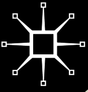

# Self-Published Psychogeographies

## Zines, DIY Communities and the 21st Century Drifter

Tanja Kapp

palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-3-031-65830-3  ISBN 978-3-031-65831-0 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-65831-0

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*For my mother and grandmothers.*

# Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible without the help and continuous support of many people. First and foremost, I am grateful to my supervisor, Barbara Korte, who always provided me with excellent and constructive feedback, as well as a great deal of understanding. My other supervisors, Tim Freytag and Axel E. Walter, likewise guided me, granting me interdisciplinary insights into their respective subjects, human geography and German literary history. Thank you for making me look beyond the normative structures of my field and for sharing your scientific vantage points. I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of cartographer Birgitt Gaida from Freiburg's Department of Geography for enriching the visual aspects of this book, and Stephanie Pleasants from the Carl-Schurz-Haus Freiburg for proofreading this work.

The emergence of this project was aided by the support of the Volkswagen Stiftung, which funded the Graduate Research Group "New Travel – New Media" at the University of Freiburg from 2018 to 2022. The time spent in this collective enriched my life in ways that extend far beyond the writing of this book. I give thanks to my colleagues and peers Uwe Baumann, Mirja Riggert, Ruth Weiand, Nora Winsky and Gisela Zimmermann, who made this special group a (partially digital) space of encouragement and interdisciplinary exchange.

My heartfelt gratitude goes out to all the exceptional people from the zine community who have interacted with me, especially those who have graciously granted me permission to use their work in this book. It takes a

fierce sense of curiosity about representation and a willingness to experiment with new forms of literary expression. Without these zine artists, this project would not have been possible.

I am deeply indebted to the many people in my life who make it wonderful and fulfilling. My parents never made me feel that there was anything I could not achieve. For this, I am forever thankful. I also give thanks to my siblings, with whom I feel incredibly connected, even though we live in different cities and continents. Heartfelt thanks are also due to my four incredible grandparents, who, like my parents, have always loved and supported me. My best friends, Sonja and Judith, have provided me with support in all phases of my life, and without them, I could not have navigated this fascinating, often-confusing journey. Last but not least, my partner has provided everything that made this book a reality: inspiring conversations, challenging walking tours, incredible food and a deep understanding of the joys and struggles of life. Thank you, my dearest Alu.

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CHAPTER 1

# Introduction: New Selves Embarking upon Old Paths

Walking is often represented in self-printed booklets, so-called 'zines', which are produced and circulated independently by the author. Many of these zines, such as Hannah Ackroyd's *It Is Solved by Walking* (2022), can be ordered online. However, one might also come across them in bookshops, find them randomly in specific locations or buy them at designated fairs. Ackroyd's zine is a particularly lengthy and heavy pamphlet to hold, thick with 84 colour-printed pages and held together at the spine by a black rubber band. Once unfolded, this self-publication reveals images of textures, landscapes and objects that create a stream of consciousness collage of a walking tour. One of the double pages, exemplary pictured in Fig. 1.1, juxtaposes the visual structure of a wall and of a collaged page, drawing on a similar angle-shaped pattern. On the left side, the paper hints at the preceding page through a folded page corner, while on the right side, the space above the depicted wall likewise draws attention to a covered 'hidden side'. In a description of her zine, Ackroyd draws an analogy between the street and paper, explaining that her zine conceptualises the process of walking as a mnemonic activity (qtd. in Good Press 2022). She perceives the locations she travels through as human-made palimpsests and views her movement through these spaces as a process of reading. Travel practices on foot, such as these, are often categorised as forms of psychogeography, which can be broadly defined as a mode of walking that

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T. Kapp, *Self-Published Psychogeographies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-65831-0_1

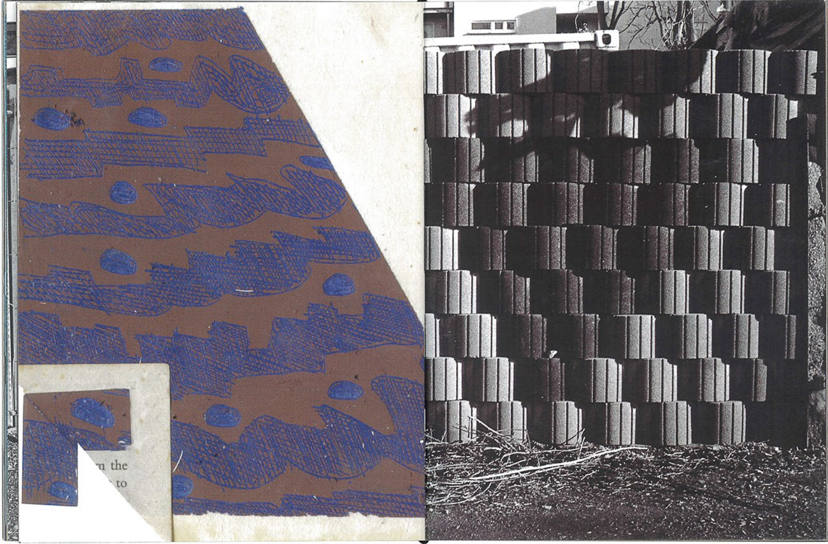

**Fig. 1.1** Juxtaposition of handcrafted page and urban space. (Hannah Ackroyd. 2022. *It Is Solved by Walking*, [60–61])

seeks to interrogate the correlation between the self and its environment in a radical, unconventional way.

In Ackroyd's self-publication—as in many more British zines—psychogeography is realised by the walk in itself becoming a creative process, a fluid attempt of sensemaking anchored in the intersection of space and time. Because the zine narrates experimentally, with scraps of paper, images and text assembled into a rugged collage, it hints at the processual similarity of walking and writing. On another page of *It Is Solved by Walking*, the narrator describes how they are "[t]urning pages, streets/ erratically", comparing the space of the zine to that of the city and a person's movement to a reader's eye on its "final race to the last page". Likewise, words belonging to walking and environmental practices are used for crafting, for putting together the zine and vice versa: Ackroyd is "harvesting scraps" of paper and is "folding" ambiguous street "corners", resulting in "a walk, a journey" that has "strung together […] loose ends". The collage-making involved in creating zines here becomes like travelling on foot in a psychogeographical manner, as it "stitches" together "[j]agged orders" of "broken pieces" of memories and impressions such as "[o]ld manuals, maps"

or "the walls we made marks on" (Ackroyd 2022, [43]). By rearranging and reassembling old material into a new form, the spatial experience is preserved by a craftperson who writes *and* walks. Ackroyd's verses are assembled of typewritten text with later added handwriting in red and black ink. This layering of multiple forms of text represents the individual stages of the description of her cognitive and physical walk. While conventional texts eschew similar changes – oftentimes to make the travelogue appear as if written 'on the go'—the zine visualises the epistemic process of writing and crafting travel as processual. Drawing on its DIY form, zine psychogeographies use this technique of visible erasure to emphasise the 'madeness' of travel texts as products of various stages of immediate and retrospective editing.[1]

In Ackroyd's zine, the narrative mediates the perspective of a walker who reconciles their artistic practice with pedestrian journeys and observations, utilising walking as a means of remembering. In the majority of psychogeographical writing, the writer as walker emerges as such a solitary figure, equipped with the privileges of time and an able body, exploring the countryside, the city or its peripheries. Their double identity prompts them to experience places and the self and to look at their psyche as well as geography. Because of their embodied and slow movement, travels by foot are often at the heart of writings about space and, in particular, of many of the proliferating British travel accounts published in recent decades. Robert Macfarlane, one of the most prominent contemporary writer-walkers, most often navigates his body through nature to render his thoughts coproduced by that landscape. As stated in his 2013 travelogue *The Old Ways*, he feels inclined to walk in the footsteps of other writers, whose "paths and tracks seem to thread their ways through the prose, poetry and art of Europe, America and—in particular—Britain over the past two centuries" (2013, 23). Walking in the footsteps of his predecessors, he adopts "the consequences of the old ways", which for him are "walking as enabling sight and thought rather than encouraging retreat and escape; paths as offering not only means of traversing space but also ways of feeling, being, and knowing" (2013, 24). Writing popular books rather than self-publishing ephemera, Macfarlane himself is now often

[1] Text revisions like these not only render travel experiences as inherently conditional on memory, but zines also use this aesthetic "roughness" (Douglas and Poletti 2016, 196) to consciously depict the travelled moment as complicated by the demands of narrative (for another example, see Kapp 2020, 158).

represented as gesturing towards a new era of nonfiction travel writing in twenty-first-century Britain that is attuned to nature. Perhaps because new nature writing is perceived as a vehicle to return to nature, often combined with the longing for slowness and a nostalgic idea of the moving body as unmediated by technology, a high number of these explorations are executed on foot. Written walking tours include accounts in which walking structures travel through suburban or peripheral locations that often elude classification, as they are situated in between categories such as urban/rural or human/nature. By means of walking travel, texts investigate the meaning of spaces that are overlooked, forgotten and easily dismissed as supposedly mundane. In addition, an increasing number of previously voiceless people make themselves heard through literary and medial expression. In a history of writing that has long been shaped by male points of investigation, female psychogeographers and writers increasingly claim their roles as walkers, both in the urban and rural spheres.[2]

## Psychogeography

Walking is practiced within and across a variety of spaces and recorded from a multitude of embodied perspectives. The writings that record walking tours intersect at the already blurred lines of the genres of nature writing and travel writing, autobiography and guidebook, political pamphlet and philosophical critique. Employing walking in narratives introduces a point-of-view that affords, first and foremost, a conceptual approximation of travel practice and experience, offering the walker the opportunity for a supposedly linear, subjective ramble and a parallel meandering of thoughts. Particularly in Great Britain, this psychogeography has developed into a medially represented slow travel practice used to come to terms with a place and its specific identity as impacted by the traveller-author themselves and people who have come before. While the term psychogeography was coined to denote a revolutionary practice of urban dwellers that sought to counter what was thought of as capitalist arrangements of the city, it developed in Britain into a literary movement of

[2] Nature writers include Kerri Andrews in her 2020 *Wanderers: A History of Women Walking*, which recounts the paths of previous female ramblers, or Sonia Overall in her 2021 travel account *Psychogeographical Pilgrimage: Seeking Thin Places*. In recent urban literature, too, walking has remained a vehicle of choice for women, such as in Olivia Laing's *The Lonely City* (2016), which examines solitude as an urban experience, or Lauren Elkin's *Flâneuse* (2017), which reclaims acts of walking the street and inhabiting public spaces as a woman.

itinerant authors who wrote themselves into an even longer tradition of psychogeographical walker-writers (Coverley 2006). For them, psychogeography retained its revolutionary and dissenting nature in the sense that it allowed the traveller to scrutinise the official usages and representations of space. Based on the ecocritical lens and materialist perspective of contemporary practitioners, forms of walking today are utilised as scientific and artistic methodologies to "become aware of our complex entanglement with material, social and cultural processes that extend well beyond our awareness" (Stenning and Marland 2020, 3). It may be argued that the radical walking of psychogeography has endured through time because of the universal applicability of the concept, which makes it easy to be recontextualised. Guy Debord, who coined the term in the 1950s, embraced the technique because it left room for interpretation (2006, 8), and this book will operate with this open definition of psychogeography, as it corresponds to the experimental DIY-mentality of practices and media studied here. In fact, this book argues that this definition of psychogeography is embraced by contemporary self-published writers because of its heterogenetic applicability. Listing the positive and negative effect of that inherent vagueness, Tina Richardson stresses that "it is [psychogeography's] undefinable quality that has led to its endurance" (2015b, 7). To walk psychogeographically is to find an occasion to come to terms with how individual identity or culture is enmeshed in the physical world and provides a means to distil the real-and-imagined strata of one's surrounding topography. This is why psychogeographers create a tradition of predecessors to refer back to—these can include already canonised forerunners such as the London-obsessed Romantic poet and printmaker William Blake or amateur archaeologist Alfred Watkins, who 'invented' the ley line theory in the early twentieth century. One reason for this assembled trajectory may be what Richardson calls the "bricolage" nature of psychogeography (2017, 9–12), which is grounded in the historical influences of alternative walking acting "as a kind of toolbox for contemporary psychogeographers" (2015b, 3), rather than a fixed set of ideas from which to follow. It might be argued that this toolbox characteristic renders psychogeography such a prolific mode of experience.

In the above quoted excerpt from *The Old Ways*, Macfarlane condenses such a seminal version of contemporary psychogeography: he uses his journey on foot as a vehicle of "sight and thought" into personal and place-specific histories, understanding his movement through nature as "ways of feeling, being, and knowing" (2013, 24), rather than as merely

escapism. In fact, his psychogeography already outlines key aspects that this mode of walking has always been concerned with, such as the intersection of the physical journey on foot and the psychological experience, a journey 'in the footsteps' of ancestors. At the same time, it also indicates developments in contemporary forms as distinct from earlier forms of written psychogeography, namely, the increasing attention to oneself as a feeling and physical individual, rather than a mere observer and the unwillingness to confine the journey to urban space. They qualify as what Richardson declares to be a "new psychogeography", adding that it "is, first and foremost, one of heterogeneity" (2015a, 250). Indeed, she claims the dawn of various "psychogeographies" (2015b, 3), and various scholars and practitioners point towards an extensive diversification of the field in relation to the practitioner's gender, aim and approach (Smith 2010; Coverley 2006; Bonnett 2009). Psychogeography is thus not seen as a mere means of deconstructing the forces responsible for the disconnection between humans and physical geography. Rather, it is used to factor in one's own presence as a signifying, embodied identity within space. While in earlier incarnations, psychogeography allowed first and foremost for a gaze outwards onto the world, today's practitioners are conscious about their presence in the world, too, and reflect on their own bodies being seen. Pursuing an exploration of space and one's situatedness in it enables the walker to come to terms with the lines of influence between the embodied self and the world it is trying to navigate. Writer Julian Hopper, in the zine *Weird Walks*, articulates that contemporary psychogeography involves attuning oneself to a location and discerning its multiple voices—acknowledging that each place harbours countless narratives and granting each its rightful recognition (Tromans et al. 2019, 18). Psychogeography thus offers a way to negotiate anxieties of place by listening to various voices, including one's own, and thus to acknowledge the palimpsestic, adaptable and inclusive aspect of a landscape.

## Zine Making

While scholarly attention dealing with these new cultural aspirations for psychogeography has been fixed at the books published by Macfarlane and his peers—exemplified by the emergence of a number of prizes for the genre—there remains a wealth of travel writing existing beyond the scope of academic scholarship. This seems especially unsatisfying when acknowledging that the sort of travel undertaken by prominent psychogeographers

is not *per se* the elitist, intellectual and exclusionary practice that many forerunners might have imagined them to be but rather that this attentive walking is, in fact, a lifeworld act of many more practitioners, including people not involved in (conventional) literary publishing industries. For the study of British travel culture as implicated by a resurgence of psychogeographical walking and spatial experience, it is thus essential to finally look at how the phenomenon is entangled with ephemeral, semi-private representations of travel. *Self-Published Psychogeographies* will examine a contemporary medium of self-published life and travel writing—the zine—which has enjoyed particular popularity among travel writers and especially psychogeographers and those practicing similar narratives about place, memory and the moving body. Ackroyd's zine shown at the beginning exemplifies the medium as a small-form booklet created by an author—termed a zinester—who compiles a diverse mix of written, drawn, painted or photographed content. Typically, zinesters use this format to share autobiographical stories, often portraying travel through a personal lens. Zines are generally home-printed and shared within tight-knit communities familiar with the form, fostering a close and immediate connection between writer and reader.

Indeed, psychogeography was always specifically entangled with independent practices of publishing and voicing opinions, practising its "spirit of dissent" (Coverley 2006, 16) through both walking and writing. The intersection of walking and the distribution of ephemera also emphasises this reciprocal relationship, as is the case, for example, with the chapbook and other forms of street literature. In addition, throughout British history, self-assembled books were created to include virtually any topic to which a person could set their mind. Beginning with the commonplace book in early modern times, the British domestically preserved memories and travel experiences through the keeping of diaries and through scrapbooking, a practice that proliferated especially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The advent of a "new materiality" brought about by the consumer revolution in the eighteenth century resulted in the production of the scrapbook as a pastime within the family home (Gowrley qtd. in Watton 2022, 9). This emerging domestic material culture coincided with the rise of sentimentalism, which was processed by gluing various visual and verbal materials together to produce this assembled matter, which also included herbaria, paper collage or quilts (Gowrley 2022, 1–2). Together with the diary, these forms of record keeping constituted a form of private material memory culture that chronicled a person's life through

the collection and assemblage of photos, postcards, tickets, newspaper cut outs and other sources. As in the social media age today, people are heavily involved in intermedial self-chronicling and memory keeping, producing semiprivate media that grant glimpses into their life through ephemeral snapshots.

This sort of life "writing with scissors" (2012), as Ellen Gruber Garvey puts it, thus continues today; however, through the zine, it also appears in forms that are decidedly material. Rather than being superseded by digital forms of intermedial journaling and record keeping possible in the social media age, forms of material, semiprivate travel writing are still cultural domestic practices. In fact, people increasingly self-publish their experiences in the medium of the zine. Like scrapbooks, they are material media originating from within the privacy of the home and thus mediate 'difficult' and/or deeply personal experiences. Through their ephemeral and self-published nature, these representations can be more confessional and express ideas and perspectives that might be too unconventional or experimental for established publishing houses. The zine refers back to the material culture (history) of privately collecting and documenting travel—as well as media participation within intimate spaces—in the form of scrapbooks, photo albums and, later, slide shows because zines merge images and texts into an assembled narrative that retains material traces of writing, drawing and composing.

As media situated between the private and public, zines can be produced by a variety of people about their experiences and are thus pieces of life writing unmediated by conventions in publishing that govern subject matter, form and narration. Other than digital media, zines convey a specific materiality that shapes their literary reception: they are bought at zine fairs or online marketplaces, and they reach the hands of their readers in a physical form. As materially assembled, self-published media outlets that represent processual subjectivities through intermediality, zines have emerged as alternative forms of writing that convey physical walking tours as an experiential *and* experimental practice. Like Hannah Ackroyd's zine depicted above, this medium remains a vehicle of artistic expression whose collage-like assemblage affords an intermedial page architecture.

The aim of this study is to examine the ways in which psychogeography is narrated in the zine through its specific material mediality. Understanding "mediality" not merely as the particular properties that characterise a given medium, but as a way to (re)conceptualise the (static) "medium" as a processual concept that is imbued with agency, this approach seeks to

take account of the material realities of the zine's creation, distribution and consumption (Bruhn 2016, 16). By paying attention to the convergence between the represented psychogeographical experience and the medial form of the zine as such, four close readings of works by British zinesters reveal how contemporary zines already possess what this study calls a psychogeographical mediality: the medium—made of its material form as a self-published print matter, its conventions of use to produce experimental, intermedial collages and its cultural context as originating within intimate communities of exchange—exhibits similarities to the psychogeographical ethos of subverting conventional ways of seeing and experiencing. Crucially, this psychogeographical mediality of zines expresses itself in three shared and intersecting characteristics: one can be seen in how landscape and page approximate each other through their conceptualisation as material-semiotic palimpsests, rendering paper and landscape as human-made spaces assembled of both real-and-imagined properties that are navigated often in a nonsequential manner. Another similarity is that both this specific medium and travel practice are understood as subversive modes of subjectivity, reflecting psychogeography's revolutionary aim to counter and reimagine local narratives, which is mirrored in the DIY ethos of zines promoting the nonconsumerist circulation of uncensored ephemera. Finally, writing and walking are represented as therapeutic practices performed to fundamentally understand the self and to examine the nature of memory. In the case studies analysed here, these explorations into the consistency and reliance of memory play out most often with regard to trauma.

## Self-Published Travelogues: Fusing Research Perspectives

By looking at walking zines for the first time, *Self-Published Psychogeographies* aims to lay the groundwork for further examinations of these homemade new psychogeographies. While they have not yet crossed over to one another, scholarship on the zine and on psychogeography has yielded a niche output in fields as diverse as literary and cultural studies, media studies, geography, anthropology, pedagogy and psychology. This is especially true for psychogeography, whose inherent vagueness already addressed above has led to its diffusion into "many genres and practices and diverse intellectual, cultural and political domains", as the geographer James

D. Sidaway has examined (2022). He acknowledges that "[t]here are many psychogeographies to address, from the political and functional gathering of data for the creation of 'situations', to proliferating literary modes and the practice-in-itself of self-reflexive walking-as-doing" (552). This book addresses the latter: psychogeography as a mode of experience expressed in literature and media. It does not address it as a method of anthropological research in itself or as a technique of teaching or sense-making within the classroom, even though the conceptualisation of walking as a methodology may be a conscious element of the life writing analysed. Rather, the book focuses on the ways in which individuals use and portray psychogeography in autobiographical travel texts, paying special attention to how the experience of psychogeography is medially afforded.

While in a majority of London-centric psychogeography, there can be a proliferation of gothic elements (Löffler 2017; Tso 2020), psychogeography has expanded from the urban streets of the metropolis into nature (Lubkowitz 2020). In Tina Richardson's collective volume *Walking Inside Out: Contemporary British Psychogeography* (2015), she assembles some of the most prolific voices by actively researching the phenomenon both in practice and as representations. Importantly, Richardson discusses how "multiple forms of representation that are now available make for a new psychogeography" (2015a, 249), elsewhere explaining that these are decidedly anti-literary, low-brow media such as blogs or acknowledges the wealth of psychogeographical zines that have been published in recent years. By examining these prevalent ephemera, this study shows how zines lend themselves to the representation of psychogeography through their mediality and the development of a literary psychogeography into new psychogeographies. Richardson's work looks at the trajectory of the phenomenon throughout the last few decades in which Will Self and Iain Sinclair have characterised British psychogeography, taking loosely where Merlin Coverley's 2006 monograph *Psychogeography*, the only book-length literary history on the practice, ended. Richardson, as well as Coverley in a new 2018 preface, sensed the recent diversification and decentralisation of the field, with an abundance of hyponyms, the inclusion of natural and "peripheral locations" (10) and new, especially female, subjectivities rambling in a psychogeographical manner. This book acknowledges these shifts in contemporary practices and has selected case studies by female as well as non-London writers, whose travelled spaces are fragmented locations that contain both urban and rural areas. However,