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A Ramble through Lie of the Land

On 21 June 2007, I joined my partner, artist David Cross, on an airfield outside Milton Keynes. I was groggy, the sun was not yet up. But that was the point. David disappeared with a pilot into a helicopter, and I watched as they took off. The helicopter's dawn flight was lit up by 'night sun', a bright searchlight attached to its front, and drew a great logarithmic spiral across the city. The centre of that spiral marked a point for the helicopter to hover, so the searchlight could fix on a group of druids and New Age revellers gathered below, celebrating the arrival of solstice at sunrise in a circle of stones.

Trance Nation (2007), an artwork by Cornford & Cross, was commissioned by the late Michael Stanley to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the founding of Milton Keynes. As the artists write, this is 'a town remarkable for its combination of urban grid and utopian origins. Sleek corporate head offices line broad avenues whose names evoke the sites or mystic rituals of ancient religion: Silbury, Avebury, Midsummer...'¹ *Trance Nation* made a connection between two different kinds of spatial practice conducted in relation to land: one generated through actions of surveillance onto the land as object, through the militarisation of the design of the helicopter and related searchlight technologies; and the other developed out of the land itself, as rituals connected to the earth and its place as matter in the solar system.

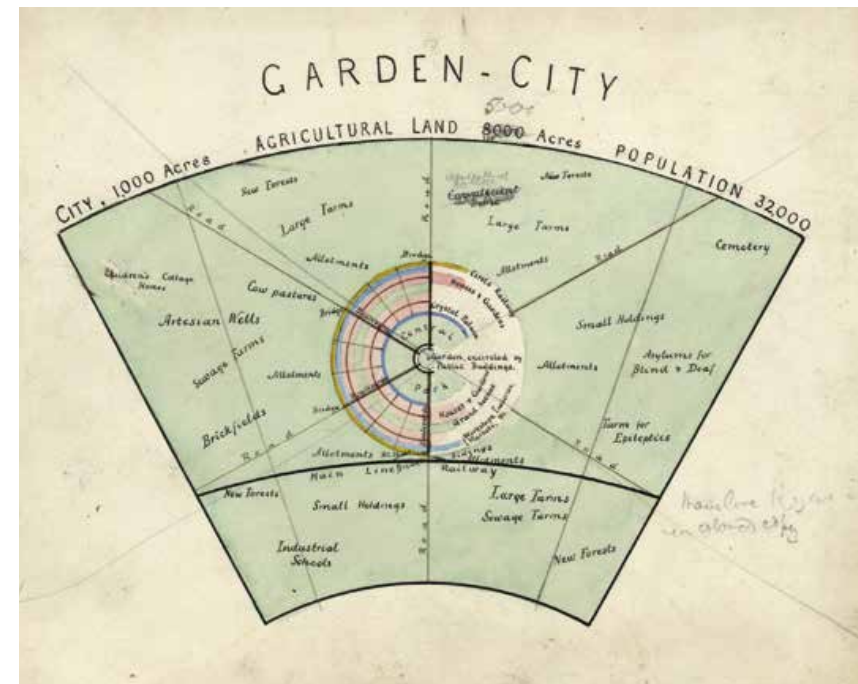
An extensive archaeological dig by the Milton Keynes Development Corporation, which preceded the building of the new town of Milton Keynes in the mid-1960s, revealed the area to have a long and deep history of settlement dating back to Neolithic times. As part of the design process the original layout of the transport

¹ Cornford & Cross, *Trance Nation* (2007), MK Gallery. See for example <http://cornfordandcross.com/projects/2007/>

trancenation/index.html (accessed 12 July 2018).

grid was shifted so that the key arterial road, Midsummer Boulevard, would align with the passage of the setting sun looking East. The application of a grid – as a critique of the tradition of the design of earlier English New Towns – was key to the non-hierarchical and devolved approach to urban design taken at Milton Keynes. Milton Keynes's so-called 'centre' did not follow the new town precedent – consisting of a core ringed by concentric zoned circles, and their sectors – but rather took the form of a central business and shopping district, which was intended to complement many other districts, each one also located at a point on a grid, allowing people to travel easily between these distributed nodes.

'A city is not a tree' is the title of a famous essay from 1965 by the architect and architectural theorist Christopher Alexander, in which he argues that the structure of a city needs to be a 'semi-lattice' – an idea later developed into a theory of complex networks – that allows for overlapping and interconnected groupings of objects and subjects, rather than a tree-like hierarchical structure, which separates specific activities, and fits more with the modernist



Ebenzer Howard, Garden City

ideals of zoning.² Alexander's essay was a major inspiration to Melvin M. Webber, advisor to Richard Llewelyn Davies on the master planning for Milton Keynes. As the planning historian and theorist Peter Hall has discussed, Webber's work argued for 'a town freed of all conventional concepts of place or hierarchy', where 'freedom of action was the governing principle, and automobility would be the key'.³ Webber's key papers, 'Order in Diversity: Community Without Propinquity' and 'The Urban Place and the Nonplace Urban Realm', which were published in 1963 and 1964 respectively, challenged the physically based concept of place that was considered to be the root of urban studies and planning of that time. As Michael B. Teitz has noted, this work shifted the 'focus of attention' in urban planning 'from *place to connectivity*',⁴ and 'the traditional meaning of "city" into networks of relationships at varying distances'.⁵

The ways in which we might understand the relation of connectedness and place become ever more important for the times in which we live, where the politics of land and issues of property rights stretch from the housing crisis in the world's major cities, to the displacements being caused by the extractive industries – directly through mining, and indirectly, right through to the enforced migration resulting from climate change. On the one hand, does being in one place prevent us from certain kinds of broader connections? On the other, if we are not in place can we be connected at all? The fast encroaching reality of peak oil collapses the 1960s vision, propagated by Webber and others, of a society based on the car, defining an ethical horizon to mobility. Yet the rise of telecommunications means that we can choose to make connections to others who might be far away over those who are nearby, without moving at all. But interestingly, the indexes of the 'most liveable cities' still show that the places people most like to live in are those where the key amenities are all in close proximity.

It is becoming crystal clear that the value of land as an asset is playing an increasingly determinant role in where we are able to live. And this applies whether this is played out through the price of materials that can be extracted from the land itself, the

2 Christopher Alexander, 'A City is Not a Tree', *Architectural Forum*, Vol. 122, No. 1, April 1965, pp. 58-62.
3 Sir Peter Hall, 'Melvin M. Webber: Maker and Breaker of Planning Paradigms', *Access Magazine*, special issue, winter 2006-2007, pp. 17-23, p. 20. See <https://www.accessmagazine.org/special-issue/melvin-m-webber-maker-and-breaker-of-planning-paradigms/> (accessed 9 July 2018).

4 Michael B. Teitz, 'Melvin Webber and the "Nonplace Urban Realm"', *Access Magazine*, special issue, winter 2006-2007, pp. 29-34, p. 32. See <https://www.accessmagazine.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2016/07/nonplaceurbanrealm.8.pdf> (accessed 9 July 2018).
5 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

use of the land to grow crops or raise cattle, or land's value in terms of its location for the construction of architecture and its later sale or lettable value. As *The Lie of the Land* makes clear, this condition is not a new one, especially in the United Kingdom, where the desirability of land – at home as property and as conquered in the colonies – has been the subject of intense political and cultural contestation historically. The question of who gets to own what kind of land and to benefit from those acquisitions, has been strongly determined by differences based on class, gender and race. Radicals, artists among them, have made it their task to question the terms of land ownership and to challenge the technologies, visual and legal, that have facilitated the sale of the earth to relatively few individuals. We see this in the work of the seventeenth-century Levellers, like John Lilburne, and the True Levellers, later known as the Diggers, who practised the farming of common land, believed in economic equality, and opposed the enclosures of common land. Enclosure was a legal process that consolidated small land holdings into larger farms whose use became restricted to the new owner rather than the earlier communal use. This involved the fencing of land and its deeding or entitling to one or more owner. It is thought that through that process between 1604 and 1914 over 5,200 individual enclosure acts were passed, covering 6.8 million acres.⁶

To understand practices that allow us to connect with one another – to be in place, and yet not to own land, to be out of place, yet not to use up fossil fuel – are becoming increasingly important for ecological reasons. The relationship between indigenous people create to the land is so different to that propounded through neoliberal versions of modernist colonial capitalism. Living *with* the land can be a less fixed kind of practice; more of a process, a delicate and balanced response to the earth and its resources. This way of living, described in Spanish as 'buen vivir', is 'a way of doing things that is community-centric, ecologically-balanced and culturally-sensitive',⁷ which, as Eduardo Gudynas writes:

promotes the dissolution of the Society – Nature dualism. Nature becomes part of the social world, and political

6 See for example, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/towncountry/landscape/overview/enclosingland/> (accessed 13 July 2018). For a historical overview, see Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution* (London: Vintage, 1994 [1958]).

7 Oliver Balch, 'Buen Vivir: the social philosophy inspiring movements in South America', *The Guardian*, 4 February 2013, available online at <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/blog/buen-vivir-philosophy-south-america-eduardo-gudynas> (accessed 12 July 2018).

communities could extend in some cases to the non-human. These include, as examples, the proposals of the biocentric environmental perspective, but also indigenous positions that recognize that the non-human (either animals, plants, ecosystems or spirits) have will and feelings.⁸

It is for this reason – the ecological imperative of sustainable life on earth – that understanding spatial practices of landscape design and land use are becoming increasingly important in connection to architecture and to urbanism. It is possible to find a correlation between the two twin poles of urban planning – connectivity and place – mentioned as fundamental to the design of Milton Keynes, and the work of anthropologist Michel de Certeau and the distinction he makes between space and place in *The Practice of Everyday Life*.⁹ Drawing on Ferdinand de Saussure's notions of *langue* and *parole* – in which *langue* is the complex of rules and conventions that constitute a language and *parole* the practice of speech – de Certeau argues that 'space is a practised place'.¹⁰ While de Certeau understands space as dynamic and constituted through practice, place somehow becomes fixed and passive in his writings, indeed at one point he compares place with a 'tomb'. It is worth quoting de Certeau's distinction here at length.¹¹

At the outset, I shall make a distinction between space (*espace*) and place (*lieu*) that delimits a field. A place (*lieu*) is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (*place*). The law of the 'proper' rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are *beside* one another, each situated in its own 'proper' and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability.

A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense

actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programmes or contractual proximities. On this view, in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization... situated as the act of a present (or of a time).¹²

And in another essay from the same collection, de Certeau distinguishes between a distanced view of the city of New York from the top of the World Trade Center and the experience of the urban realm as understood by walking through its streets. For de Certeau these are two possibilities for spatial practice, one which he understands as a visually imposed strategy, and the other as a embodied and engaged tactic. It is possible to consider how these forms of practice operate to transform each other in the urban and landscape design process; where place as land is altered through the practices of design and later of use, to become another place as landscape – where the material component that is land has been rearranged with the addition of other objects. A consideration of how land can be practised into landscape allows place and connectivity to be understood as operating in relation, as points and flows, rather than as two parts of a binary distinction. Indeed, many geographers have tried to think of how place can be 'unfixed' and understood through connectivity. In *Place and the Politics of Identity*, for example, Michael Keith and Steve Pile argue in favour of understanding place as 'unfixed, contested and multiple',¹³ writing:

A different sense of place is being theorized, no longer passive, no longer fixed, no longer undialectical – because disruptive features interrupt any tendency to see once more open space as the passive receptacle for any social process that cares to fill it – but, still, in a very real sense about location and locatedness.¹⁴

This work resonates with the shift from site-specific to situated practice in the art world, where an interest in 'site-specific' art, as an evolution of both public art and context-specific art, has developed an understanding of site that goes way beyond indicating the

⁸ Eduardo Gudynar, 'Buen Vivir: Today's Tomorrow', *Development*, Vol. 54, No. 4, 2011, pp. 441-447, available online at <http://www.womin.org.za/images/the-alternatives/fighting-destructive-extractivism/E%20Gudynas%20-%20Buen%20Vivir%20-%20Todays%20>

Tomorrow.pdf (accessed 12 July 2018).
⁹ See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 117.

Routledge, 1993).

¹³ Michael Keith and Steve Pile (eds.) *Place and the Politics of Identity* (London:

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

physical location of a work to include considerations of how site can be *practised* through performative and ethnographic processes.¹⁵ These spatialised understandings of art do not define sites and the land of which they are comprised simply in terms of geometry or morphology, but by paying attention to the cultural and spatial practices that produce them, including the actions of those who investigate them.¹⁶ In her critique of site-specific practice, Miwon Kwon warns of ‘undifferentiated serialisation’, as one of the dangers associated with taking one site after another without examining the differences between them.¹⁷ Kwon points to Homi Bhabha’s concept of ‘relational specificity’ as a way of emphasising the importance of thinking about the particularity of the relationships between objects, people and spaces. Akin to James Clifford’s notion of site as a mobile place, located between fixed points, Bhabha’s concept suggests an understanding of site that is not only specific but also relational.¹⁸ Kwon, along with curator Claire Doherty and artist Nathan Coley, have instead described the productive possibilities of being in the wrong place,¹⁹ and Doherty’s own curatorial practice has pushed the possibilities of embracing the more temporal term situation to consider new forms of site-related practices.²⁰ Such work prompted me to rethink the term ‘critical spatial practice’, that I had earlier introduced, in terms of time,²¹ and to consider

¹⁵ Nick Kaye, for example, has made a strong argument for site as a performed place, along the lines of Michel de Certeau’s notion of ‘space as a practised place’, while others have regarded site from an ethnographic perspective that includes the research processes of fieldwork as well as the artist as contemporary ethnographer. See Nick Kaye, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (London: Routledge, 2000); and Alex Coles (ed.), *Site Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2000).

¹⁶ Self-critique – along with culture, context, alterity and interdisciplinarity – are key aspects of anthropological research, which Hal Foster has described as the impact of the ‘ethnographic turn’ on fine art practice. See Hal Foster, ‘The Artist as Ethnographer’, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001) pp. 171-203, p. 182.

¹⁷ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002) p. 166.

¹⁸ James Clifford, ‘An Ethnographer in the Field’, interview by Alex Coles, in Coles, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-73.

¹⁹ See Miwon Kwon, ‘The Wrong Place’, *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002) pp. 32-43; Claire Doherty (ed.), ‘Introduction’, *Situations* (Cambridge, MA, and London: The MIT Press and the Whitechapel Gallery, 2009) pp. 12-19, p. 13; and Nathan Coley in Conversation with Claire Doherty, in Claire Doherty (ed.) *Thinking of the Outside: New Art and the City of Bristol* (Bristol: University of the West of England and Bristol Legible City in Association with Arnolfini, 2005) pp. 30-37.

²⁰ See <http://www.situations.org.uk/project/>. See also Claire Doherty, ‘Introduction’, *Situations*, pp. 12-16.

²¹ See Jane Rendell, ‘Constellations (or the reassertion of time into critical spatial practice)’, in Claire Doherty and David Cross (eds.) *One Day Sculpture* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2009). And Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (London: IB Tauris, 2006), where I introduce and define the term ‘critical spatial practice’.

how Donna Haraway’s notion of ‘situated knowledge’ creates an important starting point for thinking about the contingencies of *being* in a site and the forms of knowledge produced from such positions.²² Being in place is a condition that is contingent, that produces partial forms of objectivity, views from somewheres, that are always in connection to other places, and sites and to other subjects, so that who you can be and what you can know are dependent on *where* you can be.

My own interest in spatial practice and situated knowledge developed out of the archival research I conducted in the early 1990s into rambling, the form of movement through London by young men of the aristocracy and gentry, represented in words and images by the visual and literary genre of the ramble, which I argued was a form of gendered spatial practice, conducted in the pursuit of pleasure.²³ Ramblers were young, single, heterosexual and upper-class men, one of a number of new urban masculinities which emerged – along with the Corinthian, or upper-class sporting gentleman; the bruiser, or working-class boxer; and the dandy, or aspiring man of fashion – in the early-nineteenth century. Generated through the pursuit of pleasure, and activities such as gambling, drinking, sporting, fornicating and the consumption, display and exchange of commodities, rambling involved visits to places of leisure – assembly rooms, opera houses and theatres, parks, clubs, sporting, drinking venues, shopping streets.

The verb ‘to ramble’ describes incoherent movement, ‘to wander in discourse (spoken or written): to write or talk incoherently or without natural sequence of ideas’. As a mode of movement, rambling is unrestrained, random and distracted: ‘a walk (formerly any excursion or journey) without any definite route or pleasure’.²⁴ In the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, the verb specifically described the exploration of urban space, as well as rural space, and it was only later, in the late-nineteenth century, that the term became predominately associated with planned rural excursions.²⁵

The rambling genre had its origins in books published from the sixteenth century onwards, which delved into the London underworld, pretending to be authentic and sensational. Professing

²² See <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/architecture/programmes/postgraduate/ma-situated-practice>. See also Donna Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’, *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3, autumn 1988, pp. 575-599.

²³ Jane Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space and Architecture in Regency London* (London: The Athlone Press/Continuum with Rutgers University Press, 2002).

²⁴ Oxford English Dictionary, CD ROM, 2nd edition, (1989).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

that their aims were to warn 'country men and women' against the corrupting influence of the city, the tone of such texts was partly moralising but also titillating. By alluding to aspects of danger in a seductive rather than informative manner, 'Johnny Raws' from the country were portrayed as tempted by the excitement of urban life, as well as alerted to the location and activities of the city's sophisticated criminals. These so-called 'spy' tales, can also be distinguished by their structure, which takes the form of a journey through the city, told as a semi-fictional narrative, in which various country gentlemen are initiated to the adventures of city life under the guidance of street-wise urban relatives.²⁶

The so-called 'spy' texts focused on stories of criminals, robberies, prostitution and pictures of the seamy side of metropolitan life throughout the eighteenth century, while at the same time, the ramble emerged as a variant form, whose emphasis shifted from the desire to 'see' and therefore to know, to a desire to be seen.²⁷ While spy texts were fascinated with the darker aspects of urban life, such as crime, the ramble was more involved with excitement in the form of fun and pleasure. Like the spy, the rambler was also concerned with discovering previously unknown aspects to city life, but when indulged in during the day or on a Sunday, this would involve being shown a familiar site in a new way, whereas a night-time ramble would connect knowing and looking by combining elements of suspense and danger.²⁸ By the first decades of the nineteenth century, some publications continued to follow the earlier model of the spy and focus on the

²⁶ According to J.C. Reid, the tradition goes back to various sixteenth-century pamphlets, but the semi-narrative structure first appears in Edward Ward, *The London Spy* (London: J. Nutt and J. How, 1698-1699). See J.C. Reid, *Bucks and Bruisers* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971) p. 51.

²⁷ See for example, Anon., *Tricks of the Town laid open; or a companion for a Country Gentleman*, (London: H. Slater and R. Adams, 1747); Anon., *The Country Spy or a Ramble through London* (London: n. p., 1750); Anon., *The Devil upon Crutches in England or Night Scenes in London* (London: Phillip Hodges, 1755); Anon., *The Midnight Spy or London from 10 in the Evening to 5 in the Morning, exhibiting a Great Variety of Scenes in High Life and Low Life* (London: J. Cooke, 1766); Anon., *A Sunday Ramble: or a modern Sabbath-day Journey in and about the Cities*

of London and Westminster, (London: n. p., 1776); Anon., *Tricks of the Town laid open; a true caution to both sexes in town and country* (London: Sabine, 1780); R. King, *The Complete London Spy for the present year 1781* (London: Alex Hogg, 1781); Anon., *London unmasked or the New Town Spy* (London, n. p., 1784); and G. A. Stevens, *The Adventures of a Speculist or, a Journey through London compiled from papers written by George Alexander Stevens (Author of a Lecture upon Heads)* (London: S. Bladon, 1788). See J. C. Reid, *Bucks and Bruisers*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971) p. 51.

²⁸ *The Rambler's Magazine or Annals of Gallantry or Glee, Pleasure and Bon Ton; a delicious bouquet of amorous, bacchanalian, whimsical, humorous, theatrical and literary entertainment*, Vol. 1, No. 5, 1828, p. 207.

detection and exposure of criminal codes,²⁹ while others shifted the emphasis from the earlier texts towards the 'see[ing] of life'.³⁰ Unlike the earlier books, which were primarily scripted and only included a few black and white woodcuts, these new rambles were highly visual documents, with coloured lithographs, engravings and etchings, providing a place explicitly for urban dwellers to look at themselves.³¹

As journeys through the city, making connections between sites, rambling texts could be understood as a type of guidebook, but unlike traditional guidebooks, rambles were only semi-documentary, and also included narratives about their semi-fictional characters, which would usually bear some relation to famous figures of the time.³² The selection of places described was not comprehensive, and the focus tended to be on the activities in a place rather than its physical – architectural and landscape-based – qualities. Sites and places in a ramble are connected by type, but most importantly through time as part of a journey, and as such

²⁹ See, for example, *A Fortnight's Ramble through London, or a complete display of all the Cheats and Frauds practised in that Great Metropolis with the best Methods for eluding them being a true and pleasing narrative of the Adventures of a farmer's son* (London: Dean and Munday, 1817); George Andrewes, *The Stranger's Guide or the Frauds of London detected etc.* (London: J. Bailey, 1808); George Barrington, *Barrington's New London Spy for 1805, or the frauds of London detected, also a Treatise on the Art of Boxing by Mr. Belcher*, 4th edition (London: T. Tegg, 1805); and George Smeeton, *Doings in London; or Day and Night Scenes of the frauds, frolics, manners and depravities of the Metropolis* (London: Smeeton, 1828).

³⁰ Pierce Egan, *Life in London; or, the day and night scenes of Jerry Hawthorn, Esq. and his elegant friend Corinthian Tom, accompanied by Bob Logic, the Oxonian, in their Rambles and Sprees through the Metropolis* (London: Sherwood, Neely and Jones, 1820-1821) pp. 23-24.

³¹ Egan, *op. cit.*; Amateur, *Real Life in London, or the Rambles and adventures of Bob Tallyho, Esq. and his cousin the Hon. Tom Dashall, through the metropolis; exhibiting a living picture of fashionable characters, manners and amusements in high and low life* (London: Jones and Co., 1821-1822) pp. 198-199. This publication has been attributed to Robert Dighton by the

British Library, to Pierce Egan by the Guildhall Library, and to Jonathan Badcock or William Combe by J.C. Reid. See Reid, *Bucks*, p. 74; William Heath, *Fashion and Folly; or the Buck's Pilgrimage* (London: William Sams, 1822). This consists of a number of coloured engravings accompanied by verses, with no titles or plate numbers. Another edited edition was published in 1833. See William Heath, *Fashion and Folly illustrated in a series of 23 Humorous Coloured Engravings* (London: William Sams, 1833). In this edition the plates are each given titles. And Bernard Blackmantle, *The English Spy* (London: Sherwood, Jones and Co., 1825). The British Library catalogue attributes this text to Charles Molloy Westmacott.

³² Typical guidebooks to the city at that time included John Feltham, *Picture for London for 1818*, 19th edition (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1818); John Feltham, *The Picture of London for 1821*, 22nd edition (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1821); and J. Britton, *The Original Picture of London enlarged and improved being a correct guide for the stranger as well as for the inhabitant of the Metropolis of the British Empire together with a description of the environs*, 26th edition (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1827).

they could be said to form part of the tradition of early guidebooks that displayed the city or landscape to the visitor as a sequence, like, for example, the Benton Seeley Guidebooks to Stowe.

Rambles lack narrative plot and the characters are not developed, rather they are structured and themed to follow the desire to move through the city in the pursuit of pleasure. Excitement is developed in the reader by visually juxtaposing image, written text and different typographic techniques. Contrast is an important aspect of rambling, both in the narrative and the engravings. *Life in London* prioritises the diversity of social experience, portraying the paradoxes of city life as the main source


→ See p.130
Benton Seeley
Guidebooks
to Stowe



Benton Seeley Guidebooks to Stowe

of urban pleasure.³³ The experiences of the key protagonists are structured around contrasts – social and spatial, from high culture to popular culture, from grand interiors to dark streets, and most markedly from the wealth of London's West End to the poverty and ethnic diversity of the eastern areas of London closest to the docks, and to exchange and trade. The exhibition of the diversity of urban life, in the form of a panorama that is portable, is a key quality to the ramble as text.

The fascination with exhibition, and the design of sites to display difference and contrast is probably most famously associated with the Great Exhibition, and Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace of 1851 in particular, as the perfect motif of an exploded and sparkling visuality. And yet few people know of Paxton's other extraordinarily ambitious, but unrealised, project: the Great Victorian Way.³⁴ The designs for this infrastructure project were presented to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Metropolitan Communications by Paxton in June 1855, and consisted of a ten-mile loop around London, comprising a glass-roofed arcade, 72 feet wide and 108 feet high, covering a central roadway, lined with shops between the City and Regent's Street, and private residences in Brompton and the other areas of West London. Two levels of railway tracks – one for fast trains and the other for slow trains – were positioned behind the shops and houses. This design cleverly combines transport infrastructure, housing and consumption, display and exchange, but the fact that the proposed scheme was also known as the Great Girdle, or the Golden Girdle, hints at another reading. This word girdle suggests a different form of desire: one that wishes to reign in and control the wayward city and its celebration of commodity, gendered in the female.

In the ramble, the most important visual contrast is a social  made between the two extremes of London – the richer West and the poorer East. A key aspect of the Rambler's appeal is his mobility, and ability to move across the various strata of city life, and to 'see' life in its many facets, where the ramble as text visualises this mobility, and also allows the privilege of the Rambler's class background to be seen by the reader. The mobility of the Rambler and his ease of movement across the city is opposed in the rambling tales to the figure of the female, whose movement in public space is cause for concern – connected to frail morality at best, and prostitution at worst. One of the key sites where men

→ See pp.64-5
Joseph Paxton

³³ Egan, *Life*, pp. 23-4.

³⁴ See for example, Joseph Paxton, *Design for The Great Victorian Way* (1855). See <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/>

item/O1108503/design-for-the-great-victorian-drawing-paxton-joseph-sir/ (accessed 13 July 2018).

and women were able to mix in public in a relatively uncontrolled manner, and in relation to activities of leisure associated with the landscape, was at the Vauxhall Pleasure Garden. Like some of the other sites associated with nature in the city, such as Clerkenwell Spa, Hyde Park and Regent's Park, Vauxhall Gardens was connected with pleasure, and specifically with the liminal activities of the masquerade, where costume and disguise allowed for all kinds of possible class, gender and sexual transgressions.

→ See p.14
Canaletto

As well as a visit to a pleasure garden, a key scene in any ramble was an evening at the opera or ballet. In images of these outings, rambles are usually positioned in the ornate salons at the front of house, admiring the women on display – often described by the authors as Cyprians, and thus as courtesans or common prostitutes – as well as in the green room, at the back of house. Unlike the auditorium, salons and green rooms do not position the audience and the performer in specific places, and so these spaces contain the possibility of unregulated encounters and exchanges of gazes. In a scene in the green room of the Italian opera house, for example, a rambler is pictured, eye-glass in hand, admiring the form of a young Italian female ballerina, quite famous at the time, who is in turn watching herself in a large decorated mirror. Another scene, this time in the green room of the Haymarket Theatre, the shapely and lightly stockinged legs of the actress Madame Vestris, well known for her travesty roles, are located as the point of focus for the rambler's and the reader's gaze.

These visual dyads of male spectator and female spectacle have been thoroughly critiqued from a feminist and psychoanalytic perspective by film theorists such as Laura Mulvey, and in response other feminist critics and historians have turned to re-examining the possibilities of the female gaze. It is interesting to consider, then, how in some of the images in *The Lie of the Land* the female body is not only one that is looked at and so correlated to the landscape itself, but also one in possession of an eye that actively looks. Mrs. Jadis, as painted by Edward Alcock in 1775–1778, for example, holds a Claude glass to the landscape. This device, a small mirror, with its surface tinted grey or black, and slightly convex in shape, was one used at the time by those who were experts on landscape, and so that tells us something about Mrs. Jadis: that she knew something about landscape.

→ See pp.224–5
Edward Alcock

From her scenes of men and women courting, to the people working and socialising in rural settings, the paintings of Susanna Duncombe, also from the late-eighteenth century, equally demonstrate a woman actively representing landscapes of work and leisure in that period. These scenes, of people working in the

countryside, become idealised in the Toile de Jouy patterns and pastoral motifs that are the critical focus of Ingrid Pollard's *There Was Much Interruption* (2015). Pollard's earlier *The Cost of the English Landscape* (1989), contests dominant modes of landscape representation as open and free, and instead puts into play concerns with the lack of equal access to land, and the reduced mobility of some groups of society, in particular black and other ethnic minorities, within it.

→ See pp.74–5
Ingrid Pollard



Ingrid Pollard, *There Was Much Interruption*, 2015

The ongoing enclosure of land, and its shift from open and unfixed common occupation to specific productive usage in the service of profit, is a continuous form of erasures, expulsions and exclusions. The term 'brownfield site' has recently been applied to fully occupied social housing estates to indicate their potential as fallow land. Property consultants Savills have, for example, advised The London Borough of Southwark of the need to 'unearth the potential' of public land, and to sweat their assets.³⁵ The resultant displacement of residents out of central London and the capital itself have been documented by Loretta Lees, Just Space, Southwark Notes and others.³⁶ We see the privatisation of urban space and parks all around us on a day-to-day basis – from the replacement of social housing estates that were once magnificent in their surrounding open parks by gated private developments with shaded internal courtyards locked to the public, to the instruction from management at the-once-public-university that entry cards must be worn at all times. In the countryside, footpaths are diverted and renamed permissive paths, while signs are allowed to fall into the hedgerows, or are removed, only to be re-discovered by this rambler, in, of all places, a rotting wood pile in a private barn. The right to roam may have been established in Scotland, but in England, apart from designated routes, only some land has been assigned open access. Do not be surprised therefore to be stopped in your tracks on a Sunday walk by a member of the landed gentry discharging a firearm over your head, as a way to warn you off what you thought was a public right of way, and he sees as his own shooting ground.

To draw this ramble to a conclusion, I would like to end by highlighting how, in bringing into tension two ways of relating to land – one that seeks unrestrained movement, and another which desires to contain and control – this moment of contestation acts as a leitmotiv for the concerns raised by the work exhibited in *The Lie of the Land*. The choice of this phrase as title for the show already points to at least two kinds of 'lie': the physical form or shape that land takes, in the raw or through design, and the ability of this

³⁵ See Yolande Barnes and Sue Laming, 'Savills Research: London regeneration research proposal, 24 April 2014, available at http://www.savills.co.uk/_news/article/72418/175241-0/4/2014/savills-research-london-regeneration-research-proposal. For specific reports see, for example, <http://pdf.euro.savills.co.uk/residential---other/spotlight-public-land.pdf> (accessed 13 July 2018).

³⁶ For a mapping of the displacement of tenants and leaseholders from Southwark's Heygate Estate, see the article by Loretta Lees, Just Space, and SNAG (Southwark Notes Archives Group), 'The Social Cleansing of Council Estates in London', in Ben Campkin, David Roberts and Rebecca Ross (eds.) *Regeneration Realities: Urban Pamphleteer*, No. 2, 2014.

shape, especially when manipulated, to deceive, often through visual effect. In hiding a device inserted to delineate the edge of property, perhaps the most perfect example of the use of visual deceit as part of landscape design is the eighteenth-century 'ha-ha'.

Concerns with deception were also prominent in the early-nineteenth century ramble and connected with anxieties around female fashion and appearance. On the one hand, there was the worry that an interest in visual display was itself artificial, *unnatural* rather than natural, and that decorative devices could be used to cover the truth beneath (of class, of gender, of race), and so distort values of purity. On the other hand, there was the fear that too much revelation, especially of the upper-class female body, indicated vulgarity, moral frailty and promiscuousness. These gendered historical debates around the ethics of visibility can also be understood as ways in which particular codes – patriarchal and capitalist – regarding morality and ownership could be delineated. The nineteenth-century discourse concerning the 'proper' comportment of the female commodity might also be understood, then, as principles guiding the broader use of artifice or design with regards to private property.

Today, issues around the ethics of deception with regards to property and visibility remain as important, but the concerns are different and the representational techniques at hand allow articulations in new ways. Currently, land and value concerns demand to be considered from an ecological perspective, thus highlighting the even graver issues at stake. While the freedoms offered by the ownership of private property are ever-decreasing, we also see an increase in the privatisation of state commodities and shared amenities – air and water, as well as land. The visual spectacle of social media appears to offer ever-more opportunities for collaboration and communication, but while some more progressive journalists continue to uncover injustices through careful research, other parts of the media actively use visual techniques to distract from events concerning evictions, land grabs, and executions, for example, of activists protecting indigenous land rights. Today, unlike the nineteenth century, the worry is that lies told about land – rates of extraction for one thing, pollution for another – are producing more than gender and class injustice and the murder of colonised peoples: they facilitate the destruction of land understood as the earth itself.