*Notes from Orciny*

*by Matthew Stock*

*Orciny ... it's a sort of folk tale,'  I told Thacker, Mahalia's mother nodded; her father looked away. "It is not so really like the Breach, Mrs. Geary. Breach is real. A power. But Orciny is…" I hesitated. P.98* 2:40 – 2:47

Myth, truth, edges, exercise bikes, sea walls, envelopes, old banks, Geneva, Murder, power, control, the equator, the city and the city, unseeing, and China Mieville. What do all these categories, artefacts, people and places have in common? They all have a relationship to and take their functions from borders. More specifically **(from)** the way bodies are affected via the practices of power and control upon which borders depend.

I take as my starting point the ideas and concepts thrown up for debate from the fictional novel 'The City and The City" by China Mieville, to enable me to explore the various functions mentioned above by focusing on how contemporary artists have utilised similar techniques and modes of working to **interrogate** issues surrounding the movement and suspension of the body. In relation to borders both real and imaginary, and the violence they engender.

Written in 2009 Mieville's complex novel is a murder mystery set within two cities called Ul Qoma and Beszel a murdered body is found in one city but, as revealed later, is perpetrated in another. Detectives in both cities combine to find the killer.

With a nod to Italo Calvino's invisible cities, the novel uses many familiar tropes; mystery, corruption, and alternatives realities to enable debates around truth, myth, borders, power and control.

What is curious in this work is the relationship between the two cities of Ul Qoma and Beszel; for they have no borders, they occupy the same physical environment, spaces and frequently the same walls, buildings and roads. What is fascinating with these two cities is that they are not allowed to view each other, as doing so is a crime of the utmost gravity. The need to 'see' and then 'unsee' is drilled into all citizens from birth. The need to 'unsee' is the need to preserve each of the cities' boundaries, roads, sovereignty, and perhaps more importantly its sense of its own identity (which itself depends on the other) both within its ideology and its citizens.  Intriguingly this need is never fully explained by the author rather its left hanging as if it was always there from the start; the meaning of its origins now long forgotten. This avoidance of any specific **beginning** for the strange structure of these two cities forces the reader to take an uncomfortable position.

There is a tolerance within this dynamic but is thinly held. The abutments of both cities share the same "crosshatched" spaces that provide both cover, defence and obscurity. Within these crosshatched spaces lies the power called Breach, a form of secret police (ever present but never seen), with unlimited reach ensuring that anyone that sees and then does not unsee (Known as Breach) is removed. The punishment of Breach is to never be *seen* again.

However, there is another city known as Orciny, this exists as a third hypothesised city, posited, just like Breach, between the other two inhabiting

the interstitial areas and the unclaimed and forgotten edges. Orciny is the 'real' power in control of both Ul Qoma, Beszel and even Breach. To be with Orciny is to be able to really see. To view what is really there. But, importantly, Orciny is a story, a fiction. A tale within the tale.

Therefore Breach (the real) and Orciny (the unreal) both inhabit the same space in between the two cities. This duality reveals an interesting hypothesis; Orciny is so traumatic that it ceases to 'be' and takes on a Lacanian notion of the real and unreal via a collective repression of the truth. It's important to ask, therefore, is one city more real than the other? Is Orciny more authentic than Breach? Is Breach really Orciny?

Throughout the novel Mieville places Orciny in three important states.

Orciny as Myth
Orciny as deception
Orciny as the real.

Orciny as myth works to reaffirm the accepted status quo within the worlds of Ul Qoma and Beszel. Any serious study of Orciny would ultimately point back to the validity of the accepted structures as right and purposeful as a search for utopia is (of course) a means to fail. This search ultimately reveals that both states are valid and both have the right to power and control.

*"All that stuff about parasites and being wrong and finding out she was a thief." I said "God damn. She wasn't killed because she was, some, one of the bloody elect few who knew the awesome secret that the third city existed. She*

*8:40 – 8:52*

Orciny as myth functions as fiction, as a place of supposed freedom without the confines and restrictions of the other two cities. Importantly Orciny is fictionalised as an older, possibly more powerful reality, but does this myth ultimately reveal that the contemporary positioning of the cities is the enlightened, aspirational and utopian ideal? This reveals another question: does living in Ul Qoma or Beszel mean that you are also living in Orciny?

David Rickard, a London based artist explores ideas around time and place and how the body perceives its boundaries and perception. In his work "We are all astronauts", 2014, he chose four points along the equator

(French Polynesia, Brazil, Mozambique, and western Australia) and attempted to find contacts in these areas to produce a collaborative art work. Rickard than sent each collaborator precise G.P.S coordinates with instructions to erect a right-angled frame, made of local wood, at these points then photograph the structure in a detailed manner and send him back an image of this.

Rickard then gathered these images, twisted them through 90degrees and placed them together, with the four right angles providing the four points of a frame.

What is fascinating with Rickards work is the way in which he instigates a process that invokes willing participation from these four points on the earth,

twisting and reshaping them. The refocusing of these points has the effect of not only holding them in suspension but also controlling the way in which the points are seen and revealed. Ultimately creating new fictional borders.

Could these points within this frame be understood as Orciny?

Looking at the individual frames there is a worrying uncanniness in each that makes the viewer doubt the authenticity of the story. This reimaging on a global scale shrunk to within four frames on the wall has an Orcinyness about it. A belief in positions of abstraction revealing a new whole that can be manipulated at the creators will. 'We are all Astronauts" reveals the relational within these four geographical sites. "We are all relative to something else" Rickard says about this work and perhaps this then reveals the answer to the question above. A new border that is created through the manipulation of space via a process that produces a myth that is then allowed to grow and carve an alternative physical border of its own.

Orciny as deception is used as a means of exposing those that would want freedom from the controlling states of both cities, their aim is to be able to see and to never **unsee**. To this end the creation of Orciny is a fabrication by the leading powers to reveal these subversive radicals. A hidden city controlling both other cities can easily resonate as an analogy of post truth-politics. Reality is woven and rewoven by successive ruling states injecting and leaking subversive ideas; the two cities achieve this via provision for and the tolerance of several activist groups whose function is to manipulate these realities. Orciny as deception is also about positioning, Mieville's purposeful placement of buildings along these borders plays with the accepted rules and blurs the

boundaries between Ul Qoma and Beszel, carefully manipulated through the eyes of those that believe in Orciny.

Collectif-fact comprises of artists Annelore Schneider and Claude Piquet working between London and Geneva. They are interested in how narratives can be re-appropriated and disrupted to re-code and critique our perceptions of reality. In their recent work "no one is ever silent", 2017, they focused on the body's relationship to architecture and how this can define or undermine our reality. Produced as a 12min moving image work, the piece focuses on a building that was once a former private bank in Geneva. The voices you will hear are various inhabitants with a unique perspective on the space that reveal the hidden from within the architecture, redefining what architecture is and the ways in which the body must approach it and walk around it. Similarly, Mieville's architecture also generates bodily positions, ones that both reveal and deny Orciny. Copula Hall is one such building. It exists in both Ul Qoma and Beszel.

Orciny as the real is perhaps the most fragile interpretation, as this position implies that the other two cities are the ones that are hidden, including Breach. This is revealed when a Breach officer announces that Breach **DOES** believe in Orciny and is wary of the outcome.
"Are we at war....?" He asks.

 "nowhere else works like the cities," he said. " its not just us keeping them apart… Its everyone in Beszel and everyone in Ul Qoma. Every minute, every day. We're only the last ditch: its everyone in the cities who does most of the work. It works because you don't blink. That's why unseeing and unsensing are

In occupying the same *liminal* space as Orciny one would surmise that Breach would have the most to lose from Orciny regardless if it exists or not. As the ability to 'see' or 'unsee' is not linked to Breach but is shared by all citizens of both cities and their belief in the importance of this sense-act.

What is arresting in 'the City and the City' is the relationship to the alignment of the subjects' bodies in and around liminal space and how they are affected by this gaze, with breach only ever acting as the means to catalogue not define. Importantly, as the above quote reveals, whilst being a power with ultimate reach across space and time, Breach are not in control of this position. The subtleties of individual relationships to the borders and to breach are defined internally and not by Breach.

In a recent work of mine entitled "Carnielli Part 1 and Part 2" 2017, I placed an exercise bike at the edges of buildings, sites and networks that I specifically chose to promote a change in function of both the exercise bike and the body using it. This I then filmed and re-edited into a dual screen narrative. What is intriguing in this process is the way in which these acts reveal borders that exist, both obvious and hidden, via disrupting the objects and the bodies relationship to site and place.

"Carnielli Part 1 and Part 2" reveals that a body can both inhabit two spaces at once, a space that can be seen (Ul Qoma and Beszel) and one that is (like Orciny) more fluid and possibly unseen.

These different types of sites can easily be viewed as borders or edges that hold the body in a suspended state, poised with tension and action but ultimately unable to move.

The final act in "The City and the City" is the capture of the killer, but the killer positons himself in the in-between space between Ul Qoma and Beszel, his moves are clandestine, jerky, strange and awkward so that any citizen in either city would believe that they are in breach if they see him. So they 'unsee' and the killer moves free through borders that only he can inhabit.

The difference between Ul Qoma and Beszel is the difference between the positioning of the individuals in relation to space, each other and even the controlling power of Breach, once this breaks down so does the notions of borders. The uniqueness of Ul Qoma and Beszel is held together by the ways in which its citizens approach and reflect on these borders, and not necessarily by any state control. As Franco Berardi states in his e-flux journal essay "Malinche and the End of the world" *that* the perceived world is the projection of meaningful patterns, experiences, and shared common codes and once this breaks down so does the ability to comprehend the reality around us.