

**Exhibiting Imperial London:
empire and the city in late Victorian and Edwardian guidebooks**

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ISBN: 1 904158 11 0

PRICE: £2.50 (p&p)

First published in Great Britain 2002 by Goldsmiths College, University of London, New Cross, London SE14 6NW.

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Imperialism, geographer Jane M. Jacobs affirms, “is a global process—it occurs across regions and nations—but even in its most marauding forms it necessarily takes hold in and through the local. The embeddedness of imperialist ideologies and practices is not simply an issue of society or culture but also, fundamentally, of place.”¹ Meanings and histories of places are constructed, in large part, through textual representations,² and in this essay I shall examine ways in which spaces of the imperial London of the late Victorian and Edwardian period—that of “high imperialism”—were constructed and coded through a specific kind of text: the tourist guidebook. One such book devoutly submitted, “Be it the aim of this handbook to stimulate and assist this study of the head and heart of that great body which is called the Empire of Victoria the Good.”³ Here we get a flavour of the imperialist discourses simmering through geographic representations and spatial taxonomies of tourist guidebooks, simultaneously reflecting and authorising the imperial ideology of London’s inhabitants.

The threadbare trope of city as theatre still serves nicely to describe the self-conscious presentation of the metropolis as, in Joseph Conrad’s words, “the very centre of the Empire on which the sun never sets”.⁴ If, as historian Jonathan Schneer has commented, “[i]t was impossible, in turn-of-the-century London, to avoid the imperial subtext”, it is because London was in numerous ways coded to serve as theatrical staging site for imperialism and its underlying ideologies; the city, anthropologist Anthony Cohen reminds us, “is a symbolic as well as a built

¹ Jane M. Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the city* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 34. (To avoid confusion, it should be noted that this is not the urbanist Jane Jacobs of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* fame.)

² On this, see Fredric Jameson, who in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1981) writes that history “is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious” (p. 35).

³ Eric Hammond and B. Prescott Row, *London Town, The “Daily Mail” Jubilee Guide to the Metropolis*, ill. Alfred Ellis (London: Beechings Ltd., 1898), p. 3.

⁴ Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1967 [1907]), p. 174.

environment”.⁵ The ensemble of practices related to tourism mobilised the city’s imperial consciousness. Here, London was “staged” with reference to a specific audience: the white, bourgeois visitor from other parts of Britain and from abroad. Through a series of symbolic procedures, abetted by the texts of guidebooks, London became both object of and stage for an imperial pageant—a “dramaturgy of power”⁶—aimed largely at these visitors.

While outsiders’ impressions of the city were formed through a variety of texts—literature, reform tracts, newspapers, and so on—the most direct form of textual mediation between visitor and metropolis occurs in the tourist guidebook. A guidebook directs, authorises, highlights and erases, acts as cultural arbiter, leads visitors through the urban labyrinth and delivers a “properly” informed view of the places described. In late Victorian and Edwardian London guidebooks, we see an imperial geography mapped onto the city itself: the texts fashion a city flaunting its self-proclaimed status as centre of the world and capital of a race with an imperial destiny. These books direct the tourist gaze in directions that are consistent with the imperial message. The ubiquitous themes of geographic, cultural, and racial superiority composed a subtext within the period’s London guidebooks, crafting a unique textual lens through which the metropolis could be viewed, experienced, and consumed.

Guidebooks: cultural roles and social contracts

I should like, initially, to consider the unique position of the London guidebook among those texts that represent place. These manuals carried out a specific cultural function, namely to reproduce dominant ideology in geographic format. Jacobs writes, “The role of the spatial imaginary in the imperial project is perhaps most clearly evident in the spatial practices of mapping and naming.”⁷ While this is often acknowledged within the context of the colonial periphery, the project of mapping—in our case, of making the heterogeneous city navigable and knowable to the visitor—is also crucial in projecting an imperial vision of the metropolis. Guidebooks bear resemblances to maps, which, according to literary critic John Kerrigan, may look like “mirrors of nature” but turn out to be “cultural texts”, “semiotic constructs which share with literary texts an ability to generate the sorts of social consequences which give rise to variations on themselves.”⁸ In similar fashion, urban guides, while on the surface seemingly

⁵ Jonathan Schneer, *London 1900: the imperial metropolis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 93; Anthony P. Cohen, “Introduction”, in *Humanising the City?: Social Contexts of Urban Life at the Turn of the Millennium*, eds. Anthony P. Cohen and Katsuyoshi Fukui (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), p. 15.

⁶ Phrase taken from anthropologist Abner Cohen’s *The Politics of Elite Culture: Explorations in the Dramaturgy of Power in a Modern African Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

⁷ Jacobs, p. 19.

⁸ John Kerrigan, “The Country of the Mind”, *Times Literary Supplement* (11 September 1998), pp. 18-19. On the selective views provided by maps, one might also see the exhibit at the British Library, London, “Lie of the Land: the secret life of maps”, 27 July 2001 to 7 April 2002.

“mirrors of nature”, reflecting self-evident meanings and history of the city, are instead “semiotic constructs” and “cultural texts”.

Guidebooks refract the particular meanings of spaces partially through the authority they claim as a specific type of text. The books’ efficacy in sanctioning certain ways of “seeing” rests on several factors: among them, standardisation (of guidebooks and of travel), the seeming disappearance of the writing subject, encyclopaedic descriptions, and reliance on conventions of the genre.

The term “package tour” captures perfectly the systematising impulse that drove operators such as Thomas Cook, and elevated (or demoted, depending on one’s viewpoint) all tourists into *the* tourist. The standardisation of travel, brought on in part by such tours and an increasingly affluent and mobile middle class, resulted in a surge of London guidebooks in the late nineteenth century. Of the period’s most popular guidebooks, literary critic James Buzard relates, “Murray and Baedeker brought an inspired diligence and thoroughness to the guidebook; they standardized it, from outer covers to inner organization; they relentlessly updated it, making it not the record of someone’s tours but a description of what current tourists could expect.”⁹ Unlike the personal travel accounts and idiosyncratic guides that had predominated until mid-century, they undertook a methodical and orderly codification of the city, many including rates of currency exchange, schedules of steam liners from various parts of the world, and encyclopaedic summaries of London’s contents—from the Adelphi to the Zoological Gardens, Adelaide Street to the Zetland Arms.¹⁰ By seemingly encapsulating the entire city, the books implicitly claimed exhaustive and definitive knowledge of the city, its histories, and lifeways.

This homogenising tendency also gave rise to the guidebooks’ detached and meticulous prose, what scholar John Towner calls “their impersonal, systematic approach to providing information and guidance”.¹¹ Dominated by a cool, distant tone (and frequently plagiarising one another), they read less like the voice of a single author than like the impersonal voice of omniscient authority; this ostensible disappearance of individual author lends even more authority to the text. Many went through numerous editions, constantly updated to provide an accurate record of exactly what tourists could expect. According to Buzard, “They preceded the tourist, making the crooked straight and the rough places plain for the tourist’s hesitant footsteps; they accompanied the tourist on the path they had beaten, directing gazes and prompting

⁹ James Buzard, *The beaten track: European tourism, literature, and the ways to culture, 1800-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 65.

¹⁰ On earlier, idiosyncratic guides, see Michael Harris, “London Guidebooks before 1800”, in *Maps and Prints: Aspects of the English Booktrade*, eds. Robin Myers and Michael Harris (Oxford: Oxford Polytechnic Press, 1984). On methodical and orderly codifications, see John Vaughn, *The English Guide Book c1780-1870: An Illustrated History* (London: David & Charles, 1974), p. 64.

¹¹ John Towner, “Guidebooks”, in *Encyclopedia of Tourism*, ed. Jafar Jafari (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 267.

responses.”¹² The purchaser solicits the expertise of this reliable and steadfast potentate, to steer him through the urban labyrinth, to make sense of disorder, to enlighten and inform. The authority these books claimed—through their encyclopaedic cataloguing of the city, their all-knowing impersonal tone, their constant updating and attention to details of interest to the tourist—made all the more trenchant their particular view of the metropolis.

Literary critic Jonathan Culler, addressing the semiotics of tourism, has described how tourists seek to penetrate a society’s “alibis” for its cultural practices: they are “interested in everything as a *sign of itself*, an instance of a typical cultural practice”.¹³ The tourist seeks perceptual clues to confirm his preconceptions about a place.¹⁴ In this quest for signs of authenticity, semiotic “markers” play an indispensable role. Culler writes, “A marker is any kind of information or representation that constitutes a sight as a sight: by giving information about it, representing it, making it recognizable”, including the text on plaques, the historical pastiche which often surrounds monuments, the authoritative voice of the guidebook.¹⁵ Such markers, by authorising sites and artefacts as “authentic”, render them visually accessible and ripe for consumption. In declaring a site, for instance, to be “The church of Samuel Pepys”, the guidebook certifies it as notice-worthy and constructs it as object of authenticity, as an appropriate resting place for the tourist gaze.

Fredric Jameson’s formulation of genres as social contracts suggests the relationship between guidebook and user: “Genres are essentially literary *institutions*, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact.”¹⁶ Within the “social contract” of their genre, guidebooks promise to render the city reduced to usable textual, and in turn visual, format, transforming *sites* into *sights*. The reader, on his side of the contract, implicitly agrees to heed the guidebook’s cultural coding of spaces and artefacts described. “In the mediated situations of a more complicated social life...”, Jameson writes, “perceptual signals must be replaced by conventions if the text in question is not to be abandoned to a drifting multiplicity...”.¹⁷ As personal travelogues are replaced with the omniscient Baedeker- and Murray-style guides, subjective signal is replaced with genre-specific convention. Through reliance on convention, they act to seal off not only their own textuality but

¹² Buzard, p. 75.

¹³ Jonathan Culler, *Framing the Sign: Criticism and its Institutions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), p. 155. My emphasis. Culler borrows the term “alibi” from Roland Barthes, who in his *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Granada, 1973 [1972]), pp. 128-9, defines this as the general tendency of a culture to convert history to nature.

¹⁴ See also Graham M. S. Dann, *The Language of Tourism: A Sociolinguistic Perspective* (Wallingford, Oxon: CAB International, 1996), pp. 65-67, who argues that tourism is “tautology”, and that tourists “merely confirm the discourse which persuaded them to take the trip”.

¹⁵ Culler, pp. 159, 164. On “markers”, Culler works from ideas of Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976).

¹⁶ Jameson, p. 106. Emphasis in text.

¹⁷ Ibid.

also the heterogeneous meanings of the city from Jameson's "drifting multiplicity" of competing codes of understanding. The "proper use" of the city as cultural artefact is prescribed and textualised.

As part of this "social contract", the guidebook user may play a more passive role in textual interpretation than a reader of, say, a novel, a political polemic, or a treatise on economics. On the surface, the text appears an object of utility, explicitly *not* a political argument or epistemological meditation; the texts disavow and dissimulate power at the moment of its exercise. And simultaneously, the reader is enjoined to *perform* the text. The reader's attention is deflected from text (descriptions of the city) to the objects of description (monuments, districts, artefacts, populations), but as the eye shifts from text to corresponding physical environment, it conveys with it ideology embedded in the text. The guidebook thus conveys ideology and defers attention in the same motion.

In proclaiming itself a tool, a guidebook can encourage what Edward Said has termed a "textual attitude", where texts acquire greater authority than the reality purportedly described. In circumstances favouring "textual attitudes", including situations when people are faced with the unknown, the authority of texts like guidebooks is heightened. Said contends, "Travel books or guidebooks are about as 'natural' a kind of text, as logical in their composition or use, as any book one can think of, precisely because of this human tendency to fall back on a text when the uncertainties of travel in strange parts seem to threaten one's equanimity."¹⁸ For the visitor, the guidebook then elicits meaning, perhaps ordering the city's heterogeneous chaos into the "paths", "edges", "districts", "nodes", and "landmarks" from which psychologist Kevin Lynch has found urbanites construct their "mental maps".¹⁹

The associations and meanings of sites or spaces are to a large extent determined by the "markers" textually encapsulating them. These markers also provide a certain way of framing them: sites are not only declared "authentic", but inevitably certain meanings are privileged above others. By the late nineteenth century, Buzard claims, "the need for a cultural authority to direct travellers' attention to the 'right' objects [had] been answered by the entrepreneurs of leisure travel"—including, of course, the publishers of guidebooks.²⁰ Directing attention to the "right" objects means that conflicting or ambiguous meanings of spaces—their kaleidoscopes of signification—are stifled in favour of a transparent text, a single frame of reference. Meanings and histories of spaces are easily and superficially summed up, invested with only one aspect of their multifarious socially constructed and changing meanings, rather than opened up to conflicting interpretations or alternate readings. In displacing multiple meanings with a single

¹⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1995 [1978]), p. 93.

¹⁹ Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), pp. 47-8.

²⁰ Buzard, p. 221.

viewpoint, almost always consistent with dominant modes of representation, such texts remind us of the authority and power immanent in all representational strategies. Certainly other types of texts (literary constructions of the city, for one) do this as well.²¹ But the guidebook's lens focuses the city in a different way, for the tourist is not only imaginatively but physically guided through the city, and invited visually to appropriate its spaces.

Monumental London: the city as microcosm of empire

Interestingly, many late Victorian and Edwardian guidebooks presented London not just as heart or source or governing head of the empire, but also, in and of itself, as a microcosm and model of empire, the colonial project crystallised in the city and its peoples. A. Staines Manders, penning his guidebook to colonial soldiers on leave during the First World War, instructed that “London is the type and epitome of the Empire.”²² As we shall see, though more explicit than most guidebook pundits, Manders's conflation—or “imaginative doubling”—of capital and empire was a common, if subtle, feature of the genre. As microcosm of empire, London itself has a head or central core (Trafalgar Square in many books, the Royal Exchange in others, Westminster in still others), trade routes, far-flung provinces (suburbs of various sorts), exotic byways, and savage or “colourful” inhabitants.

Of the architectural evolution of major European capitals, historian Donald Olsen writes, “London, Paris, and Vienna had long contained monuments. Only in the nineteenth century did they try to *become* monuments.”²³ This process of centralised planning, an effort to configure entire cities as unified and coherent “works of art”, resulted in Haussmann's Paris, “Ringstrasse Vienna”, and—less successfully in London—piecemeal additions from Nash to Aston Webb and beyond. The iconography of elite values became even more a part of—indeed the dominant feature of—the built environment. Increasingly, a goal of London's planners became the transformation of the city into a monument to *empire*.²⁴ But a weak central controlling body (the

²¹ And guidebooks' versions of places can sometimes condition fictions of those places. American novelist Thomas Pynchon writes, “It wasn't until [short story] ‘Under the Rose’ (1959) that I could bring myself, even indirectly, to credit guidebook eponym Karl Baedeker, whose guide to Egypt for 1899 was the major ‘source’ for the story. ... Loot the Baedeker I did, all the details of a time and place I had never been to, right down to the names of the diplomatic corps.” Pynchon, *Slow Learner: the early stories* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984), p. 17.

²² A. Staines Manders, *Colonials' Guide to London: ANZACS, Canadians and all other soldiers of the Empire* (London: Fulton-Manders Publishing Co., 1916), p. 17.

²³ Donald J. Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art: London, Paris, Vienna* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 9. Emphasis in text. On the links between Vienna's Ringstrasse, urban modernism, and the Austrian political imagination, see Chapter 2 of Carl E. Schorske's classic study *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981 [1980]).

²⁴ Schneer claims that at the turn of the century, most of Britain's leading architects—“men for whom architecture and national identity were linked”—“believed that London was the capital city of the world's greatest empire, but that its architecture did not reflect this fact” (p. 34). We can see Aston Webb's Edwardian Baroque new layout of the Mall, the Admiralty Arch, the Queen Victoria memorial fronting Buckingham Palace, the push for widening the Strand, the monument at Aldwych, and the construction of Kingsway, as resulting from this anxiety. See Schneer, Chapter 2, in *London 1900*.

London County Council, only established in 1888²⁵) made impossible an urban reordering of the scale accomplished in Paris or Vienna. The very absence of stylistic unity—the hodgepodge of design—is one hallmark of London. In such a visually disordered conurbation (an untidy jumble that Henry James called “a tremendous chapter of accidents”), any order would of necessity be imaginative rather than physical.²⁶ Thus part of the process of “urban monumentalisation” might be described as *textual*: a monumentalisation through imaginative means; a creative reinvention of what “London” meant rather than what it looked like.

Geographer David Gilbert interprets guidebook claims for London’s world centrality as “simultaneously statements about the city’s relationship with the Empire, and its superiority over competing European imperial capitals”.²⁷ These attitudes surfaced, for example, in the 1887 *Routledge* manual, which called London “one of the best drained, best paved, best lighted, and best ventilated cities in Europe”, and also “the most charitable and the most social of capitals.”²⁸ For Murray in 1893, pre-eminence rested upon magnitude of property-value and citizenry: London “in these thousand years has grown to possess more than forty millions sterling of rateable property, and to contain five millions of a population—the greatest city in the world.”²⁹ The 1904 *Kelkel* guide not only saw the city’s rise as historically unique, but also elided any tensions between city and country or London and provincial cities, recording, “The history of the world can show no parallel to the rise and progress of London” and “its immense influence has been of the greatest benefit to the whole nation”.³⁰ Grandiosely placing London in somewhat larger context, the 1910 *Tit-Bits* book called it “the giant city of the universe”, situated as “the centre of the terrestrial globe, and the focus of wealth, commerce, and intellect.”³¹ In the guides the centrality of the city’s spaces is emphasised like a constant drumbeat: Fleet Street is “perhaps the busiest thoroughfare in the world”; the Victoria Memorial will be the “finest memorial ever put up in England”; the Albert Memorial is “the most sumptuous memorial in the kingdom”; Downing Street “the most famous street in the world”; and so on.³² The city’s promenading élites proved just as “spectacular” as the city’s monuments: “The wealth, beauty, and intellect of

²⁵ Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, intro. Andrew and Lynn Hollen Lees (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993 [1963]), p. 325.

²⁶ Henry James, *English Hours*, 2nd edition, ed. Alma Louise Lowe, ill. Anthony Gross (New York: Orion, 1960 [1905]), p. 10.

²⁷ David Gilbert, “‘London in all its glory—or how to enjoy London’: guidebook representations of imperial London”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 25, no. 3 (July 1999), p. 284.

²⁸ *Routledge’s Jubilee Guide to London and its Suburbs* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1887), pp. vii, viii. Such remarks on municipal improvements can be seen in a broader context. Many urban observers of this period, social historian Andrew Lees recounts, “derived deep satisfaction from and took personal pride in what they regarded as an impressive and heartening record of urban improvement.” Lees, *Cities Perceived: Urban Society in European and American Thought, 1820-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 219.

²⁹ *The Metropolitan London Guide* (London: Murray’s Tourist Office, 1893), p. 18.

³⁰ *The Kelkel Guide to London* (London: J. J. Keliher & Co., 1904), p. 23.

³¹ “*Tit-Bits*” *Guide to London* (London: George Newnes, Ltd., 1910), p. 9.

³² *Tourist’s Guide to London East of Trafalgar Square*, p. 18; *Royal Coronation Guide*, p. 66; *Cassell’s Ready Reference Guide*, pp. 82, 197.

London will often be seen cantering along on horseback” in Hyde Park, explained one manual; another quoted an unnamed “lively writer” pronouncing this promenade as “the most brilliant spectacle of the kind which the world can show”.³³

If we see guidebooks presenting London as a sort of microcosm of empire, then the metropolis itself needed a centre: a Heart of Empire *within* the Heart of Empire. The idea of a definable symbolic centre has always been difficult, since London has never been a monumental or architecturally unified city like Paris or Vienna. In guidebooks, as in other texts, we glimpse echoes of London’s struggle to reinvent itself as an imperial city, and can observe attempts to create an imaginative centre of gravity, even if (or perhaps because) it lacked the clear-cut physical definition of other capitals. We can detect several spaces competing as imaginative hearts of microcosmic empire.

In his book *Trafalgar Square: Emblem of Empire*, Rodney Mace characterises the Square as London’s “front room”, claiming that this type of urban space, “as in a household, attempts to give palpable expression to its host’s social and political aspirations. ... In all their manifestations they are the sole and absolute province of the ruling class, who of course decide what will be recorded and how.”³⁴ Mace’s domestic metaphor is apt and useful, but it would be incorrect to assume that a complex city like London had only one such “front room”. The city’s privileged symbolic spaces—though all part of the formal, squared-off London of officialdom and statuary—urge on us widely varying visions of Britain and her empire. Trafalgar Square, inhabited by effigies of military heroes, offers up a different flavour of empire than, say, the Palace of Westminster and Parliament Square, which rather sing the doxology of British democracy and statesmanship. Similarly, the hub centred on the Bank of England and Royal Exchange was the symbolic Prytaneum of British “gentlemanly capitalism”,³⁵ and St. Paul’s Cathedral the city’s (and world’s) central place of Protestant Christianity. Manders, with apparently artless camaraderie, drew on imperial associations of these central spaces: “The Tower, the Abbey, Westminster Hall, and St. Paul’s appeal to the imagination of the peoples of the Dominions as no novelty however brilliant can appeal. For these are theirs and ours, and in the shadow of the Abbey or the White Tower, we are Londoners all.”³⁶

³³ “*Tit-Bits*” *Guide to London* (London: George Newnes, Ltd., 1895), p. 57; *Tourist’s Guide to London West of Trafalgar Square*, p. 37.

³⁴ Rodney Mace, *Trafalgar Square: Emblem of Empire* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), p. 15. The symbolic importance of the Square to empire can be seen in the S. S.’s 1940 plan to transfer the Nelson Column to Berlin following a successful German invasion (*ibid.*, p. 17), and it remains important to tourists, as can be seen in the statistic that in the early 1970s, 93% of tourists saw Trafalgar Square (and 85% visited Westminster Abbey). These statistics from Maxine Feifer’s witty book *Going Places: The Ways of the Tourist from Imperial Rome to the Present Day*, ill. Jo Lynch (London: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 226-7.

³⁵ The phrase “gentlemanly capitalism”, describing the nexus of aristocratic class privilege and British capitalism, is a key term from P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British imperialism: innovation and expansion, 1688-1914* (London: Longman, 1993).

³⁶ Manders, p. 20.

Gilbert identifies a “consistent defensive subtext” regarding the cityscape in period guides.³⁷ We see a 1902 guide addressing endemic anxieties that the largely unplanned city didn’t match up to Continental rivals by insisting that the Londoner, returning from abroad convinced of his city’s inferiority, will find, “to his surprise, that Trafalgar Square can beat almost anything of its kind in the world, especially on a fine day”.³⁸ Similarly, another guide opined, “Though not so big as the Place de la Concorde, Paris, [the Square’s] surroundings and associations are certainly as impressive.”³⁹ In one guide, we, following instructions, turn a corner which places our “backs (of compulsion and not through discourtesy) to Nelson’s Column”.⁴⁰ The column, says the 1904 *Kelkel* guide, “is a nation’s tribute to the memory of the great admiral whose ability and courage did so much to preserve the commercial supremacy of England”.⁴¹

St. Paul’s Cathedral, for several guides “the most imposing building in the Metropolis”, featured also as emblem of empire.⁴² For Murray in 1889, the church’s “mighty dome, surmounted by its gigantic gilded cross, pointing upwards and seen afar, seems to say London is more than the centre of the world’s wealth and intelligence, it is also the centre of its Christianity.”⁴³ For another author, crowds of worshippers filling the transepts on festival days showed that St. Paul’s, “in addition to its size and importance as a large public building, takes its place also as the Cathedral of the Metropolis—a great Christian temple.”⁴⁴ The Cathedral certainly dominated the city in the opinion of one 1887 guide, which explained, “With its mighty and lofty dome, the great Anglican Cathedral seems to overshadow the entire city, and in every view of London it becomes the dominant and ever-impressive feature.”⁴⁵ *Routledge* melodramatically instructed the visitor: “Let us look around. Here are the monuments to the ‘illustrious dead.’ Step softly: we are on holy ground”—on holy ground not so much because we are in God’s House, but because we are surrounded by “memorials of the great among all professions”.⁴⁶ Indeed, claimed the 1910 *Tit-Bits* book, the church is “a pantheon for our heroes”.⁴⁷

³⁷ Gilbert, p. 290. The defensiveness is more than usually apparent in the 1910 “*Tit-Bits*”; for instance: “It is this very lack of plan that renders the City so interesting. ... London can never hope to have the uniformity of design of her more modern rivals” (p. 11).

³⁸ *The Royal Coronation Guide to London* (London: Harrison & Sons, 1902), p. 83.

³⁹ “*Tit-Bits*”, 1895, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Hammond and Row, p. 25.

⁴¹ *The Kelkel Guide*, p. 35.

⁴² Phrase used in both *Benson’s Visitors’ Guide to London* (London: Benson & Co., 1900), p. 3, and G. W. Bacon, *Bacon’s Illustrated London Guide* (London: G. W. Bacon & Co., 1906), p. 26.

⁴³ John Paul Murray, *Murray’s Guide to London* (London: John Paul Murray, 1889), p. 15.

⁴⁴ T. N. Spurrill, *Seven Days in London: An easy guide with large map and descriptive plans and illustrations* (London: H. Grube, 1902), p. 23.

⁴⁵ *Tourist’s Guide to London East of Trafalgar Square* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1887), p. 26.

⁴⁶ *Routledge’s Jubilee Guide*, p. 46.

⁴⁷ “*Tit-Bits*”, 1910, p. 22.

Murray, carrying the cardiac metaphor farther than most, left no doubt as to where the city's centre is: "By the Drinking Fountain, fronting the Royal Exchange, we are in the 'Heart of London,' from which these diverging thoroughfares, like great arteries, convey the busy crowd, as its life blood, in so many directions."⁴⁸ *Bacon's Guide*, likewise, centred the metropolis on this hub, explaining, "The great business centre of the City is at the open space opposite the Bank of England, from which seven important streets radiate".⁴⁹ And this is a place that should be familiar to the tourist, for here is the only bank "which has the power of issuing its own notes, which are well known everywhere."⁵⁰ The Bank of England is described as "the world's great financial centre", and the surrounding area, occupied by financial establishments, as "overflowing with gold and silver".⁵¹ The Royal Exchange's role in Britain's commercial empire was elaborated in a 1893 guide pointing out tympanum sculptures of the Lord Mayor and other City officials along with "a Hindoo, a Mahomedan, a Greek, and Turkish merchant; on the left are two British and a Persian merchant, a Levant sailor, a negro, a British sailor, and a supercargo."⁵²

For some writers, the heart or centre of this microcosm of empire was located at the Palace of Westminster. This reflected more general attitudes towards the edifice; critic and novelist Ford Madox Ford, for example, in 1905 declared Westminster "the heart of England, the cradle of its laws, of its empire, of its, on the whole, beneficent influence upon the comity of nations."⁵³ Such thinking was reproduced in guidebooks positioning Westminster as symbolic nucleus of the metropolis. It is here "round which so great a national and imperial interest centres", one guide solemnly proclaimed, and, "The House of Commons may be described as the place where the will of the nation finds utterance."⁵⁴ Of the House of Lords: "The fancy can picture this House on great occasions" with "the King and his Consort and other members of the Royal Family, surrounded by the great people of State, the Peers, and especially the Peeresses".⁵⁵ Even architecturally the centrality of the Houses of Parliament was affirmed; the 1902 *Royal Coronation Guide* to the city related that they are "[r]egarded impartially as the finest pile of, comparatively, modern buildings in the world".⁵⁶

⁴⁸ *Metropolitan London Guide*, p. 18.

⁴⁹ Bacon, p. 3.

⁵⁰ Spurll, p. 31.

⁵¹ *Tourist's Guide to London East of Trafalgar Square*, pp. 45, 47.

⁵² Frank Heath, *London. What to See. A handbook of general information for the use of colonial and foreign travellers* (London: Heath Brothers, 1893), n.p.

⁵³ Ford Madox Ford, *The Soul of London: A Survey of a Modern City*, ed. Alan G. Hill (London: Everyman, 1995 [1905]), p. 97. Ford's point, it should be acknowledged, is that this site is "wasted on London", as residents treat it only as "a convenient station on the Underground" (ibid.).

⁵⁴ Spurll, pp. 39, 42.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 41.

⁵⁶ *Royal Coronation Guide*, p. 75.

Political and travel commentator Donald Horne analyses the symbolism of the Houses of Parliament within the broader context of “heritage” and its political functions: “As democratic demands grew, the old order tamed them—so far as it could—by maintaining some of the symbolic language of the hereditary principle, or, more generally, of ‘tradition’. An example is the complex of images of the British parliament.”⁵⁷ The 1910 *Cassell* guide, like many books, used such symbolic language to point to a distant and mythical past, announcing, “[F]rom time immemorial Westminster has been the centre of our national life”.⁵⁸ Horne claims Westminster’s “success as a symbol comes from the broadness and ambiguities of what it is seen to stand for”. Thus the edifice could (and still can) appeal to onlookers of various and contrasting political orientations: traditionalists, imperial chauvinists, “followers of the cult of parliament”, democrats, and even populists. Contradictory interpretations of the English Civil War, also, are simultaneously memorialised in Westminster’s paintings and statues, reflecting ambiguities in national memory.⁵⁹

Directed toward the imperial cause, also, were reputations of famous literary figures, as in the Poet’s Corner of Westminster Abbey the tourist learned, “Everywhere are reminders of the men whose thought and whose expression of thought have contributed to Britain’s greatness and glory.”⁶⁰ The *Tit-Bits* guide of 1910 positioned the Abbey as London’s pre-eminent monument by route of association with the mist-shrouded English past: “The great Pantheon of England’s glory—the last resting-place of kings, queens, warriors, princes, poets, artists, sculptors, and authors—is the most impressive sight which even our great Metropolis has to show to the visitor.”⁶¹ Indeed, the books, as their most conspicuous feature, extolled the city’s history and associations with myriad famous names and glorious events. The constant elaborations and codifications of an often-equivocal history serve to encourage a sense of nostalgia in the reader. (After all, claimed Manders, “it is the Old London that the overseas visitor most desires to know and understand.”⁶²) Critic Susan Stewart reminds us that nostalgia, “like any form of narrative, is always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative”; these ideological constructions of the past are central to the mapping of the imperial metropolis.⁶³

⁵⁷ Donald Horne, *The Great Museum: The Re-Presentation of History* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), p. 103.

⁵⁸ *Cassell’s Ready Reference Guide to London*, revised by Ernest H. Rann (London: Cassell & Company, Ltd., 1910), p. 70.

⁵⁹ Horne, pp. 78-80 and 103. Relevant here is anthropologist Abner Cohen’s observation regarding the use of *ambiguity* in projecting elite politics: “Inevitably, the symbols and dramatic performances of the [élite] cult are mysterious and highly ambiguous. This is partly because they are addressed to different audiences, and are motivated by different individual and group purposes at one and the same time.” (p. 3)

⁶⁰ Hammond and Row, p. 32.

⁶¹ “*Tit-Bits*”, 1910, p. 14.

⁶² Manders, p. 18.

⁶³ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 23.

Architectural scholar Thomas Markus emphasises that *language* lies at the heart of how we use and understand buildings, that it is key to how communities create and experience buildings' meanings. "Much of what we think and feel [about buildings] is the direct outcome of descriptive texts...", Markus argues; "Their language, like all language, cannot be innocent."⁶⁴ Thus, when investigating the subtle yet comprehensive entanglements of cities and empire, we must consider not just the iconography of the built environment, but also the descriptive language used in everyday texts such as guidebooks; the web of discourse and language surrounding a monument plays a predominant role in crafting its meaning and projecting its ideology.

Suburban Dominions

If Westminster, Trafalgar Square, and St. Paul's were the "heart" of this microcosmic empire, the suburbs certainly took their place in the guidebooks as tributary dominions. In the *Daily Mail's* 1898 guide, we are told of Greater London, "Elizabeth forbade building beyond certain fixed limits. Victoria, fearing growth neither at home nor abroad, has issued no Act of Limitation."⁶⁵ In remarks like these, we see a direct and self-conscious parallel being drawn between the swift growth of the empire (especially, perhaps, during the Scramble for Africa following the 1885 Berlin Conference) and the astonishingly rapid enlargement of Greater London (the "outer ring" increasing from 414,000 in 1861 to 1,405,000 by 1891 and to 2,045,000 in 1901⁶⁶). "London, devourer of rural limits", novelist George Gissing called it in 1893.⁶⁷ Particularly interesting to read via the colonial metaphor is the 1904 *Kelkel* guide's opinion that "Even the commercial growth of the Metropolis is not so marvellous as the expansion and extension of its area... So rapid has been the growth of suburban London that each borough is almost a city in itself, and, if necessary, would be capable of self-government without the aid of the central authorities."⁶⁸

Suburban London, a guide related in 1902, was "where persons of quite moderate means or moderate social ambition enjoy life rationally" (perhaps a sort of Canada of the metropolis?).⁶⁹ Earlier in this booklet, we are told that the empire's territories are unequalled "in their vastness and their variety of climes, races, and languages", and later it is claimed that "the different suburbs are as varied, from the point of view of type, salubrity, and accessibility as, say, the British Colonies".⁷⁰ The book does not pursue taxonomies of suburbs very far, claiming, "An

⁶⁴ Thomas A. Markus, *Buildings and Power: Freedom and Control in the Origin of Modern Building Types* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 4.

⁶⁵ Hammond and Row, p. 95.

⁶⁶ Briggs, p. 312.

⁶⁷ From Gissing's 1893 novel *In the Year of the Jubilee*, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 351.

⁶⁸ *The Kelkel Guide*, pp. 23, 83.

⁶⁹ *Royal Coronation Guide*, p. 20.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 22.

analysis and classification of the Suburbs of London would be interesting, but would arouse indignant protests.”⁷¹ The parallel breaks down when the coloniser refuses to place himself under the anthropological spotlight that he trains on others.

The Other in the City

A central theme of all writings on empire is the engagement of Europeans with cultural other, whether found in the periphery or intruding upon the metropolises. Literary critic Mary Louise Pratt, attempting to evade diffusionist theorizations of conquest and domination, has coined the term “contact zone” to describe “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict”.⁷² While Pratt uses the term in discussing the colonial periphery, this expression is equally applicable to the capital, for as an increasingly cosmopolitan city, encompassing a vast array of foreign workers and commodities, London—like the colonies—was a prime contact zone of the empire.

Ford saw London as “the meeting place of all Occidentals and of such of the Easterns as can come, however remotely, into touch with the Western spirit”,⁷³ and, not surprisingly, popular texts like guidebooks also exhibited acute awareness of the colonial other’s presence in the metropolis. Sociologist John Eade rightly asserts, “The descriptions of London as a national capital, centre of empire, and European and world city rely upon establishing a boundary between insiders and outsiders.”⁷⁴ These colonial outsiders are present within the guidebooks’ city in a variety of places—in the East End and Docks, in immigrant sections like Soho, in displays at various museums and exhibition grounds, in the Square Mile’s monuments to its vast trading empire, etc.—and the books “manage” this intrusion of otherness in a variety of fashions.⁷⁵ Although the books cannot *ignore* the presence of alien bodies and artefacts when mapping London’s geographic contact zones, this alien presence must be dealt with in specific ways; it must be verbally managed, manipulated, and equivocated, lest the foreign be naturalised as an unremarkable or legitimate part of the English urban landscape (or worse—lest the visitor be tempted to “go native”, a constant anxiety for colonial authorities).

Guidebooks, as we shall see in following sections, managed the inerasable foreign elements of the city in several ways: 1.) by explicitly guiding visitors away from areas of heavy

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 22.

⁷² Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 6-7.

⁷³ Ford, p. 13.

⁷⁴ John Eade, *Placing London: From Imperial Capital to Global City* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), p. 26.

⁷⁵ Graham M. S. Dann picks up a similar theme in his article “Travelogs and the Management of Unfamiliarity”, *Journal of Travel Research*, vol. 30, no. 4 (Spring 1992), by analysing the ways travel writers “manage” unfamiliarity (using denigration of locals, the establishment of expatriate connections, and other strategies).

concentrations of foreigners, especially non-Europeans; 2.) by exoticising, denigrating, and de-naturalising the appearance of the foreign body or artefact within the metropolis, and; 3.) by positioning the foreign, when properly “contained” and displayed within the city, as sign of the empire’s breadth and glory. In these ways, a context was provided for the visitor to view London’s many exotic or threatening foreign elements with a proper, imperial perspective.

Mapping the ‘internal Orient’

Especially intriguing to those mapping the geography of imperial London is the way the East End docks, as “conduit in an imperial economy”,⁷⁶ were increasingly filled with foreign populations and exotic colonial commodities. This area, especially, represented an insertion of colonial other into the very heart of empire, a tangible spatial intrusion of far-flung territories that were normally inaccessible to the eyes of Londoners.

While it is not necessary here to rehearse well-established arguments about the late-Victorians’ fixation with a pathologised East End, a short summary should give us better perspective on our chosen texts. During the mid- and late nineteenth century, the East End, as an impoverished and supposedly dangerous district of an opulent metropolis, became a local metaphor for the “unmapped”, “uncivilised”, and ultimately “unknowable” territories over which Britain had established sway. Over the course of the period, Raymond Williams relates, a “predominant image of the darkness and poverty of the city, with East London as its symbolic example, became quite central in literature and social thought.”⁷⁷ Darkest London was a turn-of-phrase conflating the “unexplored” depths of impoverished London and the “impenetrable” African continent. George Sims, for example, characterised his 1883 exposé of slum housing as a venture through “a dark continent that is within easy walking distance of the General Post Office”.⁷⁸ Williams sees East and West Ends functioning as necessary poles of a geographic binary: “The perception of ‘darkest London’, in the largely separated East End, was a consequence of the blaze of light in that part of the city which was a national and international capital.”⁷⁹ Critic Judith Walkowitz extends this argument, claiming that the East/West

⁷⁶ Phrase from Jacobs, p. 73.

⁷⁷ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), p. 221; see also Briggs, pp. 313-319.

⁷⁸ From Sims’s book *How the Poor Live*, quoted in Judith R. Walkowitz, *The City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Mid-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 27.

⁷⁹ Williams, p. 229. Literary critic Franco Moretti, in *Atlas of the European novel: 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1998), has mapped this division through nineteenth century London novels, as well. He writes: “Cities can be very random environments, ... and novels try as a rule to reduce such randomness; this reduction ... typically *takes the form of a binary system*: the unpredictable urban elements are all pigeonholed, all classified in two well-defined fields...” (p. 107, emphasis in text). In London, he claims, this binary narrative logic follows the outlines of East and West Ends.

opposition “increasingly took on imperial and racial dimensions, as the two parts of London imaginatively doubled for England and its Empire”.⁸⁰

The Depression of 1879, followed by a severe slump in 1884-87 (especially in garment making, shipbuilding, and metalworking), had disproportionate effects on London’s already disadvantaged East. Working class housing shortages and endemic underemployment spurred an interest in urban poverty sustained over several decades, and numerous public campaigns against urban slums by such reformers as *Pall Mall Gazette* editor W. T. Stead, Andrew Mearns, Rev. George Sale Reaney, and Charles F. G. Masterman. Meanwhile, Salvation Army founder William Booth and his brigades set out, as social historian Andrew Lees recounts, to “rescue a multitude of individuals whom Booth saw as comparable in their spiritual and social degradation to the stunted and dwarfish denizens of an African jungle.”⁸¹ As historian P. J. Keating has demonstrated, “[B]y the mid-eighties the East End of London had become as potent a symbol of urban poverty..., as Manchester had been of industrial conditions in the 1840s.”⁸²

By late century, the East End and docks had become enmeshed in a dense web of texts following tropes of foreignness, of attraction and repulsion, of imaginative doubling for empire. In Conrad’s 1899 novelette *Heart of Darkness*, the narrator Marlowe—surveying London from the lower regions of the Thames—pronounces “this also has been one of the dark places of the earth”; the river, he muses, carries “[t]he dreams of men, the seed of commonwealth, the germs of empires”, reinforcing its role as what historian Peter Linebaugh labels “the jugular vein of the British Empire”.⁸³ In the metropolitan spatial imagination of much of the period’s fiction, we see an obsession with the intrusion of the exotic and foreign, what one critic calls “the prevalence of the urban jungle trope”.⁸⁴ Such fixation with alien encroachment, especially in the East End, appeared also in the popular press, as, for instance, in a 1911 *Evening Standard* article on London’s “undesirables”:

According to a member of Stepney Borough Council, ‘if you start at London Bridge you can go to Stoke Newington and Hackney, and round by Stratford back to London Bridge without knowing you are in England at all.’ ... The whole atmosphere is unmistakably foreign...; the people in the streets look

⁸⁰ Walkowitz, p. 26.

⁸¹ Works by these and other reformers are described in Lees, pp. 107-110, 155, 221. The Lees quote is from p. 221. For Booth’s view of the urban poor, see Herbert A. Wisbey, Jr., *Soldiers Without Swords: a history of the Salvation Army in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p. 110.

⁸² P. J. Keating, “Fact and Fiction in the East End”, in *Victorian Cities: Images and Realities, Vol. 2*, eds. H. J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 585.

⁸³ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990 [1899]), pp. 138, 137; Peter Linebaugh, *The London hanged: crime and civil society in the eighteenth century* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1991), p. 409.

⁸⁴ Joseph McLaughlin, *Writing the Urban Jungle: Reading Empire in London from Doyle to Eliot* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2000), p. 16. It is important to keep in mind that this shift is a matter of scale not type. For earlier descriptions of the influx and fascination with exotic commodities, see David Barnett, *London, Hub of the Industrial Revolution: A Revisionist History 1775-1824* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1998), esp. p. 155.

at a Christian stranger out of the corners of the eyes with suspicious curiosity, and the stranger notices how un-English they are.⁸⁵

For social investigators as well, links between exotic territories and local realms of “urban savagery” obtained, as urban poverty became what sociologist Les Back has called “an ‘internal Orient’ to be discovered and tamed.”⁸⁶ Several critics have examined the “renaming of poverty as a place, instead of a personal condition”, and parallels between anthropologists abroad and social investigators at home, both constructing a “separate race” for scientific and popular consumption.⁸⁷ This apparent, for example, in writings of social investigator Beatrice Webb, who in her notebooks discussed “the aborigines of the East End”: among these “idle ne’er-do-well[s]”, “[t]he worst scoundrel is the cockney-born Irishman. The woman is the Chinaman of the place, and drudges as the women of the savage races”.⁸⁸ As Walkowitz has argued, “urban explorers adapted the language of imperialism to evoke features of their own cities.”⁸⁹ We can also detect this imaginative doubling operating in reverse: in, for example, Rudyard Kipling’s descriptions of Lahore’s and Calcutta’s filth and degradation one detects a startling mirroring of the way East London was frequently described, and parliamentary candidate Major William Eden Evans-Gordon, in the 1900 “Khaki Election”, took to calling the Indian subcontinent “the East End of this Empire”.⁹⁰

The theme emerged strongly as well within the period’s guidebooks. Many taxonomised the population in crude versions of Charles Booth’s social categories; for example: “The bulk of the East End population may be divided into workers, casual workers, criminals, and the large poverty-stricken foreign settlement.”⁹¹ Of “Struggling London”, one related in 1902, “The East End is essentially the most struggling district, mainly owing to the enormous proportion of

⁸⁵ A Special Correspondent, “London Overrun by Undesirables. Vast Foreign Areas. A Growing Menace”, *The Evening Standard* (serialized from 25-27 January 1911; this quotation from 25 January). Thanks to Ben Gidley for pointing out this article.

⁸⁶ Les Back, *New ethnicities and urban culture: Racisms and multiculturalism in young lives* (London: UCL Press, 1996), p. 18.

⁸⁷ On “the renaming of poverty...”, Sam Bass Warner, Jr., “The Management of Multiple Urban Images”, in *The Pursuit of Urban History*, eds. Derek Fraser and Anthony Sutcliffe (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd., 1983), pp. 387-8. On parallels between investigators and anthropologists, Deborah Epstein Nord, “The Social Explorer as Anthropologist: Victorian Travellers Among the Urban Poor”, in *Visions of the Modern City*, eds. William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

⁸⁸ Beatrice Webb, *The Diary of Beatrice Webb: Volume 1: 1873-1892*, eds. Norman and Jean MacKenzie (London: Virago, 1982), pp. 134, 69, 205. Quoted in Ben Gidley, “The proletarian other: Charles Booth and the politics of representation”, *Critical Urban Studies: Occasional Papers* (London: Centre for Urban and Community Research, Goldsmiths College, University of London, 2000), pp. 15-16.

⁸⁹ Walkowitz, p. 18.

⁹⁰ Rudyard Kipling, *Kipling’s India: Uncollected sketches 1884-88*, ed. Thomas Pinney (London: Macmillan Press, 1986), esp. “Typhoid at home”. The Kipling pieces are discussed in Gail Ching-Liang Low, “White Skins/Black Masks: The Pleasures and Politics of Imperialism”, in *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location*, eds. Erica Carter, James Donald, & Judith Squires (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), esp. p. 246. The Evans-Gordon quote is from Schneer, p. 238, taken from the *Morning Chronicle*, 02 October 1900.

⁹¹ *Royal Coronation Guide*, p. 55. For an elaborate taxonomy of various professions and their locales throughout the metropolis, see *Routledge*, pp. 23-4.

foreigners...”⁹² These foreigners, we learn elsewhere, “come to England to get work, and ... earn very little money, and are rough and rude, and all live together in one place.”⁹³ Sightseeing in the East End “cannot be recommended”, but for those who “wish to study this side of London life, ... [t]his experience will involve no risk ... provided the main road is not left.”⁹⁴ St. George’s Street is “remarkable for nothing if not for its numerous marine-store shops, gin-shops, and slop shops, its fish-stalls in the street, and its scores of unbonneted women...”⁹⁵

In his 1903 children’s guide to the city, G. E. Mitton (co-author with Walter Besant of *The Fascination of London*), introduced readers to the sheer moral and physical putrefaction of East End life. No other guide examined comes close to expressing the utter disgust and complete lack of sympathy or identification in Mitton’s account of the East End. A brief sample will convey the tone of his three-page tirade:

In the streets where these children live everything is dirty and nasty. ... [The women] spend the day sitting on their dirty doorsteps, with the youngest baby on their knees, and their hair is all uncombed, and their dresses are filthy and torn, and they shout out to other women across the street, and make remarks on anyone who happens to pass. ... The poor little baby gets dreadful things to eat—things that you would think would kill an ordinary child... If it cries, it is jogged about or slapped...⁹⁶

Later in Mitton’s rendering, the debased East End children indulge their necromantic impulses by going off down the “foul street[s]” to play in graveyards.⁹⁷

It was not only the East End in which the poor were constructed as “a race apart”. The District of the Borough (Southwark) contained “one or two shops which have survived the housebreaker” although it is “apt to prove a disappointment, and it is distinctly not a neighbourhood for the stranger to leave the highway.”⁹⁸ On the Thames’s south bank opposite St. Paul’s, “the London waifs and strays congregate and amuse themselves after their own fashion”.⁹⁹ At the western end of Cheapside “may be seen many specimens of the London Cockney, each hawking their [*sic*] own special wares.”¹⁰⁰ Another writer tells us to “[p]ass into Sardinia Street [near Lincoln’s Inn] and taste of the slums and ‘mean streets’ of modern London.”¹⁰¹ Returning to Mitton’s East End, we learn that the poor have their own peculiar language, which is incomprehensible to the bourgeois reader unless translated by the guide: “If

⁹² Ibid., p. 21.

⁹³ G. E. Mitton, *The Children’s Book of London* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1903), p. 20.

⁹⁴ *Royal Coronation Guide*, p. 55. No risk, that is, “beyond that of hearing questionable language in the streets” (ibid.).

⁹⁵ *Routledge’s Jubilee Guide*, p. 167.

⁹⁶ Mitton, pp. 10-11.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

⁹⁸ Manders, p. 74.

⁹⁹ Heath, n.p.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Hammond and Row, p. 23.

you asked any of the children of the East End if they had seen Madame Tussaud's or the Zoo, they would grin, and say, 'Garn!' and if you told them about these things they might say, 'Yer kidding', ye're,' which is their way of saying they don't believe you, and think you are telling stories."¹⁰² The very language—"after their own fashion", "many specimens", "taste of the slums", the "translations" of East End children's speech—has a distancing and almost clinical effect (perhaps mirroring the scientific positivism of the anthropologist). Tourism researcher Graham Dann remarks, "Local voices rarely constitute markers in contemporary tourism", an observation equally *apropos* to tourism writing in our earlier period, where London's working class denizens were similarly not permitted to speak, to provide their own markers.¹⁰³ Such discussions construct a specific readership: an exclusively bourgeois subject, with absolutely no experience beyond his own class boundaries.

Drawing attention to the "exotic" foreigner workers at London's docks, Baedeker related that every morning one may see a "large and motley crowd of labourers, to which numerous dusky visages and foreign costumes impart a curious and picturesque air."¹⁰⁴ Of the mass of undifferentiated "foreigners" in the Docklands, the Chinese and Jews drew special comment from many guides. Manders gave terse summation of the East End's Chinatown: "Lodging houses and restaurants, kept by Wo Fing or Ah Sung, and here and there a little shop with a few odds and ends more or less Chinese. Knots of men in neat blue suits and smoking aromatic cigars stand in the doorways or about the street corners talking in strange language—these are the Chinese of Chinatown."¹⁰⁵ Here, all "Chinamen" merge into *the* "Chinaman", under one of his two monikers of Wo Fing or Ah Sung. Earlier, a different manual explained how these East End "Chinamen" spent their spare hours in the city, claiming that St. George's-in-the-East "is probably the only part of London in which opium smoking is indulged in, because the only part in which Chinamen foregather."¹⁰⁶ This East End connection between Orient and opium reinscribed what had become a common association in the popular imagination: opium is the prime metaphoric expression of Oriental stasis from Diderot to Hegel through to Marx's famous pronouncement on religion.¹⁰⁷ And for many writers, opium's presence in London acts as calling card announcing the arrival of colonial other: Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, for example, is

¹⁰² Mitton, p. 10.

¹⁰³ Dann, *The Language of Tourism*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁴ Karl Baedeker, *London and its Environs: handbook for travellers*, 16th revised edition (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1911), p. 145.

¹⁰⁵ Manders, p. 77. This area located off East India Dock Road behind Limehouse Church; obviously not the current "Chinatown" near Leicester Square.

¹⁰⁶ *Royal Coronation Guide*, p. 55.

¹⁰⁷ Marx also noted that the Chinese "are no more likely to renounce the use of opium than are the Germans to forswear tobacco". Karl Marx, "Revolution in China and in Europe", *New York Daily Tribune* (14 June 1853), reprinted in *Marx on China*, intro. Dona Torr (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1951), p. 8.

fascinated by an exotic Docklands opium den, by the addicts' "twisted limbs, the gaping mouths, the staring lustreless eyes".¹⁰⁸

Guidebooks, similarly, singled out East End Jews for special description of their activities and geographies. These descriptions reinforced the dividing line between "Englishness" and "Jewry" that was established in a variety of popular texts, and perhaps exemplified by a 1911 *Evening Standard* passage that candidly explained, "The alien Jew is really an Eastern...; he can never really become ... a good English citizen, because he will never be able to share our ideals, to adopt our code of morals, or our standard of honour."¹⁰⁹ Obviously not, given the Jew's tendency to pick the pockets of unwary tourists, as several guides insisted. Baedeker told his readers, "Adjoining the City proper on the E. lies Whitechapel, a district chiefly inhabited by artisans (including many Jews and foreigners)... To the left, beyond Aldgate Station..., diverges Middlesex St. (formerly Petticoat Lane), noted for its Jews' market on Sun. morning (beware of pickpockets)."¹¹⁰ Of the market, Manders wrote, "This is a great sight on Sundays, which no oversea visitor should miss[,] ... but visitors should look well after their pockets; the safest plan is to leave money and jewellery at home."¹¹¹ And yet, the strange and exotic trading festivals of the non-Christian were presented as a remarkable curiosity (presumably a startling one for the naïve provincialite!), if only for their outlandish oddity, and especially for their ability to enliven the Christian day of rest: "The Mile End Road [Whitechapel] is worth seeing on a Sunday..., for then its inhabitants make holiday, and owing to the fact that the Jews are able to trade, it is one of the few trading quarters of the town that is not hopelessly depressing."¹¹² At the exotic and eclectic Whitechapel markets, *Tit-Bits* related, "the enterprising Hebrews" will sell anything "between a white elephant and an acid drop", "between a cough drop and a canary".¹¹³

The East End docks, however, featured as a subject of profound ambivalence, which can be seen in conflicting descriptions. The docks may have been site for foreign "degradation" and working class animosities, but also represented Britain's vast trading empire, functioning as generator of national wealth and entry point for alluring foreign commodities. And so, not uncommonly, guides performed a verbal about-face, shifting from antipathy to approbation when their trudge through the East End reached the Docks. Baedeker in 1881 related, "One of the most interesting sights of London is the Port, with its immense warehouses, the centre from which the

¹⁰⁸ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1994 [1891]), p. 216. See also Virginia Berridge, "East End opium dens and narcotic use in Britain", *The London Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1978).

¹⁰⁹ "A Special Correspondent", "London Overrun by Undesirables. Vast Foreign Areas. A Growing Menace", *The Evening Standard* (serialized from 25-27 January 1911; this quotation from 27 January).

¹¹⁰ Baedeker, 1911, p. 150.

¹¹¹ Manders, p. 45.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹¹³ "*Tit-Bits*", 1895, pp. 23, 51.

commerce of England radiates all over the globe.”¹¹⁴ Thirty years on, Baedeker announced that “nothing will convey to the stranger a better idea of the vast activity and stupendous wealth of London than a visit to the warehouses at London docks, for example, filled to overflowing with interminable stores of every kind of foreign and colonial products”.¹¹⁵ For *Routledge*, at the docks, “perhaps better than anywhere else, may be observed the indications of the immense wealth and influence of the British metropolis. In no other place in the world is collected so much actual wealth with so little apparent display...”—then proceeding with a breathless, sweeping inventory of commodities pouring into the Port.¹¹⁶ (Here, if anywhere, are commodities “abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties”, in Marx’s acerbic phrase.¹¹⁷) Most histrionic, perhaps, is *Routledge*’s ode to Free Trade as tool for inter-ethnic understanding: “There, among the forests of masts, have met people of all nations and tongues; not to quarrel and disagree, but in the prosecution of the peaceful principles of commerce and profit—principles which, with education and religion, are destined at last to ‘replenish the earth and subdue it.’”¹¹⁸

Continental London

In his recent discussion of interwar guidebooks’ treatment of the Soho district, Eade relates that “[f]oreignness, exoticism and unconventional behaviour are usually associated, explicitly or implicitly... Through these constructions of urban space, the difference between those inside and outside the national boundary is both established and sustained.”¹¹⁹ Guidebooks in our earlier period also persistently described Soho as an exotic, Continental district, filled with sensual delights. Such characterisations provided aspects, as Eade also concludes, around which to differentiate “English” from “foreign” in the metropolis. Most guidebook descriptions, however, did not pathologise the area in manner akin to the “internal Orient” of the East End. Many writers, even, found the area charming or enchanting. Manders, writing in 1916, was one such enthusiastic guidebook commentator:

Here is Continental London, where people from France and Italy make their abode; with old Georgian houses now restaurants remindful of Montmartre. Its newsvendors’ shops display the latest journals from Paris, and there are little counter cafés, where one drinks coffee and listens to French airs. Here, too, is a street market, where foreign women with hair neatly coiled mingle in the crowd with English housewives...¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Karl Baedeker, *London and its Environs, including excursions to Brighton, The Isle of Wight, etc.: handbook for travellers*, 3rd edition (London: Dulau and Co., 1881), p. 123.

¹¹⁵ Baedeker, 1911, p. 144.

¹¹⁶ *Routledge’s Jubilee Guide*, pp. 166-7.

¹¹⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital*, ed. David McLellan, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995 [1867]), p. 42.

¹¹⁸ *Routledge’s Jubilee Guide*, p. 167.

¹¹⁹ Eade, p. 56.

¹²⁰ Manders, p. 79.

In this world, the foreign body and object are always clearly marked and bounded. “English London” exists partly through its contrast to the “Continental London” of Soho.

The *Cassell* guide bluntly announced, “Soho is a distinctly foreign quarter of London, largely inhabited by the Italian community.”¹²¹ Mitton displayed a more grating condescension regarding London’s Continental populations. For instance, he related that the barrel-organ man “is frequently an Italian, and has a dark-haired woman with him, and she wears a red handkerchief over her hair to make her look more foreign; and they go from house to house grinding out their awful tunes, and they get very well paid, for the people in the poorer shops and the foreign parts of London like the noise, and give them pennies.”¹²²

The guides located Continentals not only in Soho, but also in districts such as the Saffron Hill (or Hatton Garden) quarter, between Holborn Circus and Clerkenwell Road. The 1895 *Tit-Bits* guide told visitors that “[i]t is in this neighbourhood, too, that the dark-eyed wanderers from Italy have pitched their tents”.¹²³ Presenting Italians as “wanderers” living in metaphoric “tents”, the guide firmly rejects the notion that these immigrants in any sense *belong* in the metropolis, or are anything but trans-national transients. This theme of marginality likewise appeared in the 1902 *Royal Coronation Guide*, which delineates the Italian population’s location and chosen two professions, telling the tourist that “Italy (10,000) is represented largely by organ grinders and ice-cream vendors, who reside mainly in the Saffron Hill quarter”.¹²⁴

Restaurant critic N. Newham-Davis, in his 1914 *Gourmet’s Guide to London*, also sounded the theme of the Continental “worlds”—in this case gastronomic—that could be unearthed within London’s confines. Labelling one chapter “The Joys of Foreign Travel”, he describes well-worn dining stories recited by travellers upon their return from abroad. “But why go to France, Italy or Spain to obtain these materials for a story?” Newham-Davis rhetorically asks; asserting that “The circumstances can be exactly reproduced in London”, before directing the reader to Soho’s Greek Street.¹²⁵ Relating what he labels the “Italian Invasion” of London, Newham-Davis tells of his memories “of the noise of much talking in vehement Italian, of rather close quarters at little tables set for four, and of a menu of rather portentous provender” at Soho restaurants.¹²⁶ The constant coding of the peculiar, alien charm of London’s foreign restaurants and districts serves to delimit the spaces that do and do not match with the surrounding (English) backdrop. As Eade argues, “The description of others entails a commentary on the national self:

¹²¹ *Cassell’s Ready Reference Guide*, p. 105.

¹²² Mitton, p. 125.

¹²³ “*Tit-Bits*”, 1895, p. 28.

¹²⁴ *Royal Coronation Guide*, p. 97.

¹²⁵ N. Newham-Davis, *The Gourmet’s Guide to London* (London: Grant Richards, Ltd., 1914), p. 216.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 365, 368.

Soho's difference enables the British to know themselves."¹²⁷ Both in the East End and in Soho, these guidebooks help construct the "cognitive maps" explicated by urban sociologist Gerald Suttles, and thus similarly "simplif[y] to the point of exaggeration the sharpness of boundaries, population composition, and neighborhood identity", and "provide a set of social categories for differentiating between those people with whom one can or cannot safely associate".¹²⁸ By simplifying the city's ecological zones to exaggeration, they prescribe and textualise the "proper" boundaries of the reader's London.

Delimiting the London underworld

Several guidebooks play on the romance of the London underworld—a Dickensian attraction of repulsion—even as they disavow this realm and its shady transactions. The *Tit-Bits* manual of 1895, among others, gestures towards the sensationalistic appeal of London's criminal byways:

[T]he enterprising pickpocket and his brethren will not be forgotten. It is always well to remember they are about, and the visitor will be taken in imagination to some of the slims, and given a peep into the thieves' dens, the common lodging houses, and other curious corners of the town.¹²⁹

This type of account resonates with a paradox in London documentation from mid-century onwards, highlighted by literary critic Mark Seltzer. On one hand, much literature about the city presents it as an indecipherable realm of mystery; on the other hand, through this very literature itself, London is placed under an intricate examination and surveillance, "a police work not confined to the institutions of the law ... but enacted also through an 'unofficial' literature of detection: by the reports of tourists from the 'upper world' and by the investigations of an exploratory urban sociology".¹³⁰ We see the same phenomenon in *Tit-Bits* and other guides:

[I]t is probable that few visitors would care to make a trip to some of the out-of-the-way slums in the East-end, where, unquestionably, many gentlemen of shady character have their merry little nests. Indeed, we are almost inclined to refrain from mentioning the localities where the thieves' kitchens and pickpockets' haunts are to be found. The only way to see them safely is to place yourself in the charge of a friendly detective, should you be fortunate enough to know one.¹³¹

The guide pretends to renounce this type of tourism even as it whets the reader's appetite for what is portrayed as an almost jolly criminality, perpetrated by Fagin-like bounders. A surveillance is enacted in the text (especially when it goes on to divulge certain favoured tactics of underworld charlatans), while at the same time the visitor is encouraged to conduct his own

¹²⁷ Eade, p. 56.

¹²⁸ Gerald Suttles, *The Social Construction of Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 4, 22.

¹²⁹ "Tit-Bits", 1895, p. 2.

¹³⁰ Mark Seltzer, *Henry James & the Art of Power* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 26-7.

¹³¹ "Tit-Bits", 1895, p. 50.

infiltration and surveillance, in cooperation with a detective/defender from the realm of urban order.

Similarly, an 1885 guide implies that much in London lies shrouded in mystery, beneath the surface, as at *Seven Dials*: “The visitor is advised not to penetrate too deeply into the hidden mysteries of the locality, and especially to avoid it at night.”¹³² But the danger of the underworld, at least for the guides, is tightly contained; the Metropolitan Police ambit, a 1902 book reassures us, includes “just over 1,000 persons who are under special police surveillance, apart from about ten times that number, who are known as ‘bad characters’”.¹³³ Danger is not only confined to certain prescribed geographic areas, but the constabulary have this sphere, if not under lock and key, at least under watch and control.

Tit-Bits proceeds to reveal several of the iniquitous pursuits, multifarious dodges, and colourful ruses that transpire in East End establishments, and that the slumming tourist might actually witness (especially if he did not have the recommended detective in tow). Of course, this investigation of seemingly non-authorised sites is, too, part of the tourist complex. Culler argues that when tourists “flout the value system to ‘get off the beaten track’..., they do so in terms that are already prescribed by that system”; thus, “this escape itself is coded in turn, for the authentic must be marked to be constituted as authentic.”¹³⁴ And so several of these books provide markers to “authentic” poverty and criminality just as surely as they provide markers to historicity and monumentality. The type of underworld tourism coyly encouraged in guides like *Tit-Bits* lies at what Seltzer dubs the “nexus of policing and entertainment”, and whether the tourist actually undergoes the journey or merely thrills to read of these impenetrable yet alluring regions of London’s criminal world, “poverty, conspiracy, criminality are purchasable spectacles, at once opened to the public and reduced and distanced as theater.”¹³⁵

The archetypal urban navigator is perhaps the urban detective (as one critic avers, “it is the detective who makes the modern city thinkable”¹³⁶). The labyrinthine urban monster cringes into a reluctant legibility before the likes of Sherlock Holmes, or earlier, before the knowing forefinger of *Bleak House*’s “sagacious, indefatigable” Inspector Bucket.¹³⁷ Holmes, like the social anthropologist in the colonies or the social investigator at home, extends his imperious regime of knowledge over the urban landscape, finding and creating patterns of order where others have seen only chaos. Occasionally the tourist is invited to emulate the voyeurism of the

¹³² Frederick Gosman, *Seven Days in London: A Practical Descriptive Guide* (London: C. Smith & Son, 1885), p. 39.

¹³³ *Royal Coronation Guide*, p. 93.

¹³⁴ Culler, pp. 166, 165.

¹³⁵ Seltzer, p. 33.

¹³⁶ James Donald, “Detectives”, in *City A-Z*, eds. Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 56.

¹³⁷ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1994 [1852-3]), p. ix. We should note, however, that in neither Dickens’s novels nor Doyle’s Holmes stories is much time spent in the East End (see the maps presented in Franco Moretti’s book).

urban sleuth or reforming investigator. Fictional and non-fictional writing representing London's underworld, Seltzer argues, "is always, in effect, playing on the twin senses of 'bringing to book,' making it difficult to disentangle publication from incrimination, and foregrounding the police work always latent in the retailing of London mysteries", a policing that extended into the realm of our tourist texts.¹³⁸

Catalogues Raisonnés: textual containments of otherness

As I argued earlier, one strategy for "managing" the otherness encroaching upon the imperial metropolis was to contain and display it, as artefact testifying to Britain's imperial glory and omnipotence. This took place at imperial festivals and exhibitions, within museums, and even at the Regent's Park Zoo. In these settings the "native" or native artefact was safe, with few of the threatening overtones of, say, the foreigners of Whitechapel or Stepney. As in the discussion of monuments, here we must consider not only museums and exhibits themselves, but also the discourse surrounding them. Discourse does not merely reflect these struggles, but rather it is their very object.

In these controlled arenas of display, the microcosmic empire of London paraded its power over its others (and, indeed, helped to construct these others) through spectacle and variations on the theme of imperial archive. Scholar Annie Coombes, relating how imperial exhibitions extolled the benefits of empire to Africans and Britons, claims they served as "spectacle constituted simultaneously as scientific exegis and as mass entertainment", as instances "where public spectacle was enabled by (and in turn actively encouraged) the dissipation of the already tenuous boundary that divided the scientific from the popular."¹³⁹ Coombes's insights on how Africa was constructed in the popular imagination (particularly in the 1890 Stanley and African Exhibition, held at Regent's Street's Victoria Gallery) can be extended to constructions of non-European subjects in spectacles like the Hyde Park Japanese Native Village (1885), the Colonial and Indian Exhibition (1886), the Earl's Court Empire of India Exhibition (1895), Islington's Palestine in London exhibition (1907), and extravagant pageants like "Constantinople, or The Revels of the East" at the Olympia.¹⁴⁰

An intriguing theme of such racist exhibitions was that London mock-ups of these places were *better* than the real thing. For example, the Revels of the East programme claimed "to-day

¹³⁸ Seltzer, pp. 30-31.

¹³⁹ Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 63. On the geographic imagination and the Stanley and African Exhibition, see also Felix Driver, "Geography, Empire and Visualisations: Making Representations", Department of Geography: Research Papers, General Series, no. 1 (London: Royal Holloway College, University of London, 1994).

¹⁴⁰ For pamphlets and programmes to these and other exhibitions, see the John Johnson Collection of Visual Ephemera, Exhibition Catalogues Box 24, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

one need not take a tedious journey to the East to realise its glories. A journey to Olympia in the West will serve as well”; similarly the Palestine in London guide disclosed that “the visitor should be able to learn more in a day than he could otherwise learn by an actual visit in an entire week”.¹⁴¹ Such statements reveal the extent to which London served not only as stage for empire, but also as precise elaboration of empire. One need not even leave the Met’s jurisdiction to see the entire imperial edifice compiled and erected for inspection. This analysis is perhaps best supported by the following passage, from the *District Railway Guide* to the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition:

[L]et statesmen do as they will, we can no longer be in any doubt or uncertainty as to what ‘The British Empire’ means. It is visibly incorporated before us. Geographical names gather consistence, and are clothed with the flesh and blood of reality at South Kensington.¹⁴²

The territories are not represented by some pallid substitute; rather, the heretofore-abstract concept of the British Empire is said almost to come into *existence* at this London exhibition.

This type of demonstration also took place on great state occasions such as, for instance, the 1902 coronation of King Edward VII. A key feature of the Royal Progress through London, according to a coronation year city guide, would be “the various military contingents representing the ‘Sons of the Empire’... The effect [of the various “white”, “coloured”, and “half-caste” contingents] will be extremely picturesque.”¹⁴³ Foreign representatives at the Coronation, related the booklet, “will doubtless be impressed by their introduction to the British Empire—by an ocular demonstration of the possibilities of colonization, and the result of the sympathetic rule of, and civilizing influence over uncivilized peoples”.¹⁴⁴ Yet again empire was “staged” by such descriptive passages.

Robert Harbison has pointed out “the way museums rifle the world for the amusement of the mind, turn it inside out, and present it in a convenient form for absorption.”¹⁴⁵ However, as many critics have noted, the *catalogues raisonnés* has long been one of the tools of imperialism. *Apropos* here is Roland Barthes’s oft-quoted formulation: that “inventory is never a neutral idea;

¹⁴¹ Samuel Schorr, *Palestine in London: Official Guide* (London: London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, 1907), p. 19; G. Spencer Edwards, “Introductory and Explanatory”, in *Constantinople or The Revels of the East: A Grand Terpsichorean Romantic and Lyrical Spectacle, and Aquatic Pageant, In Two Acts and Six Tableaux* (London: n.d.), p. 33.

¹⁴² *The Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 1886. The District Railway Guide to the Exhibition* (London: Alfred Boot and Son, 1886), p. 11. Strangely enough, this exhibition included a mock-up of a section of pre-Great Fire London, and the ground floor shops of “Old London” were converted to offices for Colonial Commissioners (*ibid.*, pp. 60-62). The irony of the “imaginative doubling” of London and the colonies is especially apparent when one imagines colonial administrators working out of mock seventeenth century London buildings.

¹⁴³ *Royal Coronation Guide*, p. 16.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁴⁵ Robert Harbison, *Eccentric Spaces* (London: André Deutsch Ltd., 1977), pp. 147-8.

to catalogue is not merely to ascertain, ... but also to appropriate".¹⁴⁶ Hence the British Museum—"unquestionably the greatest Museum in the world"—was described as "contain[ing] the choicest objects belonging to every department of knowledge"¹⁴⁷; these "choice" artefacts gathered from the periphery are catalogued and displayed in the metropole as part of a massive, authoritative imperial archive. We see this process also in operation in the very descriptions of museums and their contents.

The power of discourse lies partially in its ability to turn its subjects into objects of antagonistic control through narrative. Critic Homi Bhabha explains, "Colonial power produces the colonized as a fixed reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible", a process we see in museum and in descriptive text alike.¹⁴⁸ For the Indian Museum in South Kensington, we are told its contents "consist of various articles made and used by the different tribes [of India], both in peace and war. Among the most interesting is a figure of Buddha and a collection of arms of all the most characteristic tribes, the banner of the prince who led the vanquished Afghans at Candahar, and the organ formerly belonging to Tippoo Sahib, with design showing tiger devouring British soldier."¹⁴⁹ Baedeker characterised this Tippoo Sahib article as "a barbaric mechanical toy".¹⁵⁰ Likewise, according to Baedeker, the British Museum's Ethnographical Collection contained "a great variety of objects illustrating the habits, dress, warfare, handicrafts, etc., of the less civilized inhabitants of the different quarters of the globe."¹⁵¹ Similarly, another guide professed that the Museum held "notable collections of the weapons, implements, and objects of worship of contemporary savage peoples", among these, a children's guide recounted, being "hideous idols from Central Africa".¹⁵²

It was not merely through the appropriation and display of native artefacts that prevailing ideology took form. According to Horne, South Kensington's complex of museums and halls shows off an "aspect of the bourgeois triumph"; the institutions "represent the voice of nineteenth-century capitalism at its most enlightened, buoyant with optimism and reason and a belief in improvement."¹⁵³ In fact, the area has been nicknamed "Albertopolis" because of its close associations with Victoria's consort, the bourgeois Prince who spent much of his life in the promotion of education, art, and science.¹⁵⁴ Guidebook descriptions of the area's institutions not

¹⁴⁶ Roland Barthes, "The Plates of the *Encyclopaedia*", in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982), p. 222.

¹⁴⁷ *Royal Coronation Guide*, p. 68; Bacon, p. 10.

¹⁴⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other question: difference, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism", in *Literature, Politics and Theory: Papers from the Essex Conference 1976-84*, eds. F. Baker, P. Hulme, M. Iverson, and D. Loxley (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 156.

¹⁴⁹ Spurr, p. 77.

¹⁵⁰ Baedeker, 1911, p. 303.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

¹⁵² Manders, p. 25; Alice A. Methley, *A Child's Guide to London* (London: Methuen & Co., 1914), p. 148.

¹⁵³ Horne, p. 121.

¹⁵⁴ See David Cannadine, *The Pleasures of the Past* (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co., 1989), pp. 12-22.

only reflected the bourgeois triumphalism to which South Kensington is so much a monument, but also portrayed it as radiating out over kingdom and empire. Thus the South Kensington (later Victoria & Albert) Museum was described in 1887 as having “done so much for the cultivation of a refined taste in, and an accurate knowledge of, the fine arts and natural sciences in the United Kingdom”; as “an important centre of artistic and scientific culture, the influence of which is felt in every part of the country.”¹⁵⁵ South Kensington’s Imperial Institute, we are told in a 1906 guide, “is intended to form a visible central point and focus of intelligence for the various nations composing the British Empire”, and to serve as “a centre devoted to the furtherance of the varied interests summed up in the words ‘British Empire’”.¹⁵⁶ The admixture of bourgeois triumphalism and the rhetoric of scientific positivism (with which curators and public convinced themselves of their own detachment and innocence) served to propel imperial ideologies.

Schneer recounts how similar discourses surfaced in guidebook and other descriptions of the Regent’s Park Zoological Gardens. “The London zoo was a kind of prism”, he contends; “Attitudes passing through it were filtered, separated out, bent to reflect imperial ideas.”¹⁵⁷ Not only was the very idea that one could cage and display all species of animals another sounding of the imperial archive motif, but in a bizarre series of imperialist anthropomorphisms in Zoo guides, we come across animal descriptions such as “guileless lions” and “devout lions” (the King of the Jungle being, of course, symbol for British supremacy); orang-utans like the “working-man”; the “nigger monkey” (because of its “delightfully absurd resemblance to a black man”); baboons similar to Queensland’s “kanaka pearl divers”; Australian dogs akin to “their disreputable black owners”; and monkeys resembling the “grotesque and repulsive appearance” of Boer president Paul Kruger.¹⁵⁸ The Zoo thus functioned as yet another space in which London presented its colonial others to itself, a process reinforced by imperial textualisations like those cited above.

While appearances of Britain’s racial others may seem peripheral to the guidebooks’ geographic representations, I am arguing that they are actually *central* to the project of defining and mapping the imperial city. Pratt notes, “While the imperial metropolis tends to understand itself as determining the periphery..., it habitually blinds itself to the ways in which the periphery determines the metropolis—beginning, perhaps, with the latter’s obsessive need to present and

¹⁵⁵ *Tourist’s Guide to London West of Trafalgar Square* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1887), pp. 29-30.

¹⁵⁶ Bacon, p. 18.

¹⁵⁷ Schneer, p. 106.

¹⁵⁸ All quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 102-5. Schneer takes these from: L. Beatrice Thompson, *Who’s Who at the Zoo* (London: 1902), pp. 11, 46-9, 56; *Daily Chronicle*, 3 September 1900; Richard Kearton, “The Zoological Gardens”, in *Living London*, vol. 1, ed. George Sims (London: 1901-03), p. 347; F.G. Aflalo, *A Walk through the Zoological Gardens* (London: 1900), pp. 110, 133-4.

re-present its peripheries and its others continually to itself.”¹⁵⁹ Just as the inclusion of colonised races in exhibitions, according to Coombes, “provided the points of differentiation around which to reinforce ... the certainty of European imperial superiority”, the irruptions of colonised races into London descriptions provided similar “points of differentiation” around which to trumpet London’s vast influence and power, as well as to detail, by implication, who really “belonged” in the English city.¹⁶⁰

Policing protest, policing texts

Like those of different races, dissidents of various sorts—whether discontented workers, Irish republicans, or Boer War protesters—gained mention in the books, although always with brusque dismissal. In London, as the heart of empire became—in several senses—just as much a battleground as some of the colonies, even class and the attempts to maintain urban order took on imperial connotations. Crucial to the imperial project was extension of British class structures through the empire, as recently highlighted by historian David Cannadine, who insists (against Said) that empire was more about “replication of sameness” than about “insistence on difference”.¹⁶¹ And Ben Gidley, for instance, notes the importation to the capital of policing methods developed in the colonies, as the Metropolitan Police recruited colonial soldiers and administrators to quell new working class uprisings in the late 1880s.¹⁶² Walkowitz recounts that working class uprisings of the 1880s, which spilled over into West End, shifted “the prevailing imaginary landscape of London from one that was geographically bounded to one whose boundaries were indiscriminately and dangerously transgressed”.¹⁶³ Illustrated by guidebook discussions of spaces for dissent is the familiar process by which cultural “insiders” recast the past—and, in this case, the city—in their own image.

One such area where dissident geographies are traced only to be dismissed is Trafalgar Square. Historian Mace has attributed the symbolic importance of the Square to its role as site for dissent: “To the mass of ordinary people whose exploitation and death had enabled the ideal of Empire to be realised, the Square offers no bronze or granite memorial; yet it is they and their descendents who ... by the use of the site as a public forum have given it real significance.”¹⁶⁴ For those trying to coat London with an élite and imperial patina, this Janus-faced site can

¹⁵⁹ Pratt, p. 6.

¹⁶⁰ Coombes, p. 64.

¹⁶¹ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2001), p. xix. Cannadine’s thesis perhaps provides a reverse window on the process of “imaginative doubling”.

¹⁶² Ben Gidley, “Policing citizenship before the War”, chapter in unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (London: Goldsmiths College, University of London, forthcoming). And, as several critics have noted, during this phase of empire the British armed forces abroad operated more as constabulary than as military in the traditional sense.

¹⁶³ Walkowitz, p. 29.

¹⁶⁴ Mace, p. 19. “Suitably enough,” Mace also comments, “...the most famous monument to the British Empire was to be built by scab labour”, recalling the strikebreaking masons who constructed the memorial to Lord Nelson. (pp. 96-7)

present maddening contradictions. Hence, London guides seem particularly eager to shelve oppositional facets of the Square's history and social significance. Of anti-Boer War protesters, the 1902 *Royal Coronation Guide* asserted, "The last big authorized meeting [in Trafalgar Square] was when an attempt was made to exploit pro-Boerism just before the outbreak of the War, and it required hundreds of police, mounted and on foot, to protect the Boer agents and their sympathizers from the fury of an audience of some 10,000 persons representing all classes of the community."¹⁶⁵ Here, the protesters are contrasted with their opponents, to whom moral authority is attributed through the assertion that they represented "all classes of the community".

An 1887 guide, similarly, labelled Trafalgar Square "as the public meeting-place of 'the classes and the masses' which have a grievance to ventilate or a new socialistic theory to propound".¹⁶⁶ The guides typically hinted that causes supported by these "classes and masses" were, above all, rather silly; as in a 1910 booklet that condescendingly described the Square's pleaders as supporting "the cause of anti-vivisection, women's suffrage, the abolition of the Lord's, or the claims of the negroes to a national blanket fund".¹⁶⁷ *Tit-Bits* even confided how and where the tourist might view truncheons used on "the memorable occasion of the battle of Trafalgar Square".¹⁶⁸ By 1910, the Trafalgar Square riots of 1886 and 1887 were becoming distant memories, which perhaps accounts for the *Cassell* guide's more generous description of the Square as the city's "safety valve", where "London lets off steam and saves itself many broken heads and windows."¹⁶⁹

Other spaces used for oppositional purposes suffered similar treatment. Hyde Park's rallies, for instance, threaten not only urban order, but also the orderly mind: "Hyde Park has been of late years the scene of many popular 'demonstrations' and 'mass meetings,' to the great annoyance of orderly and well-disposed minds",¹⁷⁰ the tourist learned in 1887. Likewise, guide-author T. N. Spurrll reported that "Some parts of the Tower are not open in the ordinary way to the public owing to the efforts, years ago [1885], of some wretches, during the Fenian scare, to carry bombs into the Tower with the object of blowing up the principal buildings".¹⁷¹ One city manual called Clerkenwell Green, for centuries a centre for radicalism, "a political meeting place of some notoriety".¹⁷² In 1916, Manders wrote, "Previous to the war Tower Hill was principally used for ... meetings held by agitators claiming the rights of citizenship, less work and more pay,

¹⁶⁵ *Royal Coronation Guide*, p. 83.

¹⁶⁶ *Tourist's Guide to London East of Trafalgar Square*, pp. 65-6.

¹⁶⁷ *Cassell's Ready Reference Guide*, p. 163.

¹⁶⁸ "Tit-Bits", 1895, p. 18.

¹⁶⁹ *Cassell's Ready Reference Guide*, p. 163.

¹⁷⁰ *Tourist's Guide to London West of Trafalgar Square*, p. 39.

¹⁷¹ Spurrll, p. 55.

¹⁷² *Kelkel Guide to London*, p. 74. Clerkenwell Green, near Farringdon on the eastern edge of central London, during this period played host to foreign political refugees (including Lenin), Irish republicans, and socialists.

or something of this description.”¹⁷³ Again, the concerns of dissidents are minimised, presented as unreasonable if not somewhat absurd, and their attempts to demarcate certain of London’s spaces in alternate ways are stymied. (Perhaps it should not, then, surprise us that Karl Marx is excluded from *Cassell’s* short list of notable persons buried at Highgate Cemetery.¹⁷⁴)

In all these instances, dissidents and their geographies erupt into the descriptions, only to be banished to the margins of the account. We thus see reflected in the guides a broader struggle to define London’s spaces, and of attempts to keep urban dissent submerged beneath the particular metropolitan vision—an ostensible “imperial consensus”—which guides offered up for visitor consumption.

In his article on imperial London guidebooks, Gilbert rightly argues for their status as “transcultural texts” and forms of “geographic knowledge”. While casting light on the hitherto shadowy “complicated and circular” correlations between “the changing expectations of the readers and the accounts of place in guidebooks”, Gilbert’s analysis does not fully illuminate these issues of power in the texts.¹⁷⁵ Guidebooks were certainly involved in such circular relationships of production and consumption, but, as we have seen, also wielded a particular spatial power. These “transcultural texts”, *especially* in the context of empire, should heighten our awareness of the ways in which techniques of representation are complicit with broader social regimes of domination and control. While elucidating one of their functions, Gilbert’s analogy between guidebooks and theatre programmes underplays the texts’ significance in creating their own object of discourse.¹⁷⁶ Even when failing to resolve ambiguities and unease, guidebooks produced and defended specific and particular versions of a city that, in London’s case, had manifold meanings.

As has been remarked by critics such as Edward Said and Paul Gilroy, however, there were and are many versions of London, none self-sufficient or autonomous and all touched by the presence and legacy of empire.¹⁷⁷ Schneer, for example, excavates several “alternative imperial Londons” of the *fin-de-siècle*, including the city’s radical and Celtic fringe, and the Londons of certain Indian and black organisations.¹⁷⁸ It is important to recognise, I think, that

¹⁷³ Manders, p. 56.

¹⁷⁴ *Cassell’s Ready Reference Guide*, p. 32.

¹⁷⁵ Gilbert, p. 283.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 293–4.

¹⁷⁷ For example, Edward Said remarks, “Far from being unitary or monolithic or autonomous things, cultures actually assume more ‘foreign’ elements, alterities, differences, than they consciously exclude. ... [W]ho in Britain or France can draw a clear circle around British London or French Paris that would exclude the impact of India and Algeria upon those two imperial cities?” *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Random House, 1993), p. 15. Similarly, Paul Gilroy notes how, in much contemporary scholarship, London, Paris, and Berlin “are readily purged of any traces of the people without history whose degraded lives might raise awkward questions about the limits of bourgeois humanism”. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 44.

¹⁷⁸ Schneer, *London 1900*, Part II: Alternative Imperial Londons. For an overview of “alternative Londons” in various non-white descriptions of the capital, see S. S. Sandhu, “Calling London: descriptions of the English

these are not just “alternative” versions of the capital, but *integral parts* of what had become a hybrid and complex conurbation, playing host to radically variegated uses and significances. These London guidebooks are texts of power because they inevitably occlude such multivalent urban meanings, such alternative yet integral parts of the city. They, along with maps and other texts, layered the order within their covers onto the city’s heterogeneous spaces and populations, and policed a bourgeois, imperial definition on the cityscape and the reader. Those outside this power grid were not able in these descriptions (applying Michel de Certeau’s phrase in different context) “to insinuate their countless differences into the dominant text”.¹⁷⁹

Conclusion

As we have seen, these tourist ephemera fashioned a version of the capital with a proud and pre-eminent history, a place of absolute centrality in the world, and clear-cut boundaries between native English and foreign or colonial interloper. Eade contends that in London descriptions “we see the familiar tendency to understand a particular place through essentialist and reified images”, but that “[b]ehind their complacent assertions there lurk unsettling questions about power and inequality”.¹⁸⁰ These geographic representations also dramatise some of the ambivalence and questioning that many *fin-de-siècle* Londoners were undergoing, about the national and world role of their metropolis, the place of cultural outsiders in that city, and the two-way processes of empire. Looking over a broader set of London texts, we can see the city as a kind of brownfield for the imperial imagination, radiating colonial vision and fantasy in radically unstable combinations.

Examination of such techniques of representation alerts us, as well, to their use in consolidating hegemony. Processes of representation are fundamentally complicit with technologies of power, though often surreptitiously. In this sense, descriptive urban texts always bear a triadic function: they reflect or refract dominant ideology and modes of thinking about the city; they play a part, through their own discourse, in constructing the object of that discourse; and they act, within the text, to police their proffered version of the urban realm against contradictions, challenges, and alternatives. But despite such continuities between techniques of representation and broader patterns of domination, attempts in London to pin down and enshrine cultural meanings, to enact a surveillance, and to circumscribe the foreign could never be wholly successful. Of the subjects of colonial authority, Bhabha writes, “[I]f discriminatory effects enable the authorities to keep an eye on them, their proliferating difference evades that eye,

Metropolis by African, Caribbean, and South Asian writers 1772-1988”, unpublished D.Phil. dissertation (Oxford: University of Oxford, 1988).

¹⁷⁹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), p. xxii.

¹⁸⁰ Eade, p. 31.

escapes that surveillance.”¹⁸¹ For while, as de Certeau argues, the panoptic city view “construct[s] the fiction that creates readers, makes the complexity of the city readable, and immobilizes its opaque mobility in a transparent text”, city-dwellers escape these totalisations and write their own “urban text” through multifarious everyday practices.¹⁸² Thus London remained (and remains) site for multiple systems of signification and representation, creases that could not be completely ironed out even in popular culture ephemera like tourist guidebooks.

Such debates bear critical relevance to attempts to understand present-day London. So often has it recently been remarked that the contemporary metropolis is shaped by its imperial past that the phrase risks becoming mere empty cliché. Yet older schemes of representation can help elucidate current *mêlées* over how and by whom the city’s spaces will be defined. Contemporary London’s social geography shows a radical entanglement with the imperial legacy, an entanglement seen not only in the proliferating pockets of former colonial populations (who through their presence call into question previous notions of what “Britain” and “British” mean), but also in the tourist crowds that still flock to consume monumental London and pay reverence to its heritage (industry).¹⁸³ While many of today’s guides—often glibly—proclaim London’s multi-ethnic diversity as a major attraction, some of the same strategies and codings still obtain.¹⁸⁴ The need to understand mechanisms of representation in popular urban descriptions is as great as ever.

¹⁸¹ Homi K. Bhabha, “Signs taken for wonders”, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1985), p. 154.

¹⁸² De Certeau, pp. 92-3.

¹⁸³ See Patrick Wright, *On living in an old country: the national past in contemporary Britain*, ill. Andrzej Krauze (London: Verso, 1985).

¹⁸⁴ On London’s diversity as presented in contemporary guides, see Eade, pp. 33-45, and Gilbert, p. 294.

My thanks to Les Back, Fran Tonkiss, and Ben Gidley for their valuable suggestions and advice.

Appendix: the selection of texts

The theoretical frames I used for textual analysis should be clear from the body of the essay itself. This appendix explains the ways texts were chosen.

The archive for primary research was established by setting beginning and ending dates of 1880 and 1918. These dates, whilst somewhat arbitrary, coincide with what is generally known as the period of “high imperialism”, and encapsulate several of Britain’s most sustained imperial ventures, including the so-called Scramble for Africa, the war in South Africa, and the Great War between the imperial European powers. It was assumed that this period would should the greatest correlation between broader ideologies and small-scale urban description, although proof of this hypothesis would, admittedly, require comparative analysis of texts from various periods.

An index of guidebooks from the period was next developed, conducting a keyword search in the British Library catalogue using “London” plus terms such as “guide”, “guidebook”, “handbook”, etc. This search produced over a thousand entries. Examining the Library catalogue’s brief descriptions, it was possible to isolate sixty-three texts (not counting multiple editions) which were published between the aforementioned dates and appeared to be London guidebooks, in the generally accepted use of the term. It is possible that a large number of guides without the selected keywords words in the title (i.e. titles such as *Seven Days in London*) escaped notice. However, as the goal of the project was qualitative evaluation rather than quantitative analysis, this did not present cause for concern.

From index, twenty-one books were selected for the sample. The most popular of the period’s books (Baedeker and Murray) were selected because of their widespread use amongst tourists. As new editions were issued every year or two, the choice of edition was somewhat arbitrary, although each new edition reproduced the previous one with few changes (mostly being logistical details related to travel arrangements). Two Murray and two Baedeker editions were analysed (in the case of Baedeker, separated by thirty years). The remaining guides were chosen arbitrarily from the original index. The sample guides were examined in detail. The selection of guides and programmes from imperial exhibitions was taken from the collections of the John Johnson Collection of Visual Ephemera, Bodleian Library, Oxford, which has interesting yet very incomplete archives of exhibition materials.

This was not a comparative study, but several of the guides fell more into line than others as far as their presentations of the imperial themes I have discussed. Of course, imperialism and its related ideologies were rehearsed in many keys, and it is certainly not my intention to present them as a monolithic phenomenon. This perhaps suggests further research into the different audiences towards which guidebooks (and other popular ephemera) were aimed and by which they were consumed: by nationality, profession, gender, or class. In such a project, comparative work would then be of value, in elucidating the different registers and presentations of imperialism that were directed toward different groups. Such discussions, however, remained outside the scope of my research.