

urban biographies: story of a manhole

The Power of Seeing is an urban design project that requires sustained observation of one chosen element in the street, over a period of time. Our premise is that if we look at something long enough, it will, in time, begin to reveal its story. We are not looking at general stories, but are attempting to move away from the generalities of urban chaos and narrow-

POWER OF SEEING

Navtej Johar

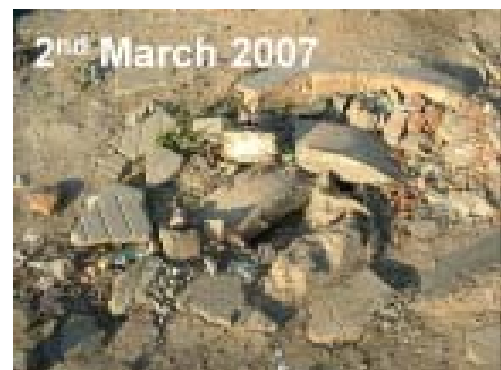
ing our focus to make specific case histories, case history of a road sign, a lamppost or a curbstone.

Here, we share with you the story of a manhole in Hauz Khas, documented over two years. The

following photo essay says it all. And the questions it raises are obvious.

Considering that there is an overwhelming general chaos which surrounds us, and the agencies that are responsible are opaque and inaccessible, the choices we are left with are, (1) to be indifferent and continually turn a blind eye; (2) be jaded by the haphazard governance of civil authorities; or, (3) be totally exasperated by the perpetual cycle of grime and chaos.

The Power of Seeing project looks at this state of affairs from one-remove. Viewing one element of disorder, in detail, over a period of time, we, (a) create a bank of case-histories of specific civic elements that form a part of a larger scenario of chaos, and (b) then begin to uncover the underlying patterns of disorder that endlessly replicate



themselves, and perhaps have been a part and parcel of our lives for generations.

We invite the citizens of Delhi to join this drive. We ask each one of you to adopt one element on the street in your neighbourhood.

Start documenting it and contribute to the pool of case-histories required to substantiate the 'Power of Seeing' project. All that we are required to do at this initial stage of envisioning reasonable urban spaces, is to 'see' and 'keep seeing'.



1st April 2006



2nd June 2006



1st October 2006



RTI Application receipt April 2, 2007



16th July 2007



25th November 2007



18th March 2008



18th March 2008



The Power of Seeing is an urban design project initiated by Navtej Johar, a Delhi-based Bharatanatyam dancer, choreographer and a yoga exponent (www.navtej.johar.com). He is the founder of Studio Abhyas, a non-profit organisation dedicated to yoga, dance, urban design and the care of stray animals (www.abhyastrust.org)