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Gaiman, Banks and Miéville – Hybrid Space and Genre

ABSTRACT

The analysis of three recent British novels: Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* (1996), Iain Banks' *Transition* (2009) and China Miéville's *The City & the City* (2009) strives to uncover structural parallelisms and the inherent evolution in their development, plot structuring and presentation. It is centred on the exhibited relation to the structure and general mechanics of space. The interpretations of space are based on Foucault's heterotopias, the rhizome of Deleuze and Guattari, and de Certeau's absent space, which show how the active force of space and the complexity of the genre identity are interconnected, and how they interact with the social and political engagement of the works and their wider cultural and social context. These seminal works of the British Boom provide a rich source material for an outline of the process of interplay of genre identity and political engagement, and an overview of how this interplay affects their plot, style and the protagonists.

Keywords: genre hybridity; space; science fiction; fantasy; political engagement

Gaiman, Banks in Miéville – hibridni prostor in žanr

POVZETEK

Analiza treh sodobnih britanskih romanov: *Neverwhere* (1996) Neila Gaimana, *Transition* (2009) Iaina Banksa in *The City & the City* (2009) Chine Miévilla razkriva povezave med pripovedno in žanrsko strukturo romanov ter strukturo in mehaniko ideje prostora. Interpretacija literarnega odnosa do prostora črpa iz Foucaultove ideje heterotopij, iz rizoma Deleuza in Guattarija ter de Certeaujevega odsotnega prostora. Izkaže se, da je kompleksnost žanrske identitete teh treh literarnih del neločljivo povezana s silnicami prostora, kar pa se navezuje tudi na družbeno in politično angažiranost romanov ter širši kulturni in družbeni kontekst. Ključni romani gibanja British Boom ponujajo bogat vir, s pomočjo katerega je orisan proces medsebojnega učinkovanja prostora, žanrske identitete in politične angažiranosti, ki posredno vpliva tudi na zgodbo, slog in protagoniste.

Ključne besede: hibridnost žanra; prostor; znanstvena fantastika; fantastika; politični angažma

Gaiman, Banks and Miéville – Hybrid Space and Genre

1 Introduction

The idea of space in postmodernity is not defined only geographically and psychologically; it is also applicable to the system of literary theory, as the texts are also spaces just as space is intrinsic to art and language. Since textual complexity can be comparable to spatial complexity, theory has to rely on terminology that can emphasise the layers and subtleties involved in something as intricate as describing texts as a form of space.

As far as the terminology of space is concerned, there is a common ground in Foucault's heterotopias, rhizome of Deleuze and Guattari, and de Certeau's absent space. They all lack depth and bear the sign of surface-focus and ahistoricity. They all try to encompass the idea of postmodern space and take into account its expanse and internal structure. And they can be applied to the study of three British novels that show some significant common ground already with the idea of space present in the titles themselves, but exhibit an even more significant connection in their relationships with space, with genre and with political engagement. Interestingly, the three works very similarly take significant care to evade the limiting boundaries of a single genre, but show a much diversified attitude to the hybridity of space, as we will demonstrate. What is more, this diversified attitude in all three cases directly addresses the political and social events current at the time of publication of the works, therefore further reinforcing their openly political agenda. In this way, the specific relationship with space, evasion of genre boundaries, and directly political content are interlinked and offer a unique opportunity for the exploration of the mechanism of their connection.

To explore these relationships, we shall observe in broad strokes how in the process of development of the novel, the structuring of the plot and the presentation of the setting in each of the three cases, the number of spaces involved rises and the role of the space in the workings of each novel changes. At the same time, there seems to be a direct relationship between the role of space, the active force of space and the complexity of the genre identity of the work.

We shall investigate each of the novels and try to determine their inherent attitudes toward space as well as the generalities and specifics of the three authors and their more or less overt relationships with contemporary world and politics.

Genre-wise we shall observe the evolution of a rather straight-forward urban fantasy with a strong inherent social component in Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* (1996), which operates on the premise of a rather simplistic division of space and fantastic invisibility or *erasing*. We shall continue with the evolved hybrid genre of the 21st century's science fiction, which glides toward the rhizomatic, labyrinthine space conceptualised by Iain Banks in *Transition* (2009), with its *forgetting* protagonist hidden in plain sight, and the *tour de force* by China Miéville in his novel *The City & the City,* where fantasy and detective novel parade a surprising sci-fi/dystopian novum of the institutionalised practice of *unseeing.*

2 *Neverwhere*

Richard Mayhew is a semi-successful young man with a regular, boring job but a very beautiful, ambitious girlfriend who only cares about succeeding in contemporary, money-driven London.

One evening he notices a young girl in curious attire bleeding on the sidewalk. His girlfriend, a typical representative of the ruling strata in the post-Thatcher era, wants to ignore the situation:

> "Jessica?" He could not believe that she was simply ignoring the figure at their feet.
>
> "What?" She was not pleased to be jerked out of her reverie.
>
> "Look."
>
> He pointed to the sidewalk. The person was face down, and enveloped in bulky clothes; Jessica took his arm and tugged him toward her. "Oh. I see. If you pay them any attention, Richard, they'll walk all over you. They all have homes, really. Once she's slept it off, I'm sure she'll be fine." (Gaiman 1998, 17)

Nevertheless, Richard helps the girl and brings her home. In the morning, the girl is gone and Richard Mayhew becomes invisible, he has been aggressively erased from his London, or, as he later learns, from London Above. His bank cards are not working, his apartment has been, without his permission, rented out to strangers. He is forced to find refuge in the London Below, which exists in a maze of sewer canals and abandoned subway stations. Richard is forced to literally fall through the cracks to *Neverwhere*: "Young man […], understand this: there are two Londons. There's London Above – that's where you lived – and then there's London Below – the Underside – inhabited by the people who fell through the cracks in the world. Now you're one of them. Good night" (Gaiman 1998, 82).

The girl (aptly called Door) whom the protagonist rescued in London Above wants to discover why her family was killed and at the same time wants to save the underworld kingdom of London Below from the evil that wants to destroy it. Since Richard Mayhew has nowhere to go he joins her quest, and at the end, after successfully returning to London Above, realises that he cannot live there any longer.

The story of *Neverwhere* is set in the London of the 1990's, a society which is still reeling after three consecutive terms of the Iron Lady, during which the government started the process of changing British industry and privatised many state-owned enterprises. In 1986, the number of people living below the official poverty line increased to almost 12 million. There were very high unemployment rates, drastic cuts were made to health care, and the number of homeless people grew. In London, close to Waterloo Station, there even appeared the so-called Cardboard City, which provided home to hundreds of people.

Neverwhere is the result of Thatcher's Britain, and its socio-political agenda is obvious. The segregation of those who have the means and those who do not was blatant and scarred the nation. The duality of the rich and poor is reflected in the duality of the two Londons, which are home to two separate groups of people, who in turn belong to two worlds: the world of the Past – fantastical, menacing, violent but energetic London Below, and the world of the Now – a dreary, bleak world of covert surveillance and dominance.

This clear division is in accordance with Michel Foucault's understanding of heterotopias. When defining the difference between the new and the old models of dominance in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault draws an impressive series of analyses, thereby drawing a picture of the new power that in Neil Gaiman's work comes to the fore in London Above. He expands on the idea of the difference between the ways of realising authority, domination and punishment "before" and "now".

London Below is an example of the old power, concentrated on the public space and public authority, which put its subjects into an extremely minimised, less visible position. It scared the population into submission through very visible, frightening ways of punishment (public executions), which from the modern perspective seem completely out of touch with our current humanitarianism (Foucault, 1997). The new power, however, abolishes the idea of public space. The power is hidden and all of the subjects are now under scrutiny. Surveillance data banks can be easily checked by authorities whose mode of operation is hidden, but strongly implied, as is the case in *Neverwhere*. The novel was written before the eruption of the various invasion of privacy scandals after 2001, which was particularly significant in Great Britain. The novel therefore resides in a Foucauldian heterotopia, the first principle of which maintains

> that there is probably not a single culture in the world that fails to constitute heterotopias. That is a constant of every human group. But the heterotopias obviously take quite varied forms, and perhaps no one absolutely universal form of heterotopia would be found. We can however class them in two main categories. In the so-called primitive societies, there is a certain form of heterotopia that I would call crisis heterotopias, i.e., there are privileged or sacred forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the humane environment in which they live, in a state of crisis. (Foucault 1986, 25)

The image for such a society is Jeremy Bentham's panopticon (Foucault 1997) where one vantage point enables the surveillance of many prisoners who do not have the possibility to see or experience their watcher. Where ancient societies attempted to make a few things visible to the many, modern societies strive to make many things visible to the few.

The new mode of punishment is not, as it might initially seem, inspired by humanitarianism, but by the need to control. Humanitarianism itself seems to be just a cover story for a new growing mode of control. People are measured and probed in various ways until they are remade into better subjects of control. The modern individual is now an object of control – the examined and categorised subject who becomes the target of policies of normalization. A case in point is the fate of Richard who, as a target of such a policy of normalisation, loses his job, identity and social status. As Foucault argues, the transition in the mode of punishment from physical torture to more modern, gentler methods is a development in the history of punitive systems (Foucault 1997).

But there is rebellion brewing somewhere below, somewhere it can hide, where it can plan the attack, in the Neverwhere of London Below. Neil Gaiman does not shy away from the optimistic belief that things can be changed and that there is room for improvement if the Establishment is tackled in a well-planned manner. The female protagonist is able to open doors, and the idea of opening doors relays the idea of opening up the space, freeing the world, breaking boundaries. As such, all the inhabitants of the London Below have names that are connected to passages, transitional spaces, doors, implying in a certain sense that there is a way out, that there is a possibility of equality and freedom and breaking out of the oppressive world of closed, punishing limitations of space.

What Gaiman does brilliantly is take on the whole concept of the multiverse (here limited to dual-verse) usually found in science fiction. He cleverly juxtaposes the idea of the duality of two worlds existing simultaneously, the world of the bluntly oppressing *real* and that of the mysteriously dangerous *fantastical*. With the falling through the cracks there is a transition into the world of fantasy, mystery, magic, and danger. The fact that Gaiman later won numerous science fiction awards, such as the Nebula and Hugo, clearly demonstrates his ability to open up

his preferred genre of fantasy. And in this way he offers his readers and protagonist a possibility of change and maybe, ultimately, the possibility of a life that is free from constraints of the emerging world. But 13 years later, when *Transition* and *The City & the City* appeared, the situation seems more complex, more hybrid and much less optimistic.

3 *Transition*

The fast-paced 2009 novel by Iain Banks comprises a number of different narratives, none of which progresses in chronological order: it is a story of rebellion, of a group of renegades – secret agents hopping through dimensions, worlds and times – who dare to attack a devious institution called the Concern or L'Expédience, which manipulates the whole multiverse. As it turns out, the Earth exists in a plethora of possible other Earths, which can be accessed by individuals who have the rare special ability of transitioning, and are able to procure a transition-enabling drug called septus, produced only by the Concern on only one of the variants of Earth called Calbefraques. The Concern trains its special agents in the art of transitioning between worlds and, of course, time, in order to change events across the multiverse. Sometimes this means saving a person from certain death or explosion, but at other times it means assassinating people, which, in fact, is the occupation of the novel's protagonist, agent of the Concern and assassin Temudjin Oh. Like Richard Mayhew of *Neverwhere*, Oh is caught somewhere in-between the worlds, but he is also caught in-between the rebellious Mrs Mulverhill and the chief operative of the Concern, Madame d'Ortolan, who is the head of the Concern's Central Council and runs the organisation.

To move between dimensions, an agent must jump into the body of a person residing in the destination one. This means that Temudjin is literally jumping from perspective to perspective as he is transitioning through a number of possible worlds. Thus, the novel offers an abundance of different perspectives that the reader needs to follow and jump into. From one person's mind to another, and from one Earth to an alternate one, we get to see more and more pieces of the puzzle: on one of the Earths Mandarin is the dominant language, on others, English.

Some Earths were destroyed by gamma rays, on other Earths humans never even evolved. For this reason, when discussing *Transition*, the idea of the rhizome seems the most appropriate, as it is all-encompassing and a model of culture which does not want to obey any organisational structure, at the same time comprising the highest number of definitions and variants:

> Contrary to a deeply rooted belief, the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is an aparallel evolution of the book and the world; the book assures the deterritorialization of the world, but the world effects a reterritorialization of the book, which in turn deterritorializes itself in the world. (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 383)

In this sense the rhizome displays culture or history or both as a map, as a varied palette which does not reveal any origin. The rhizome resists any organisation and therefore offers no tangible chronology, as it "has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 385).

Implicit in this statement is that a rhizome connects everything with anything. In a rhizome, no rules need apply. It represents a system which is without an obvious centre, where no hierarchy applies and, most importantly, where the binary relationship between what is *in* and what is *out* no longer exists (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983). This lost binarity, the random connection of the great outside and the limited inside, is what defines *Transition.* The numerous instances of random

intrusions of different characters, different media, or random appearances of the protagonist in various guises are what define this novel as well as the novelistic structuring of space.[1]

The idea of the rhizome is not the only spatial theory that is applicable here. Whereas in the instance of *Neverwhere* we were under the influence of the first principle of Foucauldian heterotopias, in *Transition* the relevant principle is the sixth:

> The last trait of heterotopias is that they have a function in relation to all the space that remains. This function unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory (perhaps that is the role that was played by those famous brothels of which we are now deprived). Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. (Foucault 1986)

Transition is in fact a novel about what happened to Europe – or, more generally, the Earth – in the period between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the Twin Towers, and what those twenty years did to society. The most blatant consequence is arguably the War on Terror which encroached upon human and civil rights and marked the beginning of the end of personal privacy and freedom. Although *Transition* is an intensely political novel, and its author an intensely and publicly political man, it is not about party politics and it transcends the political reality of Great Britain. The aim is broader and deeper. Indeed, the novel makes rebellion and attack on the establishment more aggressive and more open, but at the same time more fragmented, less efficient. There is also an additional political and social moment that is only slightly hinted at in the duality of Gaiman's *Neverwhere* and represented in its mythical monsters of the London Below, namely the emerging existence of the Other. The stranger, foreigner, the opposition as understood and explained by Zygmunt Bauman:

> In dichotomies crucial for the practice and the vision of the social order, the differentiating power hides as a rule behind one of the members of the opposition. The second member is but the other of the first, the opposite (degraded, suppressed, exiled) side of the first and its creation. Thus abnormality is the other of the norm, deviation the other of law-abiding, illness the other of health, barbarity the other of civilisation, animal the other of the human, woman the other of man, stranger the other of the native, enemy the other of friend, 'them' **the other** of 'us', insanity the other of reason, foreigner the other of the state subject, but the dependence is not symmetrical. The second side depends on the first for its contrived and enforced isolation. The first depends on the second for its self-assertion. (Bauman 1991, 14)

Groups typically define themselves in relation to others, as identity does not really mean a lot without the "other". Identity does not usually get defined for its own sake. In *Neverwhere,* the diversification is already taking place in the simple duality of poor vs. rich, adapted vs. non-adapted. But in *Transition*, Banks goes one step further in introducing a very contemporary

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[1] Interestingly, a very similar situation can later be observed in the works not associated with genre writing. In her study of literary worlds in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* from the perspective of the postmodern paradigm shift, Mojca Krevel argues that the relationship between the reading worlds of the main protagonists is the relationship between the book and the world: their coding is the same, which allows for their interconnectivity, exchangeability and equality (Krevel 2016, 179). The same principle holds true for Concern's agents and assassins, as in *Transition*, different worlds and events that are encoded in those worlds also function as "knots in a multidimensional rhizome where different realities of these worlds and events connect and are enmeshed in the exact place where the information on their existence is compatible" (Krevel 2016, 179).

otherness based on religion, race and gender. These definitions of self and others are inextricably linked rewards and punishment, material or symbolic.

Considering all the variables that affect the plot of *Transition*, defining the genre grows rather complicated. The author himself was known for splitting his persona into genre and non-genre selves. He published mainstream fiction as Iain Banks and science-fiction as Iain M. Banks, including the initial of his middle name, Menzies. In the UK, *Transition* was not published as an Iain M. Banks novel, but appeared as such in the USA, implying it belongs to the science fiction genre. The reasons were probably bipartite: firstly, the ideas of a multiverse and bodies as vessels of transition superficially seem very science-fictional, and secondly, in the USA Bank's science-fiction is better known and better received. But, as far as the plot is concerned, the mere number of spaces, which by far exceed the simple duality of *Neverwhere,* and the complex political and social dimensions of the temporal paradigm of the post-millennial era, result in a hybrid genre that is only partially (if ever) science fiction, and which entails strong elements of fantasy and psychological thriller.

This, in fact, seems rather symptomatic of the era, since both this novel and Miéville's *The City & the City* – which we are discussing next – were published in 2009 by authors who are poster children of the British Boom movement in science fiction and fantasy. The two novels are a commentary on the political context in Britain at the time. In contrast to mainstream production, genre fictions were largely ignored by the reigning powers, and so were able to establish themselves as vehicles of radical critique and rebellion against the system. The rebellion included breaking out of the limitation of the genre as well. As Luckhurst muses:

> My contention would be that the genres undergoing inventive hybridization and regenerative "implosion" – Gothic, sf, and fantasy – experienced such a revitalization in the 1990s because they could still find spaces outside the general de-differentiation or "mainstreaming" effect sought by the strategy of cultural governance. The low value accorded to the Gothic-sf-fantasy continuum allowed these genres to flourish largely below the radar of a cultural establishment often complicit, in complex ways, with the new methods of governance. (Luckhurst 2003, 423)

4 *The City & the City*

Beszél and Ul Qoma are two cities that occupy the same place. Spatially, they are indivisible but at the same time there is an intentional invisible border that divides them. This separation is guarded by most inhabitants, although there are nationalists in each city who believe that the whole place should be one metropolis at the expense of the other, and unificationists who think that they should merge. The divide is guarded by something rather undefined, called the Breach. Nobody knows what or who the Breach is. The only thing that is clear is that it does not interfere with the actions of the citizens unless they either see the other city or unlawfully cross over. Nobody really knows what happens with the offenders, but they are never to be seen again. That is why everybody is extremely careful and the residents have been taught to see and unsee things around them. Some areas of the city are *total*, which means that they belong in only one city, while some of them are *crosshatched*[2] so that a street or a house might be both in Beszél and in Ul Qoma.

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2   A term introduced by John Clute in 1997 to describe places where the demarcation line between realities or worlds is not clean and clear-cut, or where two or more worlds may simultaneously inhabit the same territory: "when borderland conventions are absent, there is an inherent and threatening instability (wrongness) to regions of crosshatch; a sense of imminent Metamorphosis" (Clute and Grant 1997, 237).

The central character of the novel is Tyador Borlú, an Inspector for Beszél's Extreme Crime Squad. He has to solve the murder of a young American archaeology student who was part of a team excavating a *precursor* site – a site from the period before the *cleavage* of the two cities. The plot thickens when the detective discovers that the victim was in fact not murdered in Borlú's hometown Beszél, but may have been killed in Ul Qoma. Borlú learns that the dead girl was, in fact, a resident of Ul Qoma, and it appears that the murder might be a case of breach, which would mean that the responsibility for finding the killer could be delegated to the mysterious forces of Breach. But things become more complicated, as "breach" is denied and it becomes clear that one of the victim's particular interests was a theory maintaining that there is a third, invisible city occupying the same area as Beszél and Ul Qoma, a city between the cities called Orciny. The novel ends in a gloomy, pessimistic way: nothing is resolved, everyone resumes their lives, and the only change happens in Borlú. The actual murderer, the Canadian scholar Bowden, tries to escape by placing himself in the same position as the Breach:

> He would be in Breach, which, unbelievably, he was not yet. He walked with equipoise, possibly in either city. Schrödinger's pedestrian […] He did not drift but strode with pathological neutrality away from the cities' centres, ultimately to borders and the mountains and out to the rest of the continent. (Miéville 2009, 295–96)

Bowden sets up a life on the borderline and provides Tyador with a model for how to understand his own role as part of the Breach: "I was learning from him how to walk between them, first in one, then the other, or in either, but without the ostentation of Bowden's extraordinary motion – a more covert equivocation" (Miéville 2009, 308). The novel ends with Borlús' words: *"I live in the interstice yes, but I live in both the city and the city"* (Miéville 2009, 312).

The fragmented and multi-layered space of Miéville's novel seems to be close to de Certeau, who builds on Foucault's heterotopias, and adds the distinction between place and space, where a place (*lieu*) is the order with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. That excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (place). The elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own "proper" and distinct location, which implies an indication of stability.

A space, however, exists when one takes into consideration direction, velocities, and time variables, which means that space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it and temporalise it. Space is a practised place. A street, which is geometrically defined by urban planning, is transformed into a space by walkers. In the same way, an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e., a place constituted by a system of signs (de Certeau 1984, 118–20).

This corresponds to the structure and workings of the two cities in Miéville's novel, of the strict location and superimposition of something additional, which can be realised only by the involvement of participants, in this case the inhabitants who actively maintain the status quo. De Certeau even subverted the originality of alternative space, and foresaw an absent space as the space of the Other, and the space where neither the territory of the Other nor of the self becomes absolute. With its sympathy for the Other, the absent space sought by de Certeau is a complementary space serving as an antidote to revolutionary rationalism impregnated with scientific positivism. For de Certeau, absent space encompasses an ethical turning which reflects on Otherness (Jang 2015, 100). Hence, in accordance with Miéville's concept of space, the role of the Other in contemporary society, as depicted in *The City & The City*, is intensified and

diversified. There is an insurmountable abyss between the conformist society of the majority, and the minority of the Other. At the same time, in the era of increased surveillance, war on terror and minimised private freedom, the idea of rebellion is completely perverted.

Rare instances of subversion do exist in the novel, but in general, people start to self-regulate. Instead of revolting against the establishment, the citizens of Beszél and Ul Qoma, fearing the unknown force of oppression, the invisible secret police, and the omnipresent terror, instead control themselves and do not want to move away from the status quo imposed upon them by the scary, Foucauldian forces of discipline and punishment. Or, as Borlú himself says: "My task is changed: not to uphold the law, or another law, but to maintain the skin that keeps law in place. Two laws in two places, in fact" (Miéville2009, 373).

This pessimism can be seen as part of the shift from the pre-millennial hope for a new century to a realisation that in the post 9/11 era nothing is going to – and indeed cannot – change.

Miéville's engagement with questions of genre has been complex and interesting. Characterising his writing as "New Weird", he is an ardent fan of weird fiction, especially the works of Mervyn Peake and H. P. Lovecraft. He has also stated that he would like to write a novel in every genre (Pistelli and van Worden 2005). When discussing the delineation between fantasy and science fiction, he clearly showed that the demarcation between them is too fuzzy to be maintained. As Miéville explains:

> What they share is as important as what distinguishes them. What they share is the starting point that something impossible is true. Whether it is not possible because it is not yet possible or whether it may never become possible, this starting point of radical alienation from actuality is the fantastic moment that both 'science fiction' and 'fantasy' share. […] What unites the genre of fantasy/Gothic and the genre of the science fiction is that they literalize their metaphors. (Shapiro 2008, 64)

He openly criticises the theories of the fantastic of the post-Tolkien works which, in his opinion, offer only a simplistic reading of the genre, and thus cater only to the demands of the market. He strongly opposes such a delineation of the genre at the expense of the specificities of artistic form. Or, as he explains, no one would ever dream of denigrating Kafka on these grounds, no matter how well he sells, while they might otherwise in the case of a story in which a character wakes up and discovers that by magic he has turned into giant cockroach. He wonders what distinguishes Kafka's use of the fantastic from Tolkien's (Shapiro 2008, 64-65). He clearly refuses to accept any limitations of a specific genre and demands complete freedom of expression. We could even argue that the freedom of literary expression which he demands and the number of genres which he freely exploits in *The City & the City* are closely connected to the complexity of the space dimension, and in contrast with the limited freedom and sovereignty of the characters in the novel.

5 Conclusion

We have observed Neil Gaiman, China Miéville and Iain Banks navigate through genres and seen how genre diversification is closely connected to the authors' relationships to space, which, moreover, seems to influence the explicitly political content of their novels. Neil Gaiman in *Neverwhere,* which is set in the pre-millennial Britain, uses a rather simple duality of space with London Below and London Above, through which he illuminates the increasingly aggressive bipartite British society of the post-Thatcher era. The first principle of Foucault's heterotopias is

the defining moment of control in this case and division, where the idea of borders and boundaries are only just emerging. Gaiman is therefore able to stay in his preferred milieu of just one genre – fantasy with urban elements – and exercise a rather pronounced political commentary. The plot still offers the protagonists an opportunity to exert their free will. Some transition between social classes is still possible, and the idea of the "dangerous" Other is only vaguely implied.

The two other works are of a later date, when the consequences of the aftermath of September 11 are extremely palpable and the optimism of the end of the 20th century has evaporated. Iain Banks' *Transition* is set just after "the golden age between the fall of the wall and the fall of the towers" (Banks 2009, 2). The novel explores the ways in which selfishness and corporate greed create and maintain the boundaries which are closing in on every individual. Banks introduces and problemises *otherness* based on religion, race and gender. Foucauldian rewards and punishments operate in a multiverse, a fragmented space, and are closely connected to fragmented definitions of self. The idea of the rhizome seems the most all-encompassing, as it is a model of culture which does not want to obey any organisational structure, and comprises the highest number of definitions and variants. The novel makes the rebellion and attack on the establishment more aggressive and more open, but at the same time it is more fragmented and less efficient, which leaves the protagonists defeated and the establishment unscathed. The genre follows the idea of fragmented space; it is multifaceted, unapologetically open and diverse.

China Miéville's *The City & the City* insists on "unseeing" those on the other side of the political, economic and physical boundaries imposed by the hidden establishment whose machinery of surveillance and punishment is already in the zone of the fantastic and magical. The space is not as fragmented as it is in *Transition*, but more elaborate. Space very efficiently underscores the idea of otherness and oppression. The concept of space follows de Certeau's distinction between place and space, and focuses on the idea of absent space as the space of Other. Miéville's protagonists almost give up on fighting the institution and are ready to self-regulate, they give up freedom voluntarily. The idea of an oppressive "magical" apparatus is enough to keep them at bay. Miéville as the author, on the other hand, very vocally defends his right to free expression and multifaceted genre works, and is not ready to succumb to the wishes of the market.

All three authors are critically acclaimed and at the same time immensely popular key players in the very vibrant British Boom movement. Their politically engaged and boundary-crossing narratives express ways in which popular culture (literature) can react to the challenges of ever more oppressive, hidden, but at the same time omnipresent, forces of surveillance and terror.

In this paper we explored how these reactions vary according to the relationship that the author and his work are willing to express towards their society, and how much political engagement they have encoded in the structure of the relationships and the nature of the literary world, and thus of the text itself. It has become evident that these structures correspond to the postmodern idea of space, to the relationship of place and space in the context of textuality. As the degree of engagement increases, so does the textual complexity and its corresponding spatial complexity. And, as we explore the structuring of the plot and presentation of the setting in the three novels, we discover how the number of spaces, the role of the space and the relationship between the protagonist and the space intensify. We have shown how the relationship between the role of space as a force of action in the novels corresponds to the complexity and fluidity of the genre identity of the work, the degree of encoded political agenda and criticism of contemporary reality, but also to the nature of the protagonists and their involvement in the working of the space and the mechanics that governs it within the work itself.