

Strange zones: Science fiction, fantasy & the posthuman city

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ABSTRACT

Science fiction has long been concerned with imagining cities of the future but contemporary 'posturban' cities are 'strange zones' where the future has already happened. How we live in these spaces is a challenge to accepted ideas about what it means to be human and, indeed, what it means to *have* a future. How then can critical urban theory engage with the new definitions of 'life' emerging from the biological sciences and their effects in urban space? Drawing on theories of posthumanism, this paper explores the contemporary city through a reading of China Miéville's fantasy novel *Perdido Street Station* which explores the imaginative potential of monsters and magic for developing new and resistant metropolitan mythologies.

Keywords: posthuman, posturban, radical fantasy

Program a map to display frequency of data exchange, every thousand megabytes a single pixel on a very large screen. Manhattan and Atlanta burn solid white. Then they start to pulse, the rate of traffic threatening to overload your simulation. Your map is about to go nova. Cool it down. Up your scale. Each pixel a million megabytes. At a hundred million megabytes per second, you begin to make out certain blocks in midtown Manhattan, outlines of hundred-year-old industrial parks ringing the old core of Atlanta... (Gibson, 1986: 57)

William Gibson's 1985 science fiction¹ novel *Neuromancer* introduced the city as virtual space; as a space produced in and through the 'consensual hallucination' (Gibson, 1986: 67) of what he now famously termed 'cyberspace'. Gibson's achievement, arguably, was to fictionalise a growing cultural anxiety about the place of the body in the world of advanced capitalism where the networks of flexible accumulation were threatening the dissolution of the boundaries through which space had been traditionally understood. At the same time, however, *Neuromancer* (and other novels emerging from the 'cyberpunk' stable)

inaugurated a departure from the stock SF engagement with outer space and other worlds. When Henry Case, Gibson's drug addled hacker protagonist 'fell into the prison of his own flesh' (12), SF fell back to earth and discovered that the retrofitted cyborg body, imagined by 1960s NASA projections to be the future for space travelling humans bound for extraterrestrial colonisation², was emerging as the model for late twentieth-century terrestrial ontologies.

This paper is a contribution to critical urban theory which takes as its basic premise that both bodies and the way that they inhabit urban space are profoundly affected by what Donna J Haraway has called 'the social relations of science and technology' (1991: 163). While contemporary science re-writes bodies as post-organic assemblages of viral, genetic and bacteriological data, the criteria which have previously secured a distinction between humans and other animals and humans and machines are proving increasingly unstable, to the extent that accepted cartographies of both bodies and cities are brought into doubt. As Elizabeth Grosz reminds us, bodies and cities are mutually constitutive (1995: 103 - 110). What, then, are the political possibilities of conceiving of ourselves as 'posthuman'? And how might new fictions of urban space which engage with divergent ontologies, contribute to thinking social relations differently?

SF itself has somewhat retreated from the ontological challenge posed by contemporary scientific discourse; a retreat marked by the rise of steampunk, an alternate history sub-genre that, while imaginatively re-working the history of 'people and things', nevertheless, as Stafania Forlini points out, tends towards an 'idealisation of mastery' which 'risks reinscribing the values of liberal humanism onto posthumanism' (2010: 73). It will be my argument here that a more fruitful fictional resource for working through the complexities of new concepts of both bodies and space is provided by the work of China Miéville, which dissolves the boundaries between SF and fantasy while, at the same time, self consciously engaging with the politics of lived metropolitan reality. As I will demonstrate, Miéville's work is marked by a teratology of hybridity. This enables it to be read as proposing a radical re-engagement with those things outside the conceptual map of modernity which might point the way to performing new cartographies of the urban for posthuman selves. First, however, I would like to make a case for the necessity of thinking the space of the city through a posthuman frame of reference.

Strange Zones

Neil Brenner argues that contemporary economic and social conditions require a re-thinking of- 'the institutional conditions of possibility for ... critical social theory' (2009: 205) alongside an understanding of the necessity for its "urbanistic' reorientation' (206). Brenner offers four propositions for how the methodologies and orientations of critical urban theory should be broadly understood. Consistent with the Frankfurt School approach to the analysis of culture under prevailing economic and social conditions, critical urban theory is concerned with developing abstract arguments which can elucidate 'the nature of urban processes under capitalism', coupled with an understanding of these processes as expressions of power relations under specific historical conditions. These techniques are brought to bear on critiquing and rejecting 'market-driven forms of urban analysis' and excavating radical urban forms 'that are latent, yet systematically suppressed, within contemporary cities' (204). It is this last with which I am particularly concerned and which cyberpunk explored, concerned, as it was, with the zones where 'the street finds its own uses for things' (Gibson, 1995: 215). But cyberpunk's often problematic relationship with the flesh and its material needs³ tended towards an accordance with the idea of the posthuman as only ever intelligible through a disassociation between the mind and body. As I will demonstrate, the latent possibilities of the city can be explored for their potential to expose the radical promise of the posthuman only if we take into account the way that bodies, and their structuring through scientific discourses, are fundamental to the way that the urban has been understood and that the social reproduction of the human is an effect of cognitive mapping produced, and sustained, by the arrangements of urban space.

Returning to Gibson's invitation to 'program a map...' we can see that, as 'certain blocks in midtown Manhattan' and 'hundred-year-old industrial parks' come into view, the city as a recognised centre of administrative and political power recedes and is replaced by a series of what Giorgio Agamben calls 'strange zones... where it is impossible to decide what is private and what is public' (2008). Strange zones emerge where public space has been sold into corporate ownership; where the open spaces and streets of the city are controlled by surveillance and rules of access. They are also the zones that Gibson identifies where accepted distinctions between public and private no longer make sense because the non-presence of electronic communication has superseded the presence of the body as a determinant of urban organisation. This gives rise to what the architectural theorist Anthony Vidler calls 'posturbanism' (1992: 177), a term also employed by Sarah Chaplin

and Eric Holding (2002) to refer to the hyperrealisation of urban space or its production as abstract space (Lefebvre, 1974). In this sense, part of what Agamben calls the 'group of dispositifs' which construct urban subjectivities are dependent on media representations which draw on mythical histories and affective characterisations to attract tourism and investment. Posturbanism signifies the passing of modernist utopian projections which built monuments to a future that would never be and thus the end of a particular form of urban anticipation, often exemplified by SF scenarios. Thus, cyberpunk can be seen to have marked the passing of what Jean Baudrillard calls SF's 'pantographic exuberance' (1991) and a recognition that the posturban condition required a re-imagining of metropolitan social space.

Agamben refers to the posturban city as 'metropolis ... a space where a huge process of creation of subjectivity is taking place'. It is this process which Agamben believes we need to understand, not on the level of economic or social structures but 'the ontological level or Spinozian level that puts under question the subjects' ability/power to act'. For Agamben, metropolis has a specific meaning. He uses the term to differentiate between the ancient Greek *polis* or political city and 'the new urban fabric' which emerged with the shift to modern biopower or governmentality as defined by Michel Foucault. In other words, the question is to be posed in terms of how contemporary urban forms (including, but not necessarily restricted to, architecture) produce and are produced by the action of discourse on bodies and how techniques which characterise urban life are internalised in the process of subject formation. Vidler refers to the relationship between the 'real city and the utopian city' as 'mediated by a mental map that includes the real in order to imagine the unreal, the ideal, or simply that which has to be remembered' (1992: 179). My response to Agamben's call for an analysis of metropolis as 'a dispositif or a group of dispositifs' (2008) therefore is to explore this 'mental map' as it is produced through scientific discourse; specifically the discourses of the biological sciences which, as I will demonstrate, have had significant effects in the mapping of urban space. This will enable me to make a case for the continued relevance of the biological sciences in the discursive production of metropolitan subjectivities before proceeding to a reading of one of Miéville's novels which, I believe, offers us a mythology through which we might recognise the political significance of a posthuman urbanism.

Body, Space & Modernity

In *Security, Territory, Population*, the fourth volume of his *Lectures at the Collège de France*, Foucault reflects on the 'art of government' as it emerged in the 18th century. It is here that he details what he calls a 'transfer' or 'shift to the outside' (2007: 117 & 118). This 'shift' is the move which largely characterises his work. He demonstrates how the forms and knowledges of the disciplinary institutions ('army, hospitals, schools, and prisons' 116) become central to the structures of governmentality. It is the shift from the inside to the outside of these institutions or, perhaps, to an analysis of the outside with reference to the inside which enables him to expose their function in what he calls 'technologies of power'. This is a process of 'grasping them at the point where they constitute techniques with operative value in multiple processes' (n119). In other words, it is not enough to understand the internal disciplines, procedures and arrangements of institutions but how these function in the circulation of power which regulates populations and which, ultimately, produces and constrains subjectivization.

I want to turn to an examination of two urban institutions which are significant for understanding the biopolitics of contemporary bodies; the hospital and the museum, specifically the museum of natural history which Tony Bennett has explored at length in his recent book *Pasts Beyond Memory* (2004). The hospital, of course, was brought to our attention as a defining institution in the production of the modern subject by Foucault in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963). Foucault's achievement was to demonstrate how the epistemology of the clinic becomes a biopolitical instrument through the incorporation of medical knowledge into a politics of health that, since the eighteenth century, has produced an understanding of pathology as a visible sign, within the body, of sicknesses originating in the organisation of the population as a whole. Disease thus becomes something that can be mapped as a distribution of pathologies specific to the organic structure of the body, synergistic with the arrangement of bodies in social space. More recently (2009), Sven-Olov Wallenstein has shown how what he calls 'the trajectory of architectural modernity' (4) is coextensive with these developments. As he demonstrates, the discourses of architectural modernity receive their legitimacy from their imbrication with the discourse of modern medicine and its concomitance with the development of the hospital as what he calls the 'curing machine' (32). What is significant here is that, towards the latter half of the eighteenth century, the classical Vitruvian model of the body as the ordering principle of built space gave way to a set of principles mandated by the techniques associated with the curing machine⁴ so that, from this point on, 'architecture is

no longer *like* a body ... but acts *upon* the body' (25).

In the same historical period, museums of natural history were responding to Augustus Pitt Rivers' 'typological method' for the display of archaeological and paleontological artefacts. Pitt Rivers' recommendations were based in an understanding of the museum as an educational space which would instruct populations in their developmental history. Pitt Rivers' achievement was to provide for what Bennett calls a 'common grammar' (2004: loc 1744) which could be applied to museum displays in diverse contexts. This common grammar was founded in an understanding of evolutionary artefacts as accounting for and evidencing a progressive development in the spheres of both nature and culture. Artefacts from extant cultures deemed 'primitive' could be displayed as monuments to an excavated human past, alongside archaeological and geological fossils as testament to the ascendancy of white European culture and white European biology (Bennett, 2004: loc 730). With the rise of psychoanalysis in the early twentieth-century, a discourse emerged which equated the presence of the disordered unconscious within the ordering of the psyche with the presence of the disordered and uncontrolled primitive within the ordering of both the body and social space. The past here was thought to survive as an atavistic presence in the lower classes in the same way that the physical appearance of non European bodies was held to indicate a lower stage in the evolutionary hierarchy (loc 2296 - 2301). From this accrued a mapping of urban space in terms of surfaces and depths. In this scheme as Stallybrass and White (1986) have pointed out, the city was mapped according to the distributed organic hierarchy of the body handed down from the Enlightenment. The architecture of state institutions, knowledge production and the dwellings of the middle class represented the head, while the areas of working class inhabitation were associated with the organs of defecation and urination.

'[W]hilst the 'low of the bourgeois body becomes unmentionable, we hear an ever increasing garrulity about the *city's* 'low' – the slum, the rag-picker, the prostitute, the sewer – the 'dirt' which is 'down there'. In other words, the axis of the body is transcoded through the axis of the city, and whilst the bodily 'low' is 'forgotten,' the city's low becomes a site of obsessive preoccupation, a preoccupation which is itself intimately conceptualized in terms of discourses of the body ... To deconstruct the symptomatic language of the bourgeois body it is necessary to reconstruct the mediating topography of the city which always-already inscribes relations of class,

gender and race (Stallybrass & White, 1986: 145, emphasis in original).

This mediating topography imparted a medically informed visibility to the city which could be treated as responsive to the ministrations of the curing machine with prescriptions for the control of infections at the level of both the social and organic bodies. At the same time, a kind of depth cartography emerged which understood the city as, like the unconscious, harbouring uncontrollable, atavistic elements which could be made visible by the expert gaze of the social scientist. This sense of a 'primitive strata' existing 'beneath' (Bennett, 2004: loc 2301) the rational order of the city served to legitimate social hierarchies and their dispersal in cityspace in terms which appealed implicitly to the discourses of evolution, progress and the organic. Hence, the 'urban ecology' of the Chicago School which, in the early 20th century, according to Edward Soja 'instrumentally abstracted cityspace out from the geohistory (and critique) of industrial capitalism, reconceptualized it as pseudo-biological organism, and liberally universalized its morphology as part of a natural-cum-social, or social Darwinian, process of "organic" evolution' (2000: 86).

The cognitive cartography of the city then is mired in bourgeois anthropocentric assumptions anchored by significant architectural sites of knowledge production such as the hospital and museum. It is the residual effects of this monumental humanism, emerging out of the colonialist patriarchy of the nineteenth-century that sustains the individualism of the contemporary neoliberal subject in the continued spectacularisation of urban space and the reproduction of consumer identities. At the same time, there is a tension between these discourses and the way that the body is emerging as a variable field of possibilities, ushered in by changes in the discourses of the biological and medical sciences. 'The body, indeed', writes Anthony Vidler, 'has become its own exterior, as its cell structure has become the object of spatial modelling that maps its own sites of immunological battle and describes the forms of its antibodies.

'... even as the spaces of exile, asylum, confinement, and quarantine of the early modern period were continuously spilling over into the "normal" space of the city, so the "pathological" spaces of today menace the clearly marked out limits of the social order. In every case "light space" is invaded by the figure of "dark space," on the level of the body in the form of epidemic and uncontrollable disease, and on the level of

the city in the person of the homeless. In other words, the realms of the organic space of the body and the social space in which the body lives and works, domains clearly distinguished in the nineteenth century ... no longer can be identified as separate' (Vidler, 1992: 168).

Vidler's 'dark space' refers, in architectural terms, to the 'hidden' spaces of the city or what must be brought to light or made transparent by the panoptical ordering of space. As he points out, 'space as threat, as harbinger of the unseen, operates as medical and psychical metaphor for all the possible erosions of bourgeois bodily and social well being' (167). The extension of the hospital as curing machine and its effect on architectural discourse can thus be seen as an attempt to impart the illumination of the dark spaces of the body made possible by the medical sciences to the understanding and organisation of the city. Dark space, I would argue, is also what shadows the project of the historical sciences as they attempt to make evolutionary change visible as both progressive and differentiated across a typology of species. Ironically however, the science that has attempted to illuminate the dark spaces at the borders of these categories is currently giving rise to new anxieties founded in concepts derived from the protocols of data exchange and ideas of infection and disease founded in the language of virality (Sampson, 2012) derived from digital processing. The discovery that disease can infect across species is a result of the sequencing of human and other animal genomes and computer modelling applied to such previously diverse phenomena as the migration of birds and bacteriology while, as Melinda Cooper has pointed out biotechnology has, for some time, been the primary focus of speculative capital with the result that 'life becomes, literally, annexed within capitalist processes of accumulation' (Cooper, 2008, loc 368). It is not now so much a case of the mapping of the spatial logics of the organic onto city space which, in turn, produces metropolitan subjectivities distributed and located according to the maps constructed by the discourses of the evolutionary and medical sciences. Posturban subjectivities emerge out of the way that these discourses have responded to the kinds of immaterial labour and disembodied sociality promoted by the ascendancy of information space so that, as the body becomes its own 'outside', dark space is what emerges from errors in the source code or the new vulnerability of bodies to re-coding either by viral infiltration or genetic modification. It is thus, also, the space from where monsters emerge, a point to which I will return later. For now, what is important is that the body has become a virtual space

with all that that implies for understanding it in terms of latent potentialities.

From Human to Posthuman

As I have demonstrated, the subjectivities produced out of the material conditions of metropolitan existence are deeply imbricated within the architectural structures of the city which contain the conceptual arrangements of knowledge in a form which mandates the terms under which it is possible to think the self. Knowledge here should be understood to refer to the tripartite of life, labour and language which Foucault identifies as the founding discourses of modern thought where the descriptions of 'life' emerging from the biological sciences are caught up in the determinations of the body as a locus of economic forces and its reproduction in the circulation of the spoken word and its visual representations (Foucault, 1970: 250 - 300). As Bennett's *Pasts Beyond Memory* clearly illustrates the 'memory machine' (2004: loc 304) of the natural history museum is a key mechanism for the dissemination of these knowledges. By attending to the museum as, like the hospital, a significant architectural monument which acts upon the body, I have shown how it contributes to the limiting of possible bodies through a spatial arrangement of artefacts as a sequence of development which arrives at something called 'human' through strategic exclusions and taxonomic differentiations. The museum can thus be held to represent the sedimentation of knowledge within culture as a form of memory⁵. It is, at the same time, a text which inscribes the body according to a spatial understanding which traverses the globe to incorporate both colonised others and other species as supporting evidence for an ontological hierarchy.

Posthuman thought then emerges at the point at which this text is being re-written by gene mapping and its associated commercial ventures which provide the founding discourse for new practices of bodily inscription and biopolitical differentiation in the twenty-first century. It was an understanding of this change to a post-organic concept of corporeality that enabled Donna Haraway to announce, in 1985, that the cyborg should be the model for future political subjectivities and what prompted N Katharine Hayles (1999) to announce that we had become posthuman. Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto' was written in response to the rise of the neoliberal world order and the concomitant 'translation of the world into a problem in coding' (164). Arguing against prevailing trends in feminist thought which sought to re-establish a naturally derived femininity as a platform from which to claim an

affinity between feminist and environmental politics, Haraway's manifesto was a call for feminists to recognise that the epistemological shift ushered in by the informational paradigm effectively deconstructs gender binaries. She saw very clearly how the technocapitalist reconstruction of the world demanded a response adequate to address the imbrication of bodies in networked and cyberspatial economic and social systems and the 'confusion of boundaries' (150) that results from our encounter with the 'sunshine-belt machines' (153) of the late twentieth and now twenty-first centuries.

Thus, like the proletariat, the cyborg emerges out of a historical moment when the relations of production are effecting a revolution in domestic and working life and calls for a radical revision in what counts as political action. In other words, while contemporary conditions provide for the possibility of posthuman thought, its oppositional force is realised through the way in which it exposes the myths which have sustained the human as an ontological category and the possibilities that it offers for re-thinking the meanings which have attached to it in order to effect what Braidotti refers to as 'inscrib[ing] the contemporary subject in the conditions of its own historicity' (2013: 189). Braidotti's post-anthropocentric nomadic methodology is highly pertinent to my argument for posturban subjectivities as only intelligible through a posthuman frame of reference because she emphasises the way that posthuman thought must necessarily concern itself with what might be called, to extend my use of Vidler's concept, the dark space of enlightenment ideas; the 'latent or systematically suppressed' that can respond to an informed and perverse re-reading. This involves, among other things, reading scientific texts as fictions of science; that is, as discursively constructed documents with significant affective resonances across time and space, attentive to their imbrication with other texts. I have begun this work by exploring how the cognitive cartography of the city is mired in anthropocentric assumptions anchored by architectural sites of knowledge production such as the hospital and museum.

What remains, then, is to proceed to an examination of what, under these conditions, 'posthuman bodies can do' (Braidotti, 2013: 99) specifically in the context of urban space. The following reading of China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* (hereafter *PSS*), the first volume of his Bas-Lag trilogy, will proceed with the awareness that memory and imagination are co-extensive in the sense that, as Braidotti puts it '[m]emories need the

imagination to empower the actualization of virtual possibilities in the subject' (167) and thus that Bennett's pasts *beyond* memory can be productively re-imagined through de-centred posthuman fictions of evolutionary science. At the same time, as I will demonstrate, this produces a host of what Braidotti calls 'creative figurations', playful embodiments of potential posthuman ontologies, (163) of which Haraway's cyborg is but one example, which function, through defamiliarisation, to collapse the grids of humanist typological categorisations. However, it will first be necessary to briefly explore how the critical potential of Miéville's writing emerges from the way in which it elides genre constraints.

Fictions of Science

It has long been recognised that SF writing is not *about* the future but is an extrapolation from known conditions into an imagined space, often beyond terrestrial horizons, which provides for (often didactically so) a critique of the social and cultural moment in which the work is produced. Traditionally, the genre has concerned itself with the social effects of scientific ideas, developed beyond their theorisation and applied to everyday life. Indeed, SF criticism, in its traditional form, has been concerned primarily with establishing the scientific and political credentials of the genre, with reading SF texts as utopian or dystopian documents for social change and with distinguishing it from fantasy literature⁶. However, as Miéville himself points out, '[t]o the extent that SF claims to be based on 'science', and indeed on what is deemed 'rationality', it is based on capitalist modernity's ideologically projected self justification; not some abstract/ideal 'science', but capitalist science's bullshit about itself' (2009: 240). Miéville's argument is that the distinction between SF and fantasy, in which fantasy functions as the irrational Other to SF's extrapolative rigour is, as he says, 'intensely ideological' (239). What he calls, borrowing from Carl Freedman, the 'cognition effect' of SF is, as he points out, derived not from recognition of its scientific accuracy (indeed, it is often wildly inaccurate in terms of established scientific facts) but from the logic of cognition itself. 'To the extent that the cognition effect is about cognition', he writes, 'it is precisely *about* it, *about* a putatively logical way of thinking, not a function of it' (239, his emphasis). The cognition effect, 'surrenders the terrain of supposed conceptual logic and rigour to the whims and diktats of a cadre of 'expert' author-functions ... a translation into meta-literary and aggrandising terms of the very layer of technocrats often envisaged in SF and its cultures as society's best hope' (239). It is possible to argue, of course, that it is the

cognition effect that enables the genre, in its best form, to establish a link between 'capitalist science's bullshit about itself' and its most damaging social effects⁷.

Nevertheless, the terms under which SF has been distinguished from fantasy point to the hegemony of a particular and historical cognitive orthodoxy, derived from science itself, which conditions the sense in which it can be said to defamiliarise and hence the sense in which it functions as critique.

However, as Miéville notes, the boundaries between SF and fantasy are continuing to erode 'at an accelerating pace' (244). In the space left by the death of what Jean Baudrillard has called the 'good old' (1991) SF imagination, what seems to be beginning to emerge is a literature which is itself concerned with the erosion of boundaries; with 'the interdigitations of human, machine, nonhuman animal or alien, and their mutants in relation to the intimacies of bodily exchange and mental communication' (Haraway, 1992: 378). In *PSS* Miéville utilises the preoccupation 'with limits, with limiting categories, and with their projected dissolution' (Jackson, 1981: 48) characteristic of fantasy literature to structure what emerges as a new urban realism for a posthuman world.

The Hybrid Zone

New Crobuzon is a steam powered metropolis, 'a huge plague pit, a morbidic city' (2000: 9) and Perdido Street Station is its hub, a 'knot of architectural tissue where the fibres of the city congeal...' (22). Combining the retro-futurism of steampunk with a Lovecraftian sensibility, the novel presents an alternative evolutionary history in which 'xenian' (13) races, apparently descended from birds, insects and amphibians co-exist with humans in an uneasy cosmopolitanism along with 'remade' (15) - citizens whose bodies have been technologically adapted, often in disturbing ways, either as punishment for transgression or to serve the needs of industry or crime. Hadas Elder-Aviram likens New Crobuzon to Dickens' London in that it is, in Foucauldian terms, a 'carceral city ... an extension of the panoptical prison to the entire fabric of urban space' (2012: 268) which is nevertheless, 'a metropolis that has undergone a process of panoptical decentralization, which has concomitantly produced spaces that undermine its power' (269). Drawing on Foucault's concept of heterotopology, New Crobuzon is, for Elder-Aviram, a 'heterotopia of deviation' (283); a labyrinth which, like Dickens' London, is mapped by an 'urban dynamic of diffusive disciplinary power and heterotopic spaces of

subversion' (269).

The story involves a renegade scientist, Isaac Dan der Grimnebulin, his xenian girlfriend, Lin, who sculpts with her own body fluids, a bird-man 'garuda' (30), Yagharek, who has lost his wings as a punishment for 'choice-theft' (48), Derkhan, a human woman and political activist and an assortment of characters, human, xenian, re-made and self-aware 'constructs' (7) - steampunk machine intelligences. While Isaac, Lin, Yagharek and Derkhan are hunted by the institutions of state control and their crimelord associates, they are aided by a selection of mercenaries, pirates and vagabonds, as well as the 'Construct Council' (451) a massive concatenation of junked machine parts which intends to harness Isaac's expertise for its own purposes and The Weaver, a giant dimension traversing spider-human who communicates in Dadaesque 'dream-poetics' (333) and whose only interest in the fate of New Crobuzon is in its function as a component in the aesthetics of the 'worldweave' (334).

Fredric Jameson has described Miéville's oeuvre as 'Radical Fantasy' (2002) which is perhaps the most apt description in that, while it utilises the 'paraxial' (Jackson, 1981: 19) conventions of the genre it does so in order to self-consciously promote a radical politics, rather than, as so much fantasy literature can be seen to do, ultimately re-assert the values of bourgeois social realism. It also falls under the description of 'The Weird', the title of a collection edited by Ann and Jeff VanderMeer to which Miéville wrote the afterword. 'The fact of the Weird', he writes, 'is the fact that the worldweave is ripped and unfinished. Moth-eaten, ill-made. And that through the little tears, from behind the ragged ... edges ..., things are looking at us... Modernity weaves a moth-eaten cloth, and it is the final instars of those bad eaters that watch us through rifts their maggoty baby selves made' (2011: 1115).

The fact of the Weird, then, is in its dealings with monstrosity; with that which cannot be encompassed by modernity's taxonomic scheme, writ large in New Crobuzon both in the imaginative hybridity of its inhabitants and the spaces through which the central protagonists of *PSS* navigate towards the dénouement: sewers, a room under an abattoir, abandoned buildings, a dump for discarded machinery, a hospice for the terminally ill, the haunts of the criminal underworld, squats, interdicted zones and the great gormenghastian roofscape of Perdido Street Station itself. Miéville revels in the

monstrosity of the a-rational, 'intensely interested', as Christopher Palmer points out, 'in the excremental and abject, in that aspect of bodily life (... of both cities and sentient creatures) that issues in spit and ooze' (2009: 226). Abjection and monstrosity are the lurking otherness which threaten the boundaries of the modern self and which, as I will argue, emerge through the text of *PSS* to subvert the cartographies which establish both the limits of both the human and its metropolitan analogue.

Aside from Perdido Street Station itself, a specific site of New Crobuzon's orientation is 'The Ribs... Leviathan shards of yellowing ivory thicker than the oldest trees... bursting away from each other, sweeping up in a curved ascent until, more than a hundred feet above the earth, looming now over the roofs of the surrounding houses, they curl... sharply back towards each other' forming an 'ancient chest cavity'. The Ribs are a mystery that science has been unable to penetrate, not least because they, and the backbone with 'vertebrae the size of houses' to which they are attached are a living fossil; 'half-exhumed bones' which are the site of '[s]omething baleful' (Miéville, 2000: 32), resisting all attempts to develop or excavate the area. Nevertheless, they dominate the New Crobuzon cityscape and enable something like a paleontology of the text; an originary leviathan structuring an argument for monstrosity as inherent to, and the defining principle behind, the way that *PSS* undermines the hegemony of 'natural' histories.

As Evelleen Richards has noted, monstrosity is a significant idea in evolutionary theory. For pre-Darwinian anatomists, supposed organic malformation or monstrosities among higher animals were 'arrests of development' (Richards, 1994: 380), indicating atavism (particularly if the organ was seen to resemble that of one of the so called 'lower' animals). Teratology thus lent itself to racial politics in that it could be enrolled to account for visible racial difference as evidence of a developmental hierarchy on the one hand or evidence of racial dimorphism on the other. Darwin's 'domestication of the monster' largely disproved this idea in that he demonstrated that sudden phylogenetic anomalies would only survive if propagated by artificial selection. Nevertheless, he insisted that major structural changes were to be explained by the gradual accumulation, over time, of minute changes. What is interesting here is that he insisted that this finding - "baffles the idea of revolution" in nature as in "government" and "institutions" (410). Monsters, then, or what Richards calls 'political anatomies' are

outside the natural laws of both biological and social change (405).

As Miéville himself has stated 'I'm in this fucking business for the monsters'⁸ and it is the monsters, the political anatomies, 'looking at us... watch[ing] us through rifts' which, I would suggest, may provide the most hopeful myths for restructuring our relationship to metropolis. For instance, one of the most extraordinary monsters in *PSS* is Mr Motley, the crime overlord, a study in teratology: 'Scraps of skin and fur and feathers swung as he moved; tiny limbs clutched; eyes rolled from obscure niches; antlers and protrusions of bone jutted precariously; feelers twitched and mouths glistened. Many-coloured skeins of skin collided. A cloven hoof thumped gently against the wood floor' (Miéville, 2000: 42). Motley is the impossible made possible. The provenance of his 'mongrel physiognomy' is never explained. Within the text, he is emblematic of the abjected excess of New Crobuzon's controlling regime; what it seeks to deny but must employ to maintain its precarious grip on the city's inhabitants. The intimation is that, like the Construct Council, he is a complex hybrid thrown up by what the city discards; its drug users, petty thieves, thugs and extortionists. But it is Motley who comes closest to articulating the totality of New Crobuzon. As he tells Lin, the khepri sculptress (human, but whose head is a scarab beetle) whom he has employed to fashion his likeness and whom he later tortures and imprisons, 'I believe this to be the fundamental dynamic. Transition. The point where one thing becomes another. It is what makes you, the city, the world, what they are... The zone where the disparate become part of the whole. The hybrid zone' (41).

The hybrid zone, then, is where monsters emerge, and Motley's analysis here corresponds with Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's concept of monstrosity as characterising the potential new political formation emerging out of what they call 'multitude', derived from Spinoza's reading of the human body 'composed of many individuals of different natures, each of which is highly composite', 'and yet', they write, this multitude of multitudes is able to act in common as one body' (2005: 190). Multitude emerges out of the breakdown of 'traditional social forms' (191) and is the as-yet-unrealised potential 'latent and implicit in our social being' (221) which, they contend, will be realised through the becoming common of disparate forms of post-Fordist labour through 'the communicative and collaborative networks that constantly produce and reproduce social life' (355). Although it is possible to criticise Hardt and Negri for a

somewhat overblown idealism given, for example, the rise of new nationalisms⁹ what is relevant here is that their concept of monstrosity emerges precisely in the zone of transition where old social forms are breaking down at the same time as the concept of 'human' that underpinned those social forms is brought into doubt. Hardt and Negri devote little space to science and technology but it is the challenge to Darwinist principles brought about by such things as transgenics, cloning and the potential applications of nanotechnology which are more relevant here, I would argue, than the dubious realisation of community through 'immaterial labour' (183). Motley's 'hybrid zone' is the rift in Modernity's 'moth-eaten cloth', through which political anatomies are revealed, forcing us 'to enter a new world in which we can only understand ourselves as monstrous' (Hardt & Negri, 2005: 194).

Indeed, it is what Haraway calls the 'promises' of monsters (1992) that largely enables posthumanism to emerge as a significant critical perspective for thinking a new politics of space. Haraway borrows from Vietnamese-American film maker and feminist theorist Trinh Minhha the notion of "'inappropriate/d others.'" to account for the 'differential artifactualism' which gives birth to promising monsters. As she says, 'To be inappropriate/d is not to fit in the taxon, to be dislocated from the available maps specifying kinds of actors and kinds of narratives, not to be originally fixed by difference' (1992: 299). The 'taxon' and 'available maps' here stand nicely for the relationship between biology and space where the spatial logics of the taxonomic differentiation of species and their environmental location maps geographies of organic distribution which correspond to the embodied metropolis, as well as its abject others. Haraway's 'companion monsters' (300) are very real artefacts of contemporary technoscientific production, as well as differential myths which write inappropriate/d others as political actors that necessarily confound taxonomies and thus the compulsion to specify bodies according to location in spatial hierarchies. As Mr Motley tells Lin, gesticulating at his own body 'with a monkey's paw ... You're still interested in what *was* and how it went *wrong*. *This is not error or absence or mutancy: this is image and essence...*' (Miéville, 2000: 115, emphasis in original).

I take Motley's denial of wrongness here as an injunction to read *PSS* from a posthuman perspective. Significant also is Isaac's status as a renegade scientist, his obsession with harnessing 'crisis energy' (Miéville, 2000: 170) and the way that the text

utilises 'thaumaturgy' (66) or magic, a stock theme of fantasy fiction but here employed as an analogy for the relationship between biological science and governmentality. 'Bio-thaumaturgy', we are told, '...was a polite way to describe an expertise one of whose uses was to tear at and recreate flesh ... to manipulate it within the limits dictated only by imagination' (173). The re-made, nevertheless, are promising monsters in that they represent both the way that bodies receive the co-ordinates of their corporeality as an effect of techniques which gain their legitimacy through economic and scientific discourses as well as the potential that this offers for their re-imagination (as hinted at in the character of Jack Half-a-Prayer, leader of the 'fReemade', 642). But it is the trope of crisis as a productive force which marks the contribution of *PSS* to thinking the city differently and thinking ourselves as agents of strategic change.

As Isaac explains it, crisis energy is an inherent property of matter, something latent in the tendency of things to 'turn themselves inside out'. '[T]hings', as he says, 'are in crisis just as part of *being*' (170, emphasis in original). The logic here is that what might be called the transition zone between one state and another can be tapped for the reserves of energy that it contains. In the case of Yagharek, whose flightless plight prompts Isaac to experiment with crisis energy, he theorises that wingless flight can be achieved by harnessing the energy released by the crisis state between flying and falling. However, Isaac's theory is tested, not by Yagharek but by the crisis that threatens the city itself when one of his experiments accidentally releases the vampiric 'slake-moths' (358) to wreak havoc in New Crobuzon. Isaac and his companions effectively save the city by using Perdido Street Station as a kind of lightning conductor to channel the crisis energy and lure the slake-moths to their doom.

Of course a straightforward reading of crisis energy in a symbolic sense would be as a simple metaphor for that which foments revolution but, in the context of New Crobuzon it takes on a different meaning; one that is consistent with what Evan Calder Williams calls 'apocalypse'. As he writes, 'apocalypse is a surging into the managed, ordered world of differentiation (which is to say a world in which oppositions are fixed) of all that is not. ...The apocalyptic describes not just the spilling forth of the unseen, but also of the undifferentiated matter of the possible, of what could have been and was not, of what neither came to be nor went away' (Calder Williams, 2011: 5)

By both the logic internal to the text and its function as a fantastic other to the mundane world of its readership, *PSS* is precisely a 'surging into the managed, ordered world of differentiation' and New Crobuzon an apocalyptic city. 'What is [the city]', asks Calder Williams, 'if not the battleground of apocalypse, keeping below its surface and off to the sides all the undifferentiated that allegedly cannot come to light?' (158). The apocalyptic pleasure of New Crobuzon is in the fact that it is in crisis; groaning under the weight of holding back the surge of the undifferentiated which it produces, constantly, as part of the process through which control is asserted. What might then be called posthuman apocalypse is the revelation of political anatomies, 'hidden in plain sight' (Calder Williams, 2011: 5) through work, like Miéville's, which can be read against the grain of modernist spatial orderings of both bodies and the spaces that they occupy¹⁰.

The city then is where the posthuman finds its conceptual home; where the spatial logics that have dictated the organising principles of bodies and their being in the world are brought into crisis by the recognition that what the human looks like, how it functions and what it will become is dependent on how you program the map. A posthuman urban politics then needs to take account of what lurks in the dark spaces of the map if it is understood as a repository of memory which is also a virtual space through which new actualisations of embodiment can emerge. If the city is understood as a machine for subjectivisation, the emergence of the posturban and the way in which it, ironically, destabilises the authoritative discourses which have largely produced it, is the moment of apocalypse through which promising monsters may emerge. Conceiving of ourselves as posthuman and as therefore, as Haraway describes it, 'resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity' (1991: 151) is a step towards claiming the city on behalf of subjects that have the 'power/ability to act' because they are attuned to the crisis energy produced by the tension between an anxious residual humanism and a posthuman becoming. Reading *PSS* through a posthuman lens enables us to examine the pleasure of playing in the interstices of modernity's moth-eaten cloth, attentive to the mutated meanings and monstrous becomings which emerge from the strange zones of metropolitan space.

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Notes

- 1 Hereafter 'SF'.
- 2 Drs Manfred E Clynes and Nathan S Kline's original paper for the September 1960 edition of *Astronautics* is republished in Chris Hables Gray's *Cyborg Handbook* (2000).
- 3 Henry Case evinces 'a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. The body was meat' (1986: 12) and the vulnerability of 'jacked-in' cyborg bodies is often stressed in Gibson's work as well as in other works of the cyberpunk genre. In film, the Wachowski's *Matrix* trilogy (1999-2003) emphasises the danger to bodies rendered inert by immersion in cyberspace.
- 4 I use machine here in the sense proposed by Agamben when he reads Foucault's concept of 'apparatus' as 'first of all a machine that produces subjectifications, and only as such is it also a machine of governance'. (2009: 20)
- 5 Bernard Stiegler has done much to advance our understanding of the relationship between biological and cultural evolution in developing his concept of 'epiphylogenetic memory' (2009: 4, emphasis in original). Arguably, what he achieves is a re-writing of the theory of evolution in such a way as to deconstruct the mythology of cultural production as an expression of an inherent humanness. Consequently, he is able to demonstrate that cultural memory, as technologically inscribed, *at the same time*, inscribes the species. Or, as he puts it 'what we would call "human nature" ... consists only in its technicity, in its denaturalization' (1994: 148).
- 6 Darko Suvin's 'On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre' (1972) is generally credited with establishing the parameters of the genre in opposition to fairy tale or fantasy. 'SF retrogressing into fairy-tale' he says, 'is committing creative suicide'. But he describes fantasy as '[e]ven less congenial to SF' (375).
- 7 For instance, the 1970s and 1980s was a productive period for feminist SF which utilised the technique of extrapolation to critique scientifically determined gender distinctions. For a discussion of this see eg., Lefanu (1988), Armit (1990) Wolmark (1993), Shaw (2000)
- 8 http://www.believmag.com/issues/200504/?read=interview_Mi%C3%A9ville
- 9 See Tom Nairn's review in the *London Review of Books* for a critique which points to the ahistoricism of their argument (<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v27/n09/tom-nairn/make-for-the-boondocks>).
- 10 Calder Williams identifies the apocalyptic in popular culture through what he calls 'salvagepunk: the post-apocalyptic vision of a broken and dead world, strewn with both the dream residues and real junk of the world that was, and shot through with the hard work of salvaging, repurposing, détourning, and scrapping' (2011: 19). One of his examples of the salvagepunk aesthetic is Richard Lester's 1969 comedy film *The Bed-Sitting Room* which Miéville references in one of his more recent novels for young adults, *Railsea* (2012). Miéville borrows images from the film, like the escalator to nowhere which drops its passengers into a blasted wasteland and Mrs Ethel Shroake, in the film the last post-apocalyptic Queen of England and, in the novel, a salvagepunk pioneer.

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