Gendering the Metropolis:
The Urban Body in the Indian Poetry in English

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Abstract

This thesis offers a comparative analysis of the oeuvres of four contemporary Indian poets – Mustansir Dalvi, Nabina Das, Akhil Katyal, and Arundhathi Subramaniam – in order to examine the tension between the Indian metropolis and the (gendered) body as it figures in their verses. Drawing from the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Brian Massumi, Sara Ahmed, Judith Butler, Henri Bergson, and Elizabeth Grosz, among others, it explores the role of affect, memory, and performativity in constituting the boundaries of the (moving) urban body, understanding affect as a potentially "asignifying rupture" in a "rhizome" that is the metropolis.

The figure of the flâneur is also being examined, as transplanted from the Western context to the Indian one, both by literary critics and by the authors themselves – how it behaves in translation, how it thrives and whether we can talk about the same concept at all. Also, how it applies to women? In my analysis, the concept partially collides with the "moving body" and the "body without an image," as well as the "body as image." I examine how the loitering or moving body perceives, reacts to or cushions the everyday "microshocks" or affects, how the poets' or their lyrical subjects' physical, emotional, and/or mental trajectories are challenged or changed by – at times – almost imperceptible events or phenomena. In that sense, I am also treating memory as both personal and political interpolation into the present, as influenced by affective forces, and thus deeply subjective. Reading poetic texts through these lenses allows me to explore more closely how the body is (re)gendered and constituted through the daily affective encounters, how it interacts with the urban mise-en-scène. In order to say something about the Indian metropolis, i.e. the gender regimes at play, I am looking at how the body emerges out of these contacts with the environment either as intelligible or as abject.

Keywords: *city; body; gender; Indian poetry; affect; memory; rhizome; flânerie; Deleuze; Guattari; Massumi; Bergson; Grosz; Butler; Ahmed; King; Chaudhuri*

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no material accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no material previously written accepted and/or published by another person, except where an appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for the thesis is accurate:

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Signed:_____

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1. Introduction

In January of 2013, I rushed into an already moving train at Churchgate station in the south of Mumbai to return to a friend's house in Bandra – a coastal suburb on Salsette Island. I was returning from a visit to Adil Jussawalla, a well-known Indian poet, carrying several books he had given me for our upcoming anthology of Indian urban writing in Croatian translation. As the train was already full to the brim, I sat down into a first empty seat on a bench, completely forgetting the fact that I was not in the right compartment – namely, the ladies' compartment. Opposite me was a man in his thirties, with a computer on his lap. After a while of jostling – bodies accidentally brushing against each other, limbs occasionally touching for lack of space – he lifted his gaze and yelled at me: "Lady, could you keep your legs to yourself?!" I was shocked. A moment later, another man asked sharply: "What are you even doing here?" (Meaning, in the men's compartment.) The first man seemed to be in some way disgusted, definitely high-strung – he was claiming his boundary out loud. Perhaps not just because I'm a woman, but also because I'm a white woman. As Sara Ahmed writes when talking about Audre Lorde's train encounter with a white woman, "particular histories are reopened in each encounter" (Ahmed 2005, p. 106). More probably it was not even a matter of grand histories in this case, but certain narratives have plainly made the scene possible. After a while, when my station was nearing, men rushed towards the door in a stampede. I was pulled toward the exit in this almost undistinguishable mass of bodies but managed to glue my back to the inside of the train just next to the door, tightly gripping my poetry collections, as I felt I would get run over otherwise. There was no time to get off safely, so I waited until the next station (the train was half-empty by now), and took a taxi back to my friend's house.

The experience is still very much alive in me as an embodied memory: it foregrounded for me the (gendered) tension between the body and the city – here, an Indian metropolis – linking it, inevitably, to poetry. Therefore, it serves as a visceral impulse behind this thesis which examines the differences – or similarities – between the metaphors, imagery, symbolism, language, etc. in poetry collections authored by male and female Indian poets, in order to find out how public and private spaces of Indian metropolises affect (gendered) bodies (and vice versa), and, consequently, the written text. I'm interested in how body boundaries are created in affective encounters (which have to be remembered to be penned down), how they are negotiated, i.e. what is the relationship between the subject's porousness and its autonomy.

2. City, the Body, and the Indian Poetry in English

Indian writing in English dates back about two hundred years. However, it went through a significant shift in both subject matter and style in the 1950s and 1960s, notes writer and critic Bruce King. The rural, philosophical, epic and mythical preoccupations, which also served the nation-building project before and after Indian independence in 1947, were replaced by a group of authors with personal and observational writing that was firmly set within the context of Indian urban centers and influenced by globalization (King 2014, pp. 2-3). Moreover, some of the most renowned contemporary Indian authors are vocal about the fact that India was hybrid even before the globalization and colonialism, and that it also had its own brand of cosmopolitanism (King 2014, p. 163).

The epicenter of this change in poetics was Bombay[1] with its circle of poets and small publishers like Nissim Ezekiel, Arun Kolatkar, Adil Jussawalla, and others (King 2004, p. 12), with Ezekiel (1924-2004) being considered "the father of modern Indian poetry written in English" (King 2014, p. 10). These poets, especially Kolatkar, hailed Bombay "as the modern city of postcolonial cosmopolitanism, pluriculturalism, urban vitality, and tolerance" (King 2014, p. 10), and drew their inspiration equally from the East and West, without qualitatively differentiating between them (Zecchini 2011, p. 33). This move opened up new ways of thinking and writing about the city and the body within the city, of their manifold and multilayered connections.

[1] I use both city names in this thesis, Bombay and Mumbai. Although Bombay changed its name to Mumbai in 1995, some authors prefer to use the former, or Bombay is the name they still call the city in their work.

However, the Indian writing in English itself, although by that point already a practice within a certain lineage, is still, in some circles, looked at with suspicion. In 1963, renowned Bengali poet, writer, translator, and essayist Buddhadeva Bose criticized Indian poetry in English in an entry in the *Concise Encyclopaedia of English and American Poets and Poetry* (edited by Stephen Spender and Donald Hall) denouncing it as the "outcome of anglomania which seized some upper-class Indians in the early years of British rule." He added that "'Indo-Anglian' poetry is a blind alley, lined with curio shops, leading nowhere" (Mehrotra 2012, pp. 216-217). These lines have been reiterated ever since, in one form or the other. Yet, Indian modern poetry in English has also established itself by now despite misgivings. King, for instance, sees it as instrumental and participative in modernization and urbanization, media proliferation, etc. – in the global, even if Westernized world (King 2005, p. 3).

Building from its urban beginning in the fifties and sixties, Indian writing in general, and poetry in particular, have seen a boom in the city topics, whereas the (urban) body has more been featured in verse. Still, there hasn't been, to my knowledge, a gendered and comparative analysis of those texts, whether in terms of prose or poetry, which is where my research, albeit on a small scale for now, fits in.

My research deals with the oeuvres of four poets: Mustansir Dalvi,[2] Nabina Das,[3] Akhil Katyal,[4] and Arundhathi Subramaniam.[5] Overall, I wanted to study authors who have been active on the Indian literary scene (even) after the turn of the millennium, and who live, or have lived for longer periods of time, in one or more of Indian metropolises. The main reason I have chosen these four, besides the recognized quality of their work both in India and abroad, is that the theme of the city appears consistently throughout their work, which is not necessarily the case with other Indian poets. Dalvi is also an architect and an urban columnist, which adds the dimension of deliberate thinking about cities and how they are structured. Katyal, on the other hand, is a queer scholar and activist, and there is a conscious gendered perspective to his verses. Subramaniam's work is strongly informed by Mumbai, while Das, besides explicitly or implicitly addressing the cities of the subcontinents in her verses, has also written on a several European and North American cities.

They are all poets who write a lot about Mumbai and Delhi, among other locations, two of the biggest Indian – and world – cities. By way of example, Bombay (whose larger metropolitan area counts twenty-two million) has the highest population density in the world in some central areas, with one million people per square mile (Mehta 2004, p. 17.). Here, I have chosen to analyze only the poems that relate to those two metropolises, and also those that are in many ways

[2] Mustansir Dalvi is the author of two collections of poetry: *Brouhahas of Cocks* (2013) and *Cosmopolitician* (2018), as well as literary translator. He teaches architecture in Bombay.

[3] Assam-born Nabina Das, currently living in Hyderabad, India, is the author of the novel *Footprints in the Bajra* (2010), three books of verses: *Blue Vessel* (2012), *Into the Migrant City* (2013), and *Sanskarnama* (2017), and the short story collection *The House of Twining Roses: Stories of the Mapped and the Unmapped* (2014). She has also been widely anthologized and has edited anthologies.

[4] Akhil Katyal is the author of two collections of verses: *Night Charge Extra* (2015) and *How Many Countries Does the Indus Cross* (2019). He is also a scholar and a queer activist. He has published his doctoral thesis from SOAS, London, under the title *The Doubleness of Sexuality: Idioms of Same-Sex Desire in Modern India* (2016). Currently, Katyal teaches creative writing at Ambedkar University in Delhi.

[5] An awarded poet and author, Subramaniam is also a curator, editor, and cultural critic. Her poetry collections include *On Cleaning Bookshelves* (2001), *Where I Live* (2005), *Where I Live: New & Selected Poems* (2009), and *When God Is a Traveller* (2014). As a prosaist, she penned *The Book of Buddha* (2005) and *Sadhguru: More Than A Life* (2010), and she also edited three prose and poetry anthologies, *Confronting Love* (with Jerry Pinto, 2005), *Pilgrim's India* (2011), and *Eating God: A Book of Bhakti Poetry* (2014).

representative of the way these poets engage with the city spaces in general. Not all of them are analyzed in equal depth for reasons of space.

I have decided on the equal number of female and male to make possible, to an extent, a certain comparative perspective when it comes to gender, although I will not be able to offer any more general conclusions about Indian urban poetry in English in that sense, as this is not a big enough sample. It might, perhaps, serve to navigate and inform further research.

I have developed my approach and outlined a field of interest on the basis of existing Indological scholarship, which has covered the history of modernist, urban writing in India, some of which focused on profiling specific poets. To this I have added a combined theoretical framework, which I will talk about in the following paragraphs, as well as the next chapter.

Amit Chaudhuri is one of those scholars and critics (and an author and poet himself), who has written on the Indian modernity and Indian writing in English. In his essays, especially the one on Kolatkar,[6] Chaudhuri transplants the European concept of a *flâneur* to the contexts of Calcutta and Bombay, reiterating Walter Benjamin's thoughts on *flânerie* as a challenge to the linearity and "'progress'" as conceptualized in modernity (Chaudhuri 2008, p. 58). At the turn of the last century, he adds, Calcutta was a site for *flânerie*, but "Benjamin's figure for the *flâneur* was Baudelaire, and for Baudelaire – and, by extension, for the *flâneur* – the East was, as it was for Henri Rousseau, part dreamscape, part botanical garden, part menagerie, part paradise. Could the *flâneur* exist in that dreamscape?" (Chaudhuri 2008, p. 59). Chaudhuri is not the only one who has asked himself this question, but he doesn't problematize the concept through the lens of gender.

[6] Kolatkar is famous for his collection of poems about the art district in South Bombay, the *Kala Ghoda Poems* (2004), which he sketched during his regular wanderings and visits to the Irani bar and restaurant called Wayside Inn (Chaudhuri 2008, p. 222)

"The *flâneur* becomes a figure for the resistance offered to what is found irresistible – the city as a medium for realizing the self," writes Patke (Patke 2003, p. 201). For him, the "Baudelairean figure" of the *flâneur* cannot be met in the context of Bombay, or South Asia, without a certain unease in the step when faced with extreme and graphic poverty and disfiguration, violence and suffocation in such cities (Patke 2003, p. 205). It is not the same "*flâneur* who goes botanizing on the asphalt" (Benjamin 2006, p. 68), but a moving body exposed to an array or smaller and bigger shocks to all the sense. That is why I, at least partially, link *flânerie* to the moving or the "affective body" (Featherstone 2010, p. 199), the "body without an image" (Massumi 2002, p. 48), and the body as image in movement (Bergson 1988, p. 18).

Poet's loitering, it seems, is justified by his vocation, writes Tester. "Baudelaire's poet is the man *of* the crowd as opposed to the man *in* the crowd. The poet is the centre of an order of things of his own making even though, to others, he appears to be just one constituent part of the metropolitan flux" (Tester 2015, p. 3). But I wouldn't agree with Tester that it is the *flâneur* who always gives meaning to people and things he (or she) notices, nor do I believe, as Tester does, that his (or her) gaze can remain detached at all times (Tester 2015, p. 6). Here is where affect complicates things, perhaps more so for women or transgender people than for men. And yet I do agree with him in correlating *flânerie* with the fondness for fugitive sights (Tester 2015, p. 7).

The general idea and my approach to these poetic texts has partly been derived from Kathryn R. Blackstone's book *Women in the Footsteps of the Buddha: Struggle for Liberation in the Therīgāthā*, in which she compared the lives of the first monks and nuns by analyzing the songs collected in their respective anthologies (*Therīgāthā* and *Theragāthā*). Blackstone explored their symbolism, imagery, and language, trying to grasp their relationship to one another, as well as to the Buddha. The analysis showed great differences between the two corpora of texts, although they

share certain poetic conventions and imagery framework. Blackstone argues that these variations stem from different gender expectations, and their different treatment within the community, both prior to and after the ordination. She also explores possible psychological / biological factors.

As I already mentioned above, there is a body of scholarly work which outlines the history of Indian (urban) writing in English. *A History of Indian Poetry in English* (2016), edited by Rosinka Chaudhuri, provides historical overview of the Indian poetry in English, but also includes articles on poets that dealt with urbanities. Similar combination of historical analysis and brief analysis of urbanity in verse can be found in Arvind Krishna Mehrotra's collection of essays *Partial Recall: Essays on Literature and Literary History* (2012). An editor and critic, but also a poet associated through with the Bombay circle of modernist poets, through friendships and collaborations (although he isn't from Bombay, and doesn't live there), Mehrotra's essays are an intriguing mix of scholarly approach and documentation of personal involvement and encounters that make up Indian literary history. What is clear from this and other books is that the avantgarde and modernist circles in Bombay, as well as elsewhere in India, were predominantly made up of male poets (or the male poets were the ones foregrounded).

Laetitia Zecchini's seminal book, *Arun Kolatkar and Literary Modernism in India: Moving Lines* (2014), focuses on the poetry of Arun Kolatkar and his relationship to the Bombay, while at the same time "moving lines" of the chronology of modernism in the Indian context. Through interviews with the main actors of Indian modernism and her research into the archival material of the Bombay publishing and poetry collective *Clearing House* (founded in 1976), Zecchini not only sheds light on the influences and the creative processes of Arun Kolatkar himself, but of the entire movement. Indian modernism, she writes, was deeply informed both by Indian non-mainstream poetic spiritual traditions, *bhakti poetry* (Zecchini 2014, p. 36), but also by

the European modernism, surrealism, Beat culture, and American pop culture in general (Zecchini 2012, p. 21). These poets were cosmopolitan bohemia who felt connected to the world's "counterculture" (Zecchini 2014, p. 46).

Ravi Sundaram discusses the impact of globalization in his book *Pirate Modernity: Delhi's Media Urbanism* (2010), theorizing the city (of Delhi) as a complex mediascape, and, similarly to Arjun Appadurai's claims in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996), sees the current era as one of media urbanism. Taking my cue from them, I am interested to examine how these mediascapes have been shaping the (gendered) urban bodies, and how the phenomena like plastic surgery and the cult of the gym-cultivated, muscular body traveled (also) via both Hollywood and Bollywood straight into poetry.

But even with mediascapes and virtual spaces the question of the physical urban space and the privilege of access to it remains equally relevant. In their groundbreaking book *Why Loiter? Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets* (2011), Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan and Shilpa Ranade discuss the impossibility, or difficulty, of women's loitering in Mumbai, both because of the architecture and the planning of its public spaces, as well as the social and political dynamics between the genders. Nevertheless, their work is primarily sociological and cultural, and doesn't deal with female literary loitering, which is one of the focal points of my thesis. As I am also arguing that women (and women poets) are controlled or challenged by affective encounters in the city, I will approach my reading of the contemporary Indian urban poetry through the lens of affect theory. I want to see – in the way that Ahmed suggests about national identity – how is it that gender also emerges from the close contact of bodies, and how belongings are established through mutual "affective readings" (Ahmed 2005, p. 95). Also, which bodies "matter" in public spaces

(Butler 1993), and how is that affectively communicated and enacted. In the following chapter I therefore turn to affect and the rest of my theoretical framework.

3. Gender Regimes, Rhizomes, and Ruptures in the Indian Metropolis

It makes sense, in many ways, to read poetry through the lens of affect, as it records the minutiae – the almost imperceptible but nevertheless relevant events that occur between people, in public and private spaces of metropolises. "Affect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon," argue Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg. It is an "impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation *as well as* the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities" (Seigworth and Gregg 2009, p. 1).

For Brian Massumi, affects equals "shocks," i.e. everyday "microshocks," which can consist merely of "a rustle at the periphery of vision that draws the gaze towards it." Still, they are a rupture, an "interruption" of perceived linearity that happens below the radar so they are noticeable only through "microperception" – not by themselves but by their "effects" (Massumi and McKim 2015, p. 53). Lauren Berlant calls this rupture in the everyday – with uncertain outcome – an "episode," the "becoming-event of the situation" (Berlant and Greenwald 2012, p. 72). Here, I understand affect as a "line of flight" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 9), as a potentially "asignifying rupture" in a "rhizome," from where "it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines," (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 12), reconfiguring the metropolis and the body in the process. But change is not guaranteed (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 9). Politics and notions may be challenged, but they may also be merely reestablished, through the body.

Deleuze and Guattari see in it the potential for the "Body without Organs," the ultimate body that is an affective instrument throughout. As such, it is likened to a "Metropolis:" "occupied, populated only by intensities" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 153). Similarly, Elizabeth Grosz speaks of "the corporeality of cities and the materiality of bodies," and the not-yet-fully grasped or outlined relationship between the two (Grosz 2001, p. 50).

Affect is what connects us to others, and by which we feel "belonging" (Massumi 2015, p. 6), and in it lies its complication – it both connects us to the outer world, and it can create boundaries too. Affects, therefore, have the potential for rupture, but also for arborification, blockage. Affect, which is intensity, and not emotion (Massumi 2002, p. 27-28), is "embodied in purely autonomic reactions most directly manifested in the skin – at the surface of the body, at its interface with things" (Massumi 2002, p. 25).

Poetic texts are – in the sense that they document and/or pass on affects or their effects – "worlding exercise," to borrow the words of Aihwa Ong, who is also referencing Deleuze and Guattari (1987) when talking about the city as an ever-morphing "network." She argues that these exercises are "those lateralizing microprocesses that remap power by opening new channels or reconfigure new social universes," and that they are, by nature, very close to speculative fiction as Donna Haraway would have it (Roy and Ong, p. 2). They are performed by the body, especially the body in movement – and cities are "intensification of movement" (Madanipour 2017, p. 59).

But bodies, Butler argues, "tend to indicate a world beyond themselves," and "this movement beyond their own boundaries, a movement of boundary itself" seems to be what bodies 'are' (Butler 1993, p. ix). In the outside space, the space of interpersonal relations, bodies come to figure – when it comes to gender – either as "intelligible" or "unthinkable, abject," and this very dichotomy is a prerequisite for "intelligibility" (Butler 1993, p. xi). Sex, or gender, is always an

attempt at sex or gender, discursively defined, and "forcibly materialized through time" through "reiterative and citational practice," through "performativity." It is, therefore, an "effect" of "power" (Butler 1993, p. 1). And these effects are what I will try to trace in my readings of poetry. As a starting point, I'm taking my cue from the following argument by Elizabeth Grosz:

> Cities have always represented and projected images and fantasies of bodies, whether individual, collective or political. In this sense, the city can be seen as a (collective) body-prosthesis or boundary that enframes, protects, and houses while at the same time taking its own forms and functions from the (imaginary) bodies it constitutes. Simultaneously, cities are loci that produce, regulate, and structure bodies. (Grosz 2011, p. 49)

Then there is, in these verses, the issue of memory. Deleuze and Guattari thought of the "rhizome is an antigenealogy," a "short-term memory, or anti memory" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 21). Massumi, on the other hand, identifies at least three kinds of memory: "a nonconscious memory of the present," "a memory of the past," and a "felt memory of the future," which are usually simultaneous and complementary events (Massumi and McKim 2015, p. 62).

"Our perceptions are undoubtedly interlaced with memories, and, inversely, a memory, as we shall show later, only becomes actual by borrowing the body of some perception into which it slips," argues Henri Bergson. "These two acts, perception and recollection, always interpenetrate each other, are always exchanging something of their substance as by a process of endosmosis" (Bergson 1988, p. 67). Memories act upon the body through sensations, which are virtual until embodied through action (Bergson 1988, p. 130). For Bergson, present is always already a memory

as our perception lags (Bergson 1988, p. 150), and the affect is the way to sense our bodies, to distinguish them from other images that constitute the outside (Bergson 1988, p. 234). Memory is what gives us our subjectivity (Bergson 1988, p. 70).

Therefore, my analysis of the representative poems will show how memory is superimposed onto topography, the physical landscape of the city, as well as onto the psychological, or affective, state of the lyrical subject. I will explore the ways in which these superimpositions work, and how, in verse, affects (or their effects) travel through time. Memory, opposite of being anti-rhizome, could be considered an offshoot, a line of flight. As Massumi notes, memory and affect intermix, so that the memory is never clear, the objects tinged with affect never accurately remembered (Massumi 2002, p. 208).

3.1 Where I Stand

The reason I am particularly drawn to the Indian urban writing stems from my long-time engagement with the contemporary Indian writing in general. I have been translating contemporary Indian authors and poets into Croatian, from English and Hindi, for the past nine years. For the recent few, my focus has been on translating and editing specifically Indian urban writing that came out as an anthology in Croatia in 2017. This thesis is the continuation of that project in many ways.

From 2012 to 2015, I spent a significant amount of time in India, and the subcontinent in general, during which I was actively following the newest trends and titles in the Indian writing in English, especially poetry. I attended readings and literature festivals in cities like Delhi, Mumbai,

and Bangalore, as well as the biggest and the most high-profile of them, the Jaipur Literature Festival, in January of 2013. I also freelanced as a literary journalist and a book reviewer for Indian and South Asian publications, writing about Indian (and other) authors. Throughout this period, I met a lot of them – some in person, others via email correspondence, which made me more keenly aware of their influences and networks, in India and abroad, but also of their self-referentiality in relation to their work as well as the Western theoretical frameworks. A good illustration of this is Arundhathi Subramaniam's poem "To the Welsh Critic Who Doesn't Find Me Identifiably Indian." Following is its last stanza:

> Arbiter of identity,
> remake me as you will.
> Write me a new alphabet of danger,
> a new patois to match
> the Chola bronze of my skin.
> Teach me how to come of age
> in a literature you've bark-scratched
> into scripture.
> Smear my consonants
> with cow-dung and turmeric and godhuli.
> Pity me, sweating,
> rancid, on the other side of the counter.
> Stamp my papers,
> lease me a new anxiety,

grant me a visa

to the country of my birth.

Teach me how to belong,

the way you do,

on every page of world history. (Subramaniam 2009, non-paginated pdf)

This is one of the reasons I decided to combine textual analysis with interviewing the poets themselves (except for Katyal, who answered some of the similar questions for the online magazine Culture Stories). I wanted to get a sense of how they feel about the cities they find themselves in, so I asked them how they embody and manifest their position as poets in the urban environment they write about; what are their daily trajectories: which parts of the city or cities are off limits, and why; would they identify themselves as *flâneurs*. It was also a way to get clarity about certain poems and my own interpretations of them. The poets confirmed what I could, more or less, deduce from their verses too – that women's access to the public spaces of Indian metropolises (and a lot of the world cities, from London to New York) is often a risky endeavor fraught with negotiation and strategizing.

4. Mapping the City Through Desire-Flows

Since I'm starting with the city as a "rhizome" in mind (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p.), I will look at the poetry in question as rhizomatic, affective mapping of the Indian metropolises, in order to examine the ways in which these four respective urban cartographies (oeuvres by four different poets) are gendered, defined by desire, by the body. Writing on affect in Deleuze and Guattari, Claire Colerbrook notes that the Body without Organs comes to be through forces, through "desiring flows" (Colebrook 2005, p. 192). By the same token, a metropolis comes to be, or at least its personal topography, sensed and made sense of by the body and memory. These topographies are, therefore, shifting and malleable, arising through the relationships between the poets and the people or objects that surround them. By topographies, I mean places of affective encounters – something was experienced, something will be remembered. At times, the boundaries of the body have been tested and perhaps readjusted. At others, they were invaded, crossed, and trauma ensued. The rhizome is "*a map and not a tracing*," and maps are changeable and malleable when they rub against the "real" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 12).

Several poems by the younger-generation Indian poet, Akhil Katyal, are those kinds of map-makers. Katyal's first collection, *Night Charge Extra* (2015), dealt with sexuality, the city, and conflicts (especially the ongoing one in Kashmir). His second collection, *How Many Countries Does the Indus Cross* (2019) is a more deliberate political statement, although reiterating all the other themes from the first book too. It problematizes nationalisms, borders, heteronormativity, and hegemonic masculinity. Even the title, which is referring to the Indus river that runs both through Pakistan and India, is evocative of (free) border-crossing, of natural rather than artificial /

political borders. Indus thus becomes more of a unifying than a dividing force. In some of its themes and motifs, as well as through classical poetic formats (*ghazal*) and quotes, the book is also a nod to the well-known Kashmiri poet Agha Shahid Ali (1949-2001), who wrote extensively on Kashmir and the conflict, and to the lineage of Sufi poets like Amir Khusro (who lived in Delhi in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and wrote in Hindustani and Persian).

In order to address hegemonic masculinity and its militant politics, Katyal denaturalizes heterosexual desire by deploying various poetic tools. It seems that he treats it more as affective than anything else, as Penelope Eckert suggests about desire (Eckert 2002, p. 104). As a consequence, what is achieved by his verses is a naturalization of homoeroticism, not just for the sake of free sexuality but to make broader political claims that include, as I already mentioned above, critique of hegemonic masculinity, nationalism, and (futile) conflicts. He is also highlighting the idea that sexual order is a function of, and a prerequisite for, not only the gender order "but the social order more generally" (Eckert 2002, p. 106). As Eckert eloquently put it, "sexuality bleeds into the rest of the world and the rest of the world bleeds into it" (Eckert 2002, p. 109). This knowing suffuses Katyal's poetry. It also foregrounds the fragility of the premise that "heterosexuality is an indispensable element of 'proper' femininity or masculinity" (Cameron and Kulick 2003, p. 73).

But I want to argue that Katyal's use of what could be termed as 'queer' language (or something akin to that) isn't so much used to categorize the poet sexually as it is, in Deborah Cameron's and Don Kulick's words, to subvert the social order that makes the highly problematic phenomena of nationalism and conflict possible. He does so by making use of "symbolically or ideologically laden linguistic resources that are available for anyone" (Cameron and Kulick 2003, p. 91). This 'queer' language is filled with, as Joseph Haynes characterized "Gayspeak," with

"argot, innuendos, categorizations, strategic evasions (such as omitting or changing gender pronouns), and, in the case of activist language, conscious revaluation of formerly derogatory terms" (Cameron and Kulick 2003, p. 88). Or, as Keith Harvey describes the characteristics and effects of 'camp talk:' its use of "Paradox, Inversion, Ludicrism and Parody" (Cameron and Kulick 2003, p. 99), "aristocratic mannerisms" or "catty femininity" (Cameron and Kulick 2003, p. 100-101) in order to emphasize the "the unstable and contingent nature of 'truth'. This is what makes 'camp talk' queer, in the sense of 'disruptive' 'disturbing' 'funny'" (Cameron and Kulick 2003, p. 101). By using humor and playing with words, Katyal is destabilizing the 'sacredness' and 'inviolability' of various (religious and socio-political) concepts, and questioning the necessity and usefulness of the heavy consequences (conflicts) they inevitably produce.

Finally, throughout his two collections, Katyal is consistent in his attempts to 'queer' the conflict, to put it that way. He manages it quite successfully, by use of irony, innuendo, humor, and twists, by carefully sequencing the scenes and imagery, by puns and wordplays. Moreover, by infusing political and social issues with queer / gay desire, he is not only denaturalizing heteronormativity but, by doing so, war as well. All of this is important when it comes to his poems about Delhi, as these mappings are personal as much as they are political.

The poem "For Someone Who'll Read This 500 Years From Now" is a good example of these exercises in personal cartography. It is also a poem marked with longing, which problematizes gender binaries, emphasizes ecological issues, and the Kashmir conflict. The speaker is addressing someone in the future and, by trying to occupy their perspective on the same region, is engaging in retrospective analysis, in what he more strongly and more connotatively calls "hindsight." After several more banal questions addressed to the imaginary future reader, the

poet asks: “How long did India and Pakistan last? / When did Kashmir become free?” Then he continues:

> our lives must seem so strange to you,
> our wars so little,
>
> our toilets for ‘men’ and ‘women’
> must make you laugh
>
> our cutting down of trees
> would be listed in your ‘Early Causes’ (Katyal 2019, p. 28)

This approach – looking at the current problems from a standpoint of someone far in the future – enables the poet to criticize these social and political issues by bypassing the contexts and arguments that could be used to justify the *status quo* and undermine the speaker’s point of view. By dis-embedding his perspective in such a way, he perhaps renders it ‘objective’ – at least he could claim (some sort of) objectivity. But the ending circles back to the private. He concludes by asking the future reader to go to the old Mughal monument, “Humayun’s Tomb / in what used to be Delhi,” and find an engraving that the speaker had once made, which reads “Akhil loves Rohit.” The speaker repeats his plea and finishes by saying, “Make sure it’s still there” (Katyal 2019, p. 29). The speaker’s homoeroticism, or homosexual love in general, is established as something that outlives, or should outlive, (oppressive) political and social norms and customs, war being one of them. This ending underlines Katyal’s recurring tendency to use homosexual love as a starting and

an ending point, perhaps to stress its potential for reimagining both politics and ecology. The speaker in the poem is also proclaiming a sort of intimate ownership of the symbol of the once ruling power, the Mughals, and thereby the (political)power in general. This is how the city landmarks become psychological triggers, (re)invested with intimate meanings through affective gestures.

Similar mapping takes place in Katyal's poem "He Was as Arrogant as a." This one personifies the sites and landmarks of Delhi by comparing a lover's character traits and the nature of their relationship to them, their (imagined) specificities:

(…)
Not that we
Didn't fight like Rajouri,
crossing each other's Civil
Lines, not that he wasn't at
times distant like Greater
Noida... (Katyal 2019, p. 32)

Again, poet's fondness for wordplay is evident here (Civil Lines is a neighborhood in North Delhi, and Greater Noida a city not far from Delhi). The poem ends with the blessings of Nizamudin's blessings, a Sufi saint who lived in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and whose *dargah* (shrine, tomb) is a well-visited site in New Delhi. I will come back to the poet's relationship to Delhi's Sufis in the paragraph on memory, but what is important to add here is Katyal's musings

(shared in an interview for Culture Stories) on the use of site-specific reference in his poetry, which "grounds the poem:"

> It does not pretend that the abstraction of thought one has arrived at, the emotional locus one has reached, or the clusterfuck of affect that one is trying to live out, is a thing independent from the very material, very ordinary or extraordinary, things, happening around you. The most relatable effect is created via the encounter with the specific, not in the banal crucible of the so-called universal. There is no universal that is not always-already arrived at through the relationship with the immediate, whether it is a Delhi flyover where you had that sinking feeling, or a London canal where you walked in love, whether it's a PM whose 56 inch chest spells doom or a Tory swine who likes the sound of his own voice, whether it's that street where someone particular was assaulted, or that bus-stop where you bumped into someone for the last time. Love, loss, time and beauty all walk on earth, their feet firmly planted to the ground. So you have to begin from there. The lyrical is not beyond the place, it sits in it.

Katyal's politics is often expressed through irony and satire, and he touches on it in passing (trough the city), in poems such as "But he is pointing his finger at us." Here the speaker is talking about caste by commenting on a statue of B. R. Ambedkar (who was an Indian politician, the main contributor to the Constitution of India, and a fighter against class and caste discrimination), as he is driving past with his upper-caste friend, on their way to Noida (Katyal 2015, p. 70). The Delhi landmarks become conversation and poetry triggers. In "Why I like my Hindutva boys," one the other hand, he jokes about liking the local extreme right-wing Hindus because they make it easy

for him to "curse" them (Katyal 2015, p. 40). The emphasis here is on "local," on the speaker's immediate surroundings. The adjective also makes them less threatening, undermining their presumed self-righteousness, while the whole poem is a good example of queer or camp talk that I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter as a poetic strategy.

4.1 "Filigreeing the Pavement:" Affective (Micro)Perception

Another kind of affective (micro)perception of the urban space and the body, as Massumi (Massumi and McKim 2015, p. 53) calls it, is foregrounded in Katyal's poem "Jangpura Extension." Quite a lyrical poem about a morning with a lover, which contains a line by Agha Shahid Ali (here in italics), and registers subtle phenomena marked by their ephemeral beauty, is, at the same time, explicitly sexual. There is rain and falling bougainvillea petals; everything is shimmering, almost incorporeal, yet deeply embodied through the opening scene of the two lovers – and the extreme embodiedness of the lyrical subjects somehow also makes for the sense of almost weightless affectiveness. However, the poem's ecstatic drowsiness is at the end interrupted by a shock – as the speaker's lover goes off by the metro, the speaker meets an older Sikh who offers him a ride in his Maruti (because he wants something from him), an Indian brand of cars that Katyal talks about at length in another poem, "Maruti Swift." In it, he speaks of what it takes to make one and what the consequences are, from ecological issues to worker strikes (Katyal 2019, pp. 39-40), so that the Maruti car in this poem also stands for an aggressive way of being and moving in a city:

"I'll walk," I said.

He took my answer and
crushed it on the road. (Katyal 2019, p. 34)

The pavement, the road, and the ground are recurring motifs here: in the first part of the poem the bougainvillea petals are "filigreeing/ the pavement with the/ colour of sunrise." Then, as the lovers are walking:

wading through

remnants of the sun attenuated
under our feet
the earth was

thawing from longing
into longing (Katyal 2019, p. 33)

This near immateriality of the ground (and the second stanza parallels sexual ecstasy with the verb "fly") is in stark contrast to the ground in the last stanza of the poem, where it is not just felt as solid, but it is solid enough for things (answers) to be crushed against it. The process, therefore, goes both ways. Answers can be solidified to the point of becoming crushable, as grief becomes "the least biodegradable of objects," and "even steel/ dissolves with your touch" in the poem "Grief" (Katyal 2019, p. 49).

4.2 *Flânerie* and the City

After a three-year long research project in Mumbai, Shilpa Phadke and her colleagues concluded that women don't loiter in the city's public spaces as men do, with a cigarette or chai at hand. If they would do so, they would be thought as "either mad or bad or dangerous to society." Instead, their trajectories lead them "from one 'sheltered' space to another" (Phadke et al 2011, p. vii). And is not before they transgress them that "that the invisible boundaries become apparent" (Phadke et al 2011, p. 8). However, the authors have made it clear that they are talking about middle-class women (also, "young, able-bodied, Hindu, upper-caste, heterosexual, married or marriageable" women).

The project began when Phadke consciously noticed that it takes a lot of safety strategizing for her and her female friends to move across the country, and in their own city, Mumbai; that this concern with safety is felt at a "visceral level" (Phadke et al, p. x). In the same way Massumi talks of the body's capacity to viscerally sense future events – for example, your lungs might contract even before you notice that someone is approaching you (Massumi 2002, p. 60). Viscerality, for Massumi, is "a rupture," "the perception of suspense" (Massumi 2002, p. 61), and for the women in metropolises, it is a daily affective probing of the urban space.

Still, it is not just women but migrants, Muslims, low-caste people etc., who are deemed outsiders to the public space (Phadke et al 2011, p. 10). All the abject or marginalized groups that represent the antithesis of proper subjects (Butler 1993, p. 2). These same groups are often (despite the violence statistics that speak otherwise) scapegoated as the perpetrators – without them the city would be safe for women (Phadke et al 2011, p. 11). Safe and clean. They are therefore like Kristeva's Oedipus, "a being of abjection and a pharmakos, a scapegoat who, having been ejected,

allows the city to be freed from defilement" (Kristeva 1982, p. 84). Industrial modernity, writes Anne McClintock, rests on imperialism and the "invention of race in the urban metropoles:" it distinguishes the proper subjects (white middle-class) from all the Others: lower classes, prostitutes, gays and lesbians, etc. (McClintock 1995, p. 5).

In her revised article in which she deals with the criticism of the term hegemonic masculinity, R. W. Connell reiterates that hegemonic masculinity presupposes other, nonhegemonic ones, which it treats the same as women, as subordinate (Connell 2005, p. 846). Hegemonic masculinity, Connell wrote in her earlier work, is not set into power through threats or violence, but by elaborate social and religious structures, by media and the police – subversive elements are held in compliance, not exterminated (Connell 1987, p. 184). And so safety is often quoted as the impetus behind the exclusion of women from public spaces (Phadke 2011, p. 16): it is not only a precaution against (sexual) attacks, but also against them getting involved with men who don't belong – it is about monitoring desire (Phadke 2011, p. 17).

In the two poems I will be analyzing here, the Assam-born poet Nabina Das is addressing precisely these issues – women in public spaces. They deal with two cities, Paris and Delhi respectively. The first is both a global city and a metropolis, the second a megacity as well. I am using the one situated in Paris only to parallel the experience of the speaker there to the one she has of Delhi. I will also investigate the notions of transnationalism and (post-)multiculturalism as reflected in Das's poetry, but more specifically, I want to explore the ways in which she treats and feels the (female) body in urban public spaces; how she engages with *flânerie*, both in her life and in verse.

In the poem "Summer of 2006, Rue du Faubourg-St. Antoine, Paris," Das riffs on Milosz's poem "Bypassing rue Descartes." She is talking about the city that overpowers the senses with

colors, sights, and smells. It is almost hedonistic, excessive with its fish and butcher stores, its soft, warm bread, and multicultural inhabitants coming – here she directly quotes Milosz – "... from Jassy and Koloshvar, Wilno and Bucharest, Saigon and Marrakesh" (Das 2013, p. 13). The speaker walks around and notices people, beggars, teenagers; she eats street food on the way, and tells us about her calm evenings in a studio overlooking the city, equally filled with sanguine, rich palettes. Amidst the current city bustle, the horseman at Place de la Nation, although a symbol of a nation-state, is rendered ahistorical, and that same ahistoricity is present in Milosz's poem – the markers of history are emptied of meaning. It seems that both poets are addressing the cosmopolitanism that Sneja Gunew talks of "as a form of decentralization that would enable receptivity to other ways of 'being at home on the world'" (Gunew 2017, p. 7). Gunew argues that multiculturalism has been lacking a cosmopolitan streak in certain representations, especially those elements that are drawn from "minority ethnics." Certain post-multicultural writers, she claims, function as translators "between the nation-state and the planetary" (Gunew 2017, p. 11). It is precisely what Das and Milosz are doing with these two poems, both of which highlight another one of Gunew's assertions: that cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism are frequently investigated through the lens of the banal, of "how people live together (or not) on the street in demotic ways" (Gunew 2017, p. 12).

On the other hand, Dorota Gozdecka et al constitute multiculturalism as a failed project since, in their words, it doesn't facilitate the proper blending in of immigrants within the host nation-state (Gozdecka et al 2014, pp. 52-52). Multiculturalism, they argue, overlooks gender inequality, oppressive religiosity, racism, and relativizes transnational human rights laws (Gozdecka et al 2014, p. 53). However, post-multiculturalism is not without its paradoxes, especially when it comes to neoliberal governmentality that would impose its rules upon various

groups of immigrants, establishing and marketing these regulations and (moral) standards as universal (Gozdecka et. al 2014, p. 58). The following verses fall somewhere between multiculturalism and post-multiculturalism, between visual specificity/difference and linguistic integration:

(…)

Men
and purple mothers
on the sidewalk
wearing boubous pushing prams
with kids that answer 'Oui!' (Das 2013, p. 14)

In an interview I did with Das in 2015, she told me that she would like to use the expression "plural belongings" to explain how she feels in the world:

> The plural part for me is like the roots of ginger – rhizomatic – growing and connecting in all directions. Exactly what Eduard Glissant had suggested. It 'grew' in that space of dichotomy where a *flâneuse* such as myself was comfortable stepping in and out. What nourishes me in these worlds I create is the possibility of growing more roots, growing more diverse and one at the same time, and define rootedness as manifold. Not sure if I said this elsewhere, but being called a Bengali or an Assamese poet and writer gives me

the biggest jitters. I'm perhaps both but not one or the other. Very much a Guwahati girl, I cherish my homestate's ethos and beauty. (Tomaš 2015)

In the Acknowledgment part of her collection *Into the Migrant City*, Das calls herself an "urban nomad" as well (Das 2013, p. 6). She certainly is one who celebrates and is deeply committed to psychogeography, as many other female writers and artists before her have been (for example, the ones featured in Lauren Elkin's book *Flâneuse*, from 2017.)

Similarly, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari stated that "multiplicities are rhizomatic, and expose arborescent pseudomultiplicities for what they are" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 8). For them, nomads are ahistorical figures, as "history is always written from the sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus, at least a possible one..." (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 23). That might be the reason why both Das's and Milosz's poems highlight the ahistoricity of the city which is not only produced by its sensory content but also through the immigrant perspective.

As opposed to Das, who spent only shorter amount of time in Paris, Czeslaw Milosz lived there as an émigré. In his book *The Witness of Poetry*, Milosz speaks about the poetry apprenticeship in Paris that would-be poets from other European countries had to undergo, and that he was engaged in since he arrived there as a young man. (He would write "Bypassing rue Descartes" fifty years later.) (Milosz 1983, pp. 7-8). In a sense, Das is forging her own poetic connections by riffing on Milosz's poem. Not just with the European poetic tradition but with the city of Paris itself – displaying intimate familiarity with its topography, and at the same time, its

significance and symbolism in the long line of poets and writers. (The proto-*flâneur* poet Charles Baudelaire being one of them.)

Milosz addresses a specific brand of multiculturalism when he calls himself "a young barbarian just come to the capital of the world." (Interestingly, Deleuze and Guattari state that nomad art is fittingly described as "barbarian, Gothic, and modern," Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 492). The poet is trying to blend in, like so many others, wishing to forget their cultural "backwardness," or what is deemed as such. "I had left the cloudy provinces behind, I entered the universal, dazzled and desiring," Milosz says. And with this line, as with the one in which he mentions those educated at Sorbonne who later became dictatorial and deadly in their homeland of Cambodia, all in the name of universalisms, Milosz, it seems, predicted the pangs and paradoxes of neoliberal post-multiculturalism. "There is no capital of the world, neither here nor anywhere else," he will conclude. Nothing underlines this clearer than a set of broken taboos he cannot be exculpated from, like the (accidental?) killing of a water snake, a being considered holy in Milosz's native Lithuania (Milosz 1983, p. 9). For Das, the issue with taboos seems to be somewhat less sinister, although she carefully constructs the image with an owl hooting

> at our taboos
> like the one I left
> under a peepul leaf
> in an earthen jar. (Das 2013, p. 15)

These "diasporic public spheres," as Arjun Appadurai calls them, are also "opposed to the nation-state model" (Appadurai 1996, p. 4). They are a product of a particular "rupture" that happened in the late eighties (Appadurai 1996, p. 2): mass migration and proliferation of (electronic) media, which have recalibrated the notions of local and global (Appadurai 1996, p. 3), as "mass-mediated imaginary (…) frequently transcends national space" (Appadurai 1996, p. 6).

This is a good seagueway into Das's second poem, "Dialogues with Dilli," in which Das talks about and talks to her city (Dilli is a Hindi/Urdu name for Delhi), the kind that Ravi Sundaram describes in his book *Pirate Modernity: Delhi's Media Urbanism* (2004). Arguing, like Appadurai, that technologies and the electronic media have completely changed the urban spaces, Sundaram adds that "a vast new mediascape envelops cities like an all-pervasive skin" (Sundaram 2010, p. 5). "The evaporation of the boundary between technology and urban life in India's urban formations has produced a kinetic city – a delirious disorientation of the senses," he continues. Humans have become intertwined with the machines (Sundaram 2010, p. 7), they have become cyborgian. M.B.N. Hansen, for example, notes that, as opposed to Bergson's idea, ours is a "universe of information," and not images (Hansen 2003, p. 225). Or, as Grosz put it, we are easily taken in by cybertechnology "because the virtual or the cyber is also always already an integral element in the subject before its introduction to this particular kind of technology" (Grosz 2001, pp. 23-24). It is a city of people glued to bigger and smaller screens, or, in the words of Donna Haraway: "By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs" (Haraway 1990, p. 191). But Delhi is also a city of Mughal and colonial British architecture which conveys empire and power, and a city with almost no public toilets, overcrowded with migrant workers from the villages (Padmanabhan 2010, p. 253-254).

Das's poem begins by the speaker opening her emails, making her mind "between the stalker and the spammer" as the only two options – love being off the table perhaps, or it seems, in waiting. She is then addressing the city, asking Dilli if it loved her (or should I use the masculine pronoun for the city?). But then she recalls the recent scenes ("A rattle on the sidewalk behind hardens my urban jaw"), of city men pushing their bodies onto her on public transport, pinching her bottom. In Delhi, it is almost impossible to be a *flâneuse* ("Shahdara to Lodhi Road is a long way to endure your stares / Peppered with comments while calloused thumbs press my breasts."), and only the *gulmohar* flowers and greenery offer occasional comfort and solace.

For Parisian women – Simone de Beauvoir wrote in the '40ies – it was similarly unthinkable to occupy public spaces such as boulevard benches, and just sit there, accompanied only by a cigarette perhaps (De Beauvoir 2010, p. 844). For Das, her hunting for an electronic love letter across the flickering screen is, on the one hand, fleeing from the overly bodily-present males in the urban public spaces and her life, not to what Grosz calls "the age-old (male) fantasy of disembodied self-containment, an existence without debt, commitment, ties – the fantasy of the self-made liberal subject" that virtual reality has to offer (Grosz 2001, p. 42), but to a (female) fantasy of a healthy connection to a city.

When I asked her about how she, as a woman, navigates the cities of India, and how she feels about the concept and practice of *flânerie*, Das, who is originally from a smaller city, Guwahati in Assam, wrote to me in an email:

> Leaving my hometown for Delhi worked like an electric shock where the realization of the physical space began to jar against the mental space that I occupied as a woman. One must

> understand I'm speaking from a privileged position although I was a social hybrid among my own people, with various kind of castes and religions and ethnicities mingled in our family. As a poet, I began to use my defense mechanism through words, images, stories. I learnt the language of attack and offense, I learnt to walk by pushing out others from my way, especially, males, and I learnt to read tones and gestures. Not necessarily always negative, these new acquirements were embellishments to my writing waiting to happen. In Delhi, I was the soft consonant or liquid sound bearer. I was the dry fish eater. In summer, I was the fish crying for rains. In winter, my desire made me burn like charcoal. When I yearned for a swelling river, they showed me a gasping dying Yamuna. In Delhi, I was not simply other-ed. As a woman, as a poet, I was glossary-ed, I was footnote-ed, I was viewed in a tunnel-eye view. Along with it all, came my being staunchly anti-fascist, Left-feminist-humanist, and a diehard optimist. Then they asked – what caste are you, when will you be married? do you live alone? you must not walk the streets alone, who's the man with you...! When served with the tag "Northeastern," the geographical northeast that mainland India looks at askew, I was a lethal potion that Delhi swallowed in trepidation. Bakra banana – "making a scapegoat of" is a Delhi phrase I learnt while Delhi denizens feared becoming a sheep or a goat (this alludes to Assam girls having witching powers) in my contact. Thus our spaces collided and merged in a mythical and surrealistic way.

Her use of the words "shock" and "scapegoat" make for an interesting parallel to the Massumi's already mentioned definition of affect (Massumi and McKim 2015, p. 53), and Kristeva's notion of the abject that needs to be expelled from cities in order for them to be clean

(Kristeva 1982, p. 84). No wonder that Sundaram writes that "unlike most cities (…) Delhi demands a tough love from its residents" (Sundaram 2010, p. xiv). This is especially true for its women. In December of 2012, when I was living in Delhi for a few months, an exceptionally brutal gang rape and murder of a young girl took place on a bus. Her name was Jyoti Pandey, she was twenty-three, and died a few days after the attack in a Singapore hospital.

I remember that the streets and the metro were empty of women and girls for weeks to come, especially after dark. On several occasions, I was stopped by policewomen and reprimanded for being out alone, or for being out so late, or in company of (male) friends. Every instance was problematic, and what seemed to be happening, at least just on the heels of the event, was that, again, women were being ushered away from the public spaces on the grounds of their safety. The aftermath of this event is the subject of Katyal's poem "Moments before she died," Delhi 29.12.12.:

> It is the night of foreboding
>
> her skin is again
> translucent
> (...)
> this night remains
> like shell-shock (Katyal 2015, p. 60)

The poet is highlighting the fragility of her skin, termed "translucent," against the "shell-shock" that is the night. The fact that it "remains" so speaks to the outrage that affectively rippled across

the country. The poem is carefully-crafted with the language that is charged with affect, the rhythm of the verses gently falling and foreboding.

On one of those days just after the event, I met a young woman on the metro, at dusk, who was upset for being caught up so late out in the city. She too asked me what I was doing there, as I was obviously a foreigner as well. Then she added: "this is Delhi, it is completely different in Mumbai," the city where she was originally from. In an email conversation about *flânerie*, the poet Arundhathi Subramaniam, also from Mumbai, told me a similar story but with a twist:

> It's been my sole mode of exercise, but it is also a source of stimulation – often over-stimulation! It's hard – the pavements are nonexistent and those that exist are ridden with potholes and hawkers and encroachments. But the many colliding smells and sounds make it an ethnographer's delight. I am not an ethnographer. But for me, walking is a way of being not just an observer, but a *participant* in the city. It is my way of belonging, my way of staking my claim to the city, my way of making it mine. (…) A city where you don't pick up the kind of aggression that you can palpably sense in places like Delhi.
>
> At the same time, I don't want to romanticize it. There is much that is wrong with the city. It's a giant sprawl of garbage and apathy, opulence and destitution, and the upsurge of gated communities that seek to insulate themselves from the outside world is disturbing. Much of what has happened to it is deplorable and unpardonable. And yet, I love the ways in which neighbourhoods sit cheek by jowl with each other – apartments with fishing villages, street food with plush restaurants, dense settlements with the blue gasp of ocean.

There is always the sense of life – breathing, shape-shifting, dynamic, perennially startling life.

I see myself less as *flâneur* and more as seeker. I have paced these city streets like a caged hamster at certain points in my life, and now I walk them with a newfound sense of freedom and joy. I had to go away, I guess, in order to reclaim the city for myself. As my spiritual journey intensified, I found myself feeling less embattled here. It pushes my buttons less. I can watch it with a certain mix of affection, exasperation and amusement.

The Bombay poet Mustansir Dalvi, again, has a completely different take on the city. In answer to my question about how the city has defined him as a poet, and how he is able to move through it, he said:

So I move through the public realm of Bombay as I please, unrestricted and often without purpose. The urban spaces of Bombay have certainly defined me as poet. The dense inner city neighborhoods and the colonial city at the southern end of Bombay have imprinted on me since childhood. Now that I live at the other extreme of Bombay, in New Bombay, that has had an impact as well. *Flânerie* of any kind enhances the collective experience of being in the city. For the very reason that it goes beyond the functional, the very act becomes a covenant with the city, accepting it for what it is, and bringing value to it by participating. Any *flâneur*, to my mind, is a producer of culture, simply by doing what she does. In any case, *flânerie* also contributes to making the city safer, by having more eyes, and feet, on

the street. And since Bombay really does not have public squares, like the ones you encounter in Europe, we make do with our streets.

This freedom of movement that Dalvi enjoys, as well as his training as an architect, translate into the specific poetic preoccupations which are more evident in his latest, second books of poems, *Cosmopolitician* (2018). It is filled with poems about various buildings and structures, builders and architects, populated with friends as well as (low-caste) characters from Bombay streets, and heavily suffused by his travels through Europe and Egypt. However, he told me, even poems about other locations were, in a sense, contextualized through his collective impressions of Bombay. Bombay, for him, is the "primary city of experience," the one that gives him "body-memory."

When it comes to buildings, Grosz deems it beneficial to follow Deleuze and view them as shape-shifting systems that are in an exchange with other spaces, perpetually redrawing the borders and the markers of keeping out and letting in (Grosz 2001, p. 7). She also asks the question if architecture can leak into us as well, and if we can begin to think of it as "assemblage," as part of a larger whole (Grosz 2001, p. 71).

Similarly, in our conversation Dalvi anthropomorphized the buildings of Bombay saying that they are, like the Bombay citizens, migrants too. "None developed as indigenous forms of architecture in the peninsular city, from the earliest to the most contemporary all types and manner of building are imported and most importantly adapted to find their place in Bombay (from Neo-Gothic to Art Deco). So the more relevant question is not transplantation but adaptation." He sees them as part of the ecosystem of the city, as much as his own body, of which they function as some

sort of extensions. Same is with various other types of structures. In the full-page prose poem "The Great Kiln," he writes about the kiln for firing ceramics that was, as the Notes section of the book claim, "part of an unrealized building proposal for the Sir JJ School of Art in Bombay by William Burges (1866)" (Dalvi 2018, p. 116). It would have been a beautiful kiln, but like this, "it remains an acknowledged embarrassment, unpretty, but functional. Function, it seems is the great driver of the coming aesthetic. It is the new age of utilitarian exploration whose inherencies call to be tweezed out and laid bare for edification, and profit" (Dalvi, 2018, p. 34). The kiln thus becomes a remnant of a different politics around art and urbanity, as well as a reminder of the current neoliberal forces that shape the markets and the city.

4.3 Topography of Memory

"We're undone by each other," writes Butler. "And if we're not, we're missing something. If this seems so clearly the case with grief, it is only because it was already the case with desire. One does not always stay intact. It may be that one wants to, or does, but it may also be that despite one's best efforts, one is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel" (Butler 2004, p. 19). The memories of such affective undoings that Butler is talking about, the residues of affective encounters, disperse themselves over the sites where the later have taken place, but also overlay the *loci* they have seemingly nothing to do with. For Bergson, memory is a survived image from the past that perpetually interplays with the now, sometimes simply adding to it, and at other times completely

taking over (Bergson 1988, pp. 65-66). In this chapter, I will be analyzing the poems that speak to this kind of charting.

First one is Katyal's two-part poem, "Two Memories, Delhi," which juxtaposes two scenes, two memories, in order to also draw parallels between them. The two scenes are removed from each other both temporally – there is a temporal difference of nineteen years (1997 and 2016), and spatially – the geographical coordinates of Delhi mark, at the beginning of stanzas, the east and the south of the city respectively, Laxmi Nagar and Jangpura Extension. (In an interview for London-based online magazine Culture Stories, Katyal said that Jangpura Extension is the neighbourhood he lives in, "where a little bit of Hindi-Urdu and French jostle with each other in the crucible of English.") The lyrical subject is twelve in the first part, and speaks of a granduncle from Sargodha in Pakistan, who is "discovered" by him as the latter is vacationing in Delhi:

> In his Jamuna paar house, he looked so frail
> sitting in his drawing room, that I was afraid
> to go near him.
> (…)
> He could not see. And for me, his could-not-seeness
> froze in the middle of the room
> but no one mentioned it.
> (…)
> We were asked to go stand in front of him.
>
> I walked slowly, my bones
> shaped like question marks. (Katyal 2019, p. 23)

He touched my face with his slight fingers
moving them lightly over my nose
my eyes (should I keep them closed? Or open?)
and said, “nice looking,” in English
then let me go. (Katyal 2019, p. 24)

The poet probably implicitly references the rift that happened in 1947, after the partition of India, when whole families were broken up, some staying while the others were fleeing, crossing the borders in both directions. What set in as a consequence, in a lot of cases, was forgetting, the non-remembering. Here, the twelve-year old child is stunned and unnerved by the granduncle’s presence, his frailness, as well as his inability to see, which no one confirms out loud. The fact that the visitor is addressing the child in English (with the words “nice looking”) points to another displacement, that of language: English, and not Hindi or Urdu, is used to bridge an awkward moment, to infuse it (or impose it) with the intimacy of mutual understanding.

In the other part of the poem, the lyrical subject is older, taken aback by another forgetting, that of the face of his former lover Rohit. The poet uses the verbs “blur” and “fade” to indicate the outlines that are losing their definedness, the borders that are giving way. The speaker is cataloguing the moments that have been thus lost, especially the sexually-charged one. The following stanza says something about the nature of remembering here, of its physicality, and its power to shape the actual body although it is no more than a virtual impulse, an affect – if I can call it like that – that has traveled back through time:

But sometimes (Katyal 2019, p. 24)
in the thin morning air

my hand takes the shape
of holding you from the back
(…)
and because each passing year
I remember you by skin,
by my fingers digging in

these nights
I hold you by your chin, whisper in your ear
"nice looking" (Katyal 2019, p. 25)

It is not just the speaker's hand that "takes the shape" as if he was, again, holding his lover, but the lover himself is remembered by his skin – both of these instances highlight the boundaries that take or lose shape. On the other hand, the parallel that is achieved with the first part of the poem by the phrase "nice looking" is the one of claiming, of the person and the moment – it's a kind of boundary drawing, and stands for a solid ground in the midst of all the melting and vanishing, but also as an example of the bodies affecting each other. For Henri Bergson, memory, like affect, can produce a body boundary (Bergson 1988, p. 226). He also thinks of the surroundings as assemblage of images, in contemporary theoretical wording, an assemblage that includes the body itself as an image, a recipient and transmitter of affection or affects (Bergson 1988, p. 17). The lyrical subject of this poem is a part of both images or scenes, and also the image that affected both those images in the past, and that still holds the power to reshuffle them as he pleases or as the moment demands.

The traveling phrase "nice looking" connects the two parts in such a way that it brings something of the past into a more recent past – or even, the future of the poem. A certain anxiety

or uneasiness is reproduced by it, which could equally refer to the awkwardness of both moments as well as the premonition or acknowledgment of forgetting. This phrase serves as a link between different kinds of memory within the poem, as Brian Massumi, who distinguishes at least three types of memory, would have it. The first is not just a thought, but "an enacted past, actively present" (Massumi 2015, p. 59. Then there is the "retrospective" memory, "going from the present to reactivate the past, whereas active memory moves in the other direction, coming from the past to energize (Massumi 2015, p. 60) the present," while "remembering forwards" is a sensing of a future by mobilizing a tendency based on a past (Massumi 2015, p. 61). And these three types of memory often appear simultaneously, filling in for each other (Massumi 2015, p. 62). When the granduncle says "nice looking" to the twelve-year old, he is launching a future in which the phrase will be repeated, this time by the grown-up speaker. The phrase is perhaps hinting, too, at a sexual quality that tinges both scenes.

On the other hand, Massumi noted that by feeling a certain emotion or recollecting a certain detail, all others are not completely out of the picture, as they are there "virtually – in potential," and could crop up at any (other) time. "Affect as whole, then, is the virtual co-presence of potentials" (Massumi 2015, p. 5). This brings up the poet's choice of memories selected for representation in verse, and the question of how this choice gets to be personally and politically translated. Moreover, how this choice yields itself to "poetic expression," which Massumi credits with the capacity to frame a situation, "its charge – in a way that actually fosters new experiences," "the kinds of affective movements" (Massumi 2015, p. 7).

Reworking memories in his poetry is for Katyal a "matter of emotional survival," as he said in an interview for Culture Stories. "Memory allowed me to meet my friend and teacher who'd

passed away, it allowed me to apologize to a past lover for my excesses, it allowed me to go to cities and streets far away, to forgive or to be forgiven. Other than saying this, I can only say that the preponderance of memory, time and loss in my poems has hopefully got sharpened by reading other poets who work with the similar 'themes' whether it is Agha Shahid Ali, W.H. Auden, Mark Doty, Vikramaditya Sahai or Dorothy Parker."

Choosing to reference the city through private memory is also to disengage from the imposed collective (political) narratives that saturate both the Delhi mediascape, as well as its architectural landscape. When Deleuze and Guattari claim that the "rhizome is an antigenealogy," a "short-term memory, or anti memory," they mean it by way of subversion of these grand narratives (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 21). In his book on Delhi's modernity, Ravi Sundaram talks about the time after the violently suppressed Indian mutiny against the British in 1857, which marked an official end to the Mughal rule. After that, the British "inaugurated a move to a different model of urban life, where the display of colonial sovereignty slowly subsumed the urban pasts of Delhi," making itself visible through the architecture of Edward Lutyens and George Baker. "Lutyen's design," he adds, "was the mobilization of ceremonial power of Empire over the colonized, with a subtle incorporation of 'local' influences." Everything is grandiose and spacious, in order to serve as platform for parades, for displays of "nationalist memory" on important days like the Republic Day (Sundaram 2010, p. 16), which marks Indian independence but also signals the subsequent partition.

Private memory of poets is therefore a subversion, an undermining of the imposed collective remembering, which can be especially important in the city like New Delhi, imagined as it was, to be an antithesis to the Old City, Shahjahanabad, which was built in the fifteenth century by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, writes Pavan K. Varma in his nostalgic essay (Varma

2010, p. 245). Varma's (and Katyal's) nostalgia doesn't just encompass the authentic architecture of residential houses with inner courtyard called *havelis* (and 'introverted gardens'), but also for the culture and a kind of urbanity (Varma 2010, pp. 247-248) that isn't anymore. Its "zeitgeist," Varma notes, was the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, a poet, scholar, calligraphist, gourmet, and hedonist that was exiled to Rangoon in the aftermath of the extinguished mutiny (Varma 2010, p. 251-252). When the British decided to construct New Delhi in 1911, they excluded Shahjahanabad by simply circumventing it. The Old City "would live on but only like an ageing courtesan abandoned by her new suitors, waiting to die" (Varma 2010, p. 252).

On the other hand, New Delhi continued to develop, and, for its populated mediascape, urban sprawling and violent outbursts since the end of 1980s, Sundaram likens living in Delhi to a "series of kinetic shock experiences." In one of his short stories about Delhi, Hindi writer Uday Prakash – Sundaram adds – wrote how its consumerist world bespeaks "the loss of memory to a world of things" in the "present that seems never-ending, often mediated through the visual representations of events." One can hardly tell the difference between "real" memories and "media narratives," i.e. "virtual memory" (Sundaram 2010, p. 87). In that sense, the poet's private memory recounted in this poem is also a redemption from the things, the objects, and the engulfing eternal present as much as it is an exercise in personal cartography, an attempt to constitute another city within the city.

A similar kind of nostalgia for Old Delhi or, more accurately, its poetic tradition, is expressed by Das in her poem "Goodbye to Ballimaran." Ballimaran is the name of the area of Old Delhi where the well-known Urdu and Persian poet Ghalib's (1797 – 1869) *haveli* still stands. The poet is visiting the actual place but constructing scenes of imagined past around Ghalib's house

and their possible meeting. She is affectively projecting onto the past, concluding it culturally and lingusticually as over by the English phrase “so long:”

> If you still exhaled behind that cindered verandah I would not know
> holding broken bangle pieces of a departed love, post intermission
> Alvida, you must’ve said in a sad refrain, adding in English, “So long.”
> (Das 2013, p. 11).

Arundhathi Subramaniam also experiences the city through layers of memory. Mumbai, for her, is a city:

> “that coats the lungs,/ stiffens the spine,/ chills the gut/ with memory.” It is city as affliction, as danger, as contagion. City as place, protagonist and palimpsest. City as goddess, as octopus (I noticed the phrase, “clammy malarial tentacles of guilt” in my poem “No”), as stray dog. A city choked with memory, a territorial big bully, and yet a city that is “so hospitable/ when I decide/ I’m just visiting” (“Home”).

In the poem “Amnesia” (Bombay, January 1993), the lyrical subject is speaking of a lover in whose arms:

> an entire metropolis
> of memory

sinks out of sight.

Here are no purple epilepsies
of earth, no charred biographies,
no well-foddered certainties bloating
in cold rigor mortis...
(…)
and I taste the fern-cool transience
of a lagoon of language,
without sediment. (Subramaniam 2009, non-paginated pdf)

In a way, this amnesia is a line of flight (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 9), a getting out of an "impasse" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 14), or a "burgeoning" of a "tree branch or root division (…) into a rhizome" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 15), as memories have a way of arborifying, fixing identities. She uses the tree metaphor in another of her poems, called the "Tree," but it is not exactly as Deleuze and Guattari would have the term – the tree here doesn't mean the ceasing of desire (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 14), simply "holding one's own, as the tree does, and receptivity," as Subramaniam told me, who was, here, interested in "the way the city dissolves binaries:" "Without accepting plurality and otherness, one would never be able to celebrate 'so many ways of tasting neon,/ so many ways of latticing a wind,/ so many ways of being ancillary to the self/ without resenting it' (Subramaniam 2009, non-paginated pdf).

4.4 From City to Sea: Striated and Smooth Spaces

For Deleuze and Guattari, city is a "striated," "sedentary" space, "the space instituted by the State apparatus," as opposed to the "smooth space" inhabited by nomads, or "the space in which the war machine develops" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 474). "In contrast to the sea, the city is a striated space par excellence; the sea is a smooth space fundamentally open to striation, and the city is the force of striation that reimparts smooth space" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 481). The dynamics and the tension between the two types of spaces, and the poets' relationship to them, is evident in some of the verses.

In Katyal's poem "Haji Ali," which deals with the island mosque and *dargah* (Sufi tomb and shrine) near Worli, Mumbai, the speaker pictures a couple sitting together by the sea as the water is climbing up, and somehow erasing the city (or its effects). He calls it the "magic spot" two times (for the saint's coffin that washed ashore six hundred years ago, and the solitude and comfort that the couple can sense there). "Haji Ali is like Bombay flying a kite in the sea," the poet says (Katyal 2015, p. 39), and more than occupying one type of space or the other, I would say that this Sufi shrine represents a liminal space between the striated and the smooth, a meeting point of the two.

Along similar lines, Subramaniam told me how although her feelings about the Bombay have been "ambivalent," the presence and sight of the sea always manages to smooth them out:

> I have experienced it as the bully, the adversary – the city that imposes terms on me, and doesn't allow me to share terms with it. It's the city that confronts me with an ethical dilemma at every turn, an aesthetic affront at every corner. It's the city that has made me

> feel diminished, abraded, energetically depleted. And each time I feel cornered or hemmed in or fatigued by the city's self-absorption, I turn a corner and find myself confronted by the wonderful Arabian Sea, and feel restored. It's the sea that rescues Bombay again and again, reminds you that you are in a harbor city – essentially outward-looking, open to plurality, to widening horizons (despite the city's sometimes more problematic parochial political strains).

In her poem "The City and I" (returning to Bombay after 26 November 2008), whose date references the terrorist attacks that happened in the city, Subramaniam speaks about this tension, but of how things were different this time. She and the city weren't on hostile terms, fighting. Although it "surged" towards her, "mangy,/ bruised-eyed,/ non-vaccinated," she felt it was "suddenly" hers (Subramaniam 2014, non-paginated pdf). The poem reads as a compassionate dedication to the city that had itself suffered attacks. It also offers a clue to the poet's relationship to the city – her need for space on one side, and the feeling of belonging only when the city abolishes the space between them by force – when it asserts itself without asking.

About her poem "Where I Live," Subramaniam says it is a "gritty, unsentimental mélange of Bombay images – an anthem and an indictment all at once." She is sequencing city scenes in a fast order, made more poignant by adjectives – from "garrulous sewers and tight-lipped taps," to "eternal hysteria/ of lurid nylon dream." It is a vain city that doesn't care, populated with disfigured beggars, and traversed by "dark alleys:"

> City that coats the lungs
> stiffens the spine
> chills the gut

with memory

Subramaniam's Bombay is a city that works itself in the body, both materially, and through affect. It shapes the bones, as Anne Fausto-Sterling would have it (Fausto-Sterling 2005, p. 1491), and possesses a kind of "thing-power" that Jane Bennett talks about when she talks about "materiality as a protean flow of matter-energy and figures the thing as a relatively composed form of that flow" (Bennett 2004, p. 349). However, it is also a city defined by and longing for (its) smooth spaces:

> where it is perfectly historical
> to be looking out
> on a sooty handkerchief of ocean,
> searching for God. (Subramaniam 2009, non-paginated pdf)

"The smooth spaces arising from the city," write Deleuze and Guattari, "are not only those of worldwide organization, but also (…) sprawling, temporary, shifting shantytowns of nomads and cave dwellers (…) Condensed force, the potential for counterattack?" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 481). In his poem "Where life stops being a city," Dalvi talks of "illegal slaughterhouses" and crows leaving organs on rooftops of strict vegetarian Hindus. It is a neighborhood, a space where the boundaries leak to the point of overflow. The idea of "life" and "city" as they are opposed in the title could be translated as an ironic rupture in the striated space (Dalvi 2018, p. 35).

Dalvi points to the mix of the striated and the smooth spaces in his poems like "Candy floss," which features a picturesque and poignant candy floss hawker (a nomad within a city, an

intrusion of the smooth spaces into the striated), who he also calls a "hag" in a nod to Arun Kolatkar's well-known verses that depict the beggars, "hags", and hawkers of Bombay (from the collection *The Kala Ghoda Poems*, 2004). Dalvi's descriptions are extremely vivid:

> (…)
>
> Scruffy as her surroundings, malodourous as fuming mangroves
> that stick lenticels out of miasmic soup, she stands with her flock
> germinating from the mud. (Dalvi 2018, p. 39)

And as is the case with Kolatkar, however harsh, clinical, or naturalistic the description, there is a certain empathy present, and insistence on a kind of dirty dignity as the "hag" could be a term of endearment for the city itself.

Dalvi is equally skilled in choosing the most memorable imagery to sing about the striated space as well, especially the one defined by glitches or blowouts, the sudden inpour of the disorderliness of the smooth space. In "Sandhurst Road," the city – suffocating in plastic and piles of garbage and greyness, the city with too little plumbing and too many flyover – is almost apocalyptically drawn:

> Richter grins, shrugs, shakes.
> The haze forms halos round skyscrapers.
> Grown men choke on angel dust. (Dalvi 2018, p. 43)

There is, again, talk of (affective) shocks, of earthquakes of traffic, and of smog. It is a city where the clacking of neon lights mixes in with the muezzin's call to prayer. The bodies are tattooed and pierced, the "New Woman" dry dies, and the "New Man" is "wired" – with cell-

phones, computers, etc., made in China. In the end, the poet gives voice to the city itself, in a New-Testament reference:

> Bring me your tired, your homeless.
> I'll give them space enough to stand in.
> Let's play. The game starts with get-up.
>
> The winner goes to sleep first. (Dalvi 2018, p. 44)

Dalvi's Bombay is here, as in some of his other poems, a chaotic patchwork of mutually exclusive strivings and their (dire) consequences, an ecological catastrophe, and an architectural and infrastructural disarray, but the poet seems to be at some kind of ease with it, which isn't the same as resignation or not-noticing. In fact, quite the opposite is true in Dalvi's case – he is too keen of an observer to lose the smaller picture to the bigger one. Instead, his focus on details opens the reader up to the "perception of suspense" (Massumi 2002, p. 61), leaving him lingering in that space (as does the poet), before the onrush of images could induce panic.

5. Transporting the Body: Local Trains and Other Affects

"Interpersonal relationships in big cities are distinguished by a marked preponderance of visual activity over aural activity. (…) Before the development of buses, railroads, and trams in the nineteenth century, people had never been in situations where they had to look at one another for long minutes or even hours without speaking to one another" (Simmel qtd. in Benjamin 2006, p. 69). This quote has traveled to many contexts, and Patke also uses it when speaking about the "arterial role" of the local trains in Bombay (Patke, 194), where 6.1 million commuters, of which approximately 15 to 20 per cent are women, pass through them daily (Phadke et al, p. 6).

In this chapter, I explore how these literary, as well as literal, bodies interact affectively with one another, how they negotiate and endure this extreme physical closeness. I also want to argue that trains are liminal spaces created (and also abolished) for the duration of a ride, and that this liminality offers both a reconfiguration of gender roles and urban identities and/or (painfully) confirms them.

As I was finishing writing this thesis, the poet Nabina Das sent me an article by Shilpa Phadke, published on an independent Indian website for news and culture, Scroll.in, that the Delhi government recently came up with the idea to make all public transport in the city free for women. Phadke was defending the move against critics who saw it as an expensive and not equality-enhancing project, by saying that affordable transport is the key that women of Mumbai have at least some access to public spaces, and that this would bring more of them into the public spaces

of Delhi. She also expressed that the separate train compartments for ladies are useful as they act as a guarantee that there will be women in the city transport, and therefore, the city.

In this chapter, I focus on two poems. More specifically on Dalvi's "The *Ladies Only*," which recounts an incident on a Mumbai local train (and is not the only one of his poems about trains), an encounter between a man and a woman at the border that separates the ladies-only compartment from the one for men. It is ten minutes to midnight, the poet tells us, and seven minutes to Borivali, a coastal suburb of Mumbai. The next scene shows what happens between a man on the train and a young woman:

> Adjusting for his comfort, not hers,
> one open hand brings face to knee,
> with the other he rips
> rags that resist more than the girl. (Dalvi 2013, p. 34)

The poet goes on to say that she is "too shy to comprehend" what is going on: the fact that it should be going on someplace else, at some other time, if at all. In the following lines, Dalvi plays with words to get his point across:

> Roused by the bumping backbeat,
>
> unlike the train's familiar cadence,
>
> childhood's end disrupts. (Dalvi 2013, p. 36)

The sounds a train makes are sexualized by the careful use of language. It feels as if the space of the train itself has facilitated such an encounter, that it has affected the people on board and produced these scenes. The train itself has effected an end to childhood or childlike innocence, both in a girl as well as in the spectators or voyeurs whose eyes are fixed on the scene (although they mask their feeling of guilt with irony). The chance voyeurs are as much affected as the man and the girl, but differently:

> Slapping their side of the partition,
>
> they stare, captivated by the mechanics
>
> of dogs fucking in a busy street. (Dalvi 2013, p. 35)

We sense that there is a feeling of abjection / disgust in the sight they are witnessing, as he compares it to dogs fucking. When talking about Bible and diet, Julia Kristeva mentions "a limit, a boundary, a border between the sexes, a separation between feminine and masculine as foundation for the organization that is 'clean and proper'" (Kristeva 1982, p. 100). Here, the poet plays with these divisions and the mutual othering that occurs as well. The voyeurs (audience) are automatically drawing their collective boundary around themselves, both by slapping (in protest?) and by the aforementioned affects and feelings which separate them from the sight – the division is additionally indicated by the word "partition," which in India has an even stronger meaning

because of the bloody partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, an extremely affective event, often spelled with a capital P.

Finally, the liminal space and the event that is created by a moving train, a space and sequences that almost escape time (and therefore consequences in time?), draw to an end:

> One minute to Borivali,
>
> the cleaven girl retracts into the stillness of the catatonic,
>
> while the one with the sense of urgency, reasons:
>
> Come on, come *on*, before I lose my erection. (Dalvi 2013, p. 37)

The man is aware of this, so he rushes the event to a conclusion. The girl is described as "cleaven," a word with multiple meanings: she is not just rendered open (in terms of clothes and her sexuality), visible, exposed, she is also split into two, divided across the already existing lines of gender partition – both physically indicated by signs on the respective compartments and encoded in bodies. Perhaps she has always already been conceptualized as divided, or as a half. The world "cleaven" also indicates trauma: the split that occurs while the psyche disassociates from the event that has just taken place. However, she is not only "cleaven," she is "catatonic" – she is so affected that she becomes immobile, stiff, mute, unable to digest and process the (abject) event, similar to Kristeva's borderline patient – their affected body is a "numbed body, of hands that hurt, of paralyzed legs" (Kristeva 1982, p. 49). On writing about shame, Sedgwick says how

its "suffusiveness seems to delineate (…) precise, individual outlines in the most isolating way imaginable," it moves us "toward painful individuation, toward uncontrollable relationality." She also notes how shame is regarded as the most self-defining of affects (Sedgwick 2003, p. 37)

Referring to Kristeva's work on nations and nationalism (Kristeva 2003), Sara Ahmed writes that "the nation is already haunted by strangers, just as the subject is already haunted by 'the stranger within,' as another way of describing "the unconscious." Ahmed argues that the connection between the boundaries of a subject and that of a nation, between their respective or causative emergence, is produced through bodies in close contact. These body boundaries, real and imagined, come into being through mutual "affective readings" (Ahmed 2005, p. 95): we figure out who is alike and who is a stranger, the Other, and that "strangeness is already *unevenly distributed*" (Ahmed 2005, p. 96). Ahmed credits emotions for boundary-shaping – "the surfaces of bodies 'surface' as an effect of the impressions left by others," be it collective or individual (Ahmed 2004, p. 10).

But how are these "affective readings" accomplished on a Mumbai local, and for what purpose? If nation-building is not at stake, what is, and when? Does it change? Are its purposes and accomplishments varied and multiple, subject to a current (political or personal) trend or preoccupation? Ahmed is interested in emotions (which are all about movement), and how they are a catalyst for boundary/identity formation, how they "allign" the individual with the collective. "Hence movement does not cut the body off from the 'where' of its inhabitance, but connects bodies to other bodies – indeed, attachment takes place through movement, through being moved by the proximity of others." (Ahmed 2005, p. 100). And what better place for this closeness than a packed train? Could it be that Mumbai locals, for the intense proximity they promise and deliver, are such boundary-formation platforms, not of nation but of sex and gender? Aren't these being

reinforced and confirmed in all-male, all-female compartments – it is not just that the commuters choose the appropriate one to travel in, but they also rub their bodies with similar, same-sex bodies (Ahmed writes of Black bodies becoming even more Black when in contact with other Black bodies) (Ahmed 2005, p. 106). "*The skin of the community is an effect of the allignement of the subject with some others and against other others*," she also argues (Ahmed 2005, p. 104). Perhaps a very gendered skin is being effected during those brief or longer train journeys in Mumbai – through expectations, norms, violence, punishment and breaches.

Subramaniam's poem "5.46, Andheri Local" also speaks of the women's compartment, where "we search/ for no personal epiphanies." The physical space between the bodies is almost abolished; they have become a unified mass:

we are welded –

dreams, disasters,
germs, destinies,
flesh and organza,
odours and ovaries.
A thousand-limbed
million-tongued, multi-spoused
Kali on wheels.

The last stanza documents both exasperation and resignation:

When I descend
I could choose
to dice carrots
or a lover.

I postpone the latter. (Subramaniam 2009, non-paginated pdf)

However, Subramaniam's poem is also a sort of paean to the local trains. She is both deeply unnerved and, at the same time, stunned by the collective organism of the huddled bodies so that she likens it with the fierce Goddess Kali. The imagined violence of the last stanza fits the image, but what is telling is that she decides to "postpone" it. The motif of dicing a lover comes across more of as a show, or a potential of, (female) strength, brought about by the collective experience, than a threat. It is a different kind of body that is being effected here than the one in the next chapter.

6. "In This Ancient City of Mirrors:"
Body-Building and the Road to Self-Improvement

Digital technologies translate into "illusions of simultaneity and immateriality (…) the sense of ephemerality and temporariness," writes Ali Madanipour (Madanipour 2017, p. 64). On the other hand, Ashis Nandy's "new colonial metropolis" is a "'virtual reality'" in the sense that it is aspirational – at the same time a possibility of a Western, Enlightenment-era rationality (Nandy 2007, p. viii, 1), as well as an egalitarian, casteless utopia (Nandy 2007, p. 12) that resembles Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome. In both cases, the bodies affectively read the city mediascape, its normativizing and narrativizing, social and political messages, which are then either reproduced or challenged (in poetry).

Our body image is how we appear to others, and how we think of ourselves, too, notes Featherstone. On the other side of the equation is the "moving body, the body without image" (you are unable to see yourself when moving, Massumi qtd. in Featherstone 2010, p. 193) or the "affective body," the body which feels and processes (Featherstone 2010, p. 193). And it is the media images that want to swerve our attention onto our bodies and lead us onto the often torturous "road to self-improvement" (Featherstone 2010, p. 197). The perceptive body (Featherstone 2010, p. 199) is, among other things, offered Botox – an attempt to erase affective markings, both permanent and temporary, from one's face, so that it can live in a perpetual present (Featherstone 2010, p. 204).

In both Arundhathi Subramaniam's, as well as Akhil Katyal's poetry, the urban body emerges also as a project, a site of construction and (visual) meaning-making. The poem "I Live

On A Road" by Subramaniam, is a good example of the contested body as a poetic motif. It sings the sculpted bodies of a better-off Mumbai neighborhood.

To set the context to the poem before delving on individual verses, it is important to note that Mumbai is the home of the Bollywood film industry. Every day, people from all over India pour into its neighborhoods and slums to make a living or try their luck on screen. "The Bombay film industry combines fantasy and stereotypes with cheerful cynicism into what it supplies to the masses as the auratic," notes Patke about the phenomenon (Patke 2003, p. 199). But Bollywood heroes and heroines are mostly fair-complexioned, nothing like the Indian masses, and together with the city's (white) colonial history, globalization, as well as the social stratification system factor in shaping an ideal body in the imagination of the citizens.

Subramaniam's poem begins by these verses:

I live on a road,
a long magic road,
full of beautiful people (Subramaniam 2009, non-paginated pdf)

They already say something about the production of beauty, about its artificiality, its "magic," which is even clearer from the following lines:

The women cultivate long mocha legs
and the men sculpt their torsos
right down to the designer curlicue
of hair under each arm (Subramaniam 2009, non-paginated pdf)

The words “cultivate” and “sculpt” indicate both effort and intentionality – it is work, and probably an honorable one, to become or stay beautiful in the mainstream sense; to have a body that is marketable and sellable, that has economic value. The poet’s irony and critical stance is even more pronounced in the rest of the first stanza:

> The lure is the same:
> to confront self with self
> in this ancient city of mirrors
> that can bloat you
> into a centrespread,
> dismantle you
> into eyes, hair, teeth, butt,
> shrink you
> into a commercial break,
> explode you
> Into 70 mm immortality. (Subramaniam 2009, non-paginated pdf)

This confronting of real bodies with imaginary ideals or norms (ultimately, with the images), as well as fragmenting of persons into body parts is what Kathy Davis talks about in her book *Reshaping the Female Body: The Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery.* Based on interviews with Dutch women who opted for a plastic surgery, the book quotes many of them as saying that most only want to be normal, not beautiful or perfect. These women regularly negatively focus on

sometimes barely perceptible details on their bodies, on the body parts that are experienced as alien, as not belonging to the rest (Davis 1995). Similarly, Kathryn Pauly Morgan explores the reasons for undergoing cosmetic surgery, for going under "the knives that 'sculpt' our bodies to make us beautiful forever" (Morgan 1991, p. 26). She argues that women are "anatomizing and fetishizing their bodies" in a culture in which elective cosmetic surgery is the new normal (Morgan 1991, p. 28), which is, again, not surprising if we take into consideration that the body is presented as a machinic organism (Morgan 1991, p. 31). However, the decision to undergo such an invasive procedure is often not a free choice at all, as it is not just culturally and medicinally presented as desirable (Morgan 1991, p. 37), but is also a prerequisite for (women's) economic positioning and, thus, survival. Transcendence even (Morgan 1991, p. 43). Moreover, Morgan links the rhetoric of this kind of cultural and media coercion with the process of colonization, which was often presented as a civilizing process (Morgan 1991, p. 37). This is especially interesting to revisit in the context of postcolonial (post)modernity's relationship to (former) subjects' bodies.

Along similar lines, Myra MacDonald argues that the decision about how to adorn their body is the way for women (but also men) to take part in "a system of meaning-creation that also leaves their response in magazines, advertisements and other media forms" (MacDonald 1995, p. 192). The coercive element in all of this is the strong cultural linkage of sexual desirability and the media-constructed ideal form, which ties in with the cult of youth too to maintain the male gaze in women's (self-)determination (MacDonald 1995, p. 194). "Modernism began the process of detaching image from realty, but it is in the shift to postmodernism that detachment becomes dislocation," she adds a few pages later. "While modernism encouraged women to emulate the ideal image they encountered in magazines and on film, postmodernism produced a more skeptical and 'knowing' relationship with image." The process of being or getting the best shape is part play

(with fashion, accessories etc.), and part discipline (MacDonald 1995, p. 199). In an introduction to a collection of papers presented at a conference on body, fasion, and technology, Leopoldina Fortunati and her colleagues constitute fashion as "an extension of both the physical and the aesthetic body," and as one of the first instances of the technological invasion of the body (Fortunati et al 2003, p. 5). The abovementioned discipline and self-control required to achieve and maintain the perfect body is aptly addressed in the rest of Subramaniam's poem:

> But life on this road is about waiting –
> about austerities at the gym
> and the beauty parlour,
> about prayer outside the shrines
> of red-eyed producers,
> about PG digs waiting to balloon
> into penthouses,
> auto rickshaws into Ferraris,
> mice into chauffeurs.
>
> Blessed by an epidemic
> of desperate hope,
> at any moment,
> my road
> might beanstalk
> to heaven. (Subramaniam 2009, non-paginated pdf)

By deploying the words such as "austerities," "prayers," and "shrines," Subramaniam likens or (ironically) equates this discipline to religious ascetic practices so well-known in India and elsewhere. At the same time, the "producers," who could stand for the entire cultural milieu that demands certain standards of beauty and appearance, are inevitably "red-eyed" – insatiable, greedy and lustful, as demons and angry gods depicted in the Hindu iconography, for instance.

The poem's ending mirrors the beginning with the evocation of the English fairytale *Jack and the Beanstalk*, or any similar story that originated from the same folk narrative about the enchanted bean that grows so high that it reaches a castle with treasures in the sky. However, the last word "heaven" might be understood as taking the reader again away from the fairytale discourse and closer to a religious one. We might read it as transcendence, enlightenment, ultimate physical and spiritual perfection. Enlightenment could be written as *en-lightenment*, as body without weight in the sense in which Susan Bordo understands anorexia and bulimia, and the imperative of the slender body. In her book *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*, Bordo discusses the language that the women suffering from these disorders use – it is often almost philosophical. These women have, in a way, developed their own metaphysics, which resembles that of Augustine or Plato in its emphasis on the dualism of will and flesh, spirit/soul and body (Bordo 2003, p. 147). "In this battle, thinness represents a triumph of the will over the body, and the thin body (that is to say, the nonbody) is associated with 'absolute purity, hyperintelectuality and transcendence of flesh,'" she continues (Bordo 1993, pp. 147-148). Bordo is careful to differentiate healthy preoccupation with eating and fitness from the pathological ones by stressing that enjoying one's embodiment could be used as a litmus test, free of the will to control and master. The same impulses to control are also present in obsessive body-building, although, Bordo notes, it looks like a process opposite to anorexia – "the body-builder is, after all,

building the body *up*, not whittling it down (...) There is the same emphasis on will, purity, and perfection..." (Bordo 1993, p. 151).

Samuel Wilson Fussell, who wrote a memoir about himself turning from scholar to bodybuilder, admits that his obsession started when he moved from Oxford to New York City. Fussell developed various psychosomatic ailments because he felt "under siege" in the city, terrified of possible injury or death, of all the murders, muggings, and crime that takes place there daily, and against which he felt unprotected and extremely vulnerable (Fussell 1992, p. 20). Until one day of 1984, in a store, he "caught 'the disease'," as he says, when he saw Arnold Schwarzenegger's chiseled figure on the cover of his book, *Arnold: The Education of a Bodybuilder* (1977). What impressed the scared Fussell most, and what he took from looking at this picture, was that the body itself could be an armor. The question Fussell asked himself was whether the muscles could be used "as insurance, as certain indemnity amidst the uncertainty of urban strife?" (Fussell 1992, p. 24) For him, getting himself into shape was the perfect solution. It was all about looks, but in a different way. However, it was, as Bordo suggests, still "a fantasy of self-mastery in an increasingly unmanageable culture," the modernity's "dream of immortality" that is now anchored in science and practical solutions, not in mythology and metaphor (Bordo 1993, p. 153).

But however much anorexia, bulimia, or extreme body building might seem like a form of resistance to mainstream culture, or, more accurately, a way of coping, they are, as Bordo argues, "in collusion with the cultural conditions that produced them" (Bordo 1993, p. 159) – the body is both a "*text* of culture," as well as a "*practical*, direct locus of social control" (Bordo 1993, p. 165).

When Subramaniam talks of the striving for penthouses and Ferraris, and of the "desperate hope," she is treading in the terrain of desire, and not just sexual desire. She is aware that certain

desires must rein in the others to achieve the goal, the desire for food and comfort give way to ambition (Bordo 1993, pp. 171-172) for the ideal body "that is absolutely tight, contained, 'bolted down', firm: in other words, a body that is protected against eruption from within, whose internal processes are under control" (Bordo 1993, p. 190). In many ways, the culture and the media mobilize the body's libidinal desires into processes that serve these same social and political superstructures, which also inscribe into that same body their own codices and regulations. Moreover, they do so by confronting "self with self," as Subramaniam writes; by making the self the regulator, the control master, and by turning metropolises, among other places, into mirroring surfaces: firstly, through the media, and then through peer- and self-monitoring. This is how the city becomes a contesting and contested space which the (gendered) bodies are expected to navigate and negotiate daily.

Similarly, Katyal is also positioning himself apart from the trends of (compulsive) body improvement, which is here linked to gay culture. In the poem "When," he says:

> When all the gay boys get their shit
> together, go to the gym and get fit
> together, I sit and generally complain
> about the weather...
> (...)
> Now, now, I say, what's the hustle,
> have you had a look at my arm,
> lately a tendon threatens to look
> like a muscle... (Katyal 2015, p. 66)

The poet is dismissing it all through humor and placing himself apart from the subculture that might be read from the poem as being (overly) invested in bodily appearance. Both he and Subramaniam might be pointing to something else as well: the poetic body as the "affective body" (Featherstone 2010, p. 193) or the perceptive body (Featherstone 2010, p. 199) from the start of this chapter.

7. Conclusion

As I have already stated in my introductory chapters, it is impossible to arrive at a more general conclusion about the differences of the poets' gendered experiences of the Indian metropolises as they feature in their poetry. It is also difficult to write about affect in poetry, or the affect transmitted through poetry – as Massumi argues – without interfering with the reader's own affective and more intuitive response to the material (Massumi 2015, p. 14).

But what emerges from this small sample of poets and texts is that the urban public spaces in India are more accessible to men and (often painfully) less so for women. This fact, which can be loudly or almost imperceptibly, i.e. affectively communicated and lived out, organizes the poets' embodied response to the cities. In case of the female poets, it meddles with their perception and their ability to observe uninterrupted. It therefore picks and chooses their topics and motifs, as memorable affective encounters tend to be the ones that get elaborated in verse. That is why some of Subramaniam's and Das's most visceral poems depict the city as a violator of boundaries, as an imposition, a lurker. Something similar can be traced in Katyal's verses too, in form of someone's sexual innuendos towards the speaker, but much more rarely. However, Katyal's poetry also documents the urban queer ghettos, which are, as Grosz states, "spaces inhabited and defined by sexual pleasure," "*both* a prison and a safe space" (Grosz 2001, p. 9). In that sense, the city is not a fully embracing space for Katyal's queer lyrical subject either. Dalvi's poetry, on the other hand, deals with the issues of (sexual) boundary violations only second-hand (the poem *Ladies Only*, which I analyzed here, is a good example).

Besides by the physical spaces of the metropolises, and the others, the bodies are being regulated through mediascapes as well, which deliberately deploy affect to send a stronger message. Memory

can serve as a boundary-effecting mechanism too, as an impetus behind personal cartographies of urban spaces, which are, in a way, mappings of desire. “The issue is to *produce the unconscious,* and with it new statements, different desires: the rhizome is precisely this production of the unconscious,” write Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 18).

Overall, this research, which predominantly used affect theory to frame the analyses of the poems, points at some of the ways in which the Indian city operates not just without but also within the bodies; it outlines how the urban public spaces in India regulate gender, and thus poetry. It also highlights (poetic) points of disruption and challenges to the *status quo*. As an invitation, this thesis might prove a useful map of possible research trajectories.

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