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# Defining the Boundaries of London: Perambulation and the City in the Long Eighteenth Century

Conference or Workshop Item

How to cite:

McKellar, Elizabeth (2014). Defining the Boundaries of London: Perambulation and the City in the Long Eighteenth Century. In: Investigating and Writing Architectural History: Subjects, Methodologies and Frontiers Papers from the Third EAHN International Meeting (Rosso, Michela ed.), pp. 437–447.

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Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

https://eahn.org/app/uploads/2015/07/EAHN2014proceedings.pdf

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13 See in particular Jürgen Zänker, "II Primo Progetto per il Santuario di Santa Maria della Consolazione a Todi e la sua attribuzione", in Studi Bramanteschi, Atti del Congresso Internazionale, Milano, Urbino, Roma (Rome: De Luca, 1974), 603-15: Davies, "Studies in the Quattrocento Centrally Planned Church." 122-33.

14 For the Madonna di Mongiovino see Zänker, "Il Primo Progetto per il Santuario di Santa Maria della Consolazione a Todi e la sua attribuzione." 603-15: for S. Maria di Varano see P. Zampetti, Il Santuario di Macereto ed Altri Edifici a Pianta Centrale del Secolo XVI (n.d., n.p.).

15 See Luisa Giordano, "L'architettura," in Cesare Alpini et al. La Basilica di S. Maria della Croce a Crema (Cinisello Balsamo: Amilcare Pizzi, 1990), 35-91.

16 This image is now in the cappella maggiore. It is not entirely clear when the east entrance was modified to form the high altar chapel but it must have been before 1514 when the subterranean undercroft below the cappella maggiore is mentioned by Pietro Terni, extracts of whose Annali di Crema are published in Tommaso Ronna, Storia della chiesa di S. Maria della Croce eretta fuori della R. città di Crema. (Milan: Manini, 1825), Document 3, 306.

17 Ibidem, 278.

18 Portalupi. Historia. 45-47: transcribed in Ceccarelli. La Madonna. 53-54.

19 The most recent study of the Arco delle Scalette is by Donata Battilotti. It appears in Lionello Puppi. Andrea Palladio. (Milan: Electa, 1999), 507 (with bibliography). 20 DEIPARAE VIRGINI BERICAE MONTIS/

IACOBVS BRAGADENO AMBROS F PRAEF/ RELIGIONIS ET URBIS AMANTISS D/ MDX-

21 Tracy E. Cooper, Palladio's Venice, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press. 2005), 213-27.

22 The bones of these saints were rediscovered in Vicenza cathedral in 1455: see Giovanni Mantese. Memorie storiche della chiesa vicentina (Vicenza: Neri Pozza. 1964) vol. 3, part 2, 566-7.

23 The painting is reproduced in Giuseppe Barbieri, Monte Berico (Milan: Terraferma. 1999), 49. The inscription reads: 'Catterina moglie di Hieronimo dal Soggio habitanti in Schiavon soggetta a Marostica del Vicentino dopo 15 giorni di perduta loquella si portò con fervorosa fede a' questa Vergine in questo modo: principio' la sud[etta] donna il viaggio alle hore 11 al fondo delle scalette a' genochinuni in sino alla chiesa non cessando di continuo bacciare le pietre della strada e terminò alle hore 23 con grand stupore della gente pervenuta che fu alla B. Vergine li fu scoperta la miracol[osa] ima[gine] e sub[ito] la lingua snodò e proruppe in queste precise parole -Madre mia di tutto questo [missing words]. Di tutto questo ne son testimoni religiosi tanto secolari quanto regulari, gentilhuomini, gentildonne, cittadini, essendo in sabbato giornodi concorso piu' di tutte gli altri' (author's transcription).

### 3.3.2 Defining the Boundaries of London: Perambulation and the City in the Long Eighteenth Century

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This paper will explore how London was defined by the new interest in walking in the long eighteenth century. As Michel de Certeau famously wrote, central to understanding the 'practices of everyday life' which create the urban milieu was the act of walking. However, such a notion can be traced back beyond the modern *flâneur* to the eighteenth century when perambulation was also seen as an important mode in the comprehension and experience of the city. In the writing on eighteenth-century culture a great deal of attention has been given to London's coffee houses, assembly rooms and the open areas of the inner city, such as squares, as the quintessential Habermasian spaces of sociability and forgers of the public sphere. But little attention has been paid to the equally important outer London suburban playgrounds. This talk will focus on the periphery of the capital to consider how the outer London landscapes were understood by contemporaries through the act of strolling in their green spaces. The paper will draw from a large body of urban literature such as the anonymous guidebook. A Sunday Ramble: Or. Modern Sabbath-Day Journey. In and about the Cities of London and Westminster (1774-1780) which offered a guide to 'the various interesting scenes ... of this Metropolis and its Environs'. Visual evidence in the form of topographical prints will also be used to establish the significance of this new leisure activity in contributing to the character and culture of the outskirts and its architecture as a distinct metropolitan zone spatially and metaphorically. This was a landscape created by movement and its accessibility from the centre. by a variety of means of transport, among which pedestrianism can be seen to be of crucial importance.

#### **K**EYWORDS

London, eighteenth-century architecture, open spaces, perambulation

OF METHODOLOGY

QUESTIONS

#### INTRODUCTION

London in the long eighteenth century was a vast sprawling region whose outer limits were depicted on maps from the 1680s onwards as being anywhere from 20 to eventually 50 miles from the centre. Up until the building boom which followed the Great Fire of 1666 the 'outparts' were generally only a short walk away and generations of citizens had resorted to them for rest, sport and recreation. The elite meanwhile indulged in the traditional aristocratic pursuits based around horsemanship and hunting. With the extraordinary growth of the middle-class in London from the later seventeenth century onwards a new class of wealthy urban dwellers were formed who, while often able to afford to at least hire a carriage (if not own one), began to enjoy the simple pleasures of pedestrianism in and around their urban heartland. As MacLean, Landry and Ward have noted 'walking, once the resort of the indigent traveller, had become a fashionable form of recreation for the middle and upper classes'. 1 The beginnings of the voque for urban promenading can be traced in John Gay's 1716 mock-heroic poem Trivia: Or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London. The poem itself asserts the pleasures, and perils, of a new form of bourgeois urban pedestrianism. Gay's walker eschews the carriages and sedan chairs of the wealthy in favour of a healthier and more frugal means of self-propulsion:

Let Beaus their Canes with Amber tipt produce, Be theirs for empty Show, but thine for Use. In gilded Chariots while they loll at Ease, And lazily insure a Life's Disease; While softer Chairs the tawdry Load convey To Court, to *White's*, Assemblies or the Play; Rosie-complexioned Health thy Steps attends, And Exercise thy lasting Youth defends.<sup>2</sup>

Gay associates unhealthy carriages with the centrally-located spaces of the elite such as the Court, gentlemen's clubs and theatres; thus linking luxury and vice with 'the false Lustre of a Coach and Six'. In contrast to this identification of a dissolute lifestyle with inner-city excess an increasing number of visual and literary accounts from the later seventeenth century began to depict the 'outparts' or 'environs' as they came to be called as a rustic idyll for leisurely walking and taking the air. 4

#### A SUNDAY RAMBLE

This paper will concentrate on one account, drawn from a large body of

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urban literature, the anonymous guidebook A Sunday Ramble; Or, Modern Sabbath-Day Journey: In and about the Cities of London and Westminster (1774-94). It will focus on four places visited by the two ramblers - the unnamed author and his companion the Captain - which illuminate various facets of the relationship between the peripatetic and the spatial. The book offered a guide to 'the various interesting scenes... of this Metropolis and its Environs' which included: mineral wells, coffee houses, places of public worship, tayerns, public gardens, Sunday routs and bagnios, 5 This was a landscape far removed from the everyday commercial and domestic sphere: instead it was defined by the extremes of the sacred and the secular. Not only was the 'journey' specifically set on 'our weekly Holiday' but each chapter also began with the time of day starting with dawn and finishing after 9pm at night. Walking distances were measured as much in time as in distance. a very important consideration due to the dangers of walking abroad in the dark. Traversing the open fields around the city was an unwise and perilous undertaking where robbers who preyed on pedestrians, known as footpads. as well as highwaymen on horseback lurked at night. The joys of rambling were therefore temporally proscribed but also geographically limited to those places within 5 miles or so of the centre, which as Daniel Defoe put it, lay near enough London so that 'they can walk to it in the morning and return at night'.6

The first area our ramblers came to was Islington, a couple of miles from their start and a place featured in many of the earliest prints of the outer London environment. Such images depicted a landscape filled with figures talking, strolling and viewing the semi-rural zone that surrounded them. The circumambulatory routes around the capital were also shaped by mealtimes and the set-times for imbibing a range of liquids at the large number of establishments that sprang up to cater for these demands. A walk in the outskirts was often a trawl from spa to inn to tea-room to tavern as much as anything else. The morning was devoted to the taking of mineral waters and so our two walkers began with a trip to Bagnigge Wells, a spa retreat just outside city. It was thronged with visitors at mid-morning taking the waters, enjoying the splendid gardens or reading the newspapers provided on a Sunday. By these means and the addition of a large assembly room the spa had been transformed from 'a little alehouse' to a place comparable to Vauxhall. Walking was not confined to movement between sites but was also one of the primary activities to take place at the resorts themselves. At the Wells the author relates that so popular was parading in the new assembly room that it had to be divided in two, creating one section for walking and one for eating, so that 'the waiters...were ... [not] prevented from giving proper attendance to those dining'. The gardens with their walks were another draw and included architectural features such as a 'small neat cottage built in the rural stile' and a grotto 'large enough to contain twenty people'. Architecture in this account is continually related to its capacity for absorbing crowds of people estimated at three hundred in this one resort on a Sunday morning.

Having established the defining features which determined the route and timing of *The Sunday Ramble* I will now focus on a number of locations that display different aspects of the spatial-peripatetic dynamic. One of the last places that the pair visited was Kensington Gardens, 'where we proposed to spend an hour in the elegant shades of the favourite retirement of his late majesty George II'. They journeyed here by coach - which they were well-off enough to afford - as it was by now 8 o'clock in the evening. Such gardens had of course long served the upper classes as spaces for perambulation in their terraced walks and wildernesses, as had their indoor equivalents of long galleries and covered loggias. The novelty in London in this period lay in the opening of such spaces to the broad mass of the public. The author described how such gardens could accommodate a whole host of activities, both the solitary and the sociable:

Does the *ruralist* wish to indulge his meditations in private – he may plunge into the recesses of a thick grove, and enjoy his own reflections ... Burns the *beau* to appear in a crowd of gaiety and elegance – he may visit the enchanting walks behind the Palace and Greenhouse... or seeks the *rejected lover* to forget the frowns of a capricious mistress – let him join the giddy crowd with the beau.<sup>11</sup>

The gardens were not completely open access. Servants were placed at the entrances to regulate the company and 'prevent persons meanly clad from going into the garden'. 'But notwithstanding the great care that is taken to preserve decency and decorum' a problem with the scribbling of obscene verses on the glass of the green-house persisted 'to the great offence of all those who are not lost to all sense of shame' with even 'many apparently virtuous females poring over the lines'. <sup>12</sup> The danger but also the thrill of perambulation was that the experience and the view could not be controlled; idealised architecture and landscape constantly collapsed into the brute realities of urban life. The author recounted that the Mall in S. James's Park was: 'chiefly used by the quality to walk in before dinner; and seldom visited by them in the evening, as it is too much frequented, at that time, by the more publicly complying females'. <sup>13</sup> The participation of respectable women in strolling and inhabiting such public places was a new phenomenon in London from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. <sup>14</sup> The experience of walking

in the grounds of a palace might have been a thrillingly novel experience for the large numbers of the urban middle classes but it was an inherently traditional form of perambulation in a garden that they were undertaking. Increasingly men and women began to seek a closer involvement with nature in the fields and open spaces outside the city. Such practices became more self-conscious under the impact of the Picturesque from the later eighteenth century onwards but as with other cultural engagements with the environs, such as landscape views, were already well-established by the 1750s.<sup>15</sup>

The essentially family-orientated and middle-class nature of this new form of excursion is made evident in our Sunday ramblers' trip up Primrose Hill, situated about two miles north of the centre. The author commented that it was 'a place of very fashionable resort of the moderate Bourgeoiserie [sic], who usually lead their children there to eat their cakes and partake of a little country air'. He then provides a wonderful account of a scene which was later illustrated by George Cruickshank as *Pastimes of Primrose Hill* (1791) which demonstrates other dimensions of the enlarged notion of the metropolitan that the act of walking engendered. (Figure 1)

The print shows Tom Cheshire, a cheesemonger, 'who is so remarkable in his patriotic affection for the place of his nativity that although he spends six



Figure 1: George Cruickshank, Pastimes of Primrose Hill, 1791. Source: British Museum

days of seven in the very centre of it, the whole of the seventh is occupied in viewing it through a telescope from some of its most convenient and contiquous acclivities'. 17 As de Certeau noted the ordinary citizens live 'down below' and write 'an urban text ... without being able to read it'. 18 The desire to make that text legible and totalize that experience through viewing directed many day trippers towards the highest points around the city. 19 Tom focuses his instrument towards the dome of S. Paul's, the symbolic centre of the city, and used on maps and in texts of the period as the point from which distances were measured.<sup>20</sup> The experience of architecture therefore was shaped not just by the act of walking but also by scopic practices which created an aerial scenography around the city constructed around its highest points. Such elevated positions were seen as physically desirable due to their clean air and lack of smoke but also as morally superior. 21 The spatial mapping that these pedestrian journeys created allowed for a kinaesthetic experience of the city: satisfying the sight with viewpoints, the smell and breath through clean air, sound through the relative tranquillity and taste through the gustatory delights available. If we free ourselves from the tyranny of the gaze and the visual, to which art and architectural historians have traditionally given primacy, the realm of the environs is revealed as a sensory smorgasbord in which the other senses were as important as viewing. Of course 'sites' do not simply equate with 'sight'.

Puffing up the hill behind Tom Cheshire is his neighbour Mr Zachary Saveall, a tallow chandler - 'dragging a four-wheel chaise behind him with four children in it, while his wife followed with his wig fixed upon the point of his cane, and his hat placed upon her bonnet'. 22 Mr Save-all has been:

Somewhat longer in the accumulation of wealth and rotundity; and is therefore of course the *greater* man in the world; besides, Zachary has to boast, what is an object of infinite importance to a citizen that he has lived thirty years in the same house. Zachary's week-days are spent so very much alike his neighbour's that it would be inhuman to separate them on the Sabbath... but, as Tom's hobby-horse is perspective on that day, so is Zachary's exercise. For that reason Zachary has provided a vehicle... in which he crams four of his wife's children, and by lugging them up the side of a forty-five degreed angle, hopes to reduce a corporal magnitude which however, great, is rather inconvenient.23

Laura Williams has shown how perambulation was also influenced by new ideas about health and movement. It was thought to be one of the best ways to stimulate the necessary circulation of the fluids in the body, in line

with Harvey's theories of the blood. This was deemed to be particularly important for urban dwellers whose lives were more physically circumscribed than was 'natural'.<sup>24</sup> Such satirical images of overfed City families resorting to the rural environs were a popular genre but they also bear witness to a new middle-class appropriation of the landscape around the town centre.<sup>25</sup> The association of rambling specifically with Sundays came about with the relaxation of Puritan attitudes from the early eighteenth century onwards. The Sabbath walk became acceptable initially as a means for pious reflection to aid the spiritual journey, as in Moses Browne's Sunday thoughts: The morning's meditating Walk (1750). The strength of non-conformism in the outer areas led to the fields around London being thronged with dissenters on Sundays. These outdoor meetings combined the spiritual with the possibility of more secular pleasures as the author of A Trip from St James's to the Royal-Exchange cynically observed:

In my Peregrinations through the City, I could not help observing that the Dissenters are much degenerated from their former way of keeping the Sabbath... to have refresh'd the Joints with a Walk. or the Countenance with a Smile, would have been as bad as Sacrilege or Murder... But now also the Case is guite otherwise with too many of them, who can on the Lord's Day prefer Saddler's Wells to Salter's Hall, and a Bottle to the Bible.26

Nowhere represented this mixture of the sacred and the secular better than another stop on our ramblers' itinerary, the Pantheon in Spa Fields. It was built on the model of James Wyatt's Pantheon in Oxford Street (1769-72) or the Rotunda at Ranelagh (1742), a much grander pleasure garden in Chelsea. The latter was the largest of these structures on the truly gigantic scale of 150ft diameter and 555ft circumference. The main attraction was the interior which was specifically designed as 'a promenade'. (Figure 2) One observer commented on the sound created by the acoustic of the vast interior space: 'all was so orderly and still you could hear the whishing sound of the ladies' trains as the immense assembly walked round and round the room'.27 A guide-book of 1793 states that 'walking round the Rotundo' was 'one of the pleasures of the place' while others referred to the parade more disparagingly as 'circular labour' or 'the ring of folly'. 28 The depiction of such spaces as scenes of confusion and gaudy ornamentation reflects the critiques of contemporary architectural theorists, such as Robert Morris and John Gwynn, who argued that the grotesque and the novel had first been introduced into architecture by the Goths and the Vandals. Thus the mixing of styles and breaking of classical order, as the hallmarks of the new commercial

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QUESTIONS

Figure 2: Thomas Bowles, The Inside View of the Rotunda in Renelagh Gardens with the Company at Breakfast, 1753. Source: British Museum.

leisure architecture, were a symbol of the wider disorder of society and its moral decline.29

The Spa Fields Pantheon may have been designed by William Newton, who had been apprenticed to the designer of the Ranelagh rotunda, William Jones, and there are strong similarities between the two buildings. 30 The interior, for which no views are known (although a plan survives), according to our guide consisted of 'two galleries, reaching entirely round the whole [...] in the middle is a curious stove, with fire-places all round'; the chimney of which protruded through the roof.<sup>31</sup> The interior was of 50ft diameter, small compared to Ranelagh but still of a considerable size, and formed a space for strolling and display. The clientele was less refined: 'consisting of some hundreds of people of both sexes; the greater part of which, notwithstanding their gay appearance, were evidently neither more nor less, than journeymen taylors, hair-dressers, and other such genteel people'. 32 Indeed it was so crowded that: 'the noise of people's feet, together with the shape of the building, rendered it no bad similitude to what it was compared by a countryman present; who staring at the multitude of people in the spacious galleries, declared that it was the largest beehive he had ever beheld'.33 For contemporaries the allusion here to Bernard Mandeville infamous satire The Fable of the Bees (1714) would have been evident. He used the 'Grumbling' Hive' as a metaphor for the teeming activity of the commercial city fuelled by luxury and avarice: 'Vast numbers thronged the fruitful Hive;/Yet those vast Number made 'em thrive;/Millions endeavouring to supply/Each other's Lust and Vanity.'34

The Pantheon in the two earlier editions of the Sunday Ramble figures as a pleasure dome yet from 1777 this 'hive' of lust and vanity had become a non-conformist chapel, with symbolically 'the Statue of Fame on the top' removed.35 As a chapel the building remained equally popular, attracting crowds of up to 2000. The Countess of Huntingdon, who formed her own denomination in 1783, took over the building and used the adjoining house. previously the Dog and Duck Inn. as her residence. This transformation from hunting inn to pleasure dome to chapel perfectly represents the layering of respectability and dissidence to be found in these outlying areas as well as the mutability of classical architecture at the time. The ideal form of the Pantheon suggests static uses but in practice it housed fluid and changing functions, only truly revealed to the visitors who strode its floors, heard its sounds and experienced the paradoxical juxtaposition of vast space and pressing humanity. Much of the urban literature of the period reflects this ambiguity towards the crowd and it is part of the environs' essential urbanity that they formed a space for sociability just as much as the centre. 36 Urban dwellers left the city on Sunday to escape its cramped conditions but flocked to large, open spaces outside the city paradoxically equally thronged with their fellow escapees.

Jane Jacobs in her The Death and Life of Great American Cities discussed how perceptions of strangeness and social distance vary according to the circumstances of city life and built environment.<sup>37</sup> In rambling through the London outskirts our eighteenth-century Modern Sabbath-Day Journey expands our notion of urban spatiality into the surrounding countryside to set up a more dynamic dialectic between town and country. It also provides alternative narratives for the Georgian city based not on notions of form, nor even function, but rather on contemporary social and phenomenological experience. These new understandings overturn traditional perceptions of classical architecture to reveal it not as an idealised construct but as the contemporary, contingent and continuously re-configured landscape of modern life.

**QUESTIONS OF METHODOLOGY** 

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  3 Ibidem, 193.
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- 6 Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, (1724-26) (London: Penguin, 1971). X.
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- 9 Ibidem 76.
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- 12 Ibidem, 79.
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- 19 Christine Stevenson, "Vantage Points in the Seventeenth-century City," in *Tall Buildings in the London Landscape*, Michael Hebbert and Elizabeth McKellar (ed.), special issue, *London Journal* 33/3 (2008), 217-32.
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- 21 There was a tradition of repairing to the capital's edge in order to survey the prospect as a metaphor for the political and moral pulse of the nation, first established by John Denham's topographical poem *Cooper's Hill*, 1642. See Matthew Craske, "Richard Jago's *Edge-Hill* Revisited: A Traveller's Prospect of the Health and Disease of a Succession of National Landscapes."

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