



# Psychogeography: Walking through strategy, nature and narrative

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[journals.sagepub.com/home/phg](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/phg)**James D Sidaway** 

National University of Singapore, Singapore

## Abstract

Proposed as an urban pedestrian practice in French texts of the 1950s, the current vogue for English-language references to psychogeography dates from the 1990s. Sampling this corpus, much of it outside academic geography, this article examines some of psychogeography's trajectories, connections and affinities, notably with nature writing. In minding gaps, the article considers gendered, decolonial and Muslim registers that extend the range of sites and protagonists, heralding other priorities and opportunities both within and beyond the North Atlantic. Finally, reflecting on what lessons lie in psychogeography and its margins for human geography, the article reconsiders questions of narrative and scale.

## Keywords

decolonial, landscape, Muslim, narrative, nature, psychogeography, walking

The simple impediments imposed on a gravity-bound primate such as ditches, dense bushes, marshy ground – sometimes just the long grass, or the spaces across open fields between any two fixed points – add a colour wash of emotional and psychological significance. Then there are the gates, barbed-wire fences . . . with all their political and social implications, that constrained me to know my place or rather to know *their* place and my restricted role within it.

Mark Cocker (2008: 131)

On the drive back from Lozells [in Birmingham, England] as a child, there were glistening nights with headlights on full beam . . . orange lamps whizzing by, a countdown ticking to the last second. I tried to guess how many there were, thinking Allah laid them out in a certain number to reassure me that all would pass. In the darkness on either side of the road, I felt all the lives Epping

Forest has seen through with its Neolithic eye. I think the forest decides who it involves. My life, another leaf shed in numberless autumns.

Mohammed Zaahidur Rahman (2019)

## I Introduction

In October 2020, as new rounds of local lockdowns were announced across England, University College London-based academic Matthew Beaumont (2020) wrote an article for *The Guardian* advocating strolling in cities, to re-encounter nature and streetscapes at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on so

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### Corresponding author:

James D Sidaway, Department of Geography, National University of Singapore, 117570 Singapore.

Email: [geojds@nus.edu.sg](mailto:geojds@nus.edu.sg)

many activities had reduced traffic and congestion. Beaumont (2020) had previously authored a book on *Nightwalking*, a nocturnal history of London, which the *Financial Times*, among other review endorsements on the website of the left-wing London-based Verso, describes as ‘a haunting addition to the canon of psychogeography’ (<https://www.versobooks.com/books/2157-nightwalking>). Such invocations of psychogeography, commonplace in literary and popular culture media, invariably – as *Nightwalking* does (on page 4 and in a Foreword by Will Self) – also invoke the work of Guy Debord (1931–1994) among other avant-garde theorists and artists under the banners of the Paris-based Situationist International (1957–1972) and superseded Letterist International (1952–1957). McKenzie Wark’s (2008, 2011) biographical vignettes describe, from the outset, psychogeography as an international affair: Paris looming large, but with connections to Amsterdam, Brussels, London, Milan and Turin, reflecting artistic and cultural currents also routed through Austria, Germany and Scandinavia (Ball, 1987; Hemmens and Zacarias, 2020; Pinder, 1996). Further accounts since detail debates about communism, decolonization, despotism, orientalism, revolution and strategy and in the background (Dolto and Moussa, 2020; Jappe, 2020; Shukaitis, 2014). Debord, like Henri Lefebvre, responded to the dirigiste rationalization of space and attendant subordination of society to consumerism in post-World War II France. When they met in the late 1950s (see Merrifield, 2006: 30–38), Debord (1955) had already proposed ‘*psychogéographie*’:

l’étude des lois exactes, et des effets précis du milieu géographique, consciemment aménagé ou non, agissant directement sur le comportement affectif des individus [the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment . . . consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals]

While this formulation remains universally cited, only a fraction pause at Debord’s attribution in a preceding line bearing the first use of the term: ‘The word *psychogeography*, suggested by an illiterate Kabyle as a general term for the phenomena a few of us were investigating around the summer of 1953 . . .’ (Debord, 1981: 5). Debord fails to explain who the ‘illiterate Kabyle’ was. S/he remains unidentified, she cannot represent herself; she must be represented.<sup>1</sup> Debord speaks for her or wants us to imagine that he does. Bearing in mind that the Kabyle, a primarily Amazigh community concentrated in mountains east of Algiers (with a large diaspora in France, Belgium and North America) and occupy a subaltern position vis-à-vis the postcolonial Algerian state (Roberts, 1982; Silverstein, 1996), Debord’s attribution gives pause for thought – as in a later section of this article, where I turn to writings in postcolonial and Muslim registers.

One year after the initial definition of psychogeography, Debord (1956) elaborated on its methods in ‘Theory of the *dérive*’ (literally ‘drift’), describing ‘a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances’, referring to ‘playful-constructive’ pedestrian encounters of urban space that are at the same time performative (see Lavery, 2018). The wider anti-establishment and ephemeral style of *psychogéographie* yielded a limited, somewhat fragmentary archive (Stracey, 2003), although Debord himself has been subject to extensive scrutiny. In 2001, a review of a new biography – ‘the fifth so far’ – noted its topicality:

Guy Debord is everywhere these days, in a suitably clandestine way. He gets arch references in books by Julian Barnes and Bret Easton Ellis, and has been seen behind everything from punk and the Angry Brigade to psychogeography and the postmodern theories of Jean Baudrillard. Debord was the leading light of the situationists, the small but immensely influential radical group who had their finest hour with the near-revolution in Paris in 1968. That may have failed, but the

situationists' style and tactics have remained a blueprint for dissent, notably in recent anti-globalisation protests. (Baker, 2001)

At least two more biographies (Kaufmann, 2006; Merrifield, 2005) and numerous revaluations of the Situationists augment the list (see the annotated bibliography in Jappe, 2018; Trier, 2019). At the same time, the astonishing proliferation of references to psychogeography, which by the 1990s evinced what had become, according to Steve Hanson (2007: 11), 'an expanded tradition' – a forgetting of its 'potential "radicalism"' with resurgent interest in literary, transcendent and academic forms. This broadening is illustrated in Merlin Coverley's (2006) companion survey, which notes how contemporary psychogeography finds retrospective validation in much earlier traditions of walking, writing and witnessing from long before Debord's 1955 formulation. For example, adopting such retrospective validation is James Clifford Kent's (2013) 'psychogeographic mapping of Havana, 1933', which explores the portfolio of the American photo-journalist Walker Evans (1903–1975). Furthermore, there is, Don Mitchell (2018: 10) notes, 'a whole cottage industry devoted to Debord's ideas about psychogeography', and what Richard Phillips (2018: 174) describes as a tendency in field manuals, academic and nonfiction accounts alike, wherein:

it has become common place to cite the Situationists, to summarise their work and to claim to walk in their footsteps – as psychogeographers. As a result, the terms Situationist and psychogeography are used loosely, liberally and as synonyms, which they are not.

In related terms, Erik Swyngedouw (2002: 153) laments the aestheticized "respectability" of what once were revolutionary, anti-establishment, anarcho-marxist and radically transformative movements'. Similarly, Patrick Keiller (2014: 186), whose works are tagged

as defining the cinematic output of British psychogeography, avoids this contemporary identifier that he views as overlooking the political purposes of its surrealist and Situationist protagonists:

the *dérive* and psychogeography were conceived, in a more politically ambitious period, as preliminaries to the production of new, revolutionary spaces: in the 1990s they seemed more likely to be preliminary to the production of literature and other works, and to gentrification, the production of previously overlooked value in dilapidated spaces and neighbourhoods.

A *Google* search for 'psychogeography' (in August 2020) yields 437,000 links. *Wikipedia* (accessed 19 July 2020) calls it 'a subfield of geography', translating the original 1955 text by Debord. The notion of 'precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment' on behaviour might recall the spatial science or behavioural geography of the 1960s and 1970s, as in the title of a once widely read textbook, *Pattern and Process in Human Geography* (Tidswell, 1976), covering laws of spatial interaction. Yet psychogeography was not originally proposed as an academic pursuit, though Debord did engage French academic geography through a critique of its dominant organicist and nationalist trends (see McDonough, 2002: 249–253). These had been framed by the *maître* of French geography, Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845–1918), following French defeat in the 1870–1871 Franco-Prussian war (on these imperial and geopolitical Vidalian visions, see Gregory, 1994: 39–52). French academic geographers did not reciprocate with interest in *psychogéographie*, which connected more with critical theorists among avant-garde international art movements (Dada and Surrealism), western Marxism (emerging from the shadows of Stalinism in the 1950s) and national liberation struggles in French colonies. The publication of Lettrist and Situationist International journals –

*Potlach* and *Internationale Situationniste* – in the mid- and late-1950s, petered out in the following decade. The Situationist International too, held a series of meetings in the late 1950s and early 1960s, disbanded in 1972, after brief reanimation during *les événements* of May 1968.

Although a few geographers adopted the term psychogeography in the late 1960s to refer to forms of environmental psychology (see Wood, 2020), Anglophone academic geographers did not cite the forms of psychogeography associated with the Situationists when behavioural geography and spatial science were in their ascendancy. Nor, in the 1970s, did Marxist or humanistic geographers connect directly with psychogeography. Subsequent psychoanalytically inspired approaches in human geography have also largely ignored psychogeography, and only one chapter in a landmark edited collection of *Psychoanalytic Geographies* briefly considers it (Davidson and Parr, 2014). Matthew Gandy (2020: 165) held that ‘the situationist excursion or *dérive*, in its classic late 1960s formulation, has little grounding in ecological observations’, although a biogeographer read Debord to propose ‘psychobiogeography’ as a supplement to psychogeography (Trudgill, 2001). It was not until Anglophone geography’s encounters with post-structuralism, from the late 1980s onwards, that human geographers began to discuss psychogeography. Among the early engagements, Alastair Bonnett (1989: 131) observed:

Although it has been established as a published body of ideas for over thirty years, situationism has only very recently and superficially been touched upon in academic geography.

Bonnett (1989: 144) saw synergies – but no direct connection or overlap – with some work in humanistic geography (notably Relph, 1976) and invited further work, considering ‘the situationists also developed the basis for a new form of geography (psychogeography)’. Nearly three decades later, with the term in the mainstream

Bonnett (2017: 474) noted that psychogeography was ‘Recently established in geography’s lexicon’. Clearly it took psychogeography a long time to become a focus of interest among academic geographers, with Steve Pile (2002) among the early adopters and Keith Bassett (2004) among the first to structure a paper around the term.

Notwithstanding the bold claim on *Wikipedia* that it is a subfield of human geography, psychogeography is far more sprawling than permits it to be accurately demarcated as a subfield of anything, for it invokes many genres and practices and diverse intellectual, cultural and political domains. Any review of contemporary influences and trends in psychogeography must contend with the scale and heterogeneity of material and practice, risking a dispersal of priorities. There 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.<sup>2</sup>

To date, no paper in *Progress in Human Geography* bears the term psychogeography in its title. What follows addresses this through a selective review of writing by geographers and others that describes itself as, or which others have claimed is psychogeography. Walking methods were foundational to early work in psychogeography, and while other mobilities may sometimes be mobilized (and arguably contain further potential), pedestrian encounters remain central. Section II (*Mind the Gap: Psychogeography Beyond the Suburbs*) moves to some of psychogeography’s margins and samples a range of allied work with potential to enrich and cross-over with psychogeography, notably interfaces with nature writing. Subsequently, section III (*Psychogeography’s Other Centres and Margins*) points to the potentialities of psychogeography beyond its usual (male) protagonists in and focus on North Atlantic domains and considers postcolonial, gendered, black and Muslim registers, with a promising geographical

diversification in psychogeographical spatial practices (including in Mecca and Balkan cities and sites in Africa and Asia) before winding back to London. The closing section IV of the article emphasizes affinities between psychogeography and geographies of story and storytelling and landscape/grammar crossovers that speak to human geographers' debates about distance and scale.

### *I London Is the Place for Me*

Debord and his confrères in the Paris-based Letterist/Situationist International explored and performed psychogeography as part of their leftist provocations and critique of the relations between culture, politics and everyday life in the 1950s and 1960s, a period that saw the advent of the nationalist regime of the Fifth Republic. One account of the moment describes Debord's wider contributions as *Revolution in the Service of Poetry* (Kaufman, 2006). A substantial translated and secondary literature from and about the Situationist International has appeared since the 1990s (Ford, 2004; McDonough, 2002; Sadler, 1998; Wark, 2008; and see the guide in Jappe, 2018), in tandem with literary, critical art and popular culture writings referencing psychogeography, as well as narrations of urban spaces through *dérives*, in the British mainstream. Much of this 'remarkable revival of interest in the Situationist subjectivity of place' observed by British film-maker Patrick Keiller (2014: 69), whose incisive geopolitical commentaries (Malpas and Jacobs, 2016) have affinities with psychogeography, was stoked by a literary vein<sup>3</sup> of psychogeography through novels, essays and travelogues by London-based writers. Chief among these authors is Iain Sinclair, who, Robert Macfarlane (2011) wrote, qualified for many epithets including 'A psycho-geographer (from which term Sinclair has been rowing away ever since he helped launch it into the mainstream)' (see Downing, 2015 and Nicholson, 2018 for

surveys of his writings). Sixteen years ago, Macfarlane (2005: 3) judged that:

Over three extraordinary books [*Lights Out for the Territory: Nine Excursions in the Secret History of London*, 1997; *London Orbital: A Walk around the M25*, 2002; and *Edge of Orison: In the Traces of John Clare's 'Journey out of Essex'*, 2005] ten years, and, 1,400 pages, Sinclair has conducted a mapping of the psychogeography of south-east England, and produced a trilogy that will, unmistakably and deservedly, take its place in the canon.

Iain Sinclair's star and that of psychogeography have ascended since. Interviewed in 2012, Sinclair described his work:

to try, linguistically, to create maps: my purpose, my point, has always been to create a map of somewhere by which I would know not only myself but a landscape and a place. When I call it a 'map', it is a very generalized form of a scrapbook or a cabinet of curiosities that includes written texts and a lot of photographs... It's not a sense of a map that wants to sell something or to present a particular agenda of any kind; it's a series of structures that don't really take on any other form of description. (Cooper and Roberts, 2012: 85)

In Pink et al.'s (2010: 3) review of the ethnomethodological potential of walking practices, these are:

pseudo-academic attempts to evoke the character of the city [London] associated with the psychogeographically tainted ramblings of Iain Sinclair, Stuart Home, Peter Ackroyd, Edmund White, Patrick Keiller and Patrick Wright among other notables.

Likewise positioning Sinclair as part of a wider, though select (at first white and middle class) group, Olivia Laing (2020) characterizes the late 1990s:

spate of haunted London novels, by Iain Sinclair, Peter Ackroyd and Chris Petit among others.

Broadly psychogeographic in nature, they featured middle-aged men washed up on the outer reaches of the Thames, part of the detritus of a city ravaged by Thatcherism.

Laing's reference to the politically endorsed ravages through the 1980s – that to Sinclair had obliged writers to wield against the physical remaking of London by 'the darkest demons of world politics' (cited in Murray 2005) – signals a key turning point and backdrop whereby psychogeography found fertile reinvention across The Channel decades after its post-war Parisian incarnation.

An account of the contexts and rise of contemporary conceptions and receptions of British psychogeography is beyond the scope of this article and would need to consider a wide range of influences, from the rave scene of the 1990s (Owst, 2012: 24–26) to the legacies of the 1960s counterculture. Arguably, however, the socio-spatial reconfiguration of the UK polity and its cities in the late 20th century has been a salient backdrop. Into the mid-1950s, particularly before the 'Suez crisis' (in late 1956) revealed the extent of British geopolitical weakness vis-à-vis the new superpowers, London remained the archetypal worldly, mercantile imperial city, still peppered with World War II bomb sites. Nearly 30,000 Londoners were killed in The Blitz and depictions in 'literary explorations of the psychological atmosphere of wartime London . . . reveal London as the scene of bomb-opened houses, ravaged squares and streets of rubble' (Bell, 2009: 168). New ecologies quickly inhabited these spaces. Richard Mabey (1996: 236) describes the telling abundance of the once scarce herbaceous purple-flowering plant Rosebay willowherb (*Chamerion angustifolium*):

Rosebay relishes areas where there have been fires, and the summer after the German bombing raids of 1940 the ruins of London's homes and shops were covered with sheets of rosebay stretching, according to some popular reports, as

far as the eye could see. There is no record of how Londoners themselves felt about this purple haze rising from the rubble . . . But it did generate one popular name – 'bombweed' – that became current throughout the south-east.

Post-war reconstruction was slower. Only as the 1950s advanced (and following re-election of Conservative government in 1951) were there stirrings of the first of what became a series of mid-late 20th-century construction booms. London's overall population fell in the decade after the war, hemmed in by new post-war planning zoning (the Green Belt), whereby there would be no replication of the extensive building along arterial roads (termed sprawl) of the 1930s. Instead, as Carol Heim (1990: 903) notes:

The Labour governments of 1945 to 1951 had embarked on an ambitious program of building New Towns, primarily in the southeast. The aim was to 'decant' population and industry from London, which was viewed as overly congested. The Conservatives continued the program, though initially with some reluctance, in the early 1950s.

By then, India, the one-time jewel in the (imperial) crown, was already independent (partitioned into two, later three, postcolonial states), but dozens among Britain's colonial redoubts remained. Well before the 20th century's end, however, London had become a post-imperial/postcolonial metropolis and putative Global City, accorded that status along with New York and Tokyo by Saskia Sassen (1991). New patterns of migration from the late 1940s, of British nationals from former Caribbean, African and Asian colonies drawn by opportunities in post-war infrastructural development, prefigured 'an important shift in London's identity, as the imperialist institutions that previously knitted together race, citizenship and nationality were dismantled' (Phillips, 2003). Through the 1950s, the development of a 'racialised construction of "Britishness" . . . defined by colour' was integral to policies of intensified

surveillance and control of the black population (Carter et al., 1987: 9), as their presence, together with other non-white populations, ‘became a central issue of political and social life in Britain’ (Phillips, 2003).

By the 1960s, East London’s dockyards, built in a speculative frenzy in the 19th century, lost their rationale as trade routes reoriented. Dockside labouring and port technologies were transformed. No longer labour intensive and woven into urban fabrics – like London’s East End – the historic docks become out-of-town enclaves. Industrial ruin and disinvestment yielded marginal spaces that offered inspiration to psychogeographers. Indeed – like latter-day ‘rave organisers drifting amongst industrial estates and old post-industrial docklands, looking for abandoned warehouses to use’ (Owst, 2012: 24) – Wark (2011: 109) recounts how:

In preparation for the 1960 London conference, Debord and [Asger] Jorn embarked on a *dérive* of the city looking for a suitable venue. They settled on this hall [in a listed house] in the Limehouse district [of London’s docklands], mythologized by Charles Dickens as a seedy warren of opium dens.

Like the restructuring in many other swathes of the UK, parts of east London deindustrialized, while conversely Heathrow (until 1966 called London airport) became the world’s busiest airport and the City the foremost global financial centre. As this shift from Imperial to Global City was accelerating, London-based sociologist Ruth Glass (1964) coined the term ‘gentrification’. Filling a picture on the life and work of Weimer emigre Glass (born Ruth Lazarus, 1912–1990), Divya Subramanian (2020) writes: ‘Glass’s description of gentrification would transcend its origins, becoming shorthand for the spatialization of class struggle’. But it was in London where this displacement of hitherto largely working-class boroughs by espresso and wine bars, refurbished mews houses, upmarket estate agents and fancy

delicatessens was forged. In the lead-up to the 2008 financial crisis, Butler and Lees (2006) mapped London’s ‘super-gentrification’. Class privilege, deindustrialization and financialization have deepened since, in what is the biggest and most unequal of Europe’s major capitals: London, in Rowland Atkinson’s (2020) summation, is the *Alpha City... Captured by the Super-Rich*. Yet, though its world standing surpassed in population and expanse since the 1920s, London remains ‘probably the most dominant capital city, relative to the country it governs, of any major state’ (Hatherley, 2020: 81), the capital of (despite Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh devolution) ‘the most centralised country in the Western world’ (Crewe, 2016: 6).

London has, however, experienced productive waves of municipal socialism, emigre progressivism, counterculture and avant-garde cultural and art movements since the 19th century. From this mix, frequently imbued with a playful fascination with magic and modernism (Bonnett, 2017), or what Gareth E Rees (2020) refers to as ‘the mythology and folklore or urban space’, a flourishing array of psychogeographies has propelled the public imagination through books, blogs, podcasts and wider conviviality. However, as a buzzword, it is London-based drifter Will Self (2007) who uses ‘psychogeography’ as a title of his broadsheet column and the book compilation:

Self has long been interested in the interlocking relationships between place, identity, and cognition: the ‘psychogeography’ that provides a virtual map to the topography of one’s consciousness. (Hayes, 2007: 7–8)

This style has been adapted and greened. Thanking Will Self, Nick Papadimitriou (2012: 3) traverses ‘the North Middlesex/South Hertfordshire escarpment, or Scarp as I prefer to call it’, mapping the topography of this area of northwest London, highlighting land over 400 feet (122 m), the main roads and the rivers, chiefly the River Colne, a tributary of the

Thames. The Colne valley divides Scarp from the higher chalk uplands of the Chilterns beyond London:

Despite being some seventeen miles from east to west and attaining in excess of 400 feet above sea level in places, Scarp is seldom commented upon by either topographers or psychogeographers, and seemingly possesses no cultural currency. Sliced by railways and motorways, topped by old roads running its length, repeatedly scarred in the name of civic utility, yet never acknowledged openly as possessing a coherent identity, Scarp nevertheless persists in the infrastructural unconscious of the northern regions of the city. (Papadimitriou, 2012: 3–4)

Others have stepped out of London to south-western England, with a modification from psychogeography to ‘mythogeography... an experimental approach to the site of performance (in the very broadest sense) as a space of multiple layers’ (Anon, 2010; see also Smith, 2014), and explorations of the connections between psychogeography, psychotherapy (Chrześcijańska, 2021; Rose, 2019) and well-being (Poole et al., 2020).

## II Mind the Gap: Psychogeography Beyond the Suburbs

Writing that adopts or reflects on the term psychogeography inhabits an expanding world of textualities, including scholarly engagements in many disciplines. In this regard, the appearance of an edited collection *Walking Inside Out: Contemporary British Psychogeography* is an important landmark and stock taking. Refusing definitive answers to what psychogeography is, Tina Richardson’s (2015: 25) introduction to the fourteen chapters in the collection celebrates:

The beauty of the inexact art that is psychogeography, appearing in the innumerable forms that it has historically taken and continues to display, attests to the durability and relevance of it

today... to absorb the urban space it occupies, situating itself socio-politically and creatively employing innumerable ways to express itself.

Beginning with Basset’s (2004) account of using psychogeography in student fieldwork, there have been a series of engagements by geographers and in geographical journals (Arnold, 2019; Bennett, 2011; Bonnett, 2009, 2017; Middleton, 2011; Overend et al., 2020; Phillips, 2018; Pierce and Lawhon, 2015; Pinder, 2005, 2018, 2020; Pyyry, 2019; Robinson and McClelland, 2020; Smith, 2010; Sidaway, 2009; Souzis, 2015). However, several relegate psychogeography to a single reference or a footnote. There is an overlap with work on mobile ethnographies that has yielded a voluminous literature, paralleling (but not often citing) psychogeography (Brown and Shortell, 2015; Cheng, 2013; Macpherson, 2016; Streule, 2020). Others connect with wider cultural, social and political geographies of walking (e.g. Mason 2020; Phelan and Philo, 2020; Stratford et al., 2020) and thence to what Lorimer (2010) called ‘an eclectic array’ of walking studies. The best-known geographical writing on rural walking draws on a phenomenological approach (Wylie, 2002, 2005) that does not situate itself as psychogeography. Ditto, those who have followed in Wylie’s footsteps, such as Riding (2016). The inclusion of a chapter on psychogeography and urban exploration in a recent textbook on *Creative Methods for Human Geographers* (von Benzon et al., 2021) perhaps marks its developing place on undergraduate curricula. That chapter, like most psychogeography, focuses on cities. Yet in her introduction to *Walking Inside Out*, Tina Richardson (2015: 7) also notes:

While the term psychogeography has generally been applied to urbia and can be a convenient way to differentiate the walking from that carried out in the countryside, its urban and rural deconstruction is just one of the qualities that adds to its indefinable character.



As Richardson signals, there are evolving crossovers between psychogeography and revitalized writing about rural landscapes and nature. This revival draws on a long tradition of topographic writing and poetry that in England goes back to the Romantic poets such as Blake and Wordsworth, who retreated to the rural and sublime in the face of advancing industrial capitalism. Topographic writings thrived too in late 19th- and early 20th-century Britain, with a late interwar flourish from an expanding London and its environs (Rogers and Papadimitriou, 2009). A non-metropolitan example is Edward Thomas' (2009) *The South Country*, first issued in 1909 and republished with an introduction by the nature writer (and Cambridge lecturer in English) Robert Macfarlane. In turn, MacFarlane would be among those whose works became part of a vogue for nature writing that became interesting 'thanks to their informed fascination with environmental matters, and their habit of combining different genres' (Motion, 2007).

The inspirations are wide-ranging, as detailed in reviews by Cocker (2015), Graham Huggan (2016), Robert Macfarlane (2013), Joe Moran (2014), Kate Oakley et al. (2018), Jos Smith (2017) and Phil Smith (2017, 2020; and as Cecile Oak, 2017). Yet the genre is easily recognized, usually written in first person, and unlike those producing "'expert knowledges" about natural phenomena' (Castree, 2005: xvii) in geography and allied disciplines. It registers influences from the 1970s counterculture, as in Roger Deakin's (2008) *Wildwood: A Journey through Trees*, and found fertile territory in Ireland (Robinson, 2008) and in Scotland, in a mash-up of genres poetry, travelogue, essays, photographs and psychogeographical walking thoughts by the Fyfe Psychogeographical Association (Eason, 2015). Its prose registers natural rhythms and vacillations. According to Phil Hubbard and Eleanor Wilkinson (2019: 260n4) the genre has parallels with 'traditions of psychogeographically-inflected urban writing', but is more focused on:

the intimate relationship between landscape, place and people, and is alert to the ways that individual biographies entwine with the landscapes and ecosystems that surround them. (p. 253)

Such 'new nature writing'<sup>4</sup> – as the London literary magazine *Granta* titled a special issue – is expansive and not confined to Britain and Ireland. It also connects with works of North American authors, such as Barry Lopez (1945–2020) and Gary Snyder who revitalized American pastoral prose (Bass et al., 1992). In turn, it is associated with a broad field of ecocriticism (for a review, see Marland, 2013) and what Tom Lynch et al. (2012: 2–3) term *The Bioregional Imagination*:

moving away from the existing but for the most part arbitrary political boundaries (nations, states, counties, cities, etc.) in favor of those that emerged from a biotically determined framework, primarily based on natural communities or watersheds.

While there are crossovers with North American currents, new nature writing has been led by UK-based authors, yielding lively debate about its limits on the part of practitioners and detractors (Macfarlane, 2015a). The editor's introduction to the special issue of *Granta* claims it to be:

interested less in what might be called old nature writing – by which I mean the lyrical pastoral tradition of the romantic wanderer – than in writers who approached their subject in heterodox and experimental ways. We also wanted the contributions to be voice-driven, narratives told in the first person, for the writer to be present in the story, if sometimes bashfully. The best new nature writing is also an experiment in forms: the field report, the essay, the memoir, the travelogue. If travel writing can seem like a debased and exhausted genre, nature writing is the opposite: something urgent, vital and alert to the defining particulars of our times. (Cowley, 2008: 10)

Reviewing Tim Dee's (2009) *The Running Sky* as an example of the genre, Stephen Moss (2009) reflects on how:

When Tim Dee and I were growing up during the 1970s, a book like *The Running Sky* might never have got into print. The new science of ethology, which applied a rigorous approach to the study of animal behaviour, led to a backlash against what was then regarded as 'old-fashioned' nature writing. Books such as JA Baker's *The Peregrine*, published in 1967, were the last hurrah of a long tradition of emotional responses to nature, going back all the way to the poetry of John Clare.

After years of neglect, the past decade has seen a resurgence of this kind of 'engaged' nature writing, in which authors balance keen and informed observation with their own thoughts and feelings. Examples include Richard Mabey's *Nature Cure*, Mark Cocker's *Crow Country*, and the more recent *Birdscapes* by Jeremy Mynott, which analyses our intellectual, social and emotional responses to birds, and attempts to discover why they fascinate us so much.

*The Running Sky*, together with others mentioned by Moss as engaged nature writing, offers a double inspiration here: psychogeography expands out of town and, simultaneously, the new nature writing moves through the suburbs and into cities. Charting paths in this combined move, the next subsection steps through a range of literature that signals the way.

### *I Border and Edge-Lands*

The borderland between England and Wales, known as the Marches (*Y Mers*), is an ill-defined and jumbled-up space where English place names can be surrounded by Welsh ones and vice versa. Among the texts that take psychogeography away from the urban is Peter Conradi's (2009) *At the Bright Hem of God: Radnorshire Pastoral*. Conradi, an Emeritus Professor at Kingston University in south-western London (and best known for his biography of Iris Murdoch), lives in Cascob, near the

Welsh border with England. His appreciation of the middle section of those borderlands begins with an engagement with recent writings in 'psycho-geography' (Conradi, 2009). Although he added a hyphen and cites inspiration from a wide range of other topographic authors, and ranges over many histories, literatures and geographies, Conradi takes psychogeography elsewhere, for example, in an account of the making and reception of Alfred Watkins' *The Old Straight Track: Its Mounds, Beacons, Moats, Sites and Mark Stones*, originally published in 1925. Watkins mapped his model of ancient lines/tracks (ley lines) connecting churches, hills, monuments from the Herefordshire landscape that lies just eastward of the border (see also the account by Daniels, 2006). Leys, it has since been claimed, are identifiable in many European landscapes. Conradi (2009: 147) notes how Watkins' theory received 'a hospitable reception from followers in Earth Mysteries in the 1960s...his observations were re-invented in cultish grammar'. Conradi is sceptical of those who advance other theories such as leys being medieval trackways while noting that leys are 'likely to remain a non-proven and wacky hypothesis' (p. 147). He goes on to note that these imaginaries point to the recovery of the sacred in landscape, something that will not readily go away:

Radnorshire, whatever you chose to make of this, lies at the epicentre of leys. It is suggestive that these lines of connexions were discovered in the Marches, that area of debatable boundaries... Meanwhile his [Watkins'] quest to understand landscape and history resembles the quest behind all narrative: to seek secret connexions, to make links visible, to find coherences – *to tell a persuasive story*. (p. 149; original emphasis)

From another section of Anglo-Welsh borderlands, the upper Bristol Channel, Owain Jones (2015: 1) describes being drawn to the cross-border bridges across River Severn (*Afon*

*Hafren*) and the landscapes either side, noting ‘how bridges can be psychogeographical “hotspots”’.

A different kind of borderland concerns Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts (2011: 6). Their *Edgelands: Journeys in England’s True Wilderness* wants ‘to break out of the duality of rural and urban landscape writing, to explore these unobserved parts of our shared landscape as places of possibility, mystery, beauty’. Adopting the term *edgelands*, developed by Marion Shoard (2000) to refer to landscapes between town and country (see too Kabo, 2015), 28 short chapters follow, with one-word titles: ‘Cars’, ‘Paths’, ‘Dens’, ‘Containers’, ‘Landfill’, ‘Water’, ‘Sewage’, ‘Wire’, ‘Gardens’, ‘Lofts’, ‘Canals’, ‘Bridges’, ‘Masts’, ‘Wasteland’, ‘Ruins’, ‘Woodlands’, ‘Venues’, ‘Mines’, ‘Power’, ‘Pallets’, ‘Hotels’, ‘Retail’, ‘Business’, ‘Ranges’, ‘Lights’, ‘Airports’, ‘Weather’, ‘Piers’.

Farley and Roberts (2011: 11) are dismissive of nature writers who set out in search only of solitude and wilderness, noting that, like cities, urban fringes and ‘remote’ places all ‘have our political, economic and social history written all over them’. Farley and Roberts (2011: 9) are also wary of psychogeography:

At other times – as in the work of some so-called *psychogeographers* – they are merely a backdrop for bleak observations on the mess we humans have made of our lives, landscapes, politics and each other. In our view, both these ‘schools’ run the same risk – using the *edgelands* as a short cut to misanthropy.

Presumably one of their targets here is Iain Sinclair, among whose most successful books is a psychogeographical inspired narration of a walk around London (Sinclair, 2002), staying as near as possible to the orbital motorway (the M25) cutting through London’s *edgelands*. There seems to be space enough both for the psychogeographers and those who prefer other labels for their peri-urban walking and writing.

England is perhaps the most mature of the world’s post-industrial terrains and its urban and peri-urban ecologies have long been recorded. For example, nearly half a century ago, Richard Mabey (1973) commemorated these as *The Unofficial Countryside*. Reviewing ‘a much deserved and handsome re-issue of Richard Mabey’s classic from 1973’, Andy Tickle (2012, 224–225) recalls:

When first published, the book fell into no known category, save the long tradition of English polemicism. Was it nature writing, a new conservation manifesto or merely the urban (and urbane) ramblings of a man seemingly off the main page of the nascent British environmental scene? . . . But it was his eye for unusual environments, and his masterful ease in celebrating them in prose in this book, that drew back the veil on the value and dynamics of urban and peri-urban nature. Thus he started a new movement of ‘wildscape’ recognition and also became an early pioneer of what is now termed ‘psychogeography’.

Mabey has since registered his wariness of psychogeography, while joining Farley and Roberts in celebrating city-edges as sites of encounter. Living the first half of his life in suburban southern England before becoming a nature writer in his thirties, Mabey (2013: 7–8) returns to the fraying edges of London suburbia, noting that ‘There’s a concept in ecology which may be useful here. An “ecotone” is a zone where one habitat merges with another, creating something more than the sum of its parts’. One senses that Mabey prefers such concepts to psychogeography. Still, some who have been influenced by both Mabey’s writing and psychogeography see points of connection. Thus, for Sinclair (2010):

Mabey’s excursions from 35 years ago, undertaken in strong heart, never succumbing to impotent rage, seem prophetic. Which is to say: true and right. Inevitable. Writing by walking, and walking again to gather up the will to write, was such an obvious tactic; a mediated response to a dim

period of failing industries, social unrest, power cuts: suppression of the imagination after the unbridled utopianism of the 60 s. But nobody else, at the moment of the book's composition, took on the job in quite this way; and not, for sure, in this territory. Mabey, like a covert infiltrator, makes an engaged pass at the ugly bits, the dirty folds in the map.

Elsewhere, Sinclair (2015:14) has noted that his own:

preferred nature studies were abandoned mine works, landfill quarries, feeder pipes, slag heaps, rust-red streams, overgrown railway embankments and not the approved catalogue of rabbits, hawks, herons, butterflies, beetles, spiders, mal-low, rock spurrey and gentian.

Geographers had also studied such 'fringe-belts':

that derive their unity, not from homogeneity of form, but from certain common factors that influenced their original location . . . near the fringe of the built-up area. During the periods of relative stagnation which punctuate the growth of any urban area certain elements tend to gather on the fringe of the built-up area: . . . playing fields, various types of community buildings, market gardens, nurseries, allotments, cemeteries, country houses and certain types of industry . . . These peripheral land uses, when later encompassed by the outward growth of the built-up area, tend to survive as a belt, sometimes continuous, separating older from younger development. (Whitehand, 1967: 223)

Such geographical work however focussed on morphology, the structure of the fringes – rather than encounters with the ecologies they have yielded, or how they may invoke what Matthew Gandy (2013) refers to as 'ecological aesthetics'. Likewise, with a few exceptions (such as Hayden and Wark, 2006), most work on urban sprawl and suburbia in North America describes processes and appearances, rather than the affect of encountering the places it

makes. Yet, as Elvin Wyly (2020: 31) notes, all suburban frontiers are about: 'changing relations among humans, and between humans and nonhuman living species, biophysical processes, and machinic creations'. Mabey and Sinclair, however, are particularly mindful of language – struggling to find the words and arrange them in ways that summon place. On reading Sinclair, Alex Murray (2007: 59) declares: 'the narrative starts everywhere because sensory experience starts everywhere . . . every piece of information has a place, every fragment can, and indeed must have some significance'. For Mabey (2010: 117, 119):

['urban wastelands' and 'fringes'] had been a revelation, a testament to the tenacity of living things. I'd hike along derelict canals, watch sandpipers bobbing on floating car tyres, find scraps of medieval hedge caught the between the mobile-home parks [. . .] the language we use about these places does us no favours. 'Brownfield' suggests deadness and sterility, the precise opposite of the riotous growth that characterises them.

While human geographers have wrestled with the challenge of representation, coining terms such as 'more than representational' (Lorimer, 2005) in recognition of the slipperiness of words/things/affects, some of the new nature writing foregrounds this challenge. There are moments when this overwhelms – there is no way to resolve it other than noting how, on watching seabirds from the shore:

My eyes cannot stay on any one bird for more than a second or two; always another comes between me and the bird I am watching, always another flies behind it. I reach for words: it is a city, a metropolis, a theatre, a cloud of gnats, Brownian motion, heaven, hell, space dust, bright stars in a dazzling universe – but nothing will do . . . The only true account would be the thing itself. (Dee, 2009: 7)

In a different register, the long history of scientific biology has, for several centuries,

struggled with the classification of the immense variety of species, and their ecologies, which even the microscale of DNA analysis turns out to be a matter of degrees and paradoxes, such as species that visually resemble each other being genetically very different or vice versa. In his compendium of *Birdscapes*, Jeremy Mynott (2009) devotes many pages to these related ways of seeing and knowing differences. He considers the succession of field guides to birds that found receptive markets in Europe and North America through the 20th century, noting how they used different terms to describe and enable identification. These needed to be selective, to simplify, or else:

There's just too much sensory information to take in otherwise and too many facts about the birds we might need to remember . . . You need to home in . . . the most successful field guides use artists' illustrations to portray the birds rather than photographs. (Mynott, 2009: 73)

Mynott therefore notes how field-guide images suppress variations that are irrelevant to making distinctions and present species in formats that enable comparisons. Birdwatchers also rely on:

some or all of a combination of factors. The most purely physical factors are probably the structure and proportions of bill, legs, and wings, which may only be seen in silhouette but which are relatively unchanging. (Mynott, 2009: 77)

But this is just a start; discerning patterns of movement, routines, contrasts and sounds are all part of the signature that enables recognition:

Metaphors and poetic images may sometimes help us grasp these traits better than plain descriptions can. Hughes's 'bounce and stab' for the song thrush is perfect, and so is Baker's 'ten high wing-beats and then a drowsy glide' for the barn owl. (Mynott, 2009: 78)

Insight is often distilled too into field notes – and sometimes into published science – a process examined for a variety of disciplines in a

collection edited by the Harvard-based biologist Michael R Canfield (2011). Such texts may appear to take us a long way from this article's focus on charting Anglophone psychogeography. However, one appreciation of the new nature writing describes key exponents (including Mabey, Deakin and Macfarlane) as a 'green flânerie', which:

speaks to the emergence of a psychoecology, with richly attuned meanderings that have strategic affinities with the work of psychogeographers, such as Iain Sinclair and Will Self who in recent years have negotiated more urban terrain. (Hunt, 2009: 71)

These strategic affinities address a wide range of audiences and themes, including the rise of women's therapeutic nature writing as a popular publishing venture. Here (thus far usually white women) write about well-being (and personal watersheds) through pedestrian encounters with landscapes and nature experienced as renewal – examples include Alys Fowler's (2017) *Hidden Nature: A Voyage of Discovery* that follows Birmingham's canals, Olivia Laing's (2017) *To the River: A Journey Beneath the Surface* on a walk that follows the course of the River Ouse in Sussex, past a stretch where Virginia Woolf committed suicide, Amy Liptrót's (2015) *The Outrun* from the Orkneys and Raynor Winn's (2018) *The Salt Path*, walking the coastal path around Southwest England after a personal financial and legal shock.

### III Psychogeography's Other Centres and Margins

Among the numerous layers of invocations, engagements and adaptations, and especially within online textualities of psychogeography such as blogs and podcasts, are challenges to the persistence of a male-centric field and privilege to wander freely in public space (Mott and Roberts, 2014). When, nearly a decade ago, Clare Brant (Marshall, 2012) noted how

‘Psychogeographic musing is often condensed into the figure of the flâneur, who is male, via Walter Benjamin’, women had already challenged this through practice and projects (see Heddon and Turner, 2012; Phadke et al., 2009, 2013; Precarias a la deriva, 2004). Posing a series of questions ‘that a feminist psychogeographical methodology might generate’, Bridger (2013: 291) includes: ‘What are my gendered experiences of specific environments? Are these places I would ordinarily visit? Why/Why not?’; ‘What are the emotional and behavioural effects of familiar and unfamiliar environments?’ and ‘How do men and women enter and exit environments?’ Since then, Rose’s (2017) psychogeography-saturated PhD thesis on *Women walking Manchester: Desire lines through the ‘original modern’ city* and Lauren Elkin’s (2016) book-length account of women walking the city in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London have appeared. Less Walter Benjamin, more Virginia Woolf. As in reflections on walking with children (Saunders, 2020), these works foreground who is walking (or loitering) where and for what ends.

The street- or ground-level engagement with urban spaces – through a variety of tactics, random drifting, purposeful transgressions, loitering, transects and urban explorations – has been integral to the multiple reinventions of this spatial practice. For example, Bradley Garrett (2013, 2014) proposes transgressive urban exploration (see Carrie Mott and Susan Roberts, 2014, for a feminist critique). Psychogeography continues to offer critical inspiration, as a ‘toolbox’ (Richardson, 2015: 3), for encountering and narrating place and cutting across multiple discourses and disciplines. Academic geographers have joined the conversation but remain at the margins of what is more often literary and experimental. As Macfarlane (2015b: 232) notes:

Sinclair and Mabey’s brilliant examples inspired hundreds of other chroniclers to take to Britain’s

edgelands: urb-exers, psychogeographers, biopsychogeographers, autobiopsychogeographers, deep topographers and other theoretically constituted lovers of the detrital and neglected.

In a brief comment on psychogeography, Caitlin DeSilvey and Tim Edensor (2013: 474) record ‘the work of scholars who engage with psychogeography to excavate the uncanny, indeterminate traces that persist in marginal spaces’. But whereas most of those margins are in selected metropolitan cities, others have rendered psychogeography into a mode of purposeful encounter in postsocialist and postcolonial cities in Africa, the Balkans and Asia (Bekteshi and Mino, 2019; Castán Broto et al., 2021; Paasche and Sidaway, 2010, 2015, 2021; Sarma and Sidaway, 2020; Sidaway et al., 2014a, 2014b; Véron, 2016). Psychogeography is invoked too in Ahmed Mater’s (2016) narrative of the makeover of Mecca in the last 15 years. The scale of this reworking, linked to Saudi and international capital flows into new malls, hotels and an extension to and remodelling of the Great Mosque, has elicited critical commentaries (Dhahir, 2016; Sardar, 2014). Shahab Ahmed (2015: 535, emphasis in the original) reflects on:

The sense of *value* that is expressed by the image of the Ka‘bah set diminutively amidst the concrete colossi of the ‘multi-national’ corporate hospitality industry . . . The modern Muslim visiting Mecca and Madinah today, who takes in hand a pre-modern guidebook to Mecca or Madinah, will simply not be able to *locate the terrain* in which his predecessors walked.

Mater notes the pace of this destruction of context, which he set out to trace in 2008, after his first pilgrimage to Mecca since early childhood:

I began a series of deliberately experimental and meandering journeys within the spiritual center of the Islamic World: Mecca. In many ways these expeditions – by foot, by car, rarely covering the same route twice and at all times open to

creative happenstance – have their roots in psychogeography . . . yet my explorations also go beyond what is usually implied by psychogeography in terms of their relational dynamic. . . . that encompasses socially and politically instrumental events, collective dreams and ideologies. (Mater, 2016: 577–579)

Two key anthropologies on Islam, written over 30 years apart, both involve walking. The title of Rudolph Ware's (2014) book *The Walking Qur'an* is a metaphor for those who memorize the entire Quran and the schooling that enables this, so they become bearers or carriers (the literal meaning of the Arabic term *hamil*) of its message. Michiel Gilson's (1982) classic *Recognizing Islam*, ends with an afterword, subtitled 'a way of walking'. Although a sympathetic observer, Gilson was not a Muslim. So the ways that walking (the act of *tawaf*) in Mecca is fundamental to *Haj* and *Umrah* were outside his experience. Yet walking to (and from) and/or into a mosque for a *Jumu'ah* also becomes an integral aspect of Muslim *Ibadah* and Gilson is mindful of the 'punctuated' time and space and attendant 'rhythms and movements' (p. 202). In some parallel steps, Paul March-Russell (2013) returns to one of the established centres of psychogeography, critiquing the whiteness of psychogeographical writing on London and the absence of black and Muslim Londoners charting postcolonial pathways through the metropolis. And UCLA-based historian Nile Green recalls that, when a student of Islamic history at The University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies in 1990s, he would spend time with Muslim communities around Brick Lane, not far from the East London locus of Iain Sinclair's psychogeography. A few years later, as Green (2016: xi) recounts:

I came across the Persian diary that a Muslim student [Mirza Salih Shirazi, later the publisher of the first Persian newspaper] had kept in London two hundred years ago, it felt like I had found an ink-and-paper time machine to connect our two

eras. The diary, printed but never translated, seemed like the key to an unknown Muslim psychogeography of the city, a walking tour of Islamic associations that gave entirely different meanings to Soho and Fleet Street.

As he read more, Green discovered they had both walked the same London streets, and nearly two centuries later made the link, with a psychogeographical eye, to a living past of centuries of Islam's connections with London and the enduring presence of Muslims. Green's retrieval of a Muslim psychogeography in London signals further potentials for more work celebrating other decolonial and anti-racist psychogeography (see also Diamond, 2018), and there are decolonial templates for psychogeographers too in Raja Shehadeh's (2007) memoir, *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape* (Dickinson, 2017; Mendeley, 2019; Nashef, 2020). Shehadeh's work offers other conceptual vocabularies, notably the Arabic word *sarha*, to wonder freely, in body and mind, so *sarhat* – the plural – are not lines but a form of intersecting meshwork, which circles back to the steps taken by the Situationists. Today, the lands where Shehadeh's grandparents walked are colonized by the permanent mesh of occupation. His walking becomes a pathway to recover connections with what remains accessible of a vanishing landscape.

Who walks where matters. Black and Asian British voices are barely audible among the new nature writing that was reviewed in section II. Urban birder and familiar UK media presence David Lindo (2011) is a prominent exception and the recently launched *The Willowherb Review*: 'a digital platform to celebrate and bolster nature writing by emerging and established writers of colour' (<https://www.thewillowherbreview.com/>). Aptly named after the flowering plant cited earlier, the Review's editors explain: '*Chamaenerion* [sometimes *Chamerion*] *angustifolium*, commonly known as rosebay willowherb or

fireweed, is a plant that thrives on disturbed ground. Its seeds do well when transported to new and difficult terrain, so some – not us – may call it a weed’.

The Situationist International did have some Congolese, Tunisian and at least two Algerian members. An article by one of the Algerians (Abdelhafid Khatib, 1958a, 1958b) is a focus for Andrea Gibbons (2015) who concludes that such Maghrebi contributions and activities have been reduced to ‘a continuing footnote to psychogeography’. Anthony Hayes (2016) however, points to the centrality of anti-colonial positions within the Situationist International during the years of Algeria’s liberation war, which coincided with their most dynamic early phase of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Similarly, Soyoung Yoon (2013) describes how the Situationist’s focus on performance, power, space and the city was far more attuned than the wider French left were to the metropolitan impacts of the struggle over Algeria, which included draconian policing and killings of Algerians in Paris. The editorial note appended to Abdelhafid Khatib’s December 1958 ‘Attempt at a Psychogeographical Description of Les Halles’ speaks down the decades to present-day criminalization and dangers faced by ‘non-White colonized people . . . in the centre of Paris, as in other European cities’ (Boynik, 2009: 22), and of *Walking While Black* (Cadogan, 2016):

This study is incomplete on several fundamental points, principally those concerning the ambient characteristics of certain barely defined zones. This is because our collaborator was subject to police harassment in light of the fact that since September, North Africans have been banned from the streets after half past nine in the evening. And of course, the bulk of Abdelhafid Khatib’s work concerned the Halles at night. After being arrested twice and spending two nights in a holding cell, he relinquished his efforts. Therefore the present – the political future, no less – may be abstracted due to considerations carried out on

psychogeography itself. (Khatib, 1958a, author’s minor spelling corrections)

For Sharanya Murali, developing psychogeography in Old Delhi, walking there with ‘Khatib’s disrupted drift’ in mind and her own difficulties as a woman in navigating Delhi’s Chandni Chowk at night, notwithstanding her privileges of upper-caste and relative wealth, the limits and potential of psychogeography are clear:

psychogeography’s walking practices are ideologically moulded on and reserved for the blueprint of European cities. Considerations of such a practice in other kinds of cities – the South-East Asian city, the postcolonial city, the occupied city, for instance – buckle under the weight of occupation and territorialisation inherent to the “slipping” and “wandering” that define it. (Sharanya, 2016: 210).

#### **IV Psychogeography Matters: Bearings and Scales**

The margins, centres, encounters and constraints prioritized in this article demand further reflection and indicate potential for a broadened field of psychography within human geography that engages a varied range of sites, orientations and protagonists. At the same time, psychogeographical drifts have moved outside of urban foci. In finding further inspiration in nature writing, as this article charted, there are synergies with work examining the expansive boundaries of the urban in the emerging debates around so-called planetary urbanization. These point to the ways that extractive processes on which cities rely, from mining to agri-business, envelop the planet, such that the frontiers of urban processes extend far beyond the conventional city-based focus of urban theory (Brenner and Schmid, 2015). Reviewing these debates, Hillary Angelo (2017: 159) argues:



that the main axis along which urban studies' foundational assumptions have been challenged in recent years has been that of the relationship of the city to its perceived opposites, as traditionally 'non-urban' research sites and subjects increasingly intrude on urban environments.

Like the Anthropocene idea perhaps, planetary urbanization is not simply a process or epoch that human agency has yielded, but a subjectivity of becoming more deeply conscious of the production of nature. One of the backdrops to the new nature writing is an approach to the countryside as crafted and tended, reflecting histories of enclosure, commodification and extraction (Hoskins, 1955) instead of conceptions of nature that, to cite Matless (2014: 5): 'underwrite, indeed naturalise, human power, not least in overlapping categories of land ownership, sanctuary and reserve'. Modifications to psychogeography inspired by the new nature writing thus also grapple with the ways that urbanization has long rested on a series of imperial planet-spanning networks in which 'natural' landscapes are enfolded (Crosby, 1986; Wilson and Jonas, 2018).

There are lessons too about scale. In an article calling for geographers to recover inspiration in the spaces of creative writing, Catherine Brace and Adeline Johns-Putra (2010: 400) note:

The critical dialogue between the disciplines of human geography and literary studies... has enjoyed greater prominence in the last few years as evidenced in the special issue of *New Formations*... and recent reviews of literary geography in *Geography Compass* and *Progress in Human Geography*.

This work continued, such as in the form of a review of new geographies of story and storytelling (Cameron, 2012), and among others, with perhaps the most startling words, Angharad Saunders' (2010: 449) consideration of what she terms 'spatial poetics', that:

operate as fully at the level of the sentence as they do the entire narrative; they simultaneously merge from outside and inside the text, from the readers as much as from the writer and the different spaces these inhabit. It would be revealing to attend to the way in which the scale of analysis (sentence, paragraph, chapter) intersects with the scale at which the literary work is presented (the individual consciousness, the home, city or region) for it brings into focus ideas of positionality: the relative powers, motivations and levels of engagement different readers and writers have and the geographies these belie.

Ongoing debate about the analytical status of scale and nature of space in human geography cannot be resolved theoretically. As David Harvey (2006, 275) surmises, the character of space (relational or absolute) and configuration of scale are social products that vary according to their conditions of their production. Each 'depends on the nature of the phenomena under investigation'. Therefore, part of the challenge and opportunity lies in the choice of analytical/narrative strategies that work through the interplays and tensions between different spatio-temporal frames. Psychogeography's creative range offers opportunity in this regard. As we walk, represent and entwine nature paths and barriers with those of words and images, then physical, emotional and intellectual landscapes and spaces are rescaled and spaced.

This scaling/spacing must also attend to intersecting temporalities. Robert Macfarlane's (2019) most recent book, *Underland: A Deep Time Journey*, recognizes the scope of human ecological impacts invoking the Anthropocene but also locates the sites and routes he writes about in 'deep time'. Elsewhere Macfarlane (2018: viii) remarks on 'first encounters' via picking up pebbles as a child that opened an appreciation of the everyday character of "“deep time” – the aeons of earth history that stretch dizzyingly away from the present, humbling the human instinct' (Macfarlane, 2018: viii). Doreen Massey made a similar point in

'Landscape/space/politics', an essay conversing with Patrick Keiller's films *Robinson in Ruins*, the third in a trilogy (with *London*, 1994 and *Robinson in Space*, 1997) in which a fictional scholar called Robinson (who is never shown) travels through and critically narrates English cities and the countryside. According to Massey (2010: 19):

These rocks of quintessential England were laid down when the land that is now this country was far further south, and just an indistinguishable part of the super-continent Pangea. Pondering the momentous tectonic history that brings us to Robinson's wanderings reinforces the feeling that the usual notion of landscape serves to smooth things over. Beneath these settled acres lies a history of almost unimaginable force and movement. (citing from abridged version in the DVD booklet)

Psychogeography offers routes of encounter into how the local can articulate the universal<sup>5</sup> that delights in reencountering and representing the world. An enlivened and broadened critical psychogeography not only reinterprets the world, it inspires us to change it. Psychogeography lends itself to negotiate multiple spatial and temporal frames as well as distance (a core theme in geography, see Simandan, 2016). It allows moving across/between scales and between/across epochs, from deep time to what Neil Smith (1984), following Marx, called 'second nature' (the humanly crafted transformations of nature that yield cities and other concrete manifestations of labour and capital). Hence psychogeography matters to core concerns of human geography, with largely untapped potential for new ways of exploring the connections between ontology, epistemology and the politics of knowledge production. This article, it is hoped, holds out encouragement for geographers to re-engage and experiment with psychogeography, also bringing other critical vantage points into dialogue, in re-narrating capital, class, empire, nature and power.

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## ORCID iD

James D Sidaway  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6169-3566>

## Notes

1. Citing an interview with Debord's first wife, Michèle Bernstein (in Normandy, 11 November 2000) Andrew Hussey (2006: 80) reports that the illiterate Kabyle attributed with the coinage 'psychogeography' was one 'who regularly sold dope to Debord and his comrades in the rue Xavier-Prive'.
2. I thank an anonymous referee for the formulations in this sentence.
3. See Ella Mudie (2015) for the longer history of lettrist/situationist psychogeography's evolution 'into an ambiguous form of literary endeavour with an ambivalent relationship to its original avant-garde formulation' (PhD Abstract).
4. While this term appeared to pay homage to the titling of a landmark 'New Naturalist' book series published by

Collins in England from 1945, as Richard Mabey (2009) notes, NN's fidelity to field biology reports stood apart from 'the kind of largely autobiographical, lyrically tinged work now clunkingly known as "[new] nature writing"'.<sup>5</sup>

5. This phrase is found in the Nobel Prize citation for the Irish poet Seamus Heaney (1939–2013) and is applied to Heaney and his fellow Ulsterman Patrick Kavanagh (1904–1967) by John Tomaney (2010).

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### Author biography

**James D Sidaway** has been professor of political geography at the National University of Singapore since 2012. His most recent research has been in Arabia and Myanmar. His latest book (with Till F Paasche, 2021) is *Transecting Securityscapes: Dispatches from Cambodia, Iraq, and Mozambique*. Athens GA: University of Georgia Press.