I. Contextualizing Contemporary Urban Narratives as Literary Documentary

THE POSTMODERN CRISIS OF REALISM AND REPRESENTATION

In her foreword to Matthew Beaumont's *Concise Companion to Realism*, Rachel Bowlby has lamented that the status of "poor old realism" is of "tasteless spam in the sandwich of literary and cultural history."[1] My project treats its corpus as a stylized trope of realism, and is thus also interested in the contemporary continuity of the discourse of reality and realism(s). On the other hand, I would also like to move away from this tendency of measuring contemporary works against a yardstick of realism debates. Let us therefore see if we may not somehow move beyond bemoaning realism as Bowlby does. In this section, we will first try to understand how postmodernity came to become widely considered a period of *crisis* of realism and representation.[2] Against the backdrop of the 'crisis' ridden postmodern literary conventions, the insistence by our authors to explicitly anchor/situate their narratives in the materiality of actual sites and bodies indicates either an outright neglect of these conventions, or perhaps a counter-reaction. They abandon the despair of this crisis and disregard the postmodern problematization of the representation of reality through an adamant empirical adherence to the 'authentic' or the tangible 'real'. To describe this aspect of my corpus on its own terms, I would go so far as to say that the usual realist concerns such as truth and referentiality are so naturalized that they are rendered invisible. Is it possible, we may then ask, that this is an indication of a 'return of the real' through "gestures of authentication"?[3] Is it possible, that this insistence on *real* places and *real* people challenges, or even simply ignores the perceived absence of reality in a "new architectural promenade" of simulations that contemporary media provides us?

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1 | Beaumont, *A Concise Companion to Realism*, xiv.

2 | Marcus and Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*.

3 | Schlote and Voigts-Virchow, "Introduction: The Creative Treatment of Actuality – New Documentarism," 108; See also Foster, *The Return of the Real*.

"This is the new architectural promenade [...] a city unrooted to any definite spot on the surface of the earth, shaped by connectivity and bandwidth constraints rather than by accessibility and land values, largely asynchronous in its operation, and inhabited by disembodied and fragmented subjects who exist as collections of aliases and agents."[4]

The physical and social urban geographies that our authors trace may be threatened by such a dystopian "disembodied and fragmented" future, but as represented by the authors, they are anything but 'mere' cyber entities. My argument is, therefore, that these authors and their narratives disregard the notion of the crisis of representation in postmodern literature precisely through an emphasis on a very tangible empirical reality. This emphasis is achieved through a narrative device, which I will call *empirical anchorage*. Specifically, in terms of method, the concept refers to the authors' phenomenological practice of exploring the material city – their personal, bodily, and 'non-abstract' experience of it. The subsequent discourse formation through the narrativization of their experience is also empirically anchored.[5] However, as we will see in the course of this project, each author makes use of very different strategies to explore the city as well as to write about it.

Since there is not much consensus as to what the term postmodern exactly means or when it commenced, a general point of departure in its understanding is to consider it as a reaction to and departure from modernity.[6] Modernity being, however, yet another such conundrum, the task becomes more muddling. Andreas Huyssen's caution in referring to both periods is telling when he tries to describe what postmodernism is:

"[A] slowly emerging cultural transformation in Western societies, a change in sensibility for which the term 'postmodernism' is actually, at least for now, wholly adequate. [...] I don't want to be misunderstood as claiming that there is a wholesale paradigm shift of the cultural, social and economic orders; any such claim clearly would be overblown. But in an important sector of our culture *there is a noticeable shift in sensibility, practices and discourse formations, which distinguishes a postmodern set of assumptions, experiences and propositions from that of a preceding period.*"[7]

The "preceding period" is modernity, whose vision of the world was generally perceived as technocratic and rationalistic. There was a strong belief in linear

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4 | Mitchell, *City of Bits*, 24.

5 | More on this later in the chapter

6 | Eagleton, "Awakening from Modernity."

7 | Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern," 8, my emphasis.

progress, absolute truths, rational planning of social orders and standardization of knowledge and production.[8] The distinguishing "noticeable shift" came in the form of *liberating* forces, which were, therefore, quite naturally, heterogeneity and difference. These two aspects thus laid the foundations for a postmodernist redefinition of cultural discourse. Postmodernism destabilized all manners of metaphysical solemnity embodied by "encompassing paradigms" through fragmentation, indeterminacy and distrust of all totalizing discourse.[9] This postmodern inadequacy and uncertainty of the means of describing social reality or lived experience was described first in anthropology as a so-called 'crisis' of representation:

"While retaining its politicized dimension as a legacy of the 1960s, social thought in the years since has grown more suspicious of the ability of encompassing paradigms […] Consequently, the most interesting theoretical debates in a number of fields have shifted to the level of method, to problems of epistemology, interpretation, and discursive forms of representation themselves, employed by social thinkers. Elevated to a central concern of theoretical reflection, *problems of description become problems of representation.*"[10]

The authors are describing a shift in their discipline to problems of 'reading' or 'interpreting' reality. The thing that signifies the crisis of representation becomes postmodernity's signature – there is a proliferation of interpretation*s* of realit*ies* with sensitivity to the role of ideology in meaning-making processes.[11]

It is interesting to note that the postmodern *crisis* narration is thus revealed to stem from older dominant paradigms whose descriptive and explanatory abilities are challenged by the new reality/realities. The difficulty of grasping, let alone representing, the social world of a global and hyper-networked capitalism that was becoming increasingly abstract fuelled the perceived crisis of the realist novel. This was intertwined with the fragmentation of the social field produced by the micro-politics of difference. Literary realism, understood as typology, experienced its 'crisis' in postmodernism in the form of a deconstruction of the

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8 | See Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 10–38.

9 | Ibid., 39–89.

10 | Marcus and Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, 9, my emphasis.

11 | Marcus and Fischer specifically use the phrase "crisis of representation" a few pages later. See ibid., 12; See also Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, on historiography: "the meaning and shape are not in the events, but in the systems which make those past 'events' into present historical 'facts'.", 89; For further reading, see the work of writers such as Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, (French); Welsch, *Unsere Postmoderne Moderne*, (German); McLaughlin, "Post-Postmodernism," (American).

ideology of representations.[12] 'Realism' became merely a yardstick against which different transformations or transfigurations of realism or other conventions and modes of discourse were held up against and evaluated (even though postmodern texts were most consciously resisting strict generic categorization).[13] In the postmodern strain of experimentation, there was also a linkage of generally contradictory spheres of reality such as technology and myth or realism with fantasy. Even as postmodern works sustained the emphasis on the mediated status of all representation, their aim was nevertheless to aspire to represent and comment on the social world. On the other hand, the *unease* with regard to representation manifested itself also as an *inability* to represent something, as in the trauma narratives of Holocaust-survivors or post-9/11 stories. Their often debilitating experience is conveyed through an 'absence' or 'lack', which can be narratively represented only through devices such as the blurring of ontology (boundary blurring) or destabilization of meaning.[14]

Rather than constitute a crisis, such paradigms readily suggest radical plurality as the fundamental condition of postmodernist writing. This can be seen from the many mixed genres such as metafiction, historiographic metafiction, and varieties of the non-fiction novel that came to be celebrated.[15] An implicit anxiety about the

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12 | This refers largely to structuralist critique of literary realism. See for example Barthes, "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?," who equates realism with the "totalitarian ideology of the referent." (159).

13 | Hence the engagement with terms such as blurred genre or hybrid genre. See respectively, Geertz, "Blurred Genres"; Nünning, "Mapping the Field of Hybrid New Genres in the Contemporary Novel"; On the other hand, one could speak of a dialogue with realism in genres such as magical realism or metafiction. See also Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, who quite rightly criticizes literary theory's tendency to view new literary trends as simply redefinitions of the real (36–7).

14 | See Onega Jaén, *Contemporary Trauma Narratives*; and Gibbs, *Contemporary American Trauma Narratives*.

15 | In the American context, we also have the development of New Journalism and the nonfiction novel. These were a dramatized blend of fictional techniques applied to the detailed observations of the journalist. The crux of the movement was, however, not a play with form, but an affirmation of a moral position assumed by the "New Journalists". A more recent revival followed and was called New New Journalism, with the difference that the emphasis now was on innovative "immersion" strategies and extended time spent on reporting. See Hellmann, *Fables of Fact*; A diachronic survey shows that such reportorial textualization of political, social and cultural "reality" are neither "new" as the American journalist-novelists would have it, nor are they restricted to the American context. One "other" example of such historical referentiality and "reshuffling of generic material" has already been thematized in discussions of 18th century English novels. See for example Ray, *Story and History*; See also McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740*; Ansgar Nünning binds these characteristics

traditionally established categories of fact and fiction runs through postmodern literature. This anxiety comes from an awareness of the discrepancy between the actual historical events and its textualization. In this vein, there have been several attempts to analyse whether a text's reception of fact or fiction depends finally on the reader or whether there is indeed something, essentially 'factual' or 'fictional' that characterizes the narrative as one or the other. Is there an empirical method to differentiate factual from fictional narratives? In other words, is it possible to locate the difference between fact and fiction in the form that each narrative respectively takes? The response to these questions is the core of the fact-fiction debate and probably that, which indicates the true postmodern crisis.[16] In the 1970s, Hayden White triggered the controversial debate over the epistemological value of historical truth with the provocative statement: "Written discourse is cognitive in its aims and mimetic in its means. In this respect, history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation."[17] White's work contains a radical critique of historical methodology and the consciousness of historians. This view of history as a literary genre called into question the claims of truth and objectivity in historical work; simply put, it showed that facts cannot speak for themselves. History could now be considered a 'literature of fact' because the historian's forms of discourses and those of the 'imaginative writer' were shown to overlap.[18] Moreover, the techniques or strategies they use in the composition of their discourses are often the same. They both aim at giving a textual image of 'reality' (verisimilitude) whereby the novelist may make more use of figurative techniques than the historian. If they are to lay claim to representing or documenting human experience of the world, both history and fiction must prove that they represent satisfactorily an image of something beyond themselves. To achieve this, White showed that both disciplines share a considerable number of conventions such as, selection, organization, diegesis,

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and diachronic examples nicely in his phrase, calling them "the journalistic prehistory of the novel". Nünning, "Mapping the Field of Hybrid New Genres in the Contemporary Novel."

16 | The belief that fictional and non-fictional narratives look alike is but one side of the debate. Dorrit Cohn, for example, argues against such a persuasion. See especially her illustrations of mode and voice in different types of narrative. She shows, for example, that while fiction is freely able to show the inner thoughts of a character by a separate narrator, historians seldom allow themselves this privilege. That is, the representation or mimesis of consciousness distinguishes fictional narratives from non-fictional ones. A "good" historian may touch upon psychological motives and reasons only if "privately revealing sources such as memoirs, diaries, and letters are available". Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction*, 118. See also 117–23.

17 | White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 122.

18 | "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" in ibid., 81–100.

temporal pacing, and emplotment.[19] Such a questioning of recorded history is tied up with the social and cultural assumptions on which our theories are based. It is a critical questioning of accepted notions of representation and truth, causality and temporal homogeneity, linearity and constancy. The fragmentation of the representation of 'reality' and the blurring of genre boundaries in postmodern art and literature are but symptoms of such a re-assessment. This distrust of (historical) 'knowledge' – of the perceived objectivity of historiography and of the notion that truth can be obtained through a focus on empirical facts – represents an epistemological conflict. It indicates an urge to liberate the disciplines from 'empiricist' notions of knowledge and truth.[20]

The next section elaborates how, despite postmodernism's pervasiveness, we can still pick up loose strands of a documentary impulse running through literature. The question that must then follow is how this documentary impulse makes the best of this 'crisis' situation? Is it perhaps a symptom of this crisis, or does it even acknowledge such a crisis? It may be argued that the documentary impulse in this project's corpus represents a move away from abstract postmodern representational paradigms to a form that is more materially grounded. Through its strategy of empirical anchorage, immersion and referentiality, it may just be the way forward, beyond the conundrum of postmodernity.

The Documentary Impulse in Literature

Let us consider this statement about the status of documentary today:

"As archives become fluid, and more and more information is available online, conflicts about the intellectual property of documentary images and sounds increase. The documentary becomes further implicated in processes of Othering and social disintegration. But contemporary documentary production has to face these conditions. They do not represent reality. They are the reality."[21]

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19 | White argues that "emplotment" is one of the most characteristic aspects shared by history and fiction: "Histories gain part of their explanatory effect by their success in making stories out of mere chronicles; and stories in turn are made out of chronicles by an operation which I have elsewhere called 'emplotment.' And by emplotment I mean simply the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific kinds of plot structures, in precisely the way that Frye has suggested is the case with 'fictions' in general." Ibid., 83.

20 | See Dobson and Ziemann, *Reading Primary Sources*, 1–18.

21 | Lind and Steyerl, *The Green Room*, 26.

On the one hand, it thematizes the diffuse nature of 'information' in a globally connected world that is problematic because of the power asymmetries it reinstates. The latter part of the statement reflects that postmodern sense of the 'loss of reality' and the precariousness of representational systems.[22] Historically, the statement points back to the loss of the hegemony of continuous models of history and evaluations of how a particular system of epistemology acquired effective discursive power in a given society.[23] A number of aspects play into this rhetoric – the linkage of knowledge to power (Foucault), a rethinking of the past and its textualization, and the union of intellectual knowledge and local memories.[24] These set the path for a postmodern preference of the fragmented and local knowledge directed against 'great truths' and 'grand theories'.[25] The distrust of the authority and objectivity of historical sources or accounts is accentuated by a mixing of genres and recourse to alternative sources of information and their interpretation.[26] As we saw in the previous section, the articulation of these epistemological debates has largely constituted the postmodern crisis of representation. As Jean Baudrillard famously put it, the 'real' thus became "that of which it is possible to provide an equivalent reproduction".[27] One would expect such a context of mediation, simulation and virtuality to open up an arena of practices that *re-stabilize* means of contesting 'realities' in art or literary productions. Perhaps these are represented by the scattered attempts in different disciplines to characterize a documentary turn in contemporary art and literary productions.[28] The works discussed by scholars are marked by their use of documentary aesthetics and formal structures – not only to utilize and modify existing documents, but also to create new 'documents'.[29]

What we are witnessing indirectly through such academic engagements is perhaps a proliferation of documentary approaches that are trying to establish a space and path for their different concepts of reality and representation. There is an irony and paradox in this newer concept of 'documentary'. On the one hand,

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22 | Baudrillard, *Simulations*.

23 | Dobson and Ziemann, *Reading Primary Sources*, 1–2.

24 | Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*.

25 | Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern*, 11; See also Munslow, *Experiments in Rethinking History*, 13.

26 | Such as metahistorical novels, postmodern historiographic fiction and metafiction, new journalism or various forms of the non-fiction novel/creative non-fiction.

27 | Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 73.

28 | See Agrell, "Documentarism and Theory of Literature"; Weeks, "Re-Cognizing the Post-Soviet Condition: The Documentary Turn in Contemporary Art in the Baltic States"; Schlote and Voigts-Virchow, *ZAA, Constructing Media Reality: The New Documentarism*.

29 | See Agrell and Schlote and Voigts-Virchow, but specifically Weeks, "Re-Cognizing the Post-Soviet Condition: The Documentary Turn in Contemporary Art in the Baltic States."

as Hito Steyerl has pointed out in the quote above, the documentary today poses as reality itself (even as it performs the function of being merely a wildcard for reality, and actually continues to signify an absence). On the other hand, these documentaries are being produced in a context in which they are merely *one* of the discourses of the real.[30] A more stimulating enquiry into contemporary documentary forms like those of our corpus should therefore not ask *what* the facts are, but rather, *how* the facts are described. More specifically, we must ask how authority and authenticity are ascribed to them to sanction one mode of explaining over another.[31]

In order to establish a relation and continuity with the above developments in literature and the related emancipation in literary analysis, I suggest a working label for this project's corpus of urban narratives. Broadly speaking, the term *literary documentary* will be used in this project to refer to the narrative mode of the corpus. By narrative mode, I mean the manner in which the narrative is rendered. In other words, literary documentary refers to the individual documentary and narrative strategies chosen to convey the authorial experience. The term indicates the disciplinary and generic overlap of its two parts, and describes the typology of the project's corpus.[32] It highlights, on the one hand, what I consider the 'empirical anchorage' of these texts – the aspect that conveys their referentiality. Conversely, 'documentarism' in our usage refers first and foremost to this empirical anchorage or referentiality.[33] At a basic level, the term 'documentary' carries with it the meanings 'factual' and 'objective' or simply 'that which is meant to provide a record of something'.[34] In our case, this relates to the authors' investigations into different facets of contemporary life in different globalized, urbanized cities. It carries with it the meaning of its root

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30 | Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 10.

31 | For such an analysis to succeed, my own project also considers the context of its corpus. In the course of this project, we will thus address the place and time of their production; the form of publication of these narratives, be it the physical form of publication including individual authorial variations; the social and normative rules of the institution governing the sources the authors use (such as newspapers, history books, personal correspondence, testimony, official documents such as court files or surveillance reports, other novels or documentaries); and the wider historical context which helps us embed them in a literary tradition.

32 | See also Schlote and Voigts-Virchow, *ZAA, Constructing Media Reality: The New Documentarism*. A study and discussion of literary documentaries, especially in the contemporary atmosphere of medial simulations and a perceived "loss of reality", has been initiated and collected by Schlote and Voigts-Virchow under the Documentary Turn, but there have been no follow up issues at the point of writing this PhD. .

33 | We will return to a more detailed discussion of empirical anchorage later in the chapter.

34 | Alluding to Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*.

in the word 'document' – to teach – derived from the Latin word *docere*. The pedagogical connotation in our urban narratives lies in their capacity to impart 'knowledge' and to instruct through their ability to thematize or problematize certain issues. The label fulfills yet another, more contemporary meaning of the word 'document', in that it refers to itself as a thing or a document – an artifact containing/providing traces of the contemporary urban situation. The 'literary', on the other hand, refers to the processes of narrativization. That is, it denotes the authorial use of literary techniques for the re-creation of their individual experiences and journeys in textual, narrative form. The label should also serve to remind us of the tension or oscillation in these works between the two aspects literary and documentary as generally polarized clusters of techniques – the metaphoric on the one hand, and realistic on the other.[35]

Turning our attention to the narrative techniques and conventions in our corpus reveals how these narrativizations convey verisimilitude. That is to say, the literary mode that the authors select also conveys the authenticity of representation. This is sustained, on the one hand, through an explicit statement of intention by the author. He establishes himself explicitly as the figure that is the focalizing subject in his narrative, the central consciousness through which the city, events and people are experienced. The reader is assured that this narrative has a stable univocal origin – the author (a real person) as narrator. This move sanctions his subjective perspective by liberating it from the falsifying restraints of so-called 'neutral' observation. Technically, following Genette, if we take diegetic to mean the universe in which the story takes place, the author's position is that of a homodiegetic narrator. He inhabits the same world as his story, but cannot perceive the inner workings of the minds of their fellow-beings. Subsequently, the narration is diegetic or a 'telling'. On the other hand, authenticity of representation is achieved at the narrative level by deploying reality references to link the narrative to the real historical world. Motifs used to this end are explicit representations of current social, cultural or political issues, 'real' people and their names, description or testimonies, and a rendering of specific situations or problems. These, ironically, underline the authors' individual perspectives and interpretations. In order to maintain a notion of documentariness in their narratives despite their subjectivity, these authors take recourse to developing reliability. To ensure reliability the authors never break with their aesthetic style of using reality as their reference.

However, the project refrains from thinking about them as 'factual' since it distances itself from the fact and fiction dichotomy. In a way, my stance reflects the authors' own strategy of empirical anchorage as a means of overcoming the realist conundrum of the discrepancy between the real and its representation.

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35 | See Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing*, 220.

This specific kind of referentiality that is situated in authorial experientiality will be discussed in the next section.

Referential Narratives and their Empirical Anchorage

Hayden White sought to spectacularize his critique of historical texts by deeming them "verbal fictions"; his use of 'fiction' here shows the denigrating connotations of the word.[36] Conversely, my project does not seek to eulogize its corpus by giving it the documentary stamp. Rather, I hope to be able to use the semantic multiplicity of the term documentary to explore the strategies the authors use to record the city they perceive or experience. The most fundamental meaning of documentary in my work alludes to its most generic meaning – that of referentiality. This calls to mind Dorrit Cohn's distinction of referential narratives from non-referential ones. Cohn views narrative as utterances that present a causal sequence of events concerning human beings, which she then differentiates into referential and non-referential. This is also more or less how the term narrative is being used in this project. Cohn's taxonomy retraces the generic boundaries that White sought to blur. However, it is not in the scope of my project to address all the questions that are raised by her differentiation of narrative. Cohn attributes referentiality to historical works, journalistic reports, biographies, and autobiographies – works that are subject, as she maintains, to judgments of truth and falsity.[37] Consequently, non-referentiality becomes, for Cohn, a "signpost" for the fictional status of a text.[38] In her well-argued critique of White's use of 'emplotment' as a literary technique, Cohn directs us to an important characteristic of referential narratives. She argues that emplotment may very well be applied to the process of structuring archival sources.[39] In contrast, a novel may be plotted, but not *em*plotted since its "serial moments do not refer to, and can therefore not be selected from an ontologically independent and temporally prior database of disordered, meaningless happenings". If we turn this around to tell us something about our corpus of *referential* narratives, the crux of her argument is that the interaction of story and discourse in referential narratives is sustained by the logical and chronological priority of documented or observed events (the story must first 'occur' in order for discourse about it to form).[40] In non-referential narratives, there is no such presumption of story over discourse. They are both considered synchronous structural aspects.

36 | White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 82.

37 | Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction*, 15–17.

38 | Ibid., 107–31.

39 | Ibid., 114.

40 | Ibid., 115.

My point here is not to split hairs about the meanings or differences between types of narrative, nor to oversimplify the issue of reference in narratives. We must, however, gather tools with which to describe our narratives that embody a special kind of discourse, which emphasizes its own referentiality. As Cohn only fleetingly suggests, we may thus add the level of *reference* to an analysis of narrative (apart from the usual story/discourse model of analysis). As our corpus illustrates, a means readily available to authors for establishing referentiality in their narratives is by stating it explicitly. Such a narrative mode does not merely integrate or insert documentary/factual material into the text as a narrative device, but is *constituted* by the referentiality of its content. It does not *use* documentary realism, but *is* documentary realism, and is in this sense performative.[41] The author is, however, restricted and restrained by this aesthetic choice for he cannot break with it to maintain his reliability. His representational accuracy becomes a matter of authenticity.

The authors of my corpus do not directly or overtly address issues pertaining to our (their) comprehension of reality. Instead, a reality 'out there' and their ability to know or capture it is assumed as an epistemic foundation. In each book, there is an almost frantic insistence by the authors on their subjectivity. This is, as we will see in more detail later, an authorial strategy of authentication and authorization that enables the authors to make their 'realism' more compelling for the reader. Due to the phenomenological aspect of the authors' city enterprise, this authorial subjectivity relativizes, but paradoxically also reinforces their assumption of an objectively knowable, describable external reality.

The narrator's reliability develops primarily from the fixed perspective of the author as experiencer, chronicler and narrator. His explicit acknowledgement of the referentiality of his work decides its reception as documentary, and hence 'factual' rather than merely 'verisimilar'. It is primarily through this strategy that the empirical anchorage of documentary is established and maintained. At the very beginning of each book, the reader is informed about the ontological referentiality he will encounter – the living author as experiencer and sincere narrator, the actual jungle of a city 'out there', real persons, their names and authentic testimonies. The epistemology of these documentary endeavors is linked to the voyeur's promise of a faithful rendering of his experience of the

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41 | My use of the term documentary realism refers only very loosely to Sauerberg, *Fact into Fiction*. Sauerberg discusses it more thoroughly as a narrative mode that draws attention to the fictional and factual in narrative. I refrain from further use of the term in the sense that Sauerberg intends it because his usage assumes a (problematic) primal notion of reality as 'structureless chaos' that I distance myself from. Where it is mentioned in my project, it refers to the authors' treatment of 'reality', not my own. However, it is also not the scope of my project to interrogate the categories of 'fact' or 'reality'. I would like to use this footnote merely to indicate my sensitivity to the issue.

contemporary urban scenography. A very earnest sort of reader-address forms the basis for the acceptance of the empirical rootedness, hence documentariness, of the narrative. Mediatisation is thus instrumentalized as a device for authentication; the authors place themselves within the narrative as interviewers, chroniclers, narrators, *and* writers of the text. Their legitimacy is at no point in genuine jeopardy, for no opportunity is spared to inform and remind the reader that the author was physically there as an experiencer. In the process, the authors' experience of the city becomes a means of discovering, describing or understanding the city, but also of constituting it. Any totalizing claims to an integrated view of reality are denied by the centrality of subjective experience. Thus, even as their subjective experience is transferred into representation, the subjectivity paradoxically enhances the documentariness of these narratives.[42]

In our discussion of the empirical anchorage of literary documentaries, we have already begun to address the question of what constitutes or characterizes these textual documentary works. On the one hand, we have the referentiality of source material and of the experientiality of the authors' own movements in the city. This is their foundation and what I have called their empirical anchorage. A characteristic trait that develops out of this situation is the paradoxical notion of objectivity arising from the subjective author/narrator complex. This objectivity is anchored in the reliability that the author/narrator establishes. Introducing the notion of empirical anchorage and theorizing the authorial sincerity to which it is harnessed enables us to avoid the terms fact and fiction in our project. The documentariness of the narratives is established through these notions and accepted as such. The project is not concerned with the verification of sources or authenticity where it designates truthfulness. My focus is more on an analysis of their authenticity where it attempts to camouflage the intentions or interests of the author. The ultimate aim being not to simply uncover authorial ideology, but to describe the strategies the authors use to authenticate and authorize their individual ideology. Thus, we must turn our attention to the 'text' at hand. The basic means by which the descriptions and experience of the city are rendered are almost facile, much like those used in straightforward realist novels to achieve the 'authentic' representation of everyday urban sights.[43] To evoke a sense of the people and places, the authors rely on realist codes of description such as

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42 | One can therefore speak of "structuring" rather than "representing" reality. See Imhof, *Contemporary Metafiction*, 23; See also McCord, "The Ideology of Form: The Nonfiction Novel," 77.

43 | In my attempt to describe the narrative strategies of my corpus, it is not my intention to view it as "merely" a continuation of "realism", a concept that is itself an over-simplification that ignores, among other things, the historical variability of aesthetic criteria. See for example how Rachel Bowlby re-opens up the debate on realism in Beaumont, *A Concise Companion to Realism*; See especially Bowlby, "Foreword."

adding 'local' color through synecdochic details. This involves conveying a feel of place through *recognizable* tropes, emotions and motifs. Literary tropes such as metaphors, distinctions (often binary), concepts, narrator perspective or emplotment lend these narratives the necessary "reality effect".[44]

Linda Hutcheon refers to this inner-outer correspondence of realist narratives as the mimesis of *product*.[45] The reader must identify the *products* being imitated (characters, actions, settings), and recognize their similarity to those in the empirical reality to validate their literary worth. In the text itself, this process goes unacknowledged, which is why Hutcheon considers such an act of reading to be passive.[46] On the other hand, a mimesis of *process* defines the functions of the reader in decoding or reading a text.[47] These are thematized in the text itself, as in the case of metafiction, and indicate that order and meaning are not the only goals of the novel. We could extend Hutcheon's model from its application for a textual analysis to an application to ANT as a method. Specifically, the notion of mimesis of process can be applied in our project to refer to moments in the authors' ANT-like enterprises that draw the reader's attention to the *method of discovering and experiencing the city*. The means of rendering that our authors use hinges on referentiality and experientiality. We will therefore later see how the notion of process mimesis provides a useful handle to discuss this interplay between the actual urban enterprise and its narrativization. Mimesis of process can thus be used to reflect on conventions of seeing, observing and experiencing. That is, the notion of process mimesis must also draw our attention to instances in the text where the reader is forced to confront his own means of seeing and experiencing the world. The notion of empirical anchorage and process mimesis will together help us to thematize and discuss the position of the spokesperson in an ANT, the lack of which is a central part of my critique of Latour's ANT. By reading my corpus as enterprises similar to ANT, we will also be able to envision ANT in more tangible means than delivered by Latour's theory. This means that I will highlight the influence of two important factors on the results of an ANT – that of different, individual *means of describing* that the spokesperson uses and the *perspectives* he assumes in order to do so.

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44 | Barthes, "History and Discourse," 154. This is not to say that the reality effect in our corpus is achieved by similar means or is the same "thing" as Barthes' reality effect. Put simply, Barthes' reality effect conceives of descriptive details as an attestation of the real, and therefore as an increase in the cost of narrative information. In the discussion of our corpus, we will see how excessive and detailed descriptions become ideological or political means for the authors. See also Rancière, "The Reality Effect and the Politics of Fiction"; "Descriptive Excess."

45 | Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, 38.

46 | Ibid.

47 | Ibid., 39.

The narratives in our corpus represent patterns imposed upon the urban experience of each author, albeit with varying degrees of authenticity. From Sinclair, we have a sort of memoir of a time and generation eased out of their borough in London through the workings of capitalism. His whimsy is almost signatory since a principle of non-sequitur governs the sequence of all his chapters. It resists reading by giving us urban and documentary 'excess' in rather random form. This is, however, a randomness that has been achieved through mechanical means, making it Sinclair's individual strategy to overcome and speak against current economic discourse on the city. Mehta's is a highly descriptive type of immersive travel journalism with a strong autobiographical strand running consistently through the book. His moralizing, exoticizing, perhaps even a burlesquing of the city, masquerades behind the 'sincere' intentions of writing a contemporary report on the city of his birth. What the author is doing, however, is rewriting Mumbai as a 'corrupted' city against an imagined, better 'original' (or a romanticised city of a remembered childhood). Nevertheless, through the testimonies it includes of various protagonists of the contemporary megacity, it also enables the reader a very essential sense of everyday living in Mumbai (even though this insight is often filtered through Mehta's judgmental perspective). Miller's exactitude in his 'walk' of Delhi indicates postcolonial repercussions of such undertakings as it relies in new ways on existing codes of description as index to place. Miller's city of Delhi is revealed as a site of the fast disappearing 'other' in an age of exhausted global reaches and as one more site of global homogenized urbanization/gentrification. Patrick Neate's authenticity is rooted by the author explicitly in the political intent of his book of recording the contemporary situation of hip-hop across the planet. It quite conveniently supports his theory about the global situation of homogenizing trends, which can be counteracted by hip-hop itself.

In this project, quite diverse narratives have been brought together because they are all a subjective, authorial focus on the diversity of cities' experience with globalization. There is recognition by each author, implicit or explicit, of global processes on local urban outcomes. If the broader theme of these literary documentaries is to participate in a larger discourse, their narratives may be taken to represent a subjective, phenomenological contribution to urban analysis. If one is to take their role in a contemporary urban analysis seriously, that is, if we are to make documentary allowance for the subjectivity that asserts a claim to reality, then we desperately need to reflect this position of seeing, telling and narrating. After all our acknowledgement of poetic strategies used to construct and color what is then taken to be reality, can we still accept the status of documentary as reality that Steyerl interprets in the opening quote to this section?

Looking through the authors' eyes, following them closely in their own narratives to describe their documentary endeavor is perhaps an obvious means to reveal the role their narratives play in constructing the specific images that

we get. On the other hand, this step also indicates that the sort of image that we get (or accept) depends largely on whether we read the narratives with or against the grain of the rhetoric of the written work, for this involves grappling with a gap between the perspective of the narrator and the reader.[48] Thus, the project retains a critical stance towards such observer-oriented subjective analyses 'disguised' as objective reports, and represents an inquiry into how the authors are systematically involved in meaning making processes (issues of authenticity and authority).

Finally, such a move must extend the critical strain to reflect on our own position as it is being developed as observer of the observers of the city. If our desire is to truly describe scenography without adopting the signifying practices of existing hegemonial discourse, then we must heed the following advice:

"What is called for is a form of travel writing that reflects on, problematizes, and ultimately extricates itself from imperialist meaning making, we need to explore how, and to what extent, travel writing summoned and wielded such force in the first place [...] We also need to explore how the internal meaning making processes operated through tropes, metaphors and other figures in the representational practices of travel writing, and how these were keyed into what Foucault calls "the order of things", the deep seated structures of knowledge that underpinned imperialist discourse."[49]

Kuehn and Smethurst address these issues with regard to travel writing, but their goals may be applied to any 'signifying' narratives that strive to transgress "the order of things". Bruno Latour has called this the 'common-sense' that circulates among us – referring specifically to the signifying practices of scientific discourse that pervade and ultimately establish themselves as non-negotiable, hard and fast, 'matters of fact'. This critical reflection of "meaning making processes" which assert hegemonic ideologies sets urgent tasks for contemporary scholars. We must first analyze and describe *existing* representational practices, in order to then emancipate/extricate ourselves from them. The empirical anchorage of our works, and the objectivity that is generated in them relies on the author's presence in the text as the narrating and the observing/experiencing entity. This demands that if we are to understand the meaning-making processes at work in them, we must read the books *against* the grain of the authors' rhetoric. This will be our own first and most important reading strategy. Our project turns to Latour's Actor-Network Theory in the next chapter with this goal in mind – to gather the tools required for analyzing existing representational practices (strategies of representation) in our corpus.

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48 | Refer Bracewell, "The Traveller's Eye," 219.

49 | Kuehn and Smethurst, *Travel Writing, Form, and Empire*, 2–3.