### CHAPTER 15

# Confronting Otherness: The Built Environments in Adrian Tchaikovsky's *Shadows of the Apt*

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The fantasy genre frequently prompts its readers to deal with their biases towards otherness, as its fictional worlds may be peopled with alien beings and bizarre characters. Otherness can be depicted as evil or good or neither; and metamorphosis can be used to blur distinctions common to perceptions in known reality (Jackson 1981, 49–50). In an alternative cosmos, built with both 'dystopian fears and utopian desires', links to reality still exist, often revealing the ideological premises of the author (Jackson 1981, 43, 53). In Adrian Tchaikovsky's ten-book series *Shadows of the Apt* (2008–2014), otherness comes from various sources, but modelling characters on the features of insects is the most memorable. The humanoid characters' traits are based on insect species, which not only determine the physical attributes but also define the psychological tendencies and the

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social behaviour of each type (called *kindens*). Naturally, the insect-derived traits are also reflected in the cities of the fantasy world.

In literature, insects have traditionally been used to demonstrate otherness. Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1915), in which Gregor Samsa wakes up one morning turned into a big bug, shunned by his family as a result, is a classic example of this trend, and a metaphor for alienation. Likewise, Leena Krohn has used the insect world in several novels, such as *Tainaron* (1985). The insect theme is taken far in these two examples, where thinking, talking beings really seem to *be* insects. In Tchaikovsky's series, the characters have instead a partially human form, without providing much detail so that their physical appearances are mostly left to readers' imagination.[1] In addition to the insect theme, the story includes a dichotomy[2] based on attitudes towards technology: the characters are either apt or inapt. Technical ability is written in the DNA of these insect-humanoids. Technology is the realm of the apt, reflected in their instinctive understanding of all things mechanical, whereas the inapt find it difficult to navigate in environments requiring technical knowledge—an inapt may be unable to even open a locked door. This division is the starting point of the story, giving a distinctive twist to the urban settings described in the series. A world of invention, a techno-utopia—or a techno-dystopia—is contrasted with another, slowly disappearing worldview, where reality is mysterious and magical. Similar divisions have been used in fantasy writing before; for example, J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* saga (1954–1955) depicts men taking over a world previously dominated by elves. A contrasting attitude to technology has also been used in Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy (2003, 2009, 2013), a series of speculative fiction where a *ustopian* society is split into 'a technocracy and an anarchy'.[3]

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[1] Kafka insisted that the main character of *Metamorphosis* was not illustrated with a picture (Bermejo-Rubio 2012, 472).

[2] Divisive categories have been common in utopian and dystopian literature, as Juho Rajaniemi (2017, 20) has noted. The categories are usually associated with social inequality. While some fantasy stories are included in utopian literature and use similar literary devices, in *Shadows of the Apt* social inequality is not obviously underlined. Rather, the divisive categories are used to emphasize differences, and subsequently prejudice, tolerance, or acceptance.

[3] Atwood (2011) has combined utopia and dystopia into the word *ustopia*, 'not-exactly places', both an imagined perfect society and its counterpart. According to Atwood, *ustopia* also includes another duality: it may be a location on a map and a state of mind.

This chapter focuses on the built environment, on the immediate surroundings and the general setting of Tchaikovsky's fantasy series. In this reading, Michel de Certeau's versions of the concepts of *strategies* and *tactics* are mobilized as a structure for defining the various scales of the story spaces, as well as understanding the spatial practices of the protagonists. The aim is to demonstrate how architecture is used to create and develop character differences and how scale variations in the urban descriptions allow the reader to become familiar with the story world. In this world, the protagonists confront otherness in shifting spatial frames and manage to move about in unfamiliar surroundings. The reading addresses the architecture of the fantasy world and the protagonists' actions within the physical realm. The emphasis is on the protagonists' point of view and, therefore, the tactics. Thus, the structure of the society and the social city are brought into discussion.

## A Network of Special Cities

The fantasy world of *Shadows of the Apt* consists of a loose network of somewhat independent city states. As the story unfolds, the unique identity of these cities is unveiled, and the powerplays and politics that govern the relations between the cities and their people. Each city is built with a special architecture, fitting the needs of its humanoid inhabitants. The built environment defines its people. The structure of the series is reminiscent of classic fairy tales, where siblings are sent out into the world to find their fortune. In this case, the fortune seekers are four young students of various backgrounds, trying to survive in a world tumbling into a global war. Their different backgrounds are local: each is connected to a particular *kinden*-city (or half-breeds to two of them) with a specific identity. The characters are presumably humanoid, but their abilities are based on those of insects. Ants are strong in communal ties, to the point of communicating telepathically. Wasps are aggressive, beetles clumsy, butterflies graceful. The physical image of the characters may be left to the readers' imagination, but the same is not true of their living environments. The author is meticulously imaginative in his descriptions of the architecture of urban settings, illustrated with painterly language that carefully carves out those spaces. The cities are constructed for the reader with words that underline a sense of materiality: towers are raised, walls erected.

The author uses various viewpoints in laying out the fantasy world, moving from city silhouettes to enclosed, embodied spatial experiences.

These views allow the writer to create a narrative setting that is both extensively regional and place-specifically local. The latter view receives its qualities of otherness from the author's decision to make the characters non-human. The otherness of their cities comes from their insectoid-derived construction; the architecture of ant-people is naturally different from that of dragonfly-people. Architecture is used to provide a background for character development as the protagonists face unfamiliar urban contexts.

The insectoid traits differentiate the *kindens* from each other. Otherness is visible on an individual level, and then amplified in the collective places of their origin: in the special architecture they have built. At the same time, the insect-derived characterization in the fantasy world also separates the reader from the story. New urban environments are presented through the perplexed reactions of the protagonists, themselves already *the other* to the reader. Otherness exists in layers, starting from the known reality of the familiar and reaching the descriptions of the unfamiliar, foreign realities.

Both familiarity and unfamiliarity are manifested in the various urban settings as the narrative progresses. They are the backdrops against which otherness is measured. The spaces in between the cities, on the other hand, are a no man's land. These spaces are lacking in detail, and the fantasy series does not need to be seen as a metaphor for a specific nation. Instead, it could depict any instance in history where territory is claimed or wars fought. Although the books do include maps of these worlds, they obscure more than they illuminate. The maps are not made to scale and distances are not provided: they simply depict the relative surroundings of various cities in the story—for example, their proximity to a mountain or a body of water. The specific characteristics of each city are only revealed with words as the story progresses. In this way, the reader resembles a typical tourist, equipped with a map that turns out to be inadequate when faced with the real spaces of a new city.

A world with flying humanoid insects does not have to be simply imagined, as the author has helpfully outlined the different urban constructions that are as varied as their builders. Otherness and estrangement are emphasized and celebrated in the series' descriptions. The Ant-cities are low, flat-roofed, and organized places (Tchaikovsky 2008, 340), where the inhabitants go about their business as a telepathically connected collective. The Fly-cities appear as a mere collection of little huts and mounds, most of the city being an underground collection of narrow tunnels that widen into gathering caves, all planned to accommodate the small-statured airborne population (Tchaikovsky 2008, 139). The Dragonfly-cities consist of houses built like graceful puzzle boxes, with sliding panels allowing the walls to be mobile and changeable (Tchaikovsky 2011, 23). The Bee-cities are formed of hexagonal cells with cellars below the surface, the description focusing on the green foliage that determines the visual image of these true 'garden cities' (Tchaikovsky 2011, 147). If some details are lacking in the descriptions, the reader makes up for them using the principle of minimal departure.[4]

The descriptions of city spaces illustrate their unfamiliar qualities, the otherness. Most of the urban descriptions are given to the reader from the viewpoint of an outsider, someone seeing the city for the first time. We are given visual, slowly unfolding views, usually from a boat, a road leading into the city, or even from above. The author guides the reader through this foreign world, starting with a *tourist gaze*.[5] The visitor looks with appraising eyes, noting the strangeness. From an overall view, the attention is eventually focused on details, on enclosed spaces inside the city. Gradually, the strangeness becomes secondary. Everyday actions of survival become important; the physical and the social are intermeshed. To interpret these two layers in the reading, a suitable framework could be found, for example, using the terms *strategy* and *tactics*, as described in the next section.

## THE FRAMEWORK FOR INTERPRETATION: STRATEGY AND TACTICS, VISUAL AND TACTILE

*Shadows of the Apt* also presents social environments whose rules and conventions are equally strange and unknown to the characters. The official structure of each city administration and the agreed rules between city states are sometimes contrasted with the underlying social and commercial organization. The contrast becomes even more pronounced as the fantasy world is thrown into war, and the wartime administration of the advancing wasp Empire enters in conflict with a resistance movement. The powerplay in the warzones includes an overlay of laws and regulations of the conquering wasp-*kinden*, but an economic layer exists simultaneously alongside the official structure. People keep on with their everyday lives, buying and selling, often oblivious of who is in charge.

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[4] The principle of minimal departure as introduced by Ryan (1980): 'whenever we interpret a message concerning an alternate world, we reconstrue this world as being the closest possible to the reality we know.'

[5] Urry's (1990) use of the concept *tourist gaze* includes the idea of learning to look, as conventions direct the gaze.

The representations of this division correspond with the scales of the physical environment. The official power structure needs a controlling large-scale view, whereas the everyday lives depend on understanding the inner workings of a city, the ordinary in the small scale. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* [1984], Michel de Certeau has adapted concepts derived from warfare—*strategy* and *tactics*—when writing about urban scales. He has connected strategy to subjects of will and power (for example, a city or an enterprise). A strategy employs places as foundations for generating relations with others. The strategic model has been used in creating political and economic rationality. A tactic, however, depends on time instead of place. It is continuously looking for useful opportunities to grasp. With tactics, heterogeneous elements are combined into a useful action (Certeau 1988, xix). For Certeau, the ordinary man becomes a multitude, eventually a 'mobile language of computations' (v). Even if individual experience is not the focus of Certeau's description, individual strands could still be visible in the fabric—this may be what Certeau was aiming for when he wrote of 'penetrating this obscurity'. He did not want to return to individuality, but, nevertheless, wanted to see the specific in social activities. The *modes of operation, action,* were more important than the acting subjects (xi).

An interpretive reading of a fantasy story may not need such an unravelling of motives, but there are useful analogies for interpretation. The worker inhabitants of an industrial city like Helleron represent what for Certeau is the multitude, 'the common people', while 'the elite' enforces the rules (1988, xiii). As Certeau has noted, consumers compose the 'network of anti-discipline' (xiv, xv), the necessary actions of everyday life. In the fantasy series, these actions are continuing in spite of the disciplined rule imposed by the arrogant wasps, conquerors claiming superiority over the other *kinden*. With tactics, the attention is directed to the social city, the lives of the common people. The lines of their everyday movements follow a logic of their own; the tactical footprints are what remain of grasped opportunities. The various *kinden* backgrounds, enhanced with the apt–inapt division, can give the word tactics many meanings. The story emphasizes the urban experiences of each observer as they navigate the foreign environments.

Certeau (1988, xxi–xxii) has drawn interesting parallels between reading and experiencing. He has presented the activity of reading as inhabiting the text. In this way, the text offers the reader a 'borrowed space'. When spaces were 'brutally lit by an alien reason', place names could convey familiar meanings in a foreign environment (Certeau 1988, 104). Similarly, in a fantasy world familiarity may be created by visible texts on the building surfaces. However, the prevailing order may be overstepped by descending into a subterranean world: the tunnels and pathways dug under the city by previous occupants, overlooked by the conquering regime, because history was dismissed as unimportant. Thus, with tactical actions the physical realm is subtly broadened to include that which is not immediately obvious on the surface layer. The city becomes a palimpsest of layers; the visible enhanced by the invisible:

> Looking around the ruins, he could see that they had been here for generations, and any building still owning to three walls had become a permanent dwelling, now completed in cloth and wood. […] It had become a Scorpion city, as though the ghosts of its builders had stayed on to teach the newcomers some shadow of their old way of life. (Tchaikovsky 2010, 239)

The urban text, as Certeau called it, needs to be read to be understood. The dreamed is leaking into the seen, the visible enhanced by memories. The comparison of linguistic formations with actions of pedestrians is based on understanding a message, whether it is written in a book or carved on a building. The two necessary positions required different ways of moving. Walking was an extroverted action, needing an outside reality, whereas the reading act was introverted, requiring a more stable mobility (Certeau 1988, 103). The relationships between the spatial and the verbal/literal were further divided by Certeau into the believable, the memorable and the primitive (1988, 105). These three categories were carriers of both memory and dreams in the urban fabric, woven in its weft, but not necessarily a visible part of the constructed urban order. Instead, Certeau called them the *extra* and the *other*, inserted into the orderly framework of a city. Thus, the urban order was punctured by spatial practices (1988, 107). Certeau's reading of a city oscillated between the spatial and the textual, but the punctured order seems to reflect the division of strategy and tactics. An order may be imposed with power, but the carriers of memory and dreams belong to the realm of tactics, taking advantage of gaps and linking the here and now with what has been and is remembered.

The described cities form complicated networks of commerce and *kinden* ties, and these larger structures can be captured in representations of space—in maps. On maps, strategy is implemented, in the original military sense of the word, as the wasp Empire stretches its influence and conquers cities. Maps are drawn up to be seen and understood; hence, the two-dimensional representation of a city is counting on reading skills. The decipherers must be familiar with the means of the message. Strategy is relying on the visual sense:

> The sheer scale defeated them: this was no fallen farmhouse or outpost. Here was a city of the old days, the days before the Nem had become a desert. Even Dannec's endless carping had faltered to a halt as they approached, to witness those great cracked walls, the massive plinths whose statues were severed at the ankle or the knee. It seemed a city built by giants […]. (Tchaikovsky 2010, 238)

In a culture where the eye is dominant (Jackson 1981, 45), places are often mastered through sight (Certeau 1988, 36–37). This implies an element of control, as being able to see far away into the distance means that one can read a space with a predictive gaze: objects are seen and then controlled. At the same time, 'power is bound by its very visibility' (Certeau 1988, 37). The visually obvious shell is being occupied and utilized by the practitioners living the everyday urban life, walking the city below the thresholds of visibility. Certeau called them *walkers*, wandering people. The networks formed by their various trajectories are, in relation to representations of space, 'daily and indefinitely other' (Certeau 1988, 93). Places are no longer visually mastered in these trajectories. The daily navigated routes over plazas and streets are not consciously noticed by the walkers. As Anthony Vidler (2001, 81) has noted, cities are *felt* rather than seen. The urban walker is constantly bombarded with outside stimuli, but mostly the everyday environment is confronted in a state of distraction (Vidler 2001, 81–83; see also Benjamin 2008 [1936], 34–35). The urban experience is twofold: using both sight and touch. Visual perception is closely linked with the tactile. One's eyes note the roughness or smoothness of the surfaces, combining what is seen with the assumed sensation of touching (cf. Pallasmaa 2012 [1996]). The distracted movement through spaces relies on the familiar and expected. One may call this an absent-minded reaction, or as Vidler (2001, 81) has put it: in a sense, cities are 'invisible'.

The so-called invisibility of the environment could be linked to the multisensory urban experience. Visual urban descriptions may indirectly appeal to other senses. Ultimately, the spatial atmosphere is captured by all the senses, as shown, for example, in August Endell's (1908) classic text about Berlin. In the painterly, even synesthetic text, the visual phenomena were complemented with urban noise and tactile experiences. Seeing required interpretation that allowed the senses to intermingle. Sound was implied when churches or railway stations were mentioned. These nouns were inseparable from the tolling bells or train whistles, and bustling street scenes carried the cacophony of voices. Sounds were twined with mass, colors connected to auditory reactions (Endell 1908). Sounds are also part of the visual descriptions of new cities in Tschaikovsky's series. An auditory event may be implied even when its absence is described, since in Ant-cities sounds are not needed to carry messages:

> To live in an Ant-kinden city was to understand silence, and he had spent time in a few. There was the silence of everyday tasks which meant that one heard only the slaves cluttering about, whispering to one another. There was the silence of the drilling field where there were marching feet and the clink of armour but never a raised voice or a shouted command: five hundred soldiers, perhaps, in perfect formation and perfect order. There was the silence after dark when families sat together with closed lips […]. (Tchaikovsky 2009, 23)

The spaces may be painted by words, but the conjured images contain the multisensory experience in its entirety. The tactile nature of materials may even become more important than the visual. It has been claimed that the 'most important thing you have to do, is to feel your way through a city' (Benjamin, cited in Vidler 2001, 84; see Benjamin 1994, 254). The tactile knowledge is formed by routine and habit. On this tactile knowledge one builds the choices of everyday life. Even when encountering something unfamiliar, one must rely on the tested modes of action that arise from collective customs or individual habit. Maneuvering in the 'urban labyrinth' needs habits as a precondition (Vidler 2001, 84), but also a resilience that can encounter the unexpected. Here, tactics become useful.

According to Certeau, many everyday practices are tactical. They must use the place they have been given, even when the place has been organized by a foreign power. These practices may be unconnected occurrences taking advantage of encountered opportunities. Tactics require guile, wit, and sometimes trickery. Therefore, tactics may include an element of surprise. Tactics also introduce whimsical playfulness into the power structure of strategy. (Certeau 1988, xix, 37–39). The concepts of strategy and tactics are useful when describing urban layers, but the strategy-tactics frame of interpretation can also be applied when reading a fantasy story. Strategy needs an overall view; with strategic descriptions the reader becomes familiar with the setting of the story. The focus is on the visible environment. Strategy is connected to power, but tactics are combining elements into action and dealing with the social city. They are used underneath the official system imposed by the conquerors. As the specific story spaces are described, the reader is transported to the streets of ever new cities. The architecture is foreign, the culture unknown. With tactics, the unfamiliar gradually becomes familiar, the everyday transforms from a stage of conscious decisions to a setting of instinctive reactions. The urban spaces are *lived*. The unfolding story becomes the focus.

## The Interpretation: Places and the Confronted Otherness

The *Shadows* series presents the reader with several opposites. The most evident one is poised in the series' title, which reflects an attitude to technology. The apt attitude is linked to a belief in progress and the necessity of change, social skills often coming second to science. The inapt are oriented to the here and now, their social life governed by intricate rules of conduct. Reality looks very different from these two attitudes. One is future-oriented, the other claims an understanding of the past. This division reflects an old argument that has long interested philosophers: What should be the human attitude to technology? In the fantasy series, the two sides of this argument include nostalgia, and its opposite, futuristic techno-positivism. The values of these two sides are contradictory. One *kindens*' utopia would invariably turn into another's dystopia. However, even if their utopian projects differ, both sides need the other to clarify its own visions. Utopia and dystopia are linked,[6] and a visionary future is not imagined without a context that includes a past (Coleman 2005, 11). Utopia and architecture both invent new worlds, thus playing with reality (Coleman 2011, 22), but utopia is also equated with social imagination

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[6] As Atwood noted when explaining her concept of *ustopia* (Atwood 2011).

(Coleman 2005, 13). In the division of apt–inapt, the physical and technical objects are contrasted with the social subjects, creating a dichotomy of the built and the lived.

The use of insect traits in the series offers an opportunity for yet another dichotomy, which articulates the everyday life of the characters: some can fly, others cannot. This skill is related to the urban descriptions in the story, as many cityscapes are described from above. A division also comes from the scalar descriptions of these environments, as the overall views are later contrasted with experiences inside the city. The vast open spaces under the sky and the long view to the horizon are then replaced by enclosed spaces, the interplay of public and private, where the visually focused tourist gaze is eventually transformed into tactile experiences or the distracted movements of everyday life.

The strategic overall view of the city descriptions is, as already noted, mainly visual. However, when tactics are employed inside the city, other senses gain importance. In their everyday lives, the inhabitants need to note, at least subconsciously, the details and atmosphere of their urban environment. The two attitudes—strategic and tactical—could be compared to the zoom-out and zoom-in views of a design process in urban planning. The process oscillates between the two, from an overall understanding of the design environment to the enclosed atmospheres of urban plazas and the details of streetscapes. The concepts of strategy and tactics are linked with the scales of the described physical environments. However, more literary interpretive dispositions also exist, which likewise use a scalar division. In this case, the spatial information is similarly linked to the physical environment, but the focus is on telling the story.

The *map* and *tour* approaches (Linde and Labov 1975, 929–930; Certeau 1988, 119; Ryan 2012) to storytelling introduce two different ways of dealing with spaces.[7] In the map approach, spaces are shown as a panorama, often from an elevated point that offers a controlling view. The descriptions can be systematic, shifting in an orderly fashion from north to south, for example. Thus, the map approach implies a sedentary lookout from which the scene is observed. The tour approach, on the other hand, describes spaces through movement. The narrator moves, for example, inside a house from room to room. This view is embodied, not purely visual. These two positions to describing spaces have obvious scalar similarities with the concepts of strategy and tactics. The map view is strategic, whereas the tour view may be linked with the tactics of everyday movements. Tchaikovsky has skillfully used these viewpoints in creating his world. They are both narrative devices and tools of spatial description.

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[7] In the original article by Linde and Labov, the *map* and the *tour* were called description types and discourse strategies; Ryan also called them strategies. To avoid confusion caused by the word *strategy*, in this chapter they are called map and tour approaches or positions.

In the present reading of the series, the scalar structure is used in the interpretation. Architecture is approached and then experienced, the viewpoint moving from an overall view to the details. Strategy is linked to the view of the urban landscape from far away, tactics to the inside experience of being in a city.[8] As characters are approaching a new urban environment, the insectoid background is a known basis for their tourist gaze. The divisive attitude to technology is also apparent in several descriptions. A techno-utopia (or a techno-dystopia, depending on the viewer's standpoint) is visible in the descriptions of war-time technology, but technological inventions have also stamped the image of industrial cities like Helleron. Its description celebrates the technological strength and connects it with the social reality of factory operations. Helleron is built on two scales: one constructed for technology, visible from afar, and the other self-organized, best experienced from within. The first look at the city is given in a strategic view, though a tactical one is already subtly implicit:

> The factories were huge grubs, extended and extended, comprising mazes of workrooms, storerooms and vehicle yards. Up on the western hills, where the air was clearer, there were mansions built as grandiose statements in stone, telling about their owners' profits and losses. Between these hulks, however, swarmed the masses. The buildings that housed the workers of Helleron were crammed together, squeezed tight, beside and under and over, as though jostling for position beside the mighty flanks of their masters. The whole complexity was shot through with silver: the rails were Helleron's breath and blood, shuttling men and machines, crew and commodities […] They watched the sheer enormity of it grow and approach them across the distance. (Tchaikovsky 2008, 138)

The strategic first view of Helleron shows its entire urban layout. The simple black dot of the book's map gains detail as the visitors approach the city. It receives a special identity of its own, determined by the town's inhabitants and their livelihoods. The tourist gaze is inquisitive, even apprehensive, prepared for the otherness that is not only revealed in the city's inhabitants, but in the very structure of the nests they have built. Typical of a map view, observed from above or far away, the different sections of the city are described in turn. Even the connection to a larger urban network is noted when rails are mentioned. The view relies on a visual outlook, flattened out into an almost two-dimensional image, a silhouette of protruding shapes. The description from afar gives a strategic view, which needs to be complemented by the experiential variety provided by the tactical view.

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[8] This division could also be linked to Atwood's definition of *ustopia*, a location (representing strategy with the map approach) as well as a state of mind (representing tactics and the tour approach (see Atwood 2011)).

Inside a city, the observer makes note of the architecture, using their background to understand the new environment. The architecture of the cities they know is the measure of scalar comparison. The unfamiliar otherness of each new place is emphasized. The foreign environment is a mystery, completely other to what the observer knows. It may be nearly impossible to understand:

> Golden stone raised higher than the walls of Collegium […] architecturally bewildering but, given the people that live here, I suppose it's not surprising. Huge buildings and broad avenues; every major building constructed vastly out of scale. […] They were mad keen on their carvings here in Khanaphes. It was obviously the main outlet for all their stunted creativity, he decided. They could never leave a stone surface blank when they could chisel intricate little stories and histories into it. Histories that revealed nothing. Stories that hinted at everything. (Tchaikovsky 2010, 1–2)

The reader is equally perplexed. Like the observer, the reader tries to decipher the visual clues given in the description, falling back on known images from architectural history. The stone walls of Khanaphes are thus chiseled with symbols that resemble ornate hieroglyphs, telling stories of a forgotten civilization, as the vast scale of the buildings recalls the pyramids and temples of ancient Egypt. The puzzle box architecture of a Dragonfly-city may bring to mind the paper-covered sliding doors of traditional Japanese houses. The wall carvings may remind one of printed ornamentation on twenty-first-century concrete facades. Words and pictures intermingle, the unknown links with the known, all according to the principle of minimal departure.

Inside the solid stone city of Khanaphes, however, a familiar commercial reality meets the reader. At the market place, characters face a multisensory city of canvas and color. Sounds and smells overwhelm. These embodied descriptions are about atmosphere, abounding with details of enclosure. For the citizens, the commercial section may be almost invisible in its familiarity, but to the visitor it is bewildering and foreign:

> From the fierce dry heat of the sun outside they were suddenly plunged into thick, muggy, sticky humidity. The daylight had dimmed to a colored gloom as it filtered through tight-stretched canvas, silk and linen. […] Che took a few steps deeper, beneath the cloth ceiling. It was like walking under water. She felt an almost physical resistance to her intrusion. […] the sounds and smells were overwhelming. (Tchaikovsky 2010, 245–246)

Tactics come into play with this tour view. The physical environment is woven with the social. The main characters maneuver the unfamiliar streets, using tactics with guile. Inside or even under a city, tunnelling through paths not visible on the surface, they make use of a tactical network based on inside knowledge and their own intuition. The visual is complemented by the tactile. Sometimes touching and hearing are the only sensory skills available. The multisensory world of *kinden*-cities is a way the author can emphasize otherness, making use of both the familiar and the strange. The variety of viewpoints is further enhanced by the apt–inapt dichotomy. In an apt world of technology, an inapt must indeed rely on a clever use of opportunities that appear in time. In a foreign, sometimes hostile environment, they are relying on more than the visual sense.

Otherness is not limited to the tourist gaze; it is shown in the reactions to this gaze. The cultural codes of each place differ. In Suon Ren, the visitor is not noticed (Tchaikovsky 2011, 23). Eyes are averted, looks are not met. The unfamiliar city walker is given a wide berth, without interference from locals. The visitors are, in a sense, invisible. In inaccessible Tharn, the society is so closed that a stranger attracts immediate attention (Tchaikovsky 2008, 524–29). Stares create a stifling atmosphere of constant observation. It is obvious that the insectoid characteristics define outward appearances. Otherness is always observable.

The otherness of the insectoid-derived constructions is emphasized; it exists in layers, starting from the known, continuing to descriptions of the unfamiliar. The collective background is visible in all things. The way each *kinden* builds its city states is determined by the typology of their dwellings. The built environment is an obvious manifestation of a culture: the form of buildings and the use of materials reflect the physical and psychological traits of their builders. When two contrasting attitudes to the built environment meet, the result is alien in its context:

> All around it the buildings of Myna conformed to a low and careful style, flat-roofed and Spartan like Ant-city designs. This thing was so utterly alien here that it must have been Wasp architecture: a great tiered monstrosity that looked so out of place it might have been dropped from the sky. (Tchaikovsky 2008, 340)

Familiar architecture provides a base from which the characters confront a foreign reality. In addition, an intricate social structure exists alongside the physical one. An example of the operationally layered structure is shown in the workings of the industrial city Helleron. The description presents a seemingly chaotic view of the city's organization, but there is a complex order amidst it all. Tactics as opposed to strategy are outlined here. The actors continue their operations under the eyes of the new rulers, the warmongering wasp-*kinden*. The city self-organizes, quickly taking advantage of the arising possibilities:

> if it was governed at all, it actually governed itself. It was ruled through a thousand small concerns, ten thousand petty greeds, by gangs, factory magnates, artificer-lords, black marketeers and, of course, foreign agents. More, this was accepted, even intended, by its people. It was all a great, sprawling, grasping chaos, the absolute anathema of the Empire's iron rule, and Thalric found he rather enjoyed it. (Tchaikovsky 2008, 165)

In many city descriptions the tactical aspects are not quite so obvious. The attention is first given to the physical attributes of the urban region, most likely from above, with an urban planner's attitude: starting from the whole and then advancing to the details. For the reader of the fantasy story, the overall picture of each spatial frame provides a starting point for experiencing a foreign reality. Using two separate scales in the urban descriptions allows the reader to enter each new situation gradually, first observing the visually perceptible physical environment before being immersed in the social realm and urban surroundings. The author describes these surroundings as they are seen by the characters moving through the city. The solidity or transparency of the architecture is revealed, but also the degrees of enclosure in the urban spaces. The streets and squares are brought into existence with words of materiality, and then enlivened by the social life and its tactical trajectories.

Inside a city, the characters' tactical movements reflect the way they have interpreted the new environments, reading the spatial and social clues. Sometimes the reading is literal: in Khanaphes, the story of the original founders is carved on the buildings. It is there for everyone to read, provided they are able to understand the symbols. However, when a city is familiar to the protagonists, the urban spaces are hardly described. The college town of Collegium is only presented with vague impressions of auditoriums, interior courtyards, and drill fields. It is a background for internal monologues and some dramatic events, but too familiar to be noticed. The setting for everyday life is not something one needs to constantly recognize. Rather, it is noted with a peripheral gaze, the sounds heard even if not actively listened to. It is formed of *spaces of distraction* (Vidler 2001, 81).

Each character in the series tries to decipher the spatial logic of a foreign environment. The everyday paths of survival depend on the background of the observer. The inapt have difficulties in a technically apt world, but the apt may overlook subtle clues that are not immediately visible to their eyes. At times it seems as if the two are living in completely different realities that only occasionally intersect. Such encounters are instances of confronting otherness, but at the same time occasions for self-reflection and understanding, opening a world where the familiar and the strange intermingle.

The cities of the fantasy series present a constructed, strange reality, which the visitor may eventually begin to see with new eyes. The environment does not become exactly familiar, but it becomes less unknown. Little by little the strangeness subsides. The tour approach allows tactics to emerge in the revealed spaces. The many *kindens* of the story enable the possibility of numerous actions. The visitors may never be inhabitants, but like the wasp-*kinden* representative in Helleron, they may learn to appreciate the variety of the unfamiliar environment.

## Conclusion: A Collective and Its Otherness

The architecture of the *kinden*-cities is a crucial part of character development in the *Shadows* sagas. The meticulous descriptions of foreign architecture emphasize the characters' background. Their existence as part of a community is evident; individuality is contrasted with a collective emphasis. Starting out, the protagonists may not yet be aware of who they are and where they came from. With this realization, the importance of the collective in the individual growth stories becomes apparent.

The collectivity determines the tourist gaze in each description. The nests built by these humanoid peoples are a part of their identity, and the primary source of their alienation in foreign environments. The collective, however, is not just dependent on architecture. In addition, it relies on the tactical, everyday social experience inside a city, which needs more than just the tourist gaze to be truly visible. Manipulation of nature and uses of technology are addressed in turn as otherness is confronted socially and physically in the strange new cities. The author's use of scalar division in the approach to the urban environments allows the reader to gradually inhabit the spatial frames. The cities are seen, they are entered, they are experienced. Self-reflection is a by-product when otherness is confronted and perhaps eventually understood. In the meantime, the cities stay with us readers. We have flown over them and walked their streets; we've acknowledged the official organization in the strategic sense, but have also revelled in the tactical possibilities. Like Atwood's *ustopian* places, the fantasy cities are both locational, depicted on maps, and states of mind, stored in the memories of the characters.

Despite all this, the otherness remains. These cities are not completely open to those who approach them with a tourist gaze. The context of their construction will always remain foreign to others. In a way these cities only exist for those who know how to read them. For others, they are almost u-topias, non-places, always indefinitely remote. The tourist gaze does not see the essence of a city. That can only be grasped through the collective social life of living in the urban environment, as a part of it, with knowledge of its history and customs. This city may seem consistently unfair to others, even if they come with the best of intentions.

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