

WALKING THE WALLED CITY

Gender and the Dérive as Urban Ethnography

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This paper focuses on the possibilities and limitations of the contemporary *dérive* as a form of ethnography in contemporary Delhi. The *dérive*, which originated as the Surrealist *déambulation* and subsequently became the Situationist *dérive* in the late 1950s, has now been re-imagined by walking artists and practitioners. In seeking to locate the Situationist *dérive* as an ethnographic practice within (Old) Delhi through Abdelhafid Khatib's *dérive*, this paper dwells on the experimental origins of the Situationist *dérive* and its journey through contemporary pedestrian practices, and asks how walking as a gendered, autoethnographic practice of the city might help narrate and navigate Indian urban spaces.

Keywords: *dérive*, Delhi, urban ethnography, gender, Abdelhafid Khatib, Situationism, performance, walking

The Situationist *Dérive*: an Introduction

Psychogeography was continually re-invented as an art practice throughout the 20th century. The term was coined by the Lettrist Group in the early 1950s, and was defined by founder Guy Debord as “the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals” (Debord 1981a: 5). Simon Sadler's definition is possibly more relevant today: “playful, cheap, and populist, an artistic activity carried out in the everyday space of the street rather than in the conventional art spaces of the gallery or theatre” (Sadler 1999: 69).

The *dérive*, or the drift, as a pedestrian practice of psychogeography originated during the days of the Lettrist International, and envisioned a new kind of city “that one encounters by chance in everyday life” (Ivain 1996: 17). According to Stalker member Francesco Careri, the Situationist *dérive* is not a very strictly regulated walk and “has a few rules”, including: “preparatory decision, based on psychogeographic maps of the directions of penetration of the environmental unit to be analysed [...] the possibility of pauses, the idea of taking a taxi to increase personal disorientation into account” (Careri 2002: 97). The *dérive* was constantly devised as a way to uproot the city by a selective, half-focussed exploration of a site; but it was also to “emotionally disorient oneself”, and the determination of the “spatial field” (Debord 1981b: 52) would depend on the aim of the drifter. While the Surrealist emphasis on chance and an unconscious embodiment of desire was properly shrugged off only with the onset of Situationism, the *dérive* itself continued to retain the element of chance without overwhelmingly focussing on it, even as the urban contexts for chance are perennially politically charged, which this article will demonstrate.

This article seeks to engage with the *dérive* as a pedestrian activity that is, firstly, specific to and politically engaged with the local architectures of Delhi. It also attempts to question

the everyday ethnography-framework of the *dérive* in this context and the utility of its enactment as autoethnography. In this article, my lack of engagement with the well-trodden territory of men who walk, and with particularly male psychogeographers, is deliberate. Deirdre Heddon and Cathy Turner identify a canon of walking – “the reiteration of a particular genealogy – or fraternity – which includes Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Henry David Thoreau, André Breton and Guy Debord”, who, as Heddon and Turner assert, create “an orthodoxy of walking” (Heddon and Turner 2012: 234) – as well as modes or kinds of walking, and what walking appears to be preoccupied with. Heddon and Turner address narrative and phenomenological issues that become particularly crucial when one considers women who walk, and their research “draws attention to a set of possibilities” including:

the political potential of a walking that mobilizes social relationships, without aspiring to an idealized notion of the free man, or free-footed nomad, without the abstract freedom of the epic task and without prioritizing or opposing distance and dislocation over locality and rootedness. (ibid.: 236)

This awareness of the “epic task” is productively challenged by the testimonies in their work by “attending to detail” in a way that “equalizes walking practices as the focus is the nearby – not the distant horizon (an open space to be conquered). Wherever one is walking, one is right here, on this foot of land” (ibid.: 230). The horizon of walking practices is indeed as epic as its chroniclers and the canon listed above suggest; it is entirely possible to dis-embodiment walking from contexts that are frequently as important and overlooked as the local, as the canon adequately demonstrates.

The *dérive* in this article has been patchworked together over a series of *dérives* that were first conducted informally over the summer of 2013, and then in a more structured manner into and throughout 2014, culminating in *dérives* that I devised in order to attempt to answer a series of questions about a network of *galis* in the Chandni Chowk area of Old Delhi. I occasionally walked with a friend but mostly by myself, and talked along the way to people who worked in the *galis* and streets I walked through. The people I spoke to were varied and included street vendors, tourists, pavement dwellers, shop owners, and other street actors. Their testimonies were informally gathered when permission to record or quote them was denied, and formally where noted otherwise. I have left these narratives out of this particular engagement with the *dérive* because an examination of the role of others who walk the streets in various capacities requires a longer, more particular dedication to the relationship between the *dérive* and the socio-economic composition of the public in Chandni Chowk, rather than a cursory manifestation of these testimonies as a supplement to my framing of the *dérive* as autoethnography. The *dérive* is narrated in the form of a reworked questionnaire about the architecture and daily rhythms of Chandni Chowk, but also through photographs and ethnographic descriptions.

My field notes took on varying forms: walking diaries, photographs (my own and those by the two professional photographers I walked with) and videos. At the completion of field work, I had over 600 photographs and at least 15 videos. The ethics policy for both photographs and videography was to film or shoot in a way that did not implicate the face of another person in the crowd, either in close-up or detail. Thus, many of the photographs are of the buildings and objects that define the street, and the videos are of my feet or the sides of the roads. The videos – shaky, hand-held, loud, raw – particularly became forms of walking diaries; I was able to refer to them for landmarks and routes when writing up the *dérives*.

Abdelhafid Khatib and the Politics of the Dérive

In December 1958, an editorial note appeared at the end of an essay by a long-time Algerian member of the Situationist International, Abdelhafid Khatib (Wark 2011: 83), in the second issue of the *Internationale Situationiste*. The note explains that the “study” was incomplete because Khatib was unable to finish the work he had begun on the streets of Paris. Khatib, who had undertaken a Situationist drift in the Parisian quarter of Les Halles, had been arrested twice and spent two nights in a holding cell because “since September, North Africans have been banned from the streets after half past nine in the evening” (Khatib 1958a). He had loitered on the streets whilst attempting the Situationist drift and, after harassment by the police, had abandoned his efforts at drifting. The only account of the drift we are left with is the document that ends with the aforementioned note, and a questionnaire entitled “Questionnaire on the Psychogeography of Les Halles” inviting responses by post; both documents are expanded upon later in this article.

In his alternative biography of the daily lives of the Situationists, McKenzie Wark re-interrogates Jean Paul-Sartre’s query about the meaning of individual freedom on the streets should a curfew be lifted, to ask, “What meaning can there be in the freedom to walk at night, through the Paris of the mid 1950s, the curfew of the occupation lifted and the curfew of the Algerian war not yet descended?” and cites the appearance of the *dérive* “as if it is a direct answer to this question” (Wark 2011: 57). Wark’s question takes on a new relevance in the light of Khatib’s fate during the curfew of the war, as does the *dérive* itself, thus tapping into questions of race and gender that have haunted the *dérive* since its inception. It did this more silently at the time than now, perhaps, but it still touched upon the undeniable discrepancy between the theory of the *dérive* – for a unified atmosphere and an apparently unified imagination of a city – and the praxis of it – for a restricted kind of people in a restricted place, lacking the freedom of the hour that Sartre lamented.

Although the details of how a *dérive* must be conducted – what increasingly became the “rules of play” – appear to have been stripped of traditional political jargon and elaborate more on the method of *dériving* itself (particularly Debord’s pre-Situationist text, “Theory of the *Dérive*”), the context in which the *dérive* was birthed was indeed an immensely political one, rendering the *dérive* a response to concerns larger than mere movement and navigation of the cityscape in question (frequently Paris, but only within Europe), such as anti-bourgeois architecture and the regime of the state. Tom McDonough writes that “the *dérive* was, at some essential level, the search for an encounter with otherness, spurred on in equal parts by the exploration of pockets of class, ethnic and racial difference in the postwar city, and by frequent intoxication” (McDonough 2009: 11). He goes on to add that “the fledgling Situationists frequented” North African and Spanish bars in various parts of Paris, “all the while projecting their own desires for alterity onto the sometimes recalcitrant subjects conscripted into their adventures”, concluding that the *dérive* bears parallels to “the ambivalence of the *flâneur* paradigm” in “its unstable mix of desire for and condescension toward the other” (ibid.).

The Situationist need for “an encounter with otherness” to unearth ambient zones in the city is reflective of their own historical positions as mostly white, male Europeans in search of everyday difference. The Situationist *dérive*, then, performs a dual function, as Khatib’s experience indicates: it highlights the spaces wherein difference occurs, such as in racially segregated pockets where the mere performance of the *dérive* will uncover “alterities” of experience and affect, but it also emphasises *embodied* difference, which affects the *dérive* as

well as the affective responses one may have to a locale; the *dérive* conducted by Khatib in Les Halles, for instance, is radically different from one that may have been conducted by Guy Debord in the same quarter, or even by Michèle Bernstein, one of the few women in the Situationist movement. If the *dérive* renders familiar urbanisms strange, it is worthwhile asking what counted as “familiar” – and for whom.

However, the *dérive* does not eliminate difference. This is where the pedestrian nature of it becomes wholly spectacular, for the *dérive* is limited by the consciousness and corpus of the drifter. All difference is embodied, especially (in the presence of) othered bodies, and the *dérive*, while sympathetic to encounters with difference, does not eliminate difference itself. Sukhdev Sandhu, for instance, in his pedestrian exploration of nocturnal lives in contemporary London, writes that his “main interest is in the streets of the capital” and his “chief piece of equipment is a pair of sturdy boots” (Sandhu 2007: 15). However, whilst Sandhu’s accounts of the various types of personae that comprise the nights of present-day London, such as immigrant night cleaners (ibid.: 30), “sleep technicians” (ibid.: 116) and the nuns of Tyburn who pray for Londoners through the night (ibid.: 130) are illuminating, his walking itself is not subject to scrutiny as a method. Additionally, the privilege of his own gendered identity as a man who is free to roam the streets at night is not actively considered in undertaking this work.

According to Sadler, “Situationists mythologized the poor as fellow travelers on the urban margins, treating the ghetto as an urban asset rather than an urban ill” (Sadler 1999: 56). The element of playfulness in the *dérive* could be read as being synonymous with the aspired disorientation, which speaks back to the body/site dialectic, a strong but invisible feature of the *dérive*, which is then often read as a process that is more a reflection of the site than it is of the body traversing it. While some areas may lend themselves more to *dériving* than others, Khatib’s example suggests that some bodies are also more policed than others. “Disorientation” or “play” takes on additional meaning in Khatib’s case – disorientation caused not just by the site of Les Halles itself, but also by Khatib being perceived as a threatening other – at that moment in Les Halles.

The Situationist *dérive* was intended to lack destination but not purpose. It was intended to control time, not submit to it. Walking was seen as a subversive act in a space that was becoming increasingly unfriendly for the pedestrian, who, consequently, became a marginalised figure by virtue of trying to overcome the linear imaginings of his immediate geography. Citing an exuberant Ivain on surviving a drift that touched “the extreme limit, the critical point” of three or four months, Sadler notes that this impulse to “possess” the city reveals “something more than mere fetishization. Like the imperialist powers they officially opposed, it was as if [S]ituationists felt that the exploration of alien quarters (of the city rather than the globe) would advance civilization” (Sadler 1999: 81). For someone like Khatib, however, the drift could not have been an endless, extreme endeavour. Sadler finds it “poignant” that “for the handful of female or non-European psychogeographers, the drift could momentarily defy the white patriarchy of urban space-time” (Sadler 1999: 81). In his brisk essay, “Who Needs Psychogeography?,” Sezgin Boynik is similarly firm on whom the *dérive* was constructed to aid. “This episode with Khatib is fundamental to understanding the political implications of psychogeography”. He says:

First of all, it shows the genuine approach of the Situationists to a non-White and colonized people’s cultural practice: it is not *psychogeographing* their area [...] as “other”; it is instead allowing the voice of the non-European colonized to be avant-garde and subversive. Secondly, it shows that this attempt is, if not impossible, very difficult. There is plenty of proof

that, after half of century, non-White colonized people still have difficulties in the centre of Paris, as in other European cities. (Boynik 2013: 21–22)

The defiance and subversion is, however, in the very undertaking of it; the momentary nature of Khatib's drift is an imposed failing, not a calibrated subversion. Sadler is right when he argues that "Debord overlooked the fact that drifters could not completely 'let go' even if they wanted to. Psychogeography was formed and validated by a situationist group discourse and culture that couldn't be just blanked out at will" (Sadler 1999: 78). How this chaos, or even the absence of it, would succeed in conclusively mapping an experience that was revolutionary in any shifts it may have created outside of what Sadler calls "Situationist group thought" remains unclear.

It remains a challenge to view the *dérive* as anything but a process. Using a *dérive* in its entirety as a retrospective event possessing a unified temporality (even if it is stretched across days or months) that will light up the problems of urbanism appears to be less useful than to think of the process – the walking of the *dérive*, in real time – as an illumination of the limitations of existing architecture and what it allows the pedestrian to do. The abrupt ending to Khatib's Les Halles expedition is most illustrative of this: in embodying difference, Khatib's *dérive* was already challenging the terrain it was being conducted on long before it was halted. "Surely it must mean something that the principal documented attempt at psychogeography was cut short by a curfew and imprisonment of a comrade simply for being an Arab", writes Andrea Gibbons (2015). The drifter matters but so does the city being drifted in. What happens when we take Khatib's questionnaire to a different kind of city?

The Architectural Space of Old Delhi

Anthony D. King speaks of three distinct, contemporary forms of Delhi: "indigenous Shahjahanabad, colonial New Delhi and postcolonial DLF City" (King 2004: 142). King does a commendable job of explaining the differences between the physical layouts of the three "cities" by turning to the implications of colonial naming of modern architectural blocks and roads in New Delhi (appended or prefixed with English terms that point towards a renewed "development" of place, such as Safdarjung Enclave or Defence Colony, which says little about the location itself and more about the kind of location it is – a gated community, perhaps, or an expanding locale – or aspires to be); the intersections of the various alleys, bazaars and neighbourhoods of Old Delhi; and the aspiring coloniality of the upcoming, self-sufficient residences in DLF (Delhi Land and Finance) City (bearing names such as Princeton Estate or Regency Park), which falls under the National Capital Region (or NCR) of Delhi.

King describes Old Delhi, formerly known as Shahjahanabad, as a spatial cluster that is separate from New Delhi and DLF City, and the attempts to contain its temporal borders between its seventeenth-century Mughal roots and its modern transformation from a "notified slum" to a "conservation area" (King 2004: 145). Ajay Gandhi links the division of Old and New Delhi to the colonial segregation of towns: "British administrators and Indian businessmen definitely moved out of medieval urban areas. The latter were increasingly termed the 'black town,' native quarters, or old city, where the mass of Indians lived", he writes. "Thereafter, and arguably until the present-day, places like Shahjahanabad became negatively defined, in terms of what they lacked. Shahjahanabad thus became Old Delhi." (Gandhi 2002: 205)

Old Delhi, although a vast expanse, is characterized in verbal and visual maps of the area by Chandni Chowk, described by Ajay Gandhi as Old Delhi's "main thoroughfare" (Gandhi 2002: 209) that divides Old Delhi into several zones. The artery of Chandni Chowk is, according to King:

The central public space of the tightly knit and originally, completely walled city, linking the crossing of a cluster of narrow lanes [...] an open area at crossroads. Unlike the space of New Delhi, produced by a series of axial roads linking widely separated points on an orthogonal plan, and designed for modern motorized traffic, the space of Old Delhi is formed by a tightly integrated conglomeration of buildings, internal courtyards and places, which assumes that movement is mainly on foot. (King 2004: 144)

Chandni Chowk translates from Hindi as "moonli(gh)t street"; a translation that is a reminder of its Mughal-era origins when it was named so. Gandhi rightly recognises that "the old city was the haunt for the vernacular, unskilled urban underclass; it was also the repository for 'authentic' food and popular culture" but simultaneously – and more importantly – that "Delhi's old city contained activity with imprecise boundaries and little official sanction [...] there was no sociological community or singular culture that defined this space" (Gandhi 2002: 204). This signifier of the "authentic" Old Delhi culture, which is crowded, chaotic and necessitates foot-movement, persists today. It is as though the street has not stepped out of its past for the Delhi that is (indigenously) "modern": it is a culture-hub, a weekend-activity and a walled city working with an internal logic that is simultaneously fascinating and un-"everyday" for outsiders.

Re-gendering Khatib's Dérive as Urban Ethnography

If I was superficially acquainted with Delhi before fieldwork, it inevitably became a form of home in the process of conducting fieldwork. Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst argue that "walking is a profoundly social activity: that in their timings, rhythms and inflections, the feet respond as much as does the voice to the presence and activity of others" (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 1). These "moving groups" are in a dynamic relationship with the city; their roles are in flux and never fully settled in the everyday social imagination because their movement itself – in any sense – is crucial to determining the shape, map and scale of their routes. This is another possibility for where the *dérive* can travel in urban India.

I spent a lot of time walking in Delhi, and the experience of walking did acquaint me more with the everyday pulse of the city, and has inevitably influenced the lenses I have chosen to view the city through. I had lived in Delhi previously, and am proficient in Hindi, so navigation itself never an issue in terms of finding my way around; I can read signs, converse fluently, and am familiar with local cultural codes. The framing of the walks as *dérives*, thus, productively estranged a familiar environment, or rather, an environment that was formerly familiar merely as a site of exploration that became a site aiding a self-conscious exploration of walking. As Weston points out, "Writing under the ethnographic 'I' means that the author must write *as* someone or something: a situated 'self'" (Weston 1997: 171, emphasis in original). This solitary *dérive* is, in this article and in my doctoral thesis (Murali 2016), framed as form of autoethnography.

The question of the "auto" in the ethnography I undertake must be addressed here: whilst the popular delineation of "evocative" and "analytical" auto/ethnographies (Ellis and

Bochner 2006; Anderson 2006) is a useful one, especially in clarifying the subject of the ethnography, the *dérive* is best considered as autoethnography in as much as the ethnographer is held accountable as the medium, and the subject is clarified as the process of walking – as with all walking practices, in art or otherwise. The focus on the self is limited to revelations about the *dérive* as a productive ethnographic walking practice. This is not a phenomenological undertaking, in other words, and as a critical/occasionally native/ethnographer, I am less interested in the body as a site and more in the site and body moving through each other.

The average day out in the “field” during the months I spent in Delhi involved a lot of walking; not just the pre-meditated walks that have taken form and structure over the course of the fieldwork I undertook as research for my thesis, but also walks to and from the metro station and auto-rickshaw stands, during commutes, walks in the gardens and between various buildings of the archives and libraries I visited, and walks in the neighbourhood where I lived. All the walking, in other words, happened outdoors, in the thick of the cityscape. The question of gender and self-preservation as a woman out in public, which accompanied me inevitably as ethnographic concerns, were also about how to be in the world and spilled into the non-ethnographic everyday, which can only be contained to a small degree. Frequently, I found myself loitering – and sometimes, when I watched the pace of everyday life settle and uproot itself in Chandni Chowk with a cup of steaming chai in my hand and nowhere to sit, perhaps it would not be a stretch to say that I was loitering without intent.

The study of intersections of gender, space and sexuality has a long lineage.¹ I localise the discussion of gender and walking by drawing on writing that considers the contexts specific to urban India. Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan and Shilpa Ranade correctly identify in their book about urban women in Mumbai and the culture of loitering that “besides demonstrating that they belong in private spaces, women also have to indicate that their presence in public space is necessitated by a respectable and worthy purpose” (Phadke et al. 2011: 24). Loitering, as they go on to reveal in their book, is not one of them. Loitering, or lingering without purpose, purports the residual action of taking up space. It draws attention to the stillness and the absence of movement, or disappearing, and makes the female body visible in the public eye; the concern that a woman doing nothing on the streets is dangerous for all sorts of reasons is one that has repeated itself over time. Equally, it is worth adding that loitering as a radical act of choice differs greatly from the praxis of loitering as a marginalised figure – the choice is not available to all, the very framing of “loitering” varies across socio-economic and religious identities, and the neoliberal co-option of women’s visibility in public as inherently liberatory can be unproductive, as it casts one’s movements as accessible or even desirable to all.

Between 2012 to 2014, Khatib’s questionnaire directed my *dérives* in Old Delhi, specifically in Chandni Chowk, its surrounding *galis* (narrow alleys) and *mohallas* (neighbourhoods). I walked usually between 8am and 2pm, and then again between 4pm and 8:30pm. The *dérives* would alternate between these time-slots, as it was difficult, due to time and resource constraints – as well as constraints of gender – to embark upon a continuous *dérive* in the way of the Situationists: an initial aim, but not one that remained practical, and which the blueprint of the Khatib *dérive* quickly substituted as a more interesting, pragmatic and unmapped Situationist method.

I began fieldwork for my thesis in 2013 by walking around Chandni Chowk to explore the *galis*, the main street, and the dead-ends of the streets. My primary aim then was to fa-

¹ See Anzaldúa 2012; Haraway 1990; Harding 1987; hooks 2004; Massey 1994; Rose 1993; Spivak 1999 for noteworthy feminist conceptualisations of these intersections that remain crucial references in critical examinations of space and gender.

miliarise myself with the site; my walking was not, as mentioned in the introduction, subject to immediate scrutiny. I repeated routes when I was more familiar with them as a means of getting from gali to gali, but did not view this very navigation as a part of the walking-as-ethnography process until August 2013, when I began undertaking *dérives* actively. On a couple of occasions in August 2013, I walked with friends, who are photographers. The walking was centred again as a process during these excursions, as walking alone was different to walking with women, for instance. The paces shifted, as did the routes we took, and even the duration of the walks. I stayed in Chandni Chowk much later, till about 9pm, on these occasions, and also paid less attention to the macro-navigation – concerns about whether we were lost, for instance – and more to micro-navigations, such as wandering into an abandoned gali, or looking more closely at graffiti on the street. The walking began to matter as much as exploring the site did. This shift in research questions gestured more urgently than ever to the consistency of gender as a research concern in my work. These particular walks aside, I walked on my own.

Khatib's questionnaire did not dictate my initial *dérives*, but as the practice-research deepened, his questions became waymarkers in themselves. I began taking notice of architectural markers, duration, continuity and halts, markers of time such as shadows and the sky, the thinning and thickening of crowds, and how these intersected with the gendered question of street navigation as an ethnographer. By the end of 2014, I was no longer just answering Khatib's questions, but also changing them, as reflected in the *dérive* I analyse in this article. It appeared more useful, therefore, to discover how Khatib's questionnaire would aid in navigating Old Delhi and re-consider this "making of ethnographic place", rather than to re-attempt the Situationist drift without considering the change in contexts: geographical, political, temporal. Concerns like the role of chance in walking, navigating the complex network of alleys, discovering the line where public space becomes private and marking temporal rhythms of the street remain the same but little else does, least of all the particularities dictating Les Halles and Old Delhi.

The premise of the "drift" I undertook was not comparative; rather, it was to examine the changing route of the drift itself. The definition of auto/ethnography can be extended here, then, to focus on the process of place-making and the mapping potential of the ethnographing body. I drifted through a series of alleys veering off the main road of Chandni Chowk at various times of the day over several months, particularly in 2014. The sites I engaged with were primarily the alleys themselves, but also included the semi-public courtyard complexes and commodities that became markers of time and space. I took some of Khatib's more useful questions and refashioned them for a potential questionnaire on drifting through Old Delhi/similar spaces.

In trying and failing to determine the Situationist "ambient zones" in the city, Khatib discovers how temporal and social rhythms of the working class affect the dominant conceptions of Les Halles. Khatib does not clarify the precise nature of these various ambiances – the "map" he includes of Les Halles ambiances is a gesture rather than a guide – which is a response to the larger Situationist lack of clarification as to what "an ambience" of a zone might consist of, but the analysis itself starts to yield more interesting observations when he describes the atmosphere of the streets of Les Halles by night:

It is true that during the period of nocturnal activity the logjam of lorries, the barricades of panniers, the movement of workers with their mechanical or hand barrows, prevents access to cars and almost constantly obliges the pedestrian to alter his route [...] But despite ap-

pearances the quarter of Les Halles is one of the easiest to cross, via the access routes which border or cross it in every direction. (Khatib 1958a)

The lorries, barricades and hand-barrows conjure up a haze of activity, which may certainly change the intended route of the *dérive*, should there be one; but perhaps it is worth asking if the drifter would prefer to use other routes of access, particularly with considerations of disability and other forms of marginalisation. Khatib's claim that "the essential feature of the urbanism of Les Halles is the mobile aspect of pattern of lines of communication, having to do with the different barriers and the temporary constructions which intervene by the hour on the public thoroughfare" (Khatib 1958a) is the beginning of his analysis of various psychogeographic zones. In thinking, thus, along "[patterns of] lines of communication" for a drift, what is laid bare is the amorphous relationship between the street and the pedestrian – in Khatib's case, he communicates with transport, barricades and temporary constructions to be able to drift. It is not the most straightforward route, and by Khatib's account it seems detrimental to his drifting that it is not so. However, it creates a map of the most legible, temporal route in some ways, given the encounters that a pedestrian may experience in the site. In this case, it is Les Halles at night crowded with the constructions, but also simultaneously, a Les Halles at night that is inaccessible to him, or people like him.

A note on maps: Artist and walker Kaiwan Mehta's *Alice in Bhuleshwar* (2009), narrates the experience of walking through the city. He attempts what I would term a variation of the Situationist *dérive* – although he notably does not – by walking around a very small area in Mumbai called Bhuleshwar. The chapters are titled a *fer* themes that emerge from walks he conducts in the area, which appear to have begun as aimless drifts but solidify, very quickly, into the pursuit of a certain dominant architectural or social feature: "Clerks and cows", "Word walk" and "Maps and masks" are some examples of the chapters. Photographs, often strewn disconcertingly across the pages with bits of text aligned at angles to the photographs, become a part of his particular maps. The descriptions and analysis are not enough because the photographs, taken from the point of view of the walker, supplement the narrative. Here is Mehta on walking without maps:

There are maps that we hold in our hands and walk while visiting places as tourists. These maps show us the streets and roads as seen from the skies. But what maps do we work with every day? Are our daily maps sheets of coloured paper in our hands? Does our map tell us what was rough and hard and where the noise levels plummet? [...] Every walk in a neighbourhood is a new walk. Can my map change everyday? (Mehta 2009: 3)

Mehta is self-reflexive about the role of maps, and the manner in which his walks become a kind of memory map. He acknowledges both the ludic aspect of walking as well as the need to dwell on it as an urban form in his work; as he describes his walks, sometimes plaintively, urban Mumbai emerges in scenes. The *dérive* I have attempted similarly creates narrative and visual walking maps of Chandni Chowk, without relying upon a more conventional route map, in an endeavour to entertain the ludological spirit that is crucial to the *dérive*.

As a woman who was alone on the streets of Chandni Chowk late in the evenings, I found myself needing to calibrate my own arbitrary standards of safety – my drifts ended abruptly because I wanted to take the rush-hour metro home so I could move with the crowds (even though crowds do not offer "safety" from assault or harassment any more than abandoned trains do). I also wanted to drift before the crowds started thinning in Chandni Chowk and my loitering or "aimlessness" would make me conspicuous. I chose not to go into *galis* that

I was unfamiliar with, ignoring the “playful” element of the drift that encourages venturing into unknown sites; but if the sky was lit and the crowds were heavy, I would duck into a gali to familiarise myself with it and then walk out quickly. As Lefebvre points out with regards to himself in the aftermath of the May 1968 uprising in Paris: “In the street, a form of spontaneous theater, I become spectacle and spectator, and sometimes an actor” (Lefebvre 2003: 18).



Figure 1: A gali at 8am, Nov 2014 (Photograph by author)

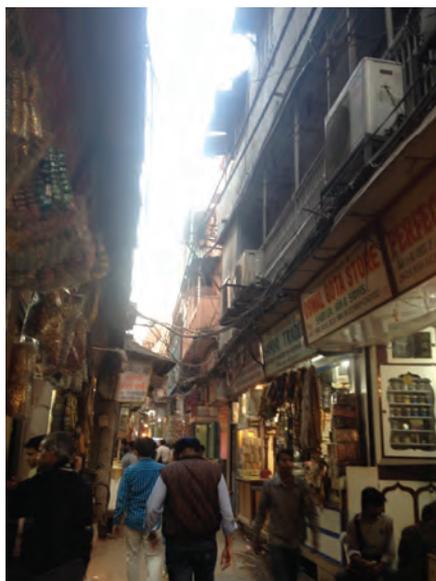


Figure 2: The same gali at 4pm, Nov 2014 (Photograph by author)



Figure 3: Trans. “The way to go to Chandni Chowk” outside the metro station, 2014 (Photograph by author)



Figure 4: Signs to landmarks on a wall in Chandni Chowk, Dariba Kalan and other galis nearby, 2014 (Photograph by author)



Figure 5: Trans. "It is absolutely forbidden to park scooters and motorbikes outside the shop. If found, the tyres will be deflated", Dariba Kalan, 2014 (Photograph by author)



Figure 6: Skyscape gridded by wires, Dariba Kalan, 2014 (Photograph by author)

I avoided following galis to their logical ends if I could not spot clear lines of communication, as Khatib's drift did, and map them before in my mind; I loitered near lamp-posts, half cloaked in the dark, unable to decide whether it was safer to be seen or not and whether I was "failing" the drift – and my job as a researcher – at that moment.

As the feminist Sara Ahmed notes, "stranger danger" or danger perceived as originating from the stranger or the unknown "allows violence to be figured as exceptional and extraordinary", and also, more importantly, "involves a refusal to recognise how violence is structured by, and legitimated through, the formation of home and community as such" (Ahmed 2000: 36, emphasis in original). Much like Khatib, my failed moments as a native/ethnographer discomfortingly at "home" on the drift reveal much about drifting and Old Delhi even if they do not illuminate traditionally Situationist concerns such as ambiances.

It is also necessary to point out my own location and complicity within this matrix of the marginalised; whilst I may have negotiated my space and safety much like other women on the street, I had the economic and social means to protect myself in ways that are perhaps not always as readily or transparently available to more precarious women subjects. I became, through the process of the *dérive*, what Ahmed calls a "wise subject": a woman "who knows where and where not to walk, how and how not to move, who and who not to talk to, has an expertise that can be understood as both *bodily and cultural capital*" (Ahmed 2000: 34, emphasis in original) that allows her to navigate the urban public and own sites by passing through them but, more importantly, marks her as distinct from "the vulnerable body, the one who is most at risk" (*ibid.*). Whilst Ahmed names this body as the child, I suggest that it is worthwhile perhaps to consider the vulnerable body as inclusive of other women too, who are more vulnerable in the contexts local to them, whose negotiation of the capital that Ahmed refers to is more complex and in flux. Khatib's questions – particularly his questions about emotions, encounters and experience – provided more than a structure to guide my walks, and subsequently, my understanding of what a *dérive* might mean. Whilst those are not the questions I chose to focus on, the ones I did were selected for their potential to reveal interesting intersections between everyday life, the making of site and walking in Old Delhi.

Chandni Chowk and its cramped alleys are not dissimilar in this aspect of relentless negotiation to Les Halles in 1958 as recounted by Khatib. The commercial activities at Chandni Chowk are marked by different enterprises – smaller, informal work like selling vegetables and plastic barrels of water before the shops opened at 11am. There was brisk activity on the road in Kinari Bazaar: the cycle-rickshaws swerved through, ferrying passengers, men began standing outside their jewellery shops to search for potential customers. Men walked around me, alongside me, and when auto-rickshaws rumbled through, we made way for them, and also even for the cycle-rickshaws. Scooters and cycles were still parked in front of some closed shop shutters. The spaces in between shops, while not large enough to be galis, were still large enough for people, mostly men, to prop themselves up on. The noise on the road appeared to be mostly from traffic – horns, motors, exhausts – and people talking amongst themselves.

A man spread his vegetables out on the road; he arrived every day at 7am and stayed till late evening, was always at the same spot just at the edge of a gali right outside a palmistry shop. The crowds treaded around or strode past him, depending on the social architectures of the street. Around us, people continued to walk, constantly marking new sections of the street I could walk on. Khatib asks in the questionnaire: "If the economic activity of Les Halles is moved elsewhere, to what should the area be devoted next?" (Khatib 1958b). The same street at 4pm saw formal businesses with private shop space at the peak of their business. Hawkers who worked in the mornings left and those who worked in the evenings took

their place. Others stayed the whole day in their spot, working till sunset. They were all part of the economic fabric. I asked instead: “How do various economic activities mark the socio-temporal rhythms of the space?” (see figs. 1 and 2). In reframing the question as such, the definition of economic activity is expanded, thus accounting for figures who change roles throughout the day and are simultaneously pedestrian, consumer, loiterer and seller.

Khatib asks “How do you enter Les Halles? How do you leave it? (Draw the axes of your main progression, excluding all usage of mechanized transport)” (Khatib 1958b). I amended his question to ask: “What marks your entrances into and exits from a site?” (see figs. 3 and 4). Signs began to guide me in curious ways – not so much in terms of what the landmarks pointed, at but by their very location and positioning. Whether they were on walls, shutters of shops, metal boards, or plastered onto electric generators, they became metonymic markers of my walks. In my continuous *dérives* of the three galis, these signposts became a measure of time (the shadows they cast, how they appear in the light, whether they are illuminated by neon signs, if they are legible in the dark) and movement.

Khatib asks: “What route do you follow within Les Halles?” (Khatib 1958b). I propose asking: “What are the architectural features that influence the route and your memory of it?” (see figs. 5 and 6). There is, of course, no single route to follow to reach anywhere in Chandni Chowk, which was not a feature unique to the market, but the indicators of access of these routes were temporal, dictated by government and individual ownership. They were marked by features that are specific to alleys in Chandni Chowk such as informal labour and clusters of electric wires that parallel the alleys they were strung along.

Coda

Having emerged from the climate of such a specific political movement, psychogeography’s walking practices are ideologically moulded on and reserved for the blueprint of European cities. Considerations of such a practice in other kinds of cities – the South-East Asian city, the postcolonial city, the occupied city, for instance – buckle under the weight of the occupation and territorialisation inherent to the “slipping” and “wandering” that define it. According to Jonathan Shapiro Anjaria and Colin McFarlene:

Central to living in, coping with, managing, attempting to dominate or write about urban landscapes is a process of not just acquiring and producing knowledge of the city, but producing the city itself as a set of changing knowledges and imaginaries. In this way, urban spatial politics and urban knowledge might be understood together as acts of city navigation. (Anjaria and McFarlene 2011: 2)

One would find it useful, therefore, to determine the limitations and contexts of cultural production of psychogeographic practices, given that the history of their evolution, all the way up to contemporary psychogeographic practices in the UK and Europe, speaks to only a certain political cityscape. The production of the city is in confluence with the *state* – the spatial politics and urban knowledge – of it. The traversing of sites is inseparable from the manner in which they are been obtained, legitimised, handed over and legalised. The political transgression that accompanies walking according to a map traced by passers-by, for instance, produces an emotional landscape that is very distinct from – and possibly even determining of – a transgression that involves reclaiming an imposed inaccessibility to those very routes. These navigations produce urban codes that are more focussed on the acquisition and production

of the city than on acknowledging its limits as impacting navigation itself. Is the act of relentless navigation itself enough to produce these imaginaries or does one, then, navigate alongside the imposed limits and produce an altogether dynamic conception of how cityscapes are produced? The former question certainly appears to be in the domain of psychogeography, and the latter is perhaps addressed to a more latent ethnographic reimagining of it.

Re-seeing the *dérive* as an ethnographic form that favours description – but not at the expense of reflection – can also be a potentially useful way of re-thinking walking itself, and its relationship to the city. The *dérive* as an ethnographic form highlights its ongoing, present nature of exploration, without ascribing spatio-temporal borders to it. The Situationist *dérive*, or a variation of it, can become a process of mapping whilst keeping its corporeality in sight as its contours change. Khatib's disrupted drift offers possibilities in the domain of everyday movement – and life, more generally, if one includes technology, the non-human, ecology and labour, for instance – in the forms within which I have practiced them, but also in further approximations and permutations. Viewing the *dérive* as an ethnographic practice can unlock new possibilities of understanding a site as opposed to a *dérive* as a past event. The writing forces a confrontation with the location of the embodied self and the rhythms encountered – such as the ease or difficulty of navigating Chandni Chowk at night, with the privileges of an upper-caste Hindu woman who is also a funded researcher – and its positioning vis-à-vis the historical lineage of those struggles such as those of Khatib's, or the lack thereof, such as those of Debord's. These could be seen as limitations of the drift, but also its possibilities.

The questions I ask could be envisioned as an alternative blueprint to everyday urban movement in Old Delhi, but they are also aimed at opening the *dérive* up to be more responsive to the urbanism it is conducted in. The questions emerge from Khatib's questionnaire, but are eventually shaped by the patterns and rhythms of life in Chandni Chowk. Conceiving a *dérive* retrospectively as a linear, contained narrative that will flag up the problems of urbanism appears to be less useful than thinking of it as a process that will illuminate the limitations of navigating existing urban rhythms, and what that allows the pedestrian to do. These questions marking the modified *dérive* themselves articulate the boundaries of the city and its possibilities, and the answers may potentially inform formal literature like maps and plans by factoring in the pedestrian, without becoming a formal map. By linking architectural features, such as the wires, as mnemonics of everyday space, or drawing attention to the simultaneity of the public and the private or even to how different economies occupy the same site differently, or to the informal working spatially and economically around formal labour, the *dérive* derives a different city, and a different set of figures are foregrounded.

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Hodajući ozidanim gradom. Rod i *dérive* kao urbana etnografija

Sažetak

Ovaj se rad bavi mogućnostima i ograničenjima suvremenog *dérivea* kao oblika etnografije u suvremenom Delhiju. *Dérive*, koji je potekao iz nadrealističkog promišljanja i potom su ga krajem pedesetih godina prošloga stoljeća usvojili situacionisti, danas ponovno osmišljavaju umjetnici i praktičari. Pokušavajući locirati situacionistički *dérive* kao etnografsku praksu u (Starom) Delhiju pomoću *dérivea* Abdelhafida Khatiba, u radu se promišljaju eksperimentalni počeci situacionističkog *dérivea* i njegov put u suvremenim pješačkim praksama te se postavlja pitanje kako hodanje kao rodno određena i autoetnografska praksa grada može pomoći u pripovijedanju i svladavanju indijskih urbanih prostora.

Ključne riječi: *dérive*, Delhi, urbana etnografija, rod, Abdelhafid Khatib, situacionizam, izvedba, hodanje