V. Of Spirals and Capitals: Sam Miller's *Delhi, Adventures in a Megacity*

At night I make plans for a city laid down
Like the hips of a girl on the spring covered ground
Spirals and capitals like the twist of a script;
Streets named for heroes that could almost exist[1]

The rest of Josh Ritter's rock song "Thin Blue Flame" has less to do with the city, but these four lines on the inside cover of Sam Miller's book become an elegy for Miller's explorations of Delhi: the ambiguous explorations in Ritter's song reflect the author's own perambulations of a spiral route through the Indian capital. In the song, Ritter's search for "royal cities" ends in a somewhat trite epiphany, with the songwriter opening his eyes to finally discover that the heaven he has been pursuing is not *above* him but has been *around* him all the time.[2] Miller, on the other hand, had his epiphany while lying awake at night and fighting his insomnia by way of a "middle-of-the-night game: the search for the perfect geometric method for exploring a city on foot."[3] It yields him the spiral, a form inspired by Muslim cities, which were built in concentric circles orbiting around a central mosque.[4] The gendering of the city through the image of "the hips of a girl on a spring covered ground" presents it as an exposed and vulnerable space. These poetic implications form, however, a stark contrast to the materiality of the city that Miller must explore and document. The author takes us on a trip around Delhi as experienced by him, juxtaposing an 'older' historical city and

1 | Lyrics from American singer-songwriter Josh Ritter's "Thin Blue Flame" as appearing on the inside cover of Miller, *Delhi*; See also "Josh Ritter Official Website."

2 | The single lends itself to a broad landscape of interpretations; it has been described as an anti-religious diatribe, see Atkinson, "JOSH RITTER: Beauty in Uncertainty"; as an anti-war song, see "Anti-War Songs Listing"; and a stream-of-consciousness, universe-trotting epic, see "Thin Blue Flame | Girl in the Gloaming."

3 | Miller, *Delhi*, 11.

4 | Ibid.

a present, rapidly changing megacity. Echoing Suketu Mehta's descriptions of Indian attitudes towards Mumbai in *Maximum City*, Miller observes that Delhi lives for the present and the future, and has little time for nostalgia: "It is a city of migrants and the growing city-pride of its inhabitants relate to its aspirations, not its history."[5] In contrast, Miller's own topography of Delhi is landmarked as much by its 'ruins' (monuments which bear witness to Delhi's historical past) as by its contemporary 'artefacts'. Miller is openly admiring and nostalgic about the 'old' Delhi, and grudgingly acknowledges the new, rapid transformations the city is undergoing. This meandering journey through the capital is interspersed with his random and sometimes peculiar encounters with people in the city.

The author places himself explicitly within the psycho-geographic tradition of the flâneur, declaring the well-known and ardent London chronicler, Iain Sinclair, as a source of inspiration for his walk of Delhi (although he does make a point of characterizing himself as "not quite as eccentric" as Sinclair).[6] Walking is 'essential' for Miller, to get to know cities, especially one such as Delhi, where "so much of life is lived out in the open."[7] A rather peculiar Contents page teases the reader with hints of what this 'life in the open' in Delhi looks like. We have sentence-long chapter headings consisting of the main events of that episode of the author's walk of Delhi. These headings arouse curiosity and anticipation, and add a touch of humor: "Chapter One: In which the Author is dazzled by the metro, finds a cure for hemorrhoids and turns the tables on an unscrupulous shoeshine man" or "Chapter Two: In which the Author explores the mysteries of the sodomitic gerund, monastic nudity and geocaching".[8] Such descriptions are convenient tags to remember a particular episode by. The episodes in turn play their own part in structuring the density and enormity of the megacity in narrative as each episode coincides with a section of the spiral walk. Miller's personalized, hand-drawn maps at the beginning of each chapter help the reader too in keeping track of where one is 'in Delhi'. These chapters are then separated by Intermissions that are detours or breaks from the spiral of Miller's walk, providing him and readers some breathing space and time to ponder, away from the spiral of the journey.

Such strategies of structuring and ordering of a representation of Delhi aid both the author and the reader, in terms of the 'readability' of the urban space and its representation. In the following section, I continue this task of describing and discussing Miller's documentary strategies more systematically. This will aid us in a second step in understanding the various trajectories and associations that Miller's text creates and traces. The final section is a stocktaking of our analysis

5 | Ibid., 61.

6 | Ibid., 8.

7 | Ibid., 7.

8 | Ibid., Contents.

to comment and discuss in how far Miller documentary method may be said to succeed as ANT.

Sam Miller's Strategies of Literary Documentary

Ordering and Structuring the Spiral Walk: A Template for 'ANT'

Sam Miller's "template for discovery" offers a tangible and rather pragmatic model for a Latourian ANT.[9] The sheer size of a megacity or the over-whelming and intangible urban complexity and chaos, which have been so extensively discussed in urban literature today, do not appear to bother this author. Selectivity serves to reduce the complexity of such an enterprise, and becomes the author's primary ordering and empowering principle. Miller takes his inspiration from Louise Bourgeois' exaltation of a spiral, and finds the "device and metaphor" for his wanderings in Delhi or what he calls a "template for discovery" – he decides to walk a spiral through Delhi:

"[A spiral is] an attempt at controlling chaos. It has two directions. Where do you place yourself; at the periphery or the vortex? Beginning at the outside is fear of losing control...Beginning at the center is affirmation; the move outward is a representation of giving, and giving up control; of trust, positive energy, of life itself."[10]

Miller's spiral starts at Connaught place, modern day Delhi's commercial and geographical center, and moves gradually outward, anti-clockwise, towards the outermost conglomerations or Delhi's so-called satellite cities. The selectivity of this undertaking is a paradoxical resource, restrictive yet unique, because it enables Miller to capture unusual or lesser-known areas of Delhi. The route offers on the one hand, spatial orientation as it provides a fixed plan of action and itinerary for on one day or in one turn of the spiral. That is, it also affords the author the advantage of foresight as to which specific areas he must walk through and the difficulties that may arise. On the other hand, it promises a rare tour of the city. In a city laid out according to a particular system of planned access and connectivity, the spiral that Miller embosses on Delhi's map randomizes his approach to the megacity. The path that the author must take, that is, the spiral of his walk, challenges this prescribed order of access within the city. It forces him into a technique of transiting spaces by way of which the chance and the anticipated, the relevant and irrelevant, the profound and eclectic, intermingle

9 | Ibid., 12–3.

10 | As quoted in ibid., 12, gap in original.

and flow into his experience of the megacity. The quote above implies a decrease in authorial control proportionate to his progress on the spiral path. However, the subjectivity of the author's role as the central character around whom the walking and experiencing activity evolves, grants and ensures the author control over the process of narrativization.

In this book, the authority and authenticity of the narrative develop out of Miller's experiences combined with the unfolding and accrual of knowledge about the city. This is markedly different in *Maximum City*, where it develops from the extensive efforts of the author to establish his sincerity and identity, or in *That Rose-Red Empire*, where Sinclair engages the reader in his concern for the city. Miller's authority also comes instated in the simple guise of his training as a journalist with the BBC and employee of the BBC World Service Trust (inside book cover). His personal introduction in the prologue is very brief, consisting of the instances in his life when he became acquainted with Delhi.[11] Just as briefly, within a page or two, Miller establishes the tradition that inspired and sparked his decision to traverse Delhi on foot, especially with a particular route in mind. Here, the names Charles Baudelaire and Gérard de Nerval make their appearance, as does Iain Sinclair.[12] Miller, too, presents contemporary Delhi as having 'degenerated': "All of its multiple avatars are visible through a thickening crust of modernity […] Delhi, the city of Sultanates and Mughals, of Djinns and Sufis, of poets and courtesans, is now also a city of cybercafés and shopping malls, of Metros and multiplexes. It is the past and it is the future."[13] There is something magical and poetic about the 'old' Delhi for Miller, something definitely more romantic and regal than the present. Like T.S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*, whom Miller quotes in a footnote, Miller's narrative is imbued by concern over the fate of the city and its people.[14] This concern is tinted by nostalgia as Miller evokes the city's grander moments in history, paying homage to them by visiting their architectural witnesses. (Miller's tendency of signifying Delhi's monumental architecture as heritage will be discussed more extensively in the next section.)

Structurally the author uses a number of strategies in order to break with the tradition of a causal narrative. Such a fracturing is achieved by quaint, hand-drawn maps of his progress along the spiral, photographs, footnotes, and short Intermissions between chapters that allow the author time to reflect on matters

11 | Ibid., Inside book cover. Miller tells us that he learned of Delhi as a child learning capitals of the cities of the world and from a vaguely remembered childhood limerick. He also learned of Delhi as a city visited by the comic figure Tintin, then in 1984 as the backdrop of the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and yet later as the setting of the film *The Householder*. See 1-4 and 149-50

12 | Ibid., 5–8.

13 | Ibid., 1.

14 | Ibid., 6, see fn. 4.

not pertaining directly to the spiral walk, as a pause before the journey continues. Footnotes give readers additional information or function as a citation of the source of the author's information, much as in an academic text. They introduce a spatial aspect by first fracturing at a textual level the text on the page, and then of the reader's perspective via hyper-textuality; the reader can choose to set aside the book and read online, get 'lost' and/ or come back to text. The footnotes are thus breaks in the continuity and monotony of 'mere' text and may simply distract the reader by provoking or suggesting an online search, or give a good laugh as in the footnote about cockroaches, or do both as with the footnote about diarrhea in Paharganj.[15] The additional knowledge in most footnotes offers historical trivia for the interested reader or is directed towards non-Indian readers such as the footnote that explains *Paneer*, an Indian cottage cheese or the various meanings of the Indian word *Pandit* in the Indian religious context and as source of the English word 'pundit'.[16] Spatiality at the textual level reflects the spatiality of the city as Miller's text offers areas for the reader to voluntarily enter or evade. Through the footnotes, the text also gains a sense of movement between representation and reality. They thus serve an authenticating purpose; the documentary experience is extended by the 'extras' offered in the footnotes and enhanced by the hyper-reality through references for reading online.

Additionally, Miller's own amateurish, black and white photographs offer the reader a sense of tangibility by providing visualization; the imaginable is rendered 'real' through the images. At a textual level, these sometimes rather random-seeming inserts of photographs break the continuity of 'mere' text visually. Pictures such as that of a square piece of toasted bread that Miller has trouble getting because he orders it with a British accent or footnotes such as the one explaining the Indian species of cockroach are obvious indulgences of self-irony or a parody of the documentary endeavor itself.[17] Miller's style of introducing humor into his city narrative through self-parody, tongue-in-cheek melodrama and irony is his means to break with the sobriety of what would otherwise run the risk of being an overwhelmingly eclectic journalistic rendering. Instead, Miller's account of his city walk maintains its entertaining and informative quality. Further into the chapter we will also consider the meaning and implications for ANT of such a turn of the observer's stance onto himself and his subsequent self-reflexivity. Narrated in the first person, it decreases the distance between the 'first-hand' witness (the author) and a witness of the second degree (the reader), while his specific style, meandering between documentary sobriety and parody, sustains the engaging, voyeuristic extent of (exotic) experience and exposition of the Indian megacity.

15 | Ibid., 46, 63.

16 | Ibid., 207, 23.

17 | Ibid., 80, 63.

'New' and 'Old' 'Spatial Fictions': A Peripatetic Journalist 'Describes'

We have seen earlier that Latour's theory of a 'second empiricism' asks humans to turn away from a 'warring of worlds' (the cleft between nature and culture) and move, in today's multi-polar, globally connected world, towards more 'peaceful negotiations' to build common 'habitable spaces'. In such a case, one's own world or 'spatial fiction' has to be negotiated and mediated with the world at large.[18] Latour urges the need to exist in heterogeneous collectives or networks, which acknowledge the humans and machines that populate these networks.[19] As a starting point for scholars, he advocates 'cultural translation' for the sake of understanding the spatial fictions with which different cultures construct themselves.[20] Latour's own jargon-ridden ideas being still in the making, it is possible to venture our own interpretations. From such a notion of habitable spaces and heterogeneous collectives, it is not a long leap to reading Miller's walk as an attempt to traverse through and gather Delhi's various 'spatial fictions', and seek in them traces or possibilities of 'negotiation and mediation' with a global and globalizing world. In how far Miller's representation may be said to be a 'cultural translation', and whether the collectives are desirable or the spaces habitable, remains to be seen. Conceptually, Latour's ideas have been deemed "romantic fictions": the immediate critique pertains to how the creation of common habitable space can, at the same time, be inclusive of differences, frictions or conflicts.[21] The more pressing issue for our analysis, which will occupy us from now on, concerns the role and influence of the spokesperson and the nature of the 'translations' that Miller produces of Delhi's 'spatial fictions'.

By following Miller's steps of the spiral walk, we get a glimpse of his representative method. We see in it some of the eclecticism that so strongly characterized Sinclair's narrative. It appears that everything encountered is described, be it outstanding or mundane, Indian or foreign, functional or artistic, banal, curious or odd. If Miller's project of walking in an Indian city 'suffers from eccentricity' – judging from reactions of Miller's friends to his project – the

18 | The modernist concept of actors acting on a system is replaced by one where negotiators (actors) circulate along networks that involve mediators (humans or objects, that is, Latour's hybrids)

19 | 'When we ponder how the global world could be made habitable […] we now mean habitable for billions of humans and trillions of other creatures that no longer form nature or, of course, a society, but rather, to use my term, a possible *collective*' Latour, 'Spheres and Networks: Two Ways to Reinterpret Globalization', 141, original italics.

20 | "Contrary to the dual notions of nature-and-society, the collective is *not* collected yet, and no one has the slightest idea of what it is to be composed, how it is to be assembled, or even if it should be assembled into one piece." Ibid., 141, original italics.

21 | See Conley, *Spatial Ecologies*, 126.

author counterbalances the "madness and perversity" of his decision with poetry in which he finds "solace and inspiration":[22]

"At worst, one is in motion; and at best
Reaching no absolute, in which to rest,
One is always nearer by not keeping still."[23]

This display of doubt and conciliation has, of course, the rhetorical function of tempering Miller's portrayal of himself as slightly eccentric. These words signify his perseverance rather than the restlessness he implies in his project of walking Delhi in a spiral. Much like Sinclair, this peripatetic journalist is inspired and spurred on by the bustle of Delhi's streets. Miller appears most comfortable and confident when he is walking, describing Delhi's new and old architecture and his often-curious encounters with people.

The book starts with Miller peering into the 'hole' at Connaught Place (CP) – a construction site for the Metro at the time (see Image 3). Miller catches CP in its moment of transition, as it becomes a lynchpin of Delhi's Metro system. The Metro in Delhi is embodied in Miller's narrative as the "latest addition of steel, glass and concrete in Delhi", a "monument to modernity" and "harbinger of change" alongside so many other "gifts for a 'modern future'" such as flyovers, malls, etc.[24] An anti-capitalist thrust shimmers through the language Miller uses to describe 'aspiring' Delhi, rendered in realist mode. Throughout the book, Miller maintains the style of a moving camera to 'show' everything he sees (or chooses to see), describing along the way the commonplace together with the monumental, the living and the built. As he peers into the hole of the construction site, the reader too participates in the child-like activity of pressing the face hard against the glass of a skylight to gape into the otherwise hidden "pulsating cavern", to be "dazzled by this new world below".[25] But in this shiny 'new world', Miller diagnoses a Delhi of an uncertain future: "The Metro has become the icon of Delhi's uncertain future, carving its way above and beneath the city, *overshadowing and undermining the forgotten and neglected* mosques, temples, churches, forts and tombs of previous rulers."[26] A conservative bias is discernable through such a juxtaposition of the new and old in Miller's narrative (see especially my emphasis) that continues, in general, to flavor his representation of Delhi. A hint of nostalgia for a 'lost' Delhi emerges soon after through the testimony of an acquaintance that has lived in an affluent apartment in CP for the

22 | Miller, *Delhi*, 35.

23 | Thomas Gunn, *On the Move*, as quoted in ibid.

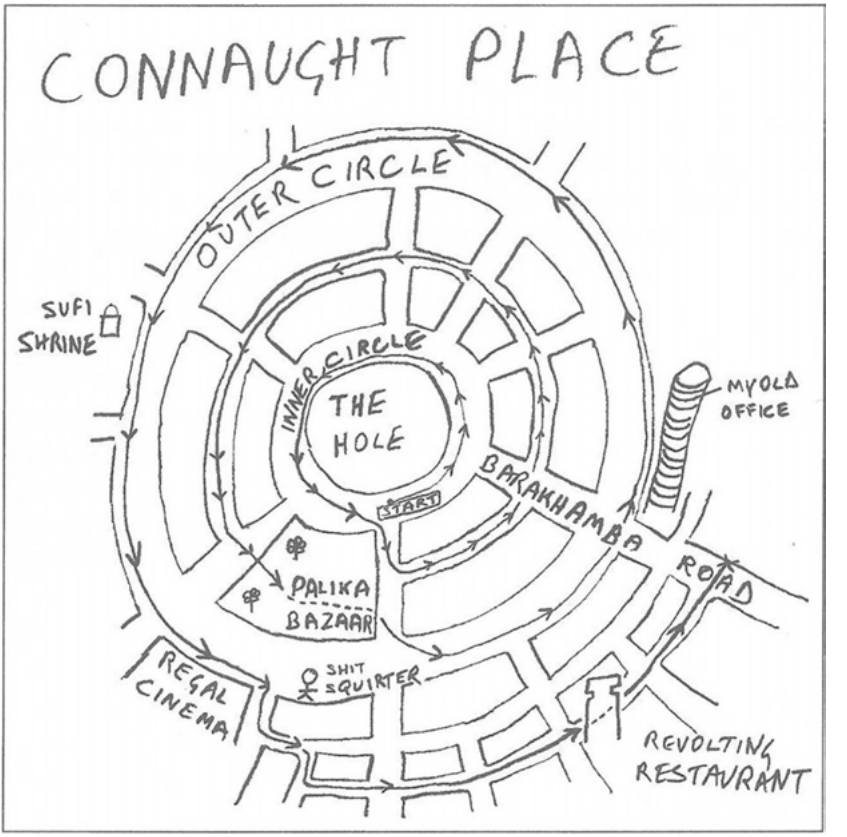
24 | Ibid., 15.

25 | Ibid.

26 | Ibid., 15, my emphasis.

past sixty-eight years: "When I asked her about how CP had changed, she looked up to the heavens. She recalled the old bandstand in the central park […] it was a beautiful park. 'The war years', she began, with a nostalgic effusiveness […] 'were lovely years.'"[27]

Image 3: Hand-drawn map of the centre of Miller's spiral - Connaught Place in Delhi as "The Hole"



Source – *Delhi*, 14 (Image used with author's permission)

However, Miller being a man on a mission with his feet firmly on the ground quickly continues his journey of CP, which in a stoic turn he calls a "Palladian outpost suffering from modest urban blight."[28] This is a sweeping statement. Miller's choice of words here to refer to the center of the Indian capital city may,

27 | Ibid., 21.

28 | Ibid., 18.

for the sensitive reader, be unfortunate in their evocation of Joseph Conrad's short story "An Outpost of Progress", and threaten to fix our perception of Miller's observations as yet another imperial critique of the 'ex-Empire'.[29] However, his choice of words is simply symptomatic of his style of representation, which juxtaposes research and historical knowledge of the area and his perception of present-day CP. It highlights Miller's empirical strategy of taking a diachronic view of Delhi. We are repeatedly reminded of the layers of history in the architecture of Delhi.[30] Miller's description of the center of Delhi is on the one hand, historical, accompanied by a short recourse to the history of CP's origin as the capital's new commercial center, as well as an architectural history of its neo-Classical buildings. On the other hand, the geometrical consistency and circularity of CP is rendered visual and vivid through his own material description of the "three circles, nestled neatly inside each other, spoked by seven radial roads".[31] An insert of a poem by Tabish Khair emphasizes this impression.[32] It deals explicitly with the deliberate geometry of pre-Metro CP: "Stamped by foreign hands, concentric".[33] A few passages later, Miller's tone becomes doubtful again. This 'modest urban blight' is described now as "inner-city decay" with a "decaying jawful [sic] of fang-like unplanned high-rise office buildings".[34] The 'urban blight' becomes embodied in the many oddities he encounters. To list a few: an ear-cleaner; the underground 'grey market' or shiny CP's 'alter ego' called Paalika Bazaar with all its peculiar shops; Gopal Das Bhavan – the site of Miller's office for over a year, which formed the "backdrop for a legendary act of incompetence and brutality by the Delhi police";[35] the President of the Sufi Council of India working as a dubious apothecary; the Regal – one of Delhi's oldest cinemas, which now shows adult B-movies; a shit squirting man who runs a shoe-cleaning scam, and so on. Paradoxically, these quirky, comical descriptions succeed in shaking off the vaguely pessimistic tones of Miller's earlier descriptions. But the chapter on CP ends, nonetheless, in a gloomy description of the last of the

29 | Miller's specific observer position as a white, British male, and the nature of narrative it generates will be discussed in more detail later.

30 | See also, "Delhi – six hundred miles from the nearest sea port – was a fossil, an open air museum of Indian history" Miller, *Delhi*, 9.

31 | Ibid., 18.

32 | Tabish Khair is a contemporary poet, novelist and literary scholar of Indian origin, currently living and working in Aarhus, Denmark. See "Tabish Khair, Official Website."

33 | Khair, *Where Parallel Lines Meet*; Miller, *Delhi*, 17, fn. 2 for Tabish Khair's full verse from his own volume, which is divided into three sections and is, in Miller's words, "obsessed with geometry". Miller's own reference does not mention from which section or precise poem he cites this verse.

34 | Miller, *Delhi*, 30.

35 | Ibid., 24.

British-built bungalows in the last of the CP radials, which reads as the closing of the coffin lid over this era of CP: "The old house at 20, Barakhamba Road has had one side of it torn away by bulldozers. The rest still stands as a vacant ruin, dwarfed by its neighbors, a decaying reminder of Delhi's recent past, gradually returning to dust".[36]

Miller's self-imposed check on his nostalgia is administered to avoid the risk of writing "as if the past were more important than the present, as so many had done before."[37] This, however, is a rhetorical strategy to detract from the fact that Miller makes his own exceptions to this rule. The growth of his spiral would normally take him just past Nizamuddin, an area Miller is personally attached to since it was his first home and has "the most gorgeous of Mughal monuments" – the medieval tomb of Emperor Humayun.[38] Here, for his own sake, the exception is made; Miller relents and makes the detour. The now restored and pristine Humayun's Tomb brings forth in Miller his own 'spatial fiction', of the tomb from before it was part of a "confident new international city, provisionally ranked, after the Red Fort, at number two on most tourists' sightseeing list".[39] The tomb had previously been Miller's "secret special place", it used to be "wild" but now it is "pretty" and Miller, becoming "inconsolable", longs to see it in its earlier state. "But that is nostalgia" he admits, finally acknowledging the irrationality of his feelings, and accepting the 'now'.[40] Without denying Miller the truth of his emotions, it must be acknowledged that this little display of wistfulness in his exposition of Humayun's Tomb has the narrative function of dramatizing the episode, while simultaneously making us witness to how the city is changing.[41]

Miller's tendency to communicate Delhi's urban imagery through descriptions of its historical monuments and other physical attributes reveals his predisposition to architecture and history. This can be read through descriptions of different modes of architecture (historical, functional or both) and various spatial elements (such as different modes of existence or paths of commuting in the city). Apart from innumerable monuments testifying to Delhi's rich and layered history, the irregular topography of Delhi itself becomes a major asset in accentuating Delhi's urban personality. The adjectival descriptions here continue

36 | Ibid., 33.

37 | Ibid., 158.

38 | Ibid.

39 | Ibid., 159.

40 | Ibid.

41 | There are at least a handful of similar scattered instances such as the before and after pictures of central Delhi's oldest building, the seven-hundred-year-old step-well, Agarsen's Baoli; or the mosque with apparently no record, which was lost to history due to the Commonwealth Games. Its existence is thus proven only by Miller's own, before and after photographs of the mosque and of the wall that later replaced it. See ibid., 47–9, 227–9.

to serve as pointers to the mediation of representation: the 'decaying' CP, the post-industrial West Delhi, Rajendra Place – "Delhi at its 'most mediocre", the "arid rocky forestlands of the Ridge", the "academic flavor" of the Delhi University area, Raisina Hill or the "heart of British New Delhi" and so on.[42] This is complemented by emphasis on the city's social morphology. The affluent in the city's center, the "mini-America" and diplomatic enclaves of Chanakyapuri, the suspicious residents of the unauthorized settlement in Kabari bazaar, the poor Bangladeshi refugees in the slums of South Delhi, the refugees of Karol Bagh, the eccentric Brahma Kumaris, the even more eccentric aristocracies of Malcha Mahal, and so on.[43] The architectural representation that Miller gives of Delhi is a very significant aspect of his narrative of Delhi. As I will proceed to show, Miller's articulation of space reveals the (imperial) ideology of appreciation and preservation of a 'bygone age' or, in other words, the codification of architecture as heritage. In the 'aspiring' Delhi of the Metro and Malls, Miller rather pessimistically perceives and criticizes the machinations of capitalistic ideology: "I find myself preaching to anyone who will listen that the world ignores Delhi's current experiments with modernity at its peril."[44] He turns his attentions more willingly to various historical monuments along the spiral, even (or maybe especially) the lesser known or not quite as historically prominent. Miller's description of the 18th century observatory, Jantar Mantar, with its "warm terracotta shades", or the "mesmerizing" domes of the Zeenat mosque, both of which feature in *The Householder*, achieves an emblematic symbolization of these architectural monuments in this Delhi portrait.[45] They are some of Miller's personal favorites; the observatory because "it seems so eccentric, so unexpected, and so ludicrously post-modern in the middle of commercial Delhi", and the "gorgeous" domes for "all their zebra-striped glory", described by Miller as a mesmerizingly romantic backdrop for the domestic dispute that unveils in this scene of *The Householder*.[46] Pitted against the narrative of global capitalism, such eulogized descriptions of a 'previous' Delhi become emblematic (in a way that double-decker buses are in London), and in their identity-giving potential, function as mnemonic sources within the narrative. These descriptions display an act of signification of architecture – be it through its history, as in the case of numerous monuments and buildings described in the book, or through his personal relation to them as just described. In the example above, the observatory or the mosque domes and Miller's signification of them by recalling them in his

42 | Ibid., See respectively 203, 136, 200, 71.

43 | Ibid., See respectively 20–2, 54, 157, 135, 130–5, 137.

44 | Ibid., 4.

45 | Ibid., 107–8 The Householder is one of the earliest films to be made by Merchant and Ivory Productions.

46 | Ibid., 44, 108.

narrative, make them vehicles of additional cultural and historical meaning and function. On the one hand, as is evident from the effect they have on Miller, rather than merely fulfilling their 'original' function as such, these architectural objects communicate a cultural history and heritage. On the other hand, they become vested with the connotations they have for Miller – of harking back to a cultural production that thematizes relations between India and the West, or as a reminder of domesticity (the social) in the urban. Conceivably, by describing the physical geography of the city marked by its losses, recoveries and substitutions, Miller arrives at what could be loosely an architectural history through the identities and ideologies attached to the space being described.

This "prospective candidate for the world's largest urban conglomeration in the world" also contains its share of open spaces, which may be categorically described as either natural spaces or skeletons of previous eras of urbanization.[47] At the beginning of one segment of the spiral, Miller looks around himself and with a far-reaching glance, gives us a panoramic view:

"All around is Delhi at its most sparse. The Ridge, empty except for jackals and peacocks and the princely siblings;[48] Chanakyapuri, home to a few disoriented diplomats and deserted after dusk; to the east, Nehru Park, with landscaped lawns where foreigners jog and sweat off their party paunches; a nine hole golf-course, and a polo ground – used only in season. Beyond that is Delhi's least visited large open space, a huge expanse of tarmac and grass."[49]

This "expanse of tarmac and grass" has had various avatars. For Miller, it has various associations – from being originally Willingdon airport to the now renamed but dysfunctional Safdarjang airport, and from being a landmark in a comic strip Miller read as a child to the site of an airplane accident that killed Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's aspiring heir, Sanjay Gandhi. In ANT terms, this is an excellent example of how the material, the human and the semiotic are stringed together in MIller's descriptions. Another historical event enters this description, which reminds us of the far-reaching impact of 9/11, that watershed event on the other side of the globe. After the September 11 attacks in New York, this already secluded airport was closed to private aircrafts. It now houses the office of the Delhi Flying Club and its airstrip is occasionally used by the prime minister's helicopter. The area is described as having a "sleepy air" and being a

47 | Ibid., 159.

48 | The Ridge is a two-thousand acre, mostly uninhabited rocky forestland in Delhi. The "princely siblings" are Sakina and Cyrus of the former royal family of Oudh, whose rule ended in the 1850s. In the sixth intermission, Miller describes his meeting with the siblings, portraying them as a little "mad" in their "struggle to avoid ordinariness". Ibid., 137–45.

49 | Ibid., 149.

"high-security zone", through which the author nevertheless manages to pass without being stopped. Miller encounters and reveals other pockets of 'green and serene' in the megacity such as the Lodi colony, an "under-loved" housing estate, which has now become "just another monolithic souvenir of one of Delhi's previous incarnations".[50] Or the fertile farmland on the floodplains of the Yamuna river occupied by farmers growing twenty different crops.[51] These descriptions, coupled with markers of Miller's rhetoric to describe the aspiring city, give rise to a juxtaposition in the narrative that magnifies these disparities and renders these open or 'natural' urban spaces vulnerable. Miller's fear of the destruction of such spaces, in other words, the fear of total urbanization co-opted by global capitalism solidifies with hints of upcoming change or emphatic insinuations such as the following, regarding the isolated airport: "Narendra [the receptionist of the Delhi Flying Club] didn't know it, but the real estate sharks are circling. The land occupied by this non-airport is enormously valuable, and there aren't many modern multi-storey, air-conditioned shopping malls in this part of Delhi."[52]

Miller's Stigma and The Role of Humor in ANT

In the first intermission, Miller concedes self-doubt and insecurity regarding his project of walking in the city. Faced with the Delhi heat of 45°C, he says: "I find it hard to admit to myself what I am doing. […] There is no slower way to explore a city, no other route through a city that is as purgatorial. It is as if moving continents has left me a little unbalanced. Understandably, I command no sympathy from others."[53] This is a strategic confession, resulting in quite the contrary. The reader's sympathies are appealed to in the face of the physical hardships Miller must undergo. His determination must seem laudable, even as it is exaggerated a little later on by the mention of the "*six* surgical interventions" that have left Miller with a bad knee in his right leg.[54]

Due to his visibility as a white British foreigner, Miller potential for immersion in an Indian city is limited. His strategy is to simply make the best of his 'handicap'. This is done on two separate levels. First, the visual stigma gains him unforeseen advantages – people often mistaking him to be an 'innocent' or 'lost' foreigner are more than willing to lend him a helping hand or excuse a

50 | Ibid., 154.

51 | Ibid., 159.

52 | Ibid., 151.

53 | Ibid., 34.

54 | Ibid., 35, my emphasis.

mistake.[55] Out of general curiosity, they even readily enter into a conversation with him.[56] Secondly, Miller exploits his identity to introduce humor into the narrative. In doing so, he reverses the gaze – to see himself as the Indians would. The side effect of such a turn in the narrative is a lightening up of the otherwise documentary sobriety. A classic example is his language mix up. Miller describes how he started jumping and dancing "like a dervish" to rid himself of stubborn ants crawling up his trousers, shouting at the same time to an onlooker by way of explanation the word *chinta*, which means worry, instead of the appropriate Hindi word *cheenti*. The onlooker shakes his head "sorrowfully" before hurrying away.[57] At the surface level, such instances often provide comic relief in the narrative. Miller's consistent use of a self-critical style makes his city-narrative endearing and draws the reader in, disarming him. The style is sustained by the fact that Miller wears his modesty on his sleeve. On seeing a misspelled signboard for English classes, Miller smirks, but is promptly reprimanded by his wife:

"[M]any sign painters are illiterate in their mother tongue, and it's barely surprising that they have such trouble with English. 'So would you, if you had to copy some words from Japanese.' And since then, I have taken a more nuanced view of Indian felicities in the English language. English is now another Indian language – spoken by more people than in my homeland. […] So who am I to tell an Indian how to parse her English noun clauses or that 'prepone' is not a word?"[58]

This self-effacement also serves to thinly veil a slight unease the author feels about his authority as narrator and identity as a foreign observer (especially white male and British). In other words, what Miller is indeed doing here in ANT-related terms is more principled. He is laying bare his – the observer's – imperfections, and herein, tied up with the author's perspective and self-effacement, we find the mimesis of process in Miller's ANT-like endeavor. Since the author is a foreigner in Delhi, the mimesis of process is located in the confrontation between him and the city, that is, in the empirical anchorage of his enterprise.

Miller's physical 'stigma' and tall stature also influence the outcome of situations he chances upon, for example, when he comes upon two policemen hitting a boy, allegedly for carrying and peddling drugs to children.[59] On

55 | See for example the police officer at the Safdarjang airport, the watchman at the Nehru stadium, a young man, Atiq, at the Punj Peeran slum. Ibid., 151, 155, 157.

56 | See for example the conductor of the National Police Brass Band or the mourners. Ibid., 177, 185.

57 | Ibid., 100.

58 | Ibid., 200.

59 | Ibid., 116.

seeing Miller, the policemen stop beating the boy and ultimately let him go. On a different occasion, the NDMC truck, which is looking to raid the black market, drives away because of Miller's presence.[60] This makes Miller, albeit unintentionally, an interventionist in the scene, and confronts him repeatedly with his own identity in Delhi/India. This is underlined by the fact that not everyone is as tolerant of Miller's sudden, unaccountable presence in their space in the megacity. When Miller chances to walk into an open-air slaughterhouse, taking pictures of the entrails and offal, and of the people working there, he soon discovers that he has walked out of his comfort zone and into an area, where his status as foreigner does not protect him. A group of young men working as butchers, prohibit his taking pictures and demand the film from his camera, while yet another group, whether in jest or in earnest remains unclear to narrator and reader, threatens him with knives: "One of them put his hand on my shoulder and lifted his knife. He brought the knife to within half an inch of my throat, and with a great venomous sneer, he then cut through the air as if he were ending my life."[61] Among all the catastrophes that could befall Miller in a megacity, this is the only moment in his narrative in which he may be said to have truly been in danger. Yet, the vivid scene at the slaughterhouse, the author's discomposure and the shock of the life-threatening incident, are all quickly neutralized by the author who questions his own perception:[62]

"I got out my mobile phone. I dialed my wife's number and it was engaged. I pretended to have a long conversation with her, telling her where I was and what I had been doing and that I'd meet her in fifteen minutes. They listened in, giggling to each other as they tried to make sense of my English. Suddenly the hostile butchers seemed like naughty children who had played a trick on an adult. By the time I had finished, they were quiet, almost timid. Each of them shook my hand."[63]

Of course, Miller's choice of re-telling such a situation is also a staged and dramatized narrative inclusion to lend suspense and climax to his account. The description of his own fear, of the probable personal danger and vulnerability in this space exposes the author in an unsettlingly unforeseen moment of his walk. The narrative means by which it is rendered – in rather affected realistic

60 | Ibid., 29.

61 | Ibid., 122.

62 | There are mentions of minor accidents, which indicate the hazards of "walking" in Delhi such as the author falling into a manhole, or jarring his leg on a protruding metal piece and bruising his knee, and also of running into and then away from the "killer pigs". Ibid., 216–7, 156, 268.

63 | Ibid., 122.

descriptions of gore and personal danger – authenticates the experience. In this section, I have only just touched upon the complexity of the self-implication in Miller's ability to turn the observing gaze onto himself. These are suggestive of important reflexive aspects in ANT methodology and will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

SIM-City, Sam's City: Cities in Crisis and Unforeseen Spatial Trajectories

Miller's juxtaposition of the 'aspiring' visions of Delhi's future and the Delhi he encounters on his spiral walk, alongside his nostalgic descriptions of historical Delhi depicts a city that is in the throes of a crisis.[64] In the eleventh Intermission, Miller describes Delhi as his *SimCity*, in a video game that allows the player to build and manage his or her own city.[65] Miller starts at the game's formal start-date, 1900, and continues through real Delhi's various historical phases. Hauntingly, his perception of the real city materializes in the game – Miller's Sim-Delhi is a city in crisis. Various infrastructural catastrophes befall it, and his incapacity as the city's mayor leads to the city's collapse as early as 1999.[66] *SimCity*, the computer game, provides the player management simulation based on the complex modeling of economic systems, and offers the player options and consequences for the planning, designing and controlling of an unlimited number of cities.[67] It raises, for Miller, the same issues that are "at the heart of modern Delhi's dilemmas" – a never ending spiral or a vicious loop: an improvement in the services or infrastructure results in more migrants, which in turn asserts pressure on the services.[68] While in the 'perfect' simulated environment Miller's Sim-Delhi is quickly reduced to rubble, the real city proves its strength and elasticity; it still stands and thrives. In the real Delhi, people have created their own 'options' to overcome infrastructural failures and produce desirable

64 | The notion of crisis and risk in the representations of cities represents a general shift from nation to cities as canonical subject of representations in contemporary discourse. See Rao, "Risk and the City"; See also Rao, "Slum as Theory."

65 | Miller, *Delhi*, 246–50.

66 | Miller is later able to, however, use a "cheat code" provided by his son to continue up to 2045, at which stage, the author's SimCity becomes an international hub for space travel. Ibid., 248–9.

67 | Atkins, *More Than a Game*, 111–137. See especially 117.

68 | This is presented as a recurrent trope in the various dilemmas of "emergent" megacities. See for example Rahul Mehrotra, the urban architect Mehta interviews in Maximum City: "If we make the city nice, with good roads, trains and accommodation – if we make the city a nicer place to live- it attracts more people from outside." Mehta, *Maximum City*, 121.

'consequences'.[69] The course of the game is, much like Borges' *Garden of Forking Paths*, a proliferating expanse of decisions and results.[70] Yet, Miller's Sim-Delhi cannot grow beyond a population of only two million, while the expansion of the 'real' Delhi offers no geographical or demographical limits.[71] Apart from raising issues about simulation and subsequent perceptions of city space and urbanity, this Intermission directly questions how Miller deals with such an expanse of 'options and consequences' in the 'real' city. The potentially innumerable options and the inevitable decision-making that must ensue in traversing and chronicling broach a central part of our critique of Latour's ANT. So far, we have seen how Miller's spiral can work as a structuring and ordering principle for an ANT. In the upcoming sections, we will take a look at some other strategies that enable Miller to overcome the urban 'axcess' he encounters.

The Aesthetics of Estrangement: Delhi Through Foreign Eyes

Apart from the brief information the author provides in the Prologue about his relation to and first encounters with the Indian capital, we learn more about him and his stance as observer through incidents he divulges in separate intermissions.[72] The textual arrangement of the book alternating between Intermission and a chapter that is a section of the spiral in Miller's route around Delhi, adds a spatial quality to the reading experience of the book. The chapters are dynamic, reflecting Miller's urban drift and allowing the reader to participate in it, while the intermissions are static in terms of movement, but impart knowledge about our guide and his musings. The second intermission, for example, reveals how Miller's personal mobility affects his perception of the city spaces he encounters. He tells us how he fled Delhi one summer to go to Europe with his children. Life in Delhi has changed the author's perception: "London, where I have lived most of my life, appeared to have shrunk and become cute. Parts of it are being turned into an urban toy land, a post-modern parody of itself."[73] In a restaurant, he eats the decoration off a dish; the greater humiliation for Miller is, however, that he apologizes by saying that he has just come from India. Both these acts (the eating and the apology) and the emotions (embarrassment and humiliation) are testimony to his position in transition. In descriptions of his travels to London and other European cities on this holiday, Miller's homesickness for his new adopted home in India pervades. Back in India

69 | Miller, *Delhi*, 248.

70 | Borges, "The Garden of Forking Paths."

71 | This is emphasized by the author's view from the tall university hospital building. See Miller, *Delhi*, 247–8.

72 | Such as his marriage to an Indian, and about life in Delhi with their children. Ibid., 124–6.

73 | Ibid., 58.

after this trip, he settles down in a flat adjoining the crumbling walls of the seven hundred year old Siri Fort, for Miller, "one of the most romantic evocations of Delhi's extraordinary history. I have come to love these ruins, and show them off proudly to visitors."[74] In India, Miller's appreciation of Delhi's history, its monuments and historical ruins throughout the book decidedly distinguishes him from his "fellow Delhiwallahs", some of whom have never even heard of the fort, and whose city-pride Miller attributes to the city's aspirations, not its history.[75] In the preceding pages, Miller has hinted critically at authors who are too nostalgia-led in their portraits of Delhi, a 'folly' he too, often subscribes to as in the above example, but from which he tries to distract the reader's attention.[76]

It is only later in the third intermission that Miller explicitly addresses the issue of his foreignness and difference, and what it entails for him:

"Life in Delhi has brought me a new kind of freedom. I am no longer one of the crowd. I no longer feel the need to conform, or to measure myself against London contemporaries. Here it is taken for granted that I am different, eccentric. I stick out wherever I go. As a *firang* [mildly derogatory word for foreigner], I have discovered a multiple role: I am a source of amusement for small children […] I am a source of additional revenue for rupee-pinching shop-keepers […] I am a source of income and consternation for wide-eyed household workers who discuss my unusual foreign ways with next-door's servants […] My size, my color, my gait, my accent, my demeanor, my body, my facial expressions mark me out as a foreigner […] Because, unlike most foreigners here, I speak and read some Hindi, I appear even more unusual."[77]

These attributes emphasize Miller's status as standing apart not just from the Indians but also from 'other foreigners'. Moreover, they reveal Miller's awareness of his own advantages and disadvantages as a Delhi flâneur. Miller admits this as he talks about using the 'stigma' of 'uniqueness' in Delhi to his advantage:

"I have learnt instead to take pleasure at others finding me amusing or incompetent; there are rewards. If I am lost, a crowd will gather to help me. If I enter a forbidden building, I only get a mild reprimand – as if I, a foreigner,

74 | Ibid., 60–1.

75 | Ibid., 61.

76 | "Those who write about Delhi tend to evoke a sadness about a lost past, a dreamy admiration for old empires. They rarely deal with it as it is now – one of the largest and fastest growing cities in the world." Ibid., 10.

77 | Ibid., 79–80, original italics, my insert.

would not know better. I am often dragged (only a little unwillingly) to the front of a queue when buying a ticket. I am, for better or worse, distinctive."[78]

Miller as experiencer and observer is, on the one hand, conspicuous through his being a tall, white British male in India, but he is obviously well aware of the privileges that accompany it. On the other hand, he remains silent about the selectivity of perception or nature of narrative his position produces. The appeal of Miller's documentary account of Delhi however lies in the author optimizing his peculiar position, in his ability to simultaneously estrange and familiarize the reader with the environment he moves about in and describes. His narrative keeps the reader engaged by the capriciousness and singularity of his spiral walk, but does not shock or disorient the reader at any stage, nor does it resort to reiterating common stereotypes about India. Here I should recall and emphasize his efforts to relativize his own shock and disorientation during the slaughterhouse episode, or the reserved manner and extent of his reporting on the atrocities such as dowry deaths and the gruesome murders of children in Noida.[79] The aesthetics of estrangement and of foreignness in Miller's account arise from him actually being a foreigner (physically and culturally) and his strategy of retaining a 'touristic' perception of India (and Indians), even if it often renders him naïve or makes him the subject of amusement for the people he encounters or the reader.

A look at some of the instances in the book that feature Miller's naïve foreignness also points to the errors in interpretation by the observer/spokesperson, and re-confirms our critique of Latour's ANT. When Miller contemplates having been witness to the beating of a man by policemen, he is shocked at his own immediate reaction – of his willingness to make allowance for the public beating of a drug dealer as an act of deterrence. However, his version of the story is soon completely dismissed by another possible, and plausible, explanation:

"I later told a journalist friend about this incident and she accused me of being totally naïve, of missing the most likely interpretation of what I had seen. She said that the Delhi police themselves are sometimes drug dealers and that the policemen were probably beating up the man I photographed for not paying them protection money."[80]

On another occasion, Miller mistakes the sheathed corpse of a fat man with a big paunch for that of a pregnant woman:

78 | Ibid., 81.

79 | Ibid., 163–4, 243–5.

80 | Ibid., 118.

"I asked in Hindi, pointing at the corpse, 'What happened to the baby?' He looked at me totally 1bemused. […] The laughter became more raucous and audible. One of them, short with an enormous paunch, began stamping his foot with hilarity [...] he told me that the corpse was that of his seventy-seven-year-old brother."[81]

These confrontations and anecdotal mishaps function as a mimesis of process, and indicate once more the need to address and theorize the element of human error in judgments made by a spokesperson in an ANT. The explicit disclosure of these 'errors' by Miller adds that measure of reflexivity to his account that maintains its 'realism' and sincerity without impairing his reliability.

Eclectic descriptions of the everyday also form an important part of Miller's aesthetics of simultaneous estrangement and familiarization. The coexistence of the ordinary with the historical ruins and the 'monuments of progress' (as he calls the shining new infrastructure of 21st century Delhi) retains reality's randomness. It enables Miller's narrative to escape the iconicity and explicitly manipulative commodification that may otherwise seep into the representation of an Indian city, as rich in layers of history and politics. However, as we will see in the upcoming section, even the eclectic everyday displays, under Miller's estranging or familiarizing gaze, refreshing and different associations.

Encountering the 'Other': Post-Colonial and Urban aspects[82]

The adventurousness in Delhi in Miller's account is achieved largely through his spiral route that takes him to lesser-known parts of Delhi. The very visible 'spectacle' of the Metro station discussed earlier is followed in the next section of the spiral by a more discreet, unspectacular place, known possibly only to a few backpacking tourists of Delhi. According to Miller's descriptions, the Everest Café of Paharganj in the backstreets of "backpacker land in Delhi" is an obscure and odd place of retreat for western travellers that does not normally welcome Indians, and is "full of un-Indian comforts".[83] From a fly on the wall description of the sorry state and apparent discomfort of various travellers in the Café, Miller's descriptions delve into the chance and experiential – of his unfortunate

81 | Ibid., 184–5.

82 | The label "post-colonial" is fraught with multiple meanings, but the scope of my dissertation restricts a thorough engagement with the complex term. I found it more conducive to inform my analysis by Gyan Prakash's idea that "containing a link to the experience of colonialism, but not contained by it, post-coloniality can be thought of as a form of realignment […] critically undoing and redrawing colonialism's contingent boundaries." Prakash, "Who's Afraid of Postcoloniality?," 188–9.

83 | Miller, *Delhi*, 63.

interaction with an Israeli woman in the Café with whom he shares no common language. Escaping this estranging scene for both narrator and reader, Miller tries to find his way back to the main Paharganj Bazaar, but is offered drugs and illicit activities. The author finally admits: "This is not Delhi at its best, […] yet it is the Delhi so many new foreign visitors first encounter, and yet again it is a part of this city that few of my Indian friends are aware of."[84] This scene is revealing in more than one way. For our analysis, more importantly, it calls attention to the role of identity and perspective of the spokesperson with regard to access to and perceptions of city spaces, and how these shape and color the narratives produced.

Echoing Mehta's representation of Mumbai's slums, we have, even though in smaller magnitudes, estranging descriptions of Delhi in Miller's account that also indicate the influence of the 'gaze' of the spokesperson on the rhetoric of the discourse produced. The incidence of accidently walking into an open air slaughterhouse may possibly be the worst thing to happen to Miller in Delhi: "At the end of the lane, I came upon a scene of slaughter, the like of which I had never seen […] after my first shocking glimpse, I looked down and shut my eyes as if not quite believing what I had seen."[85] After this first impression, the slaughterhouse is expressed in more tangible and material terms: "The air was suffocatingly [sic] heavy with the smell of fresh meat. Beneath my shoes, the street was sticky from the blood and viscera of cattle." This 'phantasmagoria' then continues to describe the human participants, which does not make it better, but turns it into a "scene of cruelty and comradeship, a giant courtyard of death and laughter."[86] Miller is so shaken on witnessing this scene and the potential danger he faces through his confrontation with the butchers (mentioned previously) that he seeks refuge in a cemetery to get a hold on himself: "I sat down, shaking with disgust and fear and anger. […] I could not figure out what had upset me more – the sight of such slaughter, or the hostility of the slaughterers. I could not find the language to express what I felt."[87] Miller's affect distracts from the fact that only he perceived the scene as gross and intimidating. His description of the scene mention "two schoolgirls, with ponytails peeping from under their headscarves and with brown leather satchels on their backs", for whom the men even make way to let them pass.[88] There is also an old man sitting "hunched over his steaming tea, as if unaware of the series of human and animal dramas being enacted around him."[89]

84 | Ibid., 65.

85 | Ibid., 120.

86 | Ibid.

87 | Ibid., 123. Miller would probably argue that these feelings come close to his aversion to shopping malls – he certainly behaves tortured on entering one. See especially 206-7.

88 | Ibid., 120.

89 | Ibid.

We have a similar stark change of scenery due to the spiral walk, demonstrated when our flâneur walks out of the grand Nehru stadium, past a conference building, and literally stumbles into an "oppressively pungent open sewer, housing Delhi's most insanitary slum."[90]

"On the south side of what is officially the Khushak drain, a long narrow park with tall trees protects the well-heeled neighborhood of Jangpura from the worst of the sights and smells of Delhi shit that flows sluggishly past its homes. […] For on the north side, garishly advertised by its multi-colored polythene roofing sheets, is a settlement of one thousand Muslim families, some of whom actually live on the bed of the sewer. The drain is about twenty meters wide, and so, except during the monsoon when the area is flooded, it is possible to stay in temporary structures built of wood and polythene without feces actually floating in while you sleep. During the monsoon, it is a lot less sanitary."[91]

Much as in *Maximum City*, we have here a view of the landscape of poverty and slum in modernist terms of debris and degradation, something to be kept hidden from the affluent neighborhood.[92] On the other hand, Miller typically does not dwell on the insanitation too long as he quickly falls into conversation with a friendly young man called Atiq who helps him maneuver on tussocks through the sewer to dry land. As they converse, the author's initial perception of the unhygienic conditions of the slum are checked by the slum resident's nonchalance about the state of his habitation:

"From a distance, Punj Peeran looked like an inner circle of hell. Close up, it didn't look much better. But Atiq told me that things had improved a lot […] The police had stopped harassing them […] There was usually water once a day, […] when there wasn't, they'd make a hole in the nearby over-ground water-main and place buckets under the leak. They had a more dangerous solution to their electricity problems […] by stringing an electric cable from the pylons supplying Jangpura on the other side of the sewer. And yes, most of the children went to school. […] There is a large permanent community of Muslims in nearby Nizamuddin and they felt reasonably safe. The settlement had been there for at least fifteen years, and while this is quite the most pitiable of places, Atiq did not want pity."[93]

90 | Ibid., 156.

91 | Ibid.

92 | See Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity*.

93 | Miller, *Delhi*, 157.

Like the slum dwellers of Mumbai, in order to make life possible in the city, the residents of Punj Peeran have found their own means or their own 'tactics' to deal with the lack of infrastructure and the failure of the state to provide for such communities. After his initial undisguised description of the slum and sewer, Miller's tone becomes more matter-of-fact when reporting Atiq's description of how they deal with daily requirements in the slum. By calling it the "most pitiable of places", however, Miller maintains a sort of human empathy for the slum dwellers. Unlike Mehta, he refrains from condescension as he mentions, "Atiq did not want pity". The slum dwellers' sense of self-sustenance, perhaps even a sense of dignity thus seeps into Miller's narrative.

Delhi's "sacred and ancient river" are yet another site of urban squalor in Miller's account. Here, again, Delhi is placed on a global map through a comparison drawn between Delhi and other "great inland cities":

"The Yamuna river is Delhi's shameful, rancid secret. […] In other great inland cities of the world – Paris, London, Vienna, Cairo, Moscow – the river is the center of urban life, […] In Delhi, it is a struggle even to get near the river, and you may regret it when you do. From close up, it is as black as pitch, with a grey-green scum where its viscose waters lap stodgily against the river bank, and a fog of miniscule midges flutter and hover above the filth. […] clearly swimming would be suicidal. […] I had been told to keep an eye out for half-burnt human corpses floating down the river or caught up in the reeds."[94]

Admittedly, the bit about "half-burnt human corpses" has the sound of an urban legend to it. Miller's repugnance, however, arises from his knowledge of how such rivers can otherwise be and an educated environmental sensibility, highlighting again his perspective (observer position) and identity.[95] For, as he continues along the river, Miller meets some farmers who use the river as a source to draw water for their crops, and who either do not 'see' or do not seem to mind the "scum" as he does:

"But with a little imagination, and if you don't look too close, and while the wind is blowing eastwards, my stroll along the Yamuna seems rather beautiful, and the place seems, momentarily, to have been transformed into an unlikely

94 | Ibid., 160–1. Miller continues to explain the source of these corpses – that Hindus cremated by the riverside and dispersed the ashes in the river, and sometimes, the cost of sufficient wood being unaffordable for some, the bodies are consigned to the river without being fully burned.

95 | See also ibid., 259–60: "The failure of the world to implement a realistic electronic waste management system is slowly killing the e-waste workers of Seelampur, and poisoning the air of the city in which I live. The thought of this [is] the ultimate depressing irony of globalization."

pre-urban pastoral idyll. But the moment the wind changed direction, the stench of shit became hard to stomach. The farmer's did not seem to mind […] I asked him if the water wouldn't poison his crops. 'Not at all,' he said, 'its very good fertilizer – as long as it's mixed with fresh water from the bore-well.'"[96]

Frequently, it is the exposition of Miller's experience of repeatedly having his perception checked by other people's stance that functions as a mimesis of process and adds a genuine level of reflexivity to his narrative. Alternatively, the reflexivity lies in the narrative distancing achieved by the change of tone (from being affected to becoming phlegmatic), which is also a means of emotional distancing on being faced with such magnitudes of 'otherness' or coping with the unpredictability of the spiral walk. And it is perhaps due to a sense of humility that this specific urban space instills in Miller that he avoids extensive reports on topics such as the Noida killings or dowry deaths, which only find brief mention in his account. Just as Miller 'hurriedly skirts' Noida, his account of the Noida killings is a sort of obligatory journalistic rendering of the basic details of the case.[97] In a similar strain, he restricts an account of the status of women in Delhi and related women's issues to an Intermission.[98]

The question of whether such discretion is not again simply an authorial strategy to divert the readers' attention from a commodifying gaze must remain unanswered as the issue remains ambiguous. There is, however, an instance in the narrative where Miller's voyeuristic curiosity becomes more explicit despite narrative attempts to camouflage it. On entering a crematorium, he is at first reserved: "But in a place of death, my nosiness about other people's lives is tempered by a fear of intruding on private grief of the mourners – so I try to make myself invisible".[99] However, this being "unrealistic for a large white man in an Indian cremation ground", Miller sits down on a stone bench and gives a detailed account of the procession of mourners and their preparation of the funeral pyre anyway, complete with a description of the wailing and grieving woman.[100]

Miller often claims that he strives to avoid the usual mistakes in writing about India (write nostalgically or make fun of Indians). Yet, he becomes prey to the error of a similar sort of misconstruction himself while talking about female emancipation in India. Let us call it Miller's fallacy of catachresis with

96 | Ibid., 161.

97 | Although, at one point, Miller admits that the panning for bones by people of Delhi (which his children think of as 'sick') is perhaps one way for the people to deal with the trauma of the incident.

98 | Miller, *Delhi*, 163–5.

99 | Ibid., 182.

100 | Ibid.

a brief nod to Gayatri Spivak.[101] In his seventh intermission, Miller broaches the subject of the status of women in Indian society and specifically in Delhi through government statistics and journalistic research. The intermission concludes with the description of a presentation by the bisexual Scottish-American performance artist and "self-proclaimed 'drag king'" for a small group of "gob-smacked Delhiwallahs" in a "tiny back room of the Khoj arts center".[102] It included photographs of a performance artist with snakes crawling over her naked body, a woman who had strapped a huge green plastic clitoris around her pelvis and similar. At the end, on being asked if there were any questions, the audience remained "glassy-eyed" and silent.[103] Although Miller himself admits that this is one of more "radical ways to encourage serious debate about the status and image of women", he concludes from the audience's silence that "female emancipation has a long way to go in the Indian capital."[104] We have here a case of catachresis working in two ways: Spivak's meaning of catachresis can be identified in Miller's act of 'thrusting' Western notions of feminism or female emancipation onto a marginal Indian audience to interpret their silence. The dissonance of Miller's assumption, of a certain universality of Western notions of feminism and female emancipation, and hence their applicability in this specific Indian context, exposes a catachresis in the sense of Derrida's notion, precisely that these notions are not universal and hence incomplete. Notwithstanding numerous differences in conceptions of what constitutes feminism or distinguishes female emancipation, my critique does not contest whether or not Miller's analysis generally holds true for Delhi. Rather, the means of extracting such a conclusion from the silence of a very specific and small group of people, and this singular and particularly 'radical' event, is a much too hasty consensus. It assumes a universal validity, translatability of the cultural codes represented by the work of the Euro-American artist, and is insensitive to the many cultural subtleties, and intricacies that may be at play in the room on that occasion. This instance thus casts a small shadow over Miller's otherwise insightful tour of Delhi. It signals that Miller's representations are indeed laden in the sense that while they owe something to the seemingly privileged position of Miller as a 'native' informant, they are still very much determined by an assuming position of Western superiority.

101 | Spivak, "Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value," see especially 200–4. Spivak extends Jacques Derrida's trope of catachresis (in his ideas on deconstruction) to apply it in sub-altern studies. For Derrida, catachresis refers to an original incompleteness that characterizes all systems of meaning, and yet, grounds philosophical discourse. For Spivak, a catachresis occurs when "a cultural identity is thrust upon one because the center wants an identifiable margin".

102 | Miller, *Delhi*, 164.

103 | Ibid., 165.

104 | Ibid.

Miller's report of his Delhi walk is probably, in all likelihood, accurate in journalistic terms, and his rendering remains captivating with its occasional and enjoyable detours of Delhi's history or anecdotes of his experiences. One must add, to Miller's credit that his literary documentary of Delhi does not specifically try to 'explain' India to a foreign readership, nor is there an overt exoticizing thrust to it, and nor does Miller subscribe to 'slum tourism' for an Indian elite, as Mehta does in many ways in *Maximum City*. This may be attributed to a deeper lying concern for the city of his residence due to Miller's specific biography as a long time ex-pat who has settled in India. Moreover, Miller's narrative also displays a perceptive awareness of, or an eager belief in, the possibility of a more complex relation between the East and West – an issue that we will discuss in the next section.

Mimesis of Process and Self-Reflexivity in Miller's ANT: Revising Preconceptions, Enabling Ethical Encounters?

'West is East and East is West'[105]

On climbing up to the tower blocks which house the surgical wards of Delhi's Hindu Rao government hospital, Miller assumes to have reached the highest point above sea level in Delhi. On looking down from the building at the city below him, however, we have an observer who is momentarily disoriented. The panorama that the vantage point enables him is not quite the one that he expected to see: "I was staring down at something that was, momentarily, astonishing. It was a huge city that was not Delhi. There was absolutely nothing that I recognized. […] It was as if the Hindu Rao staircase had teleported me to another city."[106] The author soon realizes that the tower he had climbed had no such magical powers, but that it was his mistake in observation:

"I realized that I had turned the city upside down, and smiling foolishly to myself, muttered, in an inverted echo of Kipling, that west is east and east is west. And the city I knew was behind me, and the unknown city, so much larger than I expected, was West Delhi."[107]

This elevation, which should normally 'empower' the observer through the panorama it enables, unsettles Miller instead; his perspective and knowledge of the topography of Delhi is challenged by the disorienting panorama. He realizes

105 | Ibid., 199.

106 | Ibid., 198–9.

107 | Ibid., 199.

quickly though that the view is simply turned on its head and he only has to shift his perspective. This episode in Miller's walk offers a suitable metaphor for instances described by the author as moments in which his perception is challenged in the Indian megacity. These instances are also proof of the learning process that Miller undergoes through his walk of Delhi. Miller recalls a scene from a movie, *The Householder*, in which we have a paradigmatic East-West encounter between a young Indian teacher and his soon-to-be friend, Ernest, an American. Although they are both talking in English, they completely fail to understand each other, and yet end up becoming friends. This scene is noteworthy because it indicates Miller's narrative flexibility and willingness to change the/his western anthropological gaze and suggests in his method of ANT, a potential ethical revision of preconceived notions (mimesis of process). Much in the sense of Latour's change of perspective, this enables Miller to see both, the East *and* the West, as *participants* in an encounter. Miller's self-implication is convivial in its effort to see friendship as an outcome of such an encounter despite the failure on each side to understand each other.[108]

A more explicit staging of this mimesis of process can be seen in Miller's descriptions of Ghazipur, Delhi's 'East End'. Here, Miller comes upon a huge rubbish dump where he sees a little, poor, physically handicapped girl towing a big sack and a sickly dog following her. "Alone amid the debris of civilization, I was reminded of a film depicting the aftermath of a nuclear bomb. She looked as if she might be the last person on earth."[109] This scene immediately causes him to "rant rhetorically" to himself, asking questions such as

"How could people live like this? How can they raise their children here? And what must they think of people who don't live on rubbish dumps? And how have these people benefited from India's famous economic boom? Whatever happened to the legendary economic trickle down effects of economic growth I wondered?"[110]

108 | Miller is not alone in advocating such a model of multiculturalism based on tolerance without understanding that may be witnessed in India. See also Dasgupta, *Capital*, 41: "This ability of the Third-World city to embrace utter unintelligibility within its own population, to say not 'Let me understand you so I may live alongside you,' but 'I will live alongside you without condition, for I will never understand you,' seemed not only more profoundly humane but also more promising as a general ethos of globalization, since it was clear, in these times of global interconnections, that we were all implicated in relationships with people we would never know or understand."

109 | Miller, *Delhi*, 255.

110 | Ibid.

He continues in this strain, raising issues that reflect stereotypical ways of 'seeing' and thinking about the poor. Then, something happens in this scene, which curbs his initial reaction. The dog runs up to the girl, she drops her bundle and takes the dog into her arms and smiles a big happy smile at the author. It turns out that she isn't at school because it is a holiday (contrary to the author's assumption that she just doesn't know school), that she was in the fourth grade, can read and write, and was only helping her parents on the rubbish dump that day. They also did not actually live on the rubbish dump but in a room, which was approximately a twenty-minute walk away. Here, the mimesis of process works by exposing the author completely and showing how he must completely turn around his original perception. During the lived experience, he walks into a trap – of viewing 'the poor' as one 'would' view 'the poor', of imposing values and judgments over someone and objectifying the person in the process. In the narrative, he takes the reader along with him to enter into the same trap. The revision of this process through his observation of what happens next and his interaction with the girl splinters the bias of the initial perception of this scene. The gaze in this case is reversed. ("And what must they think of people who don't live on rubbish dumps?")[111] He is forced to realize that not only is his positioning of the girl on a social ladder wrong, but that he, as an observer, is also in no position to make an accurate analysis of these people on the dump. He experiences once more a genuine clash of his worldviews and values with the reality that he encounters. Unlike Mehta, however, Miller does not attempt to interpret the differences, and it is precisely in this incompleteness that the strength of his ANT-like endeavor lies. He simply acknowledges the insecurity that the experience causes him: "I left the rubbish dump, unsure of what to make of my brief insight into the life of the rag-pickers. They worked in appalling health-endangering, life-shortening conditions, but there didn't seem to be a hint of self-pity."[112] The explicit narrativization of the observer's own emancipation of thought and knowledge (mimesis of process) serves as a strategy that shakes a firm belief in existing discourse by highlighting how common sense (in Latour's vocabulary) is propagated through pre-conceived notions that subtly disguise their own constructed nature.

Coming Full Circle at the End of the Spiral

In the last episode of the book, Miller has arrived in the last swirl of the spiral (the last ten miles of his walk), and is now in Dwarka, at the time, a 'half-built' sub-city in the city's outer limits.[113] By re-describing Miller's representation style in this

111 | Ibid.

112 | Ibid., 256–7.

113 | Ibid., 267.

particular episode, I would like to explore the possibility he offers of describing associations or tracing actor-networks in the sense of Latour. Let us consider the dialogue that arises through the juxtaposition of conflicting opinions on issues of ownership and organization of city space.

"The only areas you shitholes "preserve" is the British legacy in colonial Delhi, of all those stupid roundabouts. The real "New Delhi" is the 90% Delhi made by the REAL people of Delhi who have built it with their sweat and toil."[114]

This outburst is quoted in a footnote in the last pages of Miller's representation of Delhi, and I would argue that it once more indicates Miller's subtle self-reflexivity. It being a "not entirely unfair diatribe"[115] against Delhi authorities (who have deemed a self-organized colony in Dwarka unauthorized), Miller quotes the correspondent, and notes that the correspondent has tagged the colony on Google Earth along with this entry that pours out the correspondent's outrage. Miller's own descriptions of the area 'tag' it as a 'wasteland' being built on fertile soil. A place of poor immigrants from Bihar, Miller continues to describe, who will become urban nomads working as unskilled laborers building homes for the 'aspiring' migrants of the city, but who will never be able to afford to live in these homes themselves.[116] Miller's rhetoric in describing Dwarka has some Marxist intonations that echo the sentiments voiced by the correspondent. With the difference, of course, that Miller does indeed consider the architecture of colonial Delhi – the British legacy – worth preserving. Yet, the tracing of these differences and their visibility in Miller's text is an articulation of 'matters of concern' as it describes the complicated asymmetries in issues pertaining to ownership, organization and control of city space.

Finally, at the end of the spiral, both aspects come together – those that trouble postcolonial frameworks and political economy:[117]

"For me, a refugee from post-modern monotony, Gurgaon was worse than going back home […] I, however, had come all this way to escape places where the streets are lifeless; places where people are too world-weary or too preoccupied to smile or to talk. Were India's cities becoming like anywhere else? […] Nothing, nothing at all, happened to me as I wandered through Gurgaon. I wasn't chased by killer pigs; I didn't step into a sewer […] I suppose I should've been happy, but I wasn't. I missed the bustle, the noise, the colors,

114 | Ibid., 276, original caps.

115 | Ibid., 275.

116 | Ibid., 275–6.

117 | Ong, "Worlding Cities, or the Art of Being Global."

and the smells. For better or for worse, Gurgaon is probably the future, and Delhi, and other Indian cities, will become more and more like Gurgaon."[118]

In the urbanization and westernization of Delhi, Miller identifies and criticizes the diffused technocratic enterprise of creating a 'slick' (millennium) city through a landscape of "middle class aspiration" and "westernized urban utopia".[119] He debunks this myth by describing how this "city of dreams" has fallen by the wayside as its young population of call-center workers is already suffering from burnout syndrome. Its various amenities have begun to break down, pointing to the real needs of a burgeoning megacity, namely, sustainable infrastructure.[120] In Miller's expectations that Delhi remain 'Indian' and not become 'just like the West', we are witness, perhaps, to an essentializing of ethnicity and identity. Reminiscent of Sinclair's attitude, Miller's cynical outlook of what Delhi or other Indian cities might become in the future also borders on nostalgia and underlines his romantic vision of a former grandeur of Delhi, of retaining the otherness of India. Yet, and it must be said that this is perhaps, after all, a commendable trait in Miller's literary documentary. He ends his spiral walk with this personal bone of contention – ultimately only his simple wish to retain the soul of a city as opposed to creating gentrified but homogenous city landscapes.

118 | Miller, *Delhi*, 281–2.

119 | Ibid., 279.

120 | Ibid., 281.