# Conclusion: Actor-Network Theory and Literary Criticism

> [T]he world is a millipede that inches forward on millions of real conversations.[1]

## LOOKING BACK

The initial concern of my project was the treatment of 'the contemporary urban' in a number of considerably lengthy and detailed city narratives. They presented a trend of 'discovering' and describing the city in very individual ways. They also resort to different individual means of emphasizing their concerns about the city and the authenticity of their subjective experience and descriptions of it. Their insistence on the 'reality' of their experience and the 'realism' of their descriptions of it ignores or possibly challenges what has been widely referred to as the postmodern 'crisis of representation'. This prompted me to take a look at what brought about this crisis in the first place, only to find out that it was more a matter of rhetoric. This type of crisis narration in scholarship was the result of viewing very hybrid developments from a somewhat traditional outlook about what literature can or should do with regard to representation. These were repercussions of a crisis in a different discipline – that of historiography. It was triggered by Hayden White, whose studies showed the similarities between the techniques and strategies that literary authors and historians use in the composition of their discourses, and thus rendered the epistemological value of historical truth precarious.

Despite postmodernism's pervasive thrust to rupture or transgress various means and modes of representation, there are still scattered traces of what I referred to as the documentary impulse in literature (the most prominent of which was perhaps the New Journalism in America). To distinguish our corpus's literary strategy of documentarism, I introduced 'empirical anchorage' as their main trope. This concept refers to the authors' phenomenological practice of

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1 | Roy, "Edward Snowden Meets Arundhati Roy and John Cusack."

exploring the material city – their personal, bodily, and 'non-abstract' experience of it. The notion was extended to also include the subsequent discourse formation through the narrativization of their experience. Thus, empirical anchorage provided us with a more flexible means to deal with these narratives than retaining the traditional dichotomy between fact and fiction in our discussions. It is also a notion that collapses, especially in the case of our corpus, the difference between the 'real' thing and a 'representation'. Additionally, Linda Hutcheon's concept of the mimesis of process was introduced, but with a slight difference. In my project, it refers to the urban enterprise of the authors that I have read as possible ANT methods. The notion of mimesis of process drew our attention to instances in the text where the reader is forced to confront his own means of seeing and experiencing the world. In other words, moments in the text that draw the reader's attention to the *method* of discovering and experiencing the city. The notion of process mimesis thus provided a useful handle to discuss this interplay between the urban enterprise and its narrativization. These terms together helped us to thematize and discuss the position of the spokesperson in an ANT, an aspect that I pointed out is lacking in Latour's study. By reading my corpus as enterprises similar to ANT, we also envisioned ANT in more tangible means than delivered by Latour's theory. We were thus able to see the influence of two important factors on the results that an ANT conveys – that of various *means of describing* and the stance or *perspective* that the spokesperson may assume.

The corpus reflects current urban discourses across various disciplines, which emphasize the contemporary city as a nexus of global-local networks and entanglements. Much like the circulating discourses, these individual engagements involve, however, varying interpretations of (or reactions to) the effects of this 'connectivity' on the cities and their populations. Bruno Latour's attention to networks, especially in the urban context, suggested a more serious consideration of his ideas of an Actor Network Theory for our project. A critical appreciation of his burgeoning and diffuse corpus was attempted in order to extract heuristic tools for a reading of our own collection of city narratives. This was achieved by tracing a developmental trajectory of Latour's central idea of studying networks as a key to different levels or processes of constructivism.

An appraisal of Latour's scholarship took us back to Latour's critique of modernity's 'misleading' purification of nature and culture into separate ontological domains of non-humans (nature) and humans (culture). Latour's aim is to rethink social constructivism and 'reassemble' the social in terms of networks and associations rather than structures. A unique aspect of Latour's sociology (and thus also his contribution to social theory) is his focus on both human and non-human actors, and his extension of the agency concept to embrace research objects and technical infrastructure, or humans and nonhumans. These hybrid actants are perceived as forming, and relating to, one another in complex ways and thus form 'weak' or 'strong' networks depending on the stability of their

connections. The crucial contribution of such a unified perspective is that it collapses the conceptual difference between construction and reality.[2] For Latour, this 'unified perspective' enables a thematization of different, collective *means* of forming associations/networks (such as communication, language, social interaction and so on), and also different *levels* of social construction. Such an empiricism is, argues Latour, more 'realistic' as it is theoretically capable of accounting for *all* involved complexities.

For a more concrete application of this sociology of networks and associations, Latour turns to the language and techniques of ethno-methodology. This is, however, not the only discipline that Latour draws on. Latour's abandonment of theoretical or philosophical foundation manifests itself in the intersection of many disciplines in his scholarship, discernible by the range of concepts and terms that Latour introduces to conceptualize his ANT. These were reviewed for their applicability in our project. The first central step of Latour's Actor-Network Theory that is relevant for our project is the foregrounding of the work of 'mediation' and 'delegation' – a study of *how* representatives or scientists speak on behalf of nature or culture. In other words, the 'new empiricism' must consider the *ways* we construct or represent things. In the language of Latour's ANT, this translates as how associations are formed between actants. The actual means of 'tracing' these associations and networks is, however, an intentional gap on Latour's part in order to avoid the dogmatism for which he criticizes the Sciences. Latour provides, instead, a set of terms and concepts to accompany and guide scholars of ANT in their own projects. Thus it was that key terms from Latour's ANT such as scenography, black box, matters of fact and matters of concern found their way into our project. More importantly, Latour's suggestion to deploy description as a means to trace networks provided this project's impetus to regard our own corpus as possible ANT procedures.

In the course of my project, the city narratives were read as individual attempts by the authors to 'populate' their scenography and articulate 'matters of concern'. In other words, we followed closely in the footsteps of our ants (authors) to study *how* they describe and document their experience in the city. For an analysis of the documentary and narrative strategies used by these authors, it was necessary to read these city narratives against the grain of the rhetoric of the author. This step revealed how these narratives arise, even as they pose as quasi-objective accounts of the city, from the specific position or situatedness of the author. Each narrative reveals the author's individual way of 'seeing',

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2 | See also "So we don't have to choose between realism and social construction not because we should try to imagine some of sort of mix up between the two ill-fated positions. Rather, we have to decide between two philosophies: *one in which construction and reality are opposite, and another in which constructing and realizing are synonymous.*" Latour, "Stengers' Shibbolet," xiv, my emphasis.

experiencing and narrating. The significant role of the perspective of the author (spokesperson in ANT terminology) in a narrative that makes truth claims indicates for us a neglect on Latour's part to sufficiently theorize the position of this spokesperson in ANT. Latour's calls for a symmetrical anthropology ought to entail a reflexive stance with regard to the role of the observer/analyst or the so-called spokesperson. Latour also neglects to address the role of selectivity in the process or possible problems of retrieving *all* voices/inscriptions (for example, due to the limitations of a spokesperson). Further, he does not consider the role of power asymmetries that may arise in such an enterprise, and which can be directly linked to the identity and abilities of the spokespersons. These are issues that Latour has not directly addressed even in his later publications.[3] This aspect of Latour's ANT was introduced as theory immanent critique. Where Latour's own formulations remain vague or leave room for interpretation, the methods and strategies of our corpus are tangible illustrations of possible ANTs. It was suggested that Latour's scholarship might thus be extended by adding to the analysis questions of interests and politics represented by the *situatedness* of the ANT spokesperson.

The urban enterprises we have seen seek to mediate the relationship not only between the local scenography (the city) and the national or international context, but also the innumerable intricate networks *within* the 'local' scenography. It must be noted that an ANT reading does not differentiate between levels or hierarchies, and so it was that we concentrated on the connectivities (nodes, networks and associations) as they were traced and described by the authors. The individual documentary and narrative strategies used by each author underscore how the literary and the documentary play into each other. There is no overt or active political action that is stated by their works or that occurs through their agency. Rather, the politics is to be located in the authors' very intention to document the city in the specific, individual manner that they choose and thus in the specific stance they assume; 'what' they document and subsequently, 'how' they do so overrides other aspects of their representations. A sense of objectivity arises from the fact that by foregrounding their subjectivity, they implicitly indicate *for whom* the matters of concern matter, thus fulfilling an important specification for matters of concern.  If notions of objectivity are to be salvaged, they may be said to paradoxically reside in precisely this subjectivity. Notions of accuracy and objectivity become embedded within the premise of their 'openly acknowledged' subjectivity, as does the implicit or explicit ideology. There is a constant tension in these city narratives between the ideological stance of the

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3 | Latour only fleetingly addresses the matter of reflexivity in his own work such as in *Pandora's Hope*, 27 or obliquely in his essay "The Politics of Explanation", where he rejects 'explanations' for their use of causality. See also Mallavarapu and A. Prasad who voice a critique of Latour from a post-colonial perspective, especially 193-5.

author (personal/political motives) and the documentary aesthetic and narrative strategies they adopt to render an objective depiction of the city, albeit in varying degrees and individual styles.

On reading Ian Sinclair's *That Rose-Red Empire* as ANT, we saw how networks between aesthetic (artistic and literary) artifacts and a community are not only traced, but also created. In this chapter, we analyzed different strategies that help to evoke the memory of a specific community that is being lost through the loss of the space it occupies. Here, the networks carry us across space and time. They carry us not only across the materiality of the city, but also through various complex layers that constitute a heterogeneous yet collective cultural identity. Sinclair draws on the power of these networks to establish a heritage for Hackney – an epitaph to commemorate the loss of the borough to gentrification. The joint force of Hackney and its artistic milieu, of the material city and cultural proponents, in the heritage for Hackney reflects and supports Latour's linkage of the human and non-human in quasi-symmetrical networks.

Sinclair's dominant ANT strategy is what I have called rambling. Sinclair 'describes' the networks of Hackney by rambling – be it about his own memories and life in Hackney or its history, or about interesting trivia from the borough. It includes his raving and ranting about the Hackney Council, the London authorities, and the politics surrounding the Olympic games. His narrative includes other 'voices' – the testimonies of denizens reminiscing about Hackney. Sinclair's rambling describes everything that passes or has passed through and exists or existed in Hackney. This makes a long list, from people, streets, books, and sculptures to the lake in Hackney and the natural habitat surrounding it. Sinclair's ANT strategy or method of tracing networks in his enterprise was described using De Certeau's notion of the phatic aspect. It enables Sinclair to create and sustain the innumerable networks between people, memories, stories and material artifacts. In his attempt to capture 'everything', Sinclair's rambling create a dense and diffuse excess. The project therefore introduced and adapted the notion of mnemonic resources in order to systematize the vast array of signs, symbols, images and memories that Sinclair uses to trace Hackney's networks. A systematic reading of this excess enabled us to see how Sinclair's scenography becomes 'populated' through myriad networks of various denizens or artistic personalities of Hackney and their works, as well as streets, sights and sounds of Hackney. The notion of mnemonic sources also aided in describing Sinclair's construction of cultural identity and heritage for Hackney.

Sinclair's narrative style resists reading; this is partly due to his strategy of excess. However, this rambling 'excess' is his political strategy of artistic intervention in a political scene that has lead to the gentrification of the borough. It is also a part of Sinclair's poetics and politics of artistic eclecticism and non-conformity, which seeks to elude an over-determining 'gaze' (of, say, the London authorities). Sinclair calls the politics of such a gaze a 'not telling', a sort of silence

or abstraction, the machinations of which may be observed in the conventional practice of mapping. Sinclair then situates himself opposite such fact-making, obscuring practices with a sort of cultural and discursive 'mapping' of his own. Here it was useful to draw on de Certeau's notion of perspective. The dichotomy of up and down that de Certeau introduces simplifies the notion of perspective. My project used this simplification as a productive point of departure to conceptualize various movements of the perspective of a spokesperson in an ANT method. Sinclair maintains de Certeau's dichotomy, however, as the polarization of Hackney insiders and outsiders, confirming or reinstating the tension between Sinclair's clique in Hackney and the authorities. In this 'space war', the poetics and politics of Sinclair's ANT has an empowering thrust for Hackney as it renders the borough a living breathing 'organicity'. The emphasis on allegiance in Sinclair's narrative fulfills Latour's specification for matters of concern that indicates for *whom* they matter. On the other hand, Sinclair's excess and our difficulties in reading it should be equally instructive for ANT scholars with regard to the role and restraints of the spokesperson in an ANT.

In Suketu Mehta's *Maximum City*, the author uses his identity and background as an opening for his city narrative. He was born in Mumbai and moved to America as a teenager. Now he is returning to Mumbai in order to come to terms with his nostalgic longing, or the loss he perceives of the city of his childhood. This enables the author, on the one hand, to introduce and establish a dominant biographical strand that acts as a primary means of access to the city and runs consistently throughout his narrative. On the other hand, by rendering his move back to Mumbai in such personal and sentimental terms, Mehta cleverly camouflages his strategy of immersive, investigative journalism. It also empowers him as a city chronicler with the native benefit.[4] These strategies determine, in the very beginning, his narrative's empirical anchorage and authenticity, and establish his authority through the rhetoric of a sincere and reliable narrator. That is, we have two intertwining narrative frames arising from Mehta's immersion strategy – that of the investigative journalism and the autobiographical strand – with Mehta as a common denominator. This key position as observer, chronicler and spokesperson thus provided a starting point and recurring theme in this chapter.

In order to carry our ANT inquiry forward, the chapter looked at three important aspects. By reading this book within an ANT setup, it was possible to collect and analyze different strategies of documenting and narrating the city, and address the question of how ANT can and should go beyond journalistic reporting. Mehta uses a watershed moment in Mumbai's political history as an entry point for his investigative frame – the riots in 1992-3 that ensued after

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4 | "In all that time, I hadn't lost my accent. I speak like a Bombay boy; it is how I am identified in Kanpur and Kansas." Mehta, *Maximum City*, 3.

the destruction of the Babri Masjid (mosque) in 1992 by Hindu extremists, and its subsequent repercussions. A sizeable part of Mehta's book is dedicated to revisiting the sites of the riots in Mumbai, the victims and the perpetrators. The city unfolds alternatingly through Mehta's research and interviews with the victims and perpetrators. Mehta thus traces the rise of right wing politics in India and other effects of the communal segregation that followed as a result of the politically motivated and instigated hatred. This frame provides Mehta with a means to inquire into different sectors and aspects of the city, but it cannot be really separated from the biographical frame as Mehta's family life, work, pleasure, and the urbanity he investigates mingle and drive each other. Mehta's work as a scriptwriter for a Bollywood production reveals the film industry's flipside through his subsequent interactions with its director and actors. He befriends Ajay Lal of the police force. This friendship unfolds not only the challenging life of a leading policeman in Mumbai, but also institutional processes and corruption, infrastructural limitations and unethical consequences. In light of Mehta's friendship with Lal, Mehta must confront an ethical struggle of his own on becoming privy to the unofficial vigilantism and investigative or penal methods of the police in Mumbai. The covert world of the stigmatized entertainment industry of bar dancers becomes accessible as Mehta befriends and interviews bar dancers, cross-dressers and prostitutes, tracing their different trajectories and networks.

The three main nodes that Mehta uses to structure the book on the other hand, Power, Pleasure and Passages, represent Mehta's attempt to structure the excess that he encounters and experiences. What quickly becomes clear when we read *Maximum City* as ANT is Mehta's treatment of people as a nexus of associations that provides him with a starting point to trace different actor-networks. Through Mehta's treatment of people as nodes that lead him to different networks, we have a (limitedly) vicarious experience of the city. Consequently, Mehta soon encounters what was analyzed in the project as tactics with reference to de Certeau – the 'creative means' by which urban populations interact and overcome infrastructural deficiencies. In his interactions, Mehta, consciously or unconsciously, displays a shifting perspective. This dynamic function of perspective was articulated with reference again to de Certeau's more static dichotomy of perspectives. Mehta was seen to be an insider (Indian) or outsider (foreign-returnee), an experiencer or observer, self-defined or interpellated, as well as various combinations of all these positions. In general, this display of a dynamic perspective offers ANT the rather stimulating prospect of a multi-perspectival spokesperson or observer position. In case of Mehta, however, these positions indicate his situatedness alternatively as privileged or unprivileged diaspora in India, and the inferences he draws reveal their limitations. Mehta's means of populating the scenography and describing the networks render Mumbai as a city of exigencies – a 'maximum city'. Capitalizing

on the existing shock of juxtapositions in Mumbai of the rich and poor, clean and dirty, pious and criminal, and so on, Mehta's strategy of description is gritty realism. It spectacularizes what the author perceives, experiences and narrates as 'extremes'. A dominant trope that achieves this strategy is Mehta's description of Mumbai's slums as 'phantasmagorias' – a sort of other-worldliness. The pastoral backdrops and values upheld by slum dwellers are rendered equally strange by their juxtaposition with the criminal capacities of a number of slum dwellers. The image of poverty and crime becomes metonymic for Mumbai, and the estrangement that arises through such a rendering accomplishes an 'othering' of Mumbai. This narrative tendency of Mehta's was read as an indication of his anxiety. It is an anxiety that derives, on the one hand, from his perception of *himself* (and his family) being imperiled by the city, and on the other hand, from his way of 'seeing' *the city* as being in a state of peril (or crisis). This perception of the city by Mehta is further emphasized by the different metaphors he introduces for the city such as "paap ni bhoomi" (city of sins), or "maya ki nagri" (city of illusions). Mehta's analysis and critique of Mumbai in typically modernist terms of a lack of infrastructure and progress were shown, however, through the thematization of his perspective, to be his limited 'way of seeing' the city. This is a fact that Mehta must himself later acknowledge. It is that much needed moment of self-reflexivity in his ANT – the author's acknowledgment of the *conditions of perception* that have modified his relation to the city. Through the consistent focus on the observer-narrator position, or the spokesperson in ANT terms, this chapter underlined the need to implicate the position within the actor-networks it strives to document. By extension, this highlighted the importance of process mimesis as a conceptual handle to display and discuss self-reflexivity in an ANT. The asymmetry between the spokesperson and his actor-networks was especially visible in this book because Mehta moves alternatingly and visibly between various experiential and observational roles – between being immersed in his situation and assuming an omniscient fly-on-the-wall perspective to render evaluations. As a result, what Mehta offers are often matters of fact, and it is on rare occasions when he reflects his own role, position and effect that we come close to insights that Latour would call matters of concern. Altogether, Mehta's narrative signals, for us as ANT scholars, the productivity and success of his immersion strategy to access an existential level of life in the megacity.

In Sam Miller's *Delhi, Adventures in a Megacity*, we have as ANT method a rather pragmatic and practical 'tool for discovery'. A spiral drawn on the map of Delhi lays down the path that Miller must follow through the city. This spiral route provides a starting point and a means of access to the megacity. It contains the city, but at the same time, it suggests endless outward movement or even flexibility through the tightening or loosening of this coil. It serves as an indispensable handle on the complexity and enormity of the enterprise of 'discovering' the megacity. However, the structure and control suggested by the spiral route is

at best only partial, as it simultaneously randomizes Miller's experience in the city. In a way, Miller has a covert strategy of immersion in the city. Miller lives in Delhi with his Indian wife and children. His personal introduction through biographical details and subsequent intimate relation to the city establishes the empirical anchorage of this book. Miller's own authority comes instated in the simple guise of his training as a journalist with the BBC and employee of the BBC World Service Trust. Further, to facilitate the reader's anticipation of the kind of tour of the city they are going to get, Miller contextualizes his own work by situating himself in the tradition of psycho-geographers such as Nerval and Sinclair. The authority and authenticity of the narrator and narrative is thus established in a very simple and forthright manner. Miller's skill in sustaining it is then displayed throughout the book by the unfolding of the city through Miller's spiral tour. All the while, the reader has the sense of being guided gently through the megacity by Miller's own entertaining but skilled and informative commentary and further accrual of knowledge about the city.

Miller traces this spiral around the city by literally walking it. In our analysis, we entered what we called Delhi's various 'spatial fictions' and examined the networks and associations that Miller encounters and documents. Our reading of his enterprise emphasizes that Miller's experience, perspective and narrative stem from his identity as a white, British male. Miller exploits his physical visibility to achieve a sort of foreigner benefit in the Indian capital. People often mistake him for a lost tourist, they readily chat with him or are more than willing to lend a helping hand or even excuse his presence in an area, which would otherwise remain beyond his bounds (such as the cremation ground). Miller's openness to include his identity and modes of seeing or thinking in his reflections on the city is essential for a fulfilling ANT analysis, and is consistently upheld by various instances of the reversal of the gaze of the observer on himself. There is also a thematization of the role of the observer/spokesperson as *agency* in the instances when Miller's presence affects the outcome of a situation. Our discussion of Miller's game playing of SimCity opened up the issue of options that the spokesperson is presented with and the consequences of his decisions. The potentially innumerable options open to a tracer of networks and the inevitable decision-making that enable the tracing of networks broach a central part of our critique of Latour's ANT. This critique was indicated by Miller's ANT-like procedure especially when he discusses his game of SimCity in his eleventh intermission. An inquiry into possible strategies to deal with the arbitrariness of ANT continued as we looked at further strategies that Miller uses to overcome and access the urban excess of the spiral walk of Delhi.

We saw that the tempering of the foreign, alienating, or shocking was Miller's individual narrative strategy. Unlike Mehta, Miller utilizes his role alternately as foreigner and resident to achieve a productive balance between estrangement and familiarization. However, our project set out to maintain a critical stance

towards these narratives. Therefore, due to Miller's identity as a white British journalist, a post-colonial sensibility was adopted towards him. This made us sensitive to some of Miller's 'errors'. These mark, on the other hand, the self-reflexivity in his enterprise as he acknowledges them openly in his attempt to maintain a sense of modesty. Nevertheless, aspects of Miller's narrative that indicate his assumption of the universality of Western notions, say for example, of feminism and female emancipation, or that of viewing architectural monuments as heritage, were discussed as stemming from his identity. These indicate what Latour warns us against – a rationalized and black-boxed type of 'common sense'. However, there is also a very generous willingness from Miller's side to extend the strain of reflexivity to himself. It is displayed in his keen awareness of, and perhaps an eager belief in, the possibility of a more complex relation between the East and West. In this context, the turn of the spokesperson's gaze upon himself was discussed as a very effective means of revising deep seated knowledge or common sense – a sign of the much needed reflexivity in an ANT.

## READING NETWORKS AS A FORM OF LITERARY CRITICISM: THE AFFORDANCES OF NETWORKS AND NARRATIVES

In the beginning of the project, we saw that what was seen as the postmodern crisis of representation was indeed a breaking away from the rationality and order of the previous era. It was seen to be manifest in the hybrid forms that cropped up, and academia has spent much attention on their tendency to experiment with formless or anti-formal tropes such as of intervention, disruption, dissolution or transgression. Our own corpus on the other hand displays, at first glance, a return of very individual yet traditional notions of authorial *control* and means of *ordering* experience and rendering it. Reading the corpus as potential ANT methods enabled us to discover numerous principles and strategies of connectivity that reinforced my reading of them as a certain type of network. This is an indication, perhaps, that a different strategy of reading is being suggested here. It is an indication, anyway, for scholarship to move its focus away from what it has maintained are postmodernity's various efforts to disrupt and destabilize order, and away from seeking its source in historical conditions. In order to theorize this particular sense of 'order' that our own corpus suggests, let us take a look at Caroline Levine's notion of *forms,* (especially networks) and their *affordances*.

In her stimulating book, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*, Levine invites us to a dialogue about how to apprehend literature in relation to social life. As a methodological starting point, we are introduced to a formalist notion of forms as organizing principles. Drawing on cases from literature, visual art, mass culture and everyday experience, Levine examines the manifestations of four abstract forms – wholes, rhythms, hierarchies, and networks. If we are to

follow Levine's logic for a reading of literary texts, we would have to track these forms also on the level of content. Next, the heterogeneity in form's conceptual theory becomes, for Levine, the five functions of form. Forms can contain, differ, travel, overlap, and operate politically. This new kind of close reading involves a careful attention to the forms that organize texts, bodies, and institutions, and how these organizing principles encounter one another inside as well as outside of the literary text.[5] Levine demonstrates such a reading practice through close readings of her own and shows that the method builds on "what literary critics have traditionally done best – reading for complex interrelationships and multiple overlapping arrangements."[6] The newness in Levine's methods lies in her exporting the practice to new objects – "the social structures and institutions that are among the most crucial sites of political efficacy."[7]

The literary-critical tool that accompanies Levine's analysis of forms is the notion of affordances. It describes the potential uses or actions latent in materials and design. This does not establish a distinction between form and affordance, but rather a relationship. Steel, for example, affords strength, hardness, smoothness, and durability. A specific design of this material such as a doorknob affords turning, pushing, and pulling. These intended affordances of an object may, however, be extended by a creative user for, say, hanging clothes or signs.[8] Levine calls these possible extensions the latent affordances of a form. Since a specific form can be put to use in unexpected ways that may extend its affordances, it is not enough to ask what forms *do*. We must also look for the latent potentialities of aesthetic and social arrangements. If we use the notion of affordances to think about form, it allows us to grasp both the specificity and the generality of forms. That is, we can then think about the constraints and possibilities that different forms afford, and the fact that these 'new' patterns or arrangements carry with them their own affordances as they move across time and space.[9] Networks, for example, afford connection and circulation, while narratives afford the connection of events over time. Forms as an organizing principle act also as a constraint. This entails that a form can encounter other, possibly contesting or dominating organizing principles and constraints. New encounters between different forms affords us the opportunity to study possible *latent* affordances, and by extension, the range of ways how forms may co-exist, overlap or collide with each other. This notion additionally emphasizes a 'latently' neglected aspect in the discussion of our corpus. Although ANT implies and advocates a collapse between representation and the outside world, these texts are not made of the

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5 | Levine, *Forms*, 16.

6 | Ibid., 23.

7 | Ibid.

8 | Ibid., 6.

9 | Ibid.

material world they invoke. The texts lay claim to their own forms – narrative, rhetorical, discursive – as well as their own materiality – spoken, written and printed language. Together they lay claim to their own affordances, which indicate a range of possibilities. What were to happen if we follow the affordances of both literary form and material objects, and imagine them as mutually shaping potentialities without privileging one over the other?

On reviewing our project in this concluding section, we can say that the consequence of ANT in literary studies is a sensitivity to networks in our reading practice – the associations and interconnectivity between humans and non-humans or the social and natural. We may even venture to say that it indicates a starting point for a reading practice that does not differentiate between aesthetic and social forms. On having isolated a form in our object of study, the questions we must then ask are thus: what does this form afford, and what happens when it meets, clashes or collides with other forms? For example, and this is putting things very broadly, the affordance of Sinclair's ANT is the evocation of Hackney as a place of welcome social heterogeneity, a culturally rich and flourishing borough, or in other words, a commendable and promising space. This opposes the image of Hackney as worst borough propagated in order for its gentrification to be 'necessary'. We encounter numerous co-existing and overlapping networks in Sinclair's Hackney, but are also referred to wholes in the form of state power or developers. The book itself is the result of the collision between these two forms, an artifact that leads us again to the networks traced within it.

We saw how Latour's ANT asks us to notice points of contact between actors and the routes actors take. Levine sees this connectedness as the first and foremost affordance of a network. On the other hand, many other formal elements such as wholes, rhythms, and hierarchies also connect to create larger formations or networks. The actual and possible paths or routes that forms follow will lead us to specific patterns of contact between different forms, and the routes they take after this encounter.[10] This methodological overlap between Levine's theory of forms and ANT brings us full circle back to Latour. Levine's formalist approach to reading forms and their affordances also suggests paying careful attention to the multiplicity of networks and especially to their differences.

In Levine's reading of Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*, she shows that the novel casts social relations as a complex heaping of networks that stretch across space and unfold over time. She argues that Dickens uses narrative form to convey society itself as a network of dynamically unfolding networks with multiple *principles of interconnection*. Depending partly on these principles, the networks can clash and collide with other forms, and they can overlap with other networks or forms.[11] Levine also touches upon other forms in Dickens' novel, but since our

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10 | Ibid., 113.

11 | Ibid., 112–31.

focus is on networks, let us stay with the main points she makes about networks as forms. She argues that Dickens makes use of the affordances of narrative form to conceptualize the ways in which networks unfold temporally. In her reading of *Bleak House*, she imagines the enormous variety of connectors that link people. She identifies and describes different principles of interconnection such as the lawsuit, the contagious disease (smallpox), the network of philanthropies, the aristocratic socio-political network, rumor, patterns of kinship, and so on. Finally, there is also the space of the city itself, seen as a network of interconnected streets, buildings, and characters that are all linked largely by sheer contiguity. Larger networks of transportation and communication crisscross this space, linking it further to adjacent sites. Communications, transportation, and economic networks are commonly thought of as powerful connectors that consolidate nations or enable globalization. In her reading of networks in Dickens' *Bleak House*, however, Levine argues that a formalist approach to reading networks reveals many large and small opportunities to hamper networks and their coordinating power.[12] This discovery in Levine's study recalls our own discussion of tactics in the city and reminds us of an important goal of Latour's ANT – to question and 'undo' deep seated structures of knowledge and power which become silently accepted as common sense.

The point of this little detour to Levine's reading of Dickens is to ask the following question: Is it feasible for us to see Levine's notion of forms as a productive 'addition' to ANT as a method of literary criticism? We must, after all, grasp the affordances of each network and what they can entail for other forms to understand the specificity of the network. The questions Levine asks in her analysis are similar to the ones we asked in our reading of the corpus as ANT:

"What kind of network is it? What rules govern it? Which networks can jeopardize, stabilize, or reroute bounded unities, and how exactly do they do so? Which enclosures successfully contain networks, and why? Rather than assuming that "culture" entails a neat containment of networks by shapes, or conversely, that networks always destroy or disregard boundaries, a formalist method offers tools to track the particular range of ways in which these forms run up against each other and the consequences their encounters bring into the world."[13]

In order to bring our project to an albeit temporary but productive conclusion, let us draw together Latour's ANT method and Levine's notions of forms and affordances to offer a starting point for new ways of apprehending society and literary texts. In the following passages, I will attempt such a reading of Patrick

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12 | Ibid., 114–5.

13 | Ibid., 119–20.

Neate's *Where You're At*. To stay within the scope of a concluding section, this reading will be brief and should be understood accordingly as a point of departure for further inquiries. In our reading, we will stay with our original strategy of reading the author's enterprise as a tangible method of ANT. We must therefore inquire into the means and principles of connectivity of the networks we encounter in it. Additionally, we will also ask in how far this book is organized around political, technological, economic, artistic and social networks. The part of our reading that is most interesting for this concluding section is to ask how Neate's ANT succeeds in analyzing the complexity and power of networked social experience.

ANT need not work only to populate a local scenography with the networks it traces. It can travel and need not stop at the local, adjacent or even national borders. The network's formal capacity (affordance) for extension and contiguity can push us in potentially any number of directions. We thus find ourselves becoming globetrotting 'ants' as *Where You're At* is set in five different megacities. In other words, Neate's book expands the affordances of ANT by carrying the method across the globe. Let us begin with the aspect that we first encounter – the materiality of the book – and follow Neate's networks from there. The title evokes a hip-hop classic by Eric B and Rakim "I Know You Got Soul".[14] The line is completed on the back cover of the book: "It ain't where you're from/it's where you're at", and alludes to the heterogeneity of the hip-hop music scene. More importantly though, the original line calls for a unity in the hip hop movement of that era, and this is, as we later find out, the exact message that is intended on the cover of Neate's book. It is a call for unity of hip-hop communities, not only in America this time, but also *across the world*.[15] The rest of the title, "Notes From the Frontline of a Hip Hop Planet" indicates the global reaches of this network. We thus already begin to get a sense of the importance of connectivity and networks in this book. The picture of Nike Vandal Supremes that claims most of the space on the book cover evokes and indicates the world of hip hop fashion – itself a series of networks of its own. The first part of the title, *Where*

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14 |  Eric B. and Rakim, *I Know You Got Soul*.

15 |  Neate, *Where You're at*, 7. See also Lyrics/Eric B. and Rakim, *I Know You Got Soul,* my emphasis:

Now if your from Uptown, Brooklyn- bound,

 The Bronx, Queens, or Long Island Sound,

*Even other states come right and exact,*

*It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at*

Since you came here, you have to show and prove

And do that dance until it don't move

'Cause all you need is soul self-esteem will release,

The rest is up to you, Rakim 'll say peace

*You're At*, may thus be understood to indicate a moment in a network that records temporality – a moment which catches hip hop where it's at 'now' as compared to 'before'. Of course, all this is confirmed only much later in the book. The rest of the title implies facticity and conflict as *Notes From the Frontline of a Hip Hop Planet* could mean a report possibly of an encounter between hip-hop and the world. The title is thus doing its own work in establishing the book's empirical anchorage. The first chapter, however, is almost autobiographical; the reader is given a personal introduction to the author as he reminisces about his first contact with hip-hop as a teenager.

We are introduced to author and narrator (our ANT spokesperson) Patrick Neate in first person. The rapport Neate develops is sociable and personal. He recollects the beginnings of his love for hip-hop, and admits to his nostalgia for its (almost forgotten) past 'glory' and attraction. Neate's language may occasionally come across as overtly stylized to someone not acquainted with hip-hop lingo. It often slips into a colloquial form colored with slang, filled with jargon and allusions to popular music as well as hip hop cultures. Through the use of vernacular in first person and direct reader address, Neate builds up an informal and intimate rapport with the reader. This bond is strengthened by his exaggerated self-reflexivity as an investigator. He acknowledges ever so often that his is only one 'take' on the matter and therefore not a definitive analysis of hip hop across the world: "I make no claim that this is a definitive analysis of worldwide hip hop; rather it's a snapshot of where we're at that inevitably omits more than it shows."[16] It is ironically this subjectivity that reinforces the book's empirical anchorage as it is accompanied by an almost naïve sincerity: "But I hope you'll trust that I'm writing with complete love and honesty because I'm writing this for all of you who are open-minded enough to recognize the most intriguing, bizarre and downright important manifestation of popular culture of our times [hip-hop]."[17] The book is a snapshot or a precise *fixation* of a particular (subjective) representation at a given time and place – this constitutes its 'documentariness', albeit in an indirect and somewhat crude manner. More importantly, however, this autobiographical opening is a key to the various networks the book traces/opens/creates. For it is Neate who is the most important 'association', 'principle of linkage' or 'connector' responsible for generating, documenting and narrating all the other networks that we encounter in his book. Neate uses the narrative form of the book to convey the world as a network of dynamically unfolding hip-hop networks. His narrative develops more or less chronologically as he moves from one megacity to another. We must keep in mind, however, that the networks we encounter in these cities exist, develop, crash, collide or break simultaneously, much as people's lives are played out simultaneously all over the world. Thus,

16 | Neate, *Where You're at*, 7.

17 | Ibid.

Neate makes use of the affordances of narrative form to illustrate how networks unfold. The reason for Neate's movement is the next principle of interconnection then, as a search for its 'essence' – what hip hop means today – is part of Neate's personal and global quest. This quest is driven by Neate's interest in existing and possible interconnections between far-flung lives that may be actively re-connected in order to revive hip-hop's original function of articulating their problems.

Neate begins this enterprise by first identifying hip-hop's displacement from its place of birth in New York, and tracing its transnational re-territorialization. That is, by personally visiting various cities across the globe and discovering how hip hop is being reused and recoded in very specific local contexts maintaining its essence as an articulation against the grain of capitalist, technocratic or hegemonial. The connectivity principle in *Where You're At* is contingent because it relies on the phatic capabilities of Neate as connector. That is, the linkage between nodes, and therefore between networks, arises more or less randomly as Neate follows hip-hop's networks by meeting with various DJ's or song-artists who are recommended to him by the previous network or node. This introduces and indicates the arbitrariness and unpredictability in ANT, and represents a positive attribute in that it ensures to an extent that our spokesperson remains unbiased. On the other hand, precisely the same aspect may appear unfavorable if we acknowledge the selectivity of the spokesperson. That is, how the spokespersons in our corpus were all indeed predisposed through the agenda or concerns that weighed on them. Neate is, on the other hand, also a musician himself, a prolific music journalist, and a successful author, and he puts all these skills to maximum use in his enterprise. Not only do we encounter a dizzying linkage of various song artists and their work that supports his statements, but also an array of academic literature that reflects and supports his research and analyses, thus relativizing his subjectivity and increasing the documentary sobriety of his book.

The arbitrariness of networks suggested here is also due to a principle of replaceability. The nodes and networks are replaced by other nodes and networks through time and space. It is how the hip-hop network is replicated over and over again. If we were to regard this as a sort of kinship network, it is characterized by the fact that it is always emerging and perpetually in process. The form of hip-hop's network reflects its affordance, that is, its resistance to totality. This processual aspect is nevertheless held in check by Neate's quest for hip-hop's *Ursprung*, its essence and authenticity. The outcome of this quest is, however, repeatedly held off by this changeability and drives Neate forward in his search: "hip hop has opened more doors of enquiry for me than any other aspect in my life."[18]

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18 | Ibid., 202.

A look at the dialectics of globalization in circulating discourses indicates the contradictory affordances of globalization's networks. On the one hand, they are progressive and emancipatory. On the other hand, they are oppressive and damaging. Neate's main argument is that the latter can be contested and reconfigured from 'below' in ways that promote democracy and social justice. In other words, he too is looking for some means to hamper larger, hegemonial networks and their coordinating power, to bring about social change. Five different cities are inter-linked in the book by Neate's investigation of hip-hop's current status across these cities. Since Neate's investigation spans across the globe, it provides the author with means to link local conjunctures to global processes through his position as chronicler. On the one hand, we have a richly documented grassroots investigation of hip hop which seeks and suggests solutions to a number of pertinent urban problems in the specific sites visited by Neate. What quickly becomes clear and is partly even emphasized by the author himself is that his observations and research as a music journalist are rooted in his own critical attitude towards hegemonic or capitalist structures. The book thus culminates unsurprisingly in the author articulating an agenda for hip hop that advocates specific social, cultural and political change, the effectivity of which remains uncertain.[19] I would argue, though, that the importance of Neate's book lies, as my brief reading of it implies, in the various networks around which the book is organized and which it analyses in the interest of this agenda. While the networks invite Neate to expand the affordances of his narrative, the narrative in turn affords us insight and understanding about the world in the form of these networks.

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19 | Neate is very explicit about this: "Hip hop negotiates 'experience of marginalization, brutally truncated opportunity, and oppression'. That's its politics. […] Hip hop should mean acting locally, connecting globally, thinking glocally. [sic] Surely that should be its first political manifesto." See also: "Hip hop must reclaim itself from the corporate giants." Ibid., 159, 202.