically about the connection between the books and the society we live in.

1.2 Background

The City and the City(2009) is Mieville's 4th book. Prior to it he published :

Perdido Street Station (2000) a fantasy sci fi novel with a mix of steampunk, political dystopia and horror is set in a gritty, industrial, multispecies and multicultural town of New Crobuzon. This was one of the first novels to establish the *New Weird* genre. The novel discusses issues of corruption, urban decay, monstrous bureaucracy, and the chaos and alienation of living in modern cities.

The Scar (2002), is to some degree a sequel to *Perdido Street Station*, it follows the aftermath of the events of the first novel and through new characters explores themes of freedom, exile, and fluid identities.

Iron Council (2004), is a revolutionary tale set in the same universe as the first two novels and explores class struggle, workers' rights, and rebellion.

Those novels, all set in the same universe, were followed by *The City and the City*(2009), which breaks away from all the intricate world-building of the first three novels and introduces a new, more grounded world that nevertheless deals with many of the same societal problems.

In *The City & The City* (2009), he blends noir detective fiction with speculative political metaphors. The novel that starts with the premise of an established noir detective trope: a dead woman, the wrong side of town, a washed-out detective, and a dark and foggy run-down city. However, it very quickly becomes clear that things are not quite what they seem, not in the murder investigation but in the world itself.

The reader is initially introduced to one of the twin cities, Beszel while the other, UI Qoma, is only casually, but continuously mentioned. It is slowly revealed to the reader, via carefully placed small clues, that Beszel and UI Qoma physically occupy the same physical space, they overlap. In the novel, this overlap is referred to as “crosshatching”. There are no borders, just a rigid socio-political, cultural, urban, and architectural perceptual contrast. Architecture and urban design are at the forefront of this separation. Although both cities are implied to be Eastern European possible post-Soviet entities, Beszel is older, run-down, described as a mix of Eastern European, old Balkan architecture and culture mixed with cultural pockets created by recent immigration, while UI Qoma is implied to be an ultra-modern, rich futuristic city, possibly with Arabic or East Asian influences leaning in expression more towards Dubai.

In this thesis, I will attempt to understand and analyze the two crosshatched cities using Phenomenological Hermeneutics and iconography. I will analyze how Melville used iconography to communicate the distinctions in the culture of expression of those cities to explore themes of national identity, political power, cultural separation, and the nature of reality. I will explore the differences in the lived experiences of the inhabitants of the crosshatched cities and through that lens analyze the concept of invisible borders in the novel, examining how they function as both a literal and symbolic force shaping the characters, their sense of self, and sense of belonging.

2. Research Methodology

In this research, I will combine a multi-faceted qualitative research methodology incorporating phenomenological hermeneutics and iconography to analyze how architecture and urban design affect the lived experience, construct a sense of self and belonging, and reinforce separation via invisible borders in China Miéville's *The City & The City*. Through a close reading of the novel, I will apply this methodology to explore its spatial and symbolic facets, focusing on the impact of experiencing the built environment on the formation of identities and social cohesion.

Guiding Questions:

1. How does *The City & The City* use architecture and urban planning to create a sense of belonging and seclusion in Beszel and Ul Qoma?
2. In what ways does the novel's portrayal of urban space challenge traditional notions of borders and sovereignty?
3. How do experiences of space, movement through a city, and sensory experiences contribute to one's emotional connection with a space?
4. In what ways do abandoned or decaying spaces hold memory, and how does this affect their role in urban identity?

2.1 Phenomenological Hermeneutics

Phenomenological Hermeneutics will be applied through a close reading of *The City & The City* (2009), to explore the experience of both cities in the novel.

I will concentrate on the lived perception and interpretation of one's surroundings, where meaning is constructed through habitual ways of navigating, experiencing (and unexperiencing), and seeing (and unseeing) the spaces one occupies. I will consider how the enforced practice of "unseeing" in can be viewed not as a cognitive process, but as a learned way of being-in-the-world (Heidegger's *dwelling*). From this perspective, perception cannot be neutral; it is always filtered through historically and socially conditioned interpretations. The cities aren't just physical spaces; they are interpretive structures that define identity, behavior, and social reality.

The analysis will also examine embodiment, movement, and sensory engagement, colors, textures, noise within the divided cityscape, and how formative this can be for one's perception and experience of the space.

2.2. Iconographic Analysis

The iconographic analysis will focus on the symbolic meanings embedded in the novel's architectural descriptions and urban landscapes.

I will

- I identify recurring motifs: architectural forms, monuments, symbols, visual narratives, and markers specific to each city and attempt to decode their effect within the narrative of belonging

and nonbelonging.

- contextualize those findings as symbols of cultural, ethnic, religious, and historical value.
- I investigate how the novel's spatial imagery reflects real-world urban planning ideologies and try to use Miéville's fictional cities in larger discussions on space, power, and identity.

2.3 Imagine the Unseen: Artistic Reinterpretations of Beszel and Ul Qoma

In this last section based on the findings from the Phenomenological Hermeneutics and iconographic analysis, I will apply more personalized creative approach in an attempt to imagine the unseen and create artistic reinterpretations of Beszel and Ul Qoma as separate elements and as part of the disjointed whole.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Overview of the novel

The City & The City (2009) is a novel that starts with the premise of an established noir detective trope: a dead woman, the wrong side of town, a washed-out detective, and a dark and foggy run-down city. However, it very quickly becomes clear that things are not quite what they seem, not in the murder investigation but in the world itself.

The reader is initially introduced to one of the twin cities, Beszel while the other, Ul Qoma, is only casually, but continuously mentioned. It is slowly revealed to the reader, via carefully placed small clues, that Beszel and Ul Qoma physically occupy the same physical space, they overlap. In the novel, this overlap is referred to as “crosshatching”. There are no borders, just a rigid socio-political, cultural, urban, and architectural perceptual contrast.

The enforced separation is not only municipal but is maintained through a phenomenon called unseeing. The inhabitants are not allowed to interact with, see, hear or have any awareness of the inhabitants or the built forms of the city that overlap with theirs. The unseeing is maintained through a system of learned perception and strict legal enforcement. Residents are trained from childhood to ignore the presence of the other city and its residents to the point that it becomes second nature. Everything that is unintentionally seen, heard, or otherwise perceived is carefully “unseen” and “unheard” to avoid punishment by the “breach”: an organization with near-omniscient authority, that enforces the illusion that the division is natural even though it’s entirely made up.

There are very tangible systems in place from color schemes to architectural, cultural expression, language, fashion, culture, religion, age of infrastructure, etc that separate Beszel

from UI Qoma. All those elements create that sense of alienation, marking things as “other” and “to be unseen”.

Architecture and urban design are at the forefront of this separation. Although both cities are implied to be Eastern European possible post-Soviet entities, Beszel is older, run-down, described as a mix of Eastern European, old Balkan architecture and culture mixed with cultural pockets created by recent immigration, while UI Qoma is implied to be an ultra-modern, rich futuristic city, possibly with Arabic or East Asian influences leaning in expression more towards Dubai. The geographic location of the cities is only hinted at, in relation to their distance from other places known to the reader. “To Fly to Beszel from the east coast of the US involves changing planes at least once, and that’s the best option. It is a famously complicated trip. There are direct flights to Beszel from Budapest, from Skopje, and, probably an American’s best bet, from Athens” (Miéville, 2009, p72).

As mentioned, the division between Beszel and UI Qoma is not a physical barrier in the traditional sense. Unlike the Berlin Wall, which physically separated East and West Berlin, the division between these two cities exists primarily in the minds and behaviors of their inhabitants. Residents are trained from birth to “unsee” and “unhear” anything that belongs to the other city, ensuring that they do not accidentally perceive or interact with spaces that are legally outside their jurisdiction. This strict adherence to division is a fundamental aspect of the novel’s social order, making transgression —whether intentional or accidental—one of the most serious crimes. Breach, a mysterious and almost omnipresent force overseeing this separation, exists to enforce the division and punish those who violate it. Its role as an omnipresent yet invisible authority mirrors the function of intelligence and surveillance agencies in divided cities. While Beszel and UI Qoma lack a tangible physical boundary, the

psychological barriers instilled in their citizens ensure compliance just as effectively as a wall or checkpoint. The physical function of borders, therefore, operates through behavior, urban planning, and law enforcement rather than through overtly visible means. While the cities have no tangible boundaries every building, every distinct curb, and every bench belonging to the "other" is an invisible checkpoint. The physical function of orders, therefore, operates through behavior, urban planning, and law enforcement rather than through overtly visible means. Those checkpoints appear to function in a very similar manner to the very physical entity of the Berlin Wall.

The more interesting aspect of the division is beyond the physical expression, it lies within the conceptual enforcement. The earlier discussed ideas of seeing"/"unseeing" and "hearing"/"unhearing" are an integral part of how citizens construct their reality. Miéville explores the power of perception in shaping social and political structures, suggesting that division is often maintained not by fear of punishment alone but through ideology and the separation of oneself from the "other". This conceptual function of borders can be seen as a parallel to the real-world divided cities, where the space is shared but split due to cultural, ideological, and religious borders like The Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Armenian quarters of Jerusalem. Those distinct communities inhabit the same urban space but live culturally, and politically different lives divided by their religion and cultural identity.

Another example of this can be seen in the religiously divided Northern Ireland. Belfast with its Protestant and Catholic neighborhoods is upheld not only by physical barriers but also by the deeply ingrained identities of its residents.

The book, however, tries to somewhat separate itself from the parallels to Berlin or Jerusalem. While in conversation it paints the comparison to "split cities" as almost offensive it

also communicates to the reader how much more rigid and unforgiving the imaginary borders of those cities are, and that there's a patriotic/ nationalist element to this separation.

"It was a conference. 'Policing Split Cities.' They had sessions on Budapest and Jerusalem and Berlin, and Beszel and Ul Qoma."

"Split cities? I'm surprised the acad let you go."

"I know, I could almost feel my freebie evaporating in a gust of other people's patriotism. My super said it wasn't just a misunderstanding of our status it was an insult to Beszel . Not wrong, I suppose. (Mieville, 2009, p 74)

The conceptual function of borders in *The City & The City* is further exemplified through the limitations placed on knowledge and communication. Ul Qoma is technologically advanced compared to Beszel, yet its residents are not permitted to share this progress with their Beszel counterparts. This restriction echoes real-world cases where divided populations experience vastly different economic and technological developments due to political circumstances, as seen in East and West Berlin before reunification. The enforced ignorance of the other city's advancements ensures that the status quo remains unchallenged and that each city retains its distinct identity.

3.2 Architecture and the sense of belonging

Architecture and urban space are often overlooked as an integral formative element of our collective and individual identities. Yet phrases such as "a Parisian" or a " New Yorker" come loaded with inferred meanings. The way a New Yorker identifies someone as a recent transplant to the city is immediately drawing an invisible border separating their "us": someone

part of their collective identity, from “Them”: someone encroaching upon it. In many ways this is illustrated with the way they navigate and respond to the urban space around them.

In *The Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch (1960) examines the phenomenon of the mental maps we create in our urban spaces to form personal experiences while navigating them. He introduces the idea of paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks as the key elements we subconsciously use to map out our urban environment and provide coherence to our experience of it. He states, “In the process of way-finding, the strategic link is the environmental image, the generalized mental picture of the exterior physical world that is held by an individual. This image is the product both of immediate sensation and of the memory of past experience, and it is used to interpret information and to guide action” (Lynch, 1960, p. 4).

On the flip side, urban settings lacking those identifiable anchors can contribute to alienation and the feeling of being lost in a crowd of others. While it’s implied that both cities have very distinctive and recognizable urban expressions, the novel also discusses places in Beszel that are so run-down that they become “no man’s land” spaces, having fallen into such deep decay that they lose all identifiers of the city they belong to. “I saw past the edges of the estate to the end of GunterStrász, between the dirty brick buildings. Trash moved in the wind. It might be anywhere. An elderly woman was walking slowly away from me in a shambling sway. She turned her head and looked at me...In my glance I took in her clothes, her way of walking, of holding herself, and looking. With a hard start, I realized that she was not on GunterStrász at all, and that I should not have seen her” (Mieville, 2009, p 12).

The recognizable elements in the city, whether they are famous landmarks or niche building typologies that express a particular time or culture, give the space a distinct visual identity. This visual identity anchors the inhabitants within it, creating a strong sense of place,

recognition and belonging (Lynch, 1960).

An interesting connection can be made between the experience of cities through Michel de Certeau's concepts in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) and the "experiencing" of cities in Mielville's *The City and the City*. Unlike the previously discussed authors, he views a reverse identity-shaping dynamic between the urban environment and the occupant. From his standpoint, it's not the environment that forms an identity, but the people with their identities engage with the environment differently resulting in the personalization of spaces. People engage in "tactics" to navigate and personalize existing spaces, resisting some imposing structures along the way. "a tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No elimination of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy. The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power" (de Certeau, 1984).

This parallels the idea of "unseeing" and "unhearing" as an act or a tactic of completely obliterating the existence of the "other"/ imposing structure out of the memory of the experience in the novel. Though the rules are rigid and unforgiving, the actual borders of the cities are only perceived (locus). While not seeing or interacting with a structure or object on the way is an impossibility, "unseeing" and "unhearing" become tactics to navigate the existence of invisible borders and one's interactions with them. One passage describes how the infrastructure of the 'other' city obstructs the view from a Beszel window—an unavoidable, daily reality that must be continuously and deliberately 'unseen'. "In the morning trains ran on a raised line meters from my window. They were not in my city. I did not of course, but I could have stared into the carriages—they were quite that close" (Mieville, 2009, p25). The subject of encroaching infrastructures picked up later in the novel, when where the protagonist commits

what he calls “a brief” crime by maintaining eye contact with the passengers of the train, who then get startled and unsee him immediately (Mieville,2009, p40).

Another instance of the complexity of “unseeing” as a tactic in a busy urban setting is presented just a few paragraphs later. “I walked by the brick arches: at the top, where the lines were, they were elsewhere, but not all of them were foreign at their bases. The ones I could see contained little shops and squats decorated in art graffiti. In Beszel it was a quiet area, but the streets were crowded with those elsewhere. I unsaw them, but it took time to pick past them all”(Mieville,2009, p27).

3.3 Architecture and Memory: The Role our Built Environment plays in the formation of our individual and collective Identities.

Urban environments can be seen as collective storage systems for our collective memory, our historical and cultural sense of belonging and thus reinforce our collective identities. Pierre Nora’s *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire (1989)*, discusses similar concepts to those of Kevin Lynch. He refers to physical elements of the built environment, such as monuments, streets, and historic districts as sites of memory and identity. The presence of old buildings and cities built layer upon layer through time gives us a connection to the past and keeps communal narratives alive (Nora, 1989). He differentiates between the concepts of history and memory in this context, placing them in almost opposing

positions to each other. “ Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past”. (Nora, 1989, p.8).

Nora’s thoughts on the opposition of history to memory can be discussed through the polar opposite attitudes towards history and memory in the two cities. Beszel, though poor and in disrepair, has a stronger connection to its past through this layering of culture and memory over time, Ui Quoma in contrast has built over its history, leaving nothing to identify the passage of time. Having destroyed the physical manifestations of history in their everyday life, they are now very focused on the idea of memory, as a preservation effort. In Ui Qoma the past is dotted on as something to be studied and thus remembered since there are very few physical reminders of it in the city itself. This is portrayed through the many archeological sites that are held to high regard in Ui Quoma, and barely exist in Beszel. “Ui Qoma, at least, with its mawkish sanctimoniousness about history (obvious guilty compensation for the pace of change, for the vulgar vigour of much of its recent development), its state archivists and export restrictions, kept its past somewhat protected” (Mieville, 2009, p.62).

Beszel on the other hand has a casual almost neglectful approach to memory which can be illustrated through the portrayal of a street of antique shops. First we’re introduced to the dominant building typology in the eclectic antique shop neighborhood, then the author dives into the trinkets and items in the antique shops, explaining how it is one of the more successful

businesses in the city, since tourists show a lot of interest in antique items with a hint of history and while Besz citizens themselves, living lives surrounded by those everyday items are more than willing to part with an heirloom or two for profit.

This relationship between architecture and collective memory is also discussed by Aldo Rossi in *The Architecture of the City* (1966). Rossi discusses the city as two different concepts: one as a large man-made, complex work of architecture and engineering and the second, a more limiting aspect as merely a collection of urban artifacts. The urban artifacts are defined by their characteristics, such as individuality, locus, and memory (Rossi, 1966, p29-33).

The city as a man-made work of architecture and engineering, is presented as an object that grows over time. He continues to discuss this over time development through the emergence of building typologies. He deemphasizes the influence of function concentrating more on need “The type developed according to both need and aspiration to beauty: a particular type was associated with a form and way of life” (Rossi, 1966, p40).

Early in the novel as you're introduced to Beszel. It is stated that over two hundred years before the events of the novel unfold, there was an influx of Muslim refugees from the Balkans, who upon arrival settled into Beszel's previously Jewish ghettos. As a result of this new cultural addition, new architectural typologies emerged, one of which is the DöplirCaffé. “One Muslim and one Jewish coffeehouse, rented side by side, each with its own counter and kitchen, halal and kosher, sharing a single name, sign, and sprawl of tables, the dividing wall removed. Mixed groups would come, greet the two proprietors, and sit together, separating on communitarian lines only long enough to order their permitted food from the relevant side, or ostentatiously from either and both in the case of freethinkers. Whether the DöplirCaffé was one establishment or two depended on who was asking: to a property tax collector, it was

always one" (Mielville, 2009, p22)

This typology reemerging from the intersection of need and tradition, is in line with Rossi's thoughts on typologies as expressions first of all of need and culture, while function is a byproduct of those and other elements at play.

The coexistence of two different, yet both Besz identities here, intertwined through need into one building typology is in stark contrast to the implied rigid separation from and the unseeing of the UI Coman side of the environment.

As an urban artifact, the cities develop layers of meaning over time. Buildings and structures accumulate meaning and become more than what their function entails. He states that the history of a city is also, in fact, the history of architecture (Rossi, 1966, p114) and the soul of the city becomes the city's history, the cities distinctive and definitive character it's memory (Rossi, 1966, p130).

Thus architecture is more than its function or its expression, it is a participant in shaping identities and citizenry.

Henry Lefebvre further elaborates on this idea in *The Production of Space* (1974). He coined the concept of a "perceived", "conceived" and "lived" space. He identifies how the environment has the potential to affect our daily experiences not only in personal but also in political and social manners.

Perceived Space is the physical and observable space that hosts social interaction, and daily routines (Lefebvre, 1974). . In the context of The City and The City the perceived spaces are fractured. Each city can only perceive its own city while willfully blocking the perception of the other. The people move through spaces that are physically adjacent, but must discipline themselves to perceive them as distinct, enacting the political and cultural

separation through habitual behaviors.

Conceived space is a highly controlled and conceptualized space, shaped by power structures that implement and sometimes enforce rules (Lefebvre, 1974). The conceived space here, the so-called “crosshatch,” is represented by the legal, political, and bureaucratic structures that uphold the division, the Breach. The crosshatching can be seen as a gigantic conceived space that spans over the lived and perceived spaces.

Lived Space is the emotional, symbolic, and subjective space — how individuals experience and assign meaning to space based on their memories, cultural identity, and personal connections (Lefebvre, 1974). The lived space is the space that creates our sense of belonging, memories, and nostalgia. A perceived space and real space might not be as rigidly separated as it seems. One might argue a perceived space becomes a lived space once it has memories, and feelings attached to it. A poeticized perceived space is transformed into a lived space. This entails that a lived space is not just the space we live in and occupy but a conglomeration of social, cultural, political, and economic issues. Cities are designed and evolve into designs that reflect our realities but also reinforce power structures through spatial hierarchies.

People of different communities, especially those marginalized, interact with those spaces in different manners, and it has the potential to shape their identities in different manners, creating the possibility of multiple subcultures and identities belonging to a generalized whole.

The city Beszel, the city where a large part of the collective “US” is the communal sense of belonging precisely through these shared layers of history and culture and

architectural expression built over the years by layering the old and the new, the local and immigrant, making both part of their collective “US”.

Martin Heidegger’s essay *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* (1951), offers a slightly varying perspective on architecture’s role in identity formation. Here, he argues that the word “dwell” has a much deeper meaning than the act of occupying space. He starts by differentiating between the words to build and to dwell, by first discussing the shared roots they have in old English and High German. But to build to dwell and to build to erect a building are fundamentally different concepts. To dwell is a fundamental way of being in space and thus being in the world (Heidegger, 1951, p 2-7).

A city works in precisely the same way as a well-designed home. We can apply the concept of dwelling, occupying the space to a city. In this context the city is more than a glorified shelter, it’s the extension of the inhabitant’s self. When our needs, and values are aligned with our surroundings it fosters a sense of authenticity and groundedness.

The inhabitants of both Ul Coma and Beszel dwell in their respective cities in very different manners, but what is of essence here is their way of dwelling, a way of avoiding unhearing and unseeing: a learned way of being in the space.

3.4 Modern Urbanization and Identity Crisis

While traditional urban environments reinforce stable identities and a sense of belonging, modern cities can often disrupt that balance. Georg Simmel, in *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1903), explores how rapid urbanization and industrialization can create a sense of

fragmentation. Cities that grow too inorganically, and too rapidly can become impersonal, fragmented. Those inhabiting those large impersonal cities develop an apathetic attitude to protect themselves against the constant sensory overload from external and internal stimuli (Simmel, 1903). The density and anonymity of urban life, the concern with economic benefits over all other needs, challenges the formation of stable interpersonal connections, formation of identities, and feeling of belonging and the leads to feelings of detachment.

Juhani Pallasma in *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* critiques modernist architecture for prioritizing visual aesthetics over multisensory experiences. He argues that contemporary buildings often lack the tactile, auditory, and olfactory richness necessary for deep emotional and identity-based connections (Pallasma, 2013). “As buildings lose their plasticity, and their connection with the language and wisdom of the body, they become isolated in the cool and distant realm of vision. With the loss of tactility, measures, and details crafted for the human body – and particularly for the hand –architectural structures become repulsively flat, sharp-edged, immaterial and unreal. The detachment of construction from the realities of matter and craft further turns architecture into stage sets for the eye, into a scenography devoid of the authenticity of matter and construction”. (Pallasma, 2013, p.29).

Unlike Beszel, Uj Qoma is better understood in the context of the last three thoughts. Beszel, while poor, decrepit, and in disrepair, has strong roots and a sense of place. It is demonstrated continuously through the description of building typologies, the layering of the city development, even the decaying structures are assigned a romanticized “having been through a lot” aura. This is also true about their changes in language where the etymology of many words and phrases leads to a layering similar to the one of the urban environment.

Uj Qoma in contrast is more modern, and technologically advanced, with dominant

building forms being sleek highrises. There's very little emotional value assigned to them, other than the feeling of grandeur and prosperity, Ui Quoman identity is rooted less in the belonging to the place and more in them not being Beszel. In their case, the unseeing is more similar to the way ghettos were unseen in big cities. It's analogous to how any inhabitant of a metropolis has experienced the subconscious unseeing of the homeless who occupy the same streets they walk on.

The City and the City among other things is a hyperbole of this phenomena brought into a sci-fi fantasy context where the only sci-fi fantasy element is the complex overlap/cross-hatching of the cities and it's aftermath in the form of absolute separation of the population. Architecture and the urban elements have a profound effect on the life of their inhabitants. They become influences that shape their identity on both an individual and collective level. They can, in many instances, act as both identifiers of one's belonging, and separation of one from the others. The separation of the collective "us" from them. Understanding this relationship between space and identity is crucial for creating environments that support not only functional living but also forge deep emotional and cultural connections.

4. Limitations and Challenges

-Subjectivity of the narrator: The novel is written in first person, the narrator though not unreliable, is full of personal biases, has a sense of cultural belonging to one of the two cities, and is unable to see the full picture, with the exception of some small transgressions.

The narrator's perspective reflects his personal relationship with the urban environment and is emotional and selective. This in itself is not a limitation as it allows one to examine the lived experience of the narrator both in his city and the other. The limitation comes in the unavailability of the reverse narrative, the experience of Ui Quoma as "theirs" and Beszel as the other.

-Risk of Overemphasizing the Reader's Experience, by focusing failing to remove personal lens of experiences while studying the experiences of the narrator

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