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Making sense of Rome in the eighteenth century: walking and the French aesthetic imagination

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Abstract  This article traces the contours of a new way in which Rome was explored, imagined, and represented in the eighteenth century in texts and images by French travelers. These narratives, found in epistolary writings and the pictorial arts, reflected and suggested that viewers, readers, or strollers could enter into landscapes, wander through streetscapes, and commune with the past in both the space of the city and the space of representation. These narratives, found in epistolary writings and the pictorial arts, reflected and suggested that viewers, readers, or strollers could enter into landscapes, wander through streetscapes, and commune with the past in both the space of the city and the space of representation. French travelers brought with them a new modern form of walking linked to the creation of Parisian public boulevards, while contemporary philosophy associated the production of knowledge directly to the sensorial apparatus of the body. Writers would describe contemporary encounters with imagined figures from ancient history, while artists would visually reconfigure such encounters through the genre of the Roman capriccio. This pictorial mode was turned toward an exploration of the various ways in which movement, real or imagined, gave rise to popular forms of experiencing the Eternal City directly as well as to a verbal and visual language to express it to others. What this teaches us is that, for the enlightenment visitor, looking was not a passive act of consumption, but an active engagement with complex, confusing, and evocative material remains of the ancient city within the frame of the modern one.

Keywords architectural capriccio, eighteenth-century Rome, French art, travel, walking

When Jean-Baptiste Dupaty recalled his feelings as he first arrived in Rome in the 1780s, the French magistrate and man of letters described how deeply the overwhelming grandeur of the Eternal City penetrated into his soul. The very name of Rome contained within it, for him, all the centuries, emperors, nations, everything grand, fascinating, and terrifying all at once. “This air that I presently breathe, this air that vibrated with so many of Cicero’s eloquent words; the emperors, with so many powerful and terrible words; the popes, with so many enchanted words.” Amid such alluring eloquence, terrible commands, and superstitious incantations, Dupaty was eager to immerse himself in this world, but where should he go, he asked himself? He felt lost, as if he were in the middle of an ocean, immersed within Rome’s three great ages: “the Rome of Augustus, the Rome of Leo X, and the Rome of the reigning pope.” As all these Romes called to him at once, Dupaty wondered how he could adequately rein in and orient his undisciplined gaze so that he could properly apprehend the city as a grand palimpsest. The solution he decided upon was to begin walking, an act that would lead him on itineraries of discovery through the city: “I must start by wandering to and fro, to make good use of my eagerness to see everything, which would always prevent me from looking.” In choosing to “wander” (errer), Dupaty signaled a particular mode of walking to determine his perambulations. He went on to define this kind of wandering as a form of ambling “to and fro” (de côté et d’autre), here and there, with no apparent destination. Only by such movement, of slowing his gait, he believed, would he be able to restrain his restive desire to see everything at once (impatience de voir) and focus his inquisitive gaze (regarder) upon the stones of Rome. Thus begins Dupaty’s Roman journey, where walking was the medium through which he communed with visions of the past, visions made so vivid by the way ruins were framed by the city of the present. Walking was not simply a means for Dupaty to move from site to site. On the contrary, walking was, for him, a means of more intimately engaging with Rome as he constantly searched for ways of immersing himself in the city’s material past through acts of direct touch, mental wanderings, and mobile viewing. He used these techniques to bridge the profound dissonance that travelers often felt between the state of Rome’s ruins and its spectacular past, that is to say, between their sensory perception of the city and the historical knowledge they brought with them.

Dupaty’s ways of exploring Rome were an adaptation, we believe, of an emerging aesthetics of strolling developed in Paris within a new culture of leisure and the design of urban public boulevards that was then brought to bear on the Eternal City as a solitary investigative practice. Dupaty used this new mobile aesthetic to deploy a particular way of describing Rome through what he saw, heard, and felt as an urban wanderer in search of a direct physical confrontation with the past. In a similar manner, artists working in Rome responded to the same spatial historical encounters by translating what they experienced into pictures, creating visual analogues to the writers’ descriptions that sought to make sense of the complicated palimpsest of Rome’s daily life and material past. In both verbal and visual registers, in the eyes of foreigners, a composite image of Rome emerged between its ancient remains and its modern interventions. This image pervaded the production of travel literature and painting practice in ways that defined the city’s erratic fulfillment of the visitor’s desire for historical
immersion. This article, therefore, proposes to open up the question of how Rome was apprehended and consumed, described and represented by writers and artists who were constantly on the move—forging itineraries, engaging physically with the past, organizing and reconfiguring the city’s heritage within its present. This is not to say that walking through a city’s spaces in order to become familiar with it was new to the eighteenth century, but that mobile itineraries were self-consciously deployed as an aesthetic practice that produced vivid imaginings of the past by aligning a rhetorical mode of walking with a technique of describing. Such itineraries, roving incessantly across the city, are implicit, we believe, in the pictorial genre of the Roman capricci (figure 1). This genre, which brought disparate concrete elements of the city together with architectural fantasies of the classical past, played an increasingly influential role in constructing and diffusing the image of Italian cities, particularly Rome and Venice, in the eighteenth century. These “fantasies” were linked directly to the urban environment that inspired them and were addressed specifically to travelers’ experiences. Therefore, within what was a larger peninsular phenomenon, we focus exclusively on examples of the Roman capriccio, whose developing iconography was dependent on the specific topography of the Eternal City. They combined an archaeological fascination with a fabulist’s creativity to produce harmonized compositions of real and imaginary monuments, and real and imaginary people, both ancient and modern.

What follows is an attempt to trace the general contours of these related practices to suggest that the city provided a productive site for walking through, thinking of, and describing a shared culture beyond Christian pilgrimage. This study reinterprets the ways in which travelers (and artists among them) conceived and represented their experience of the city, which leads to a new interpretation of the wandering, thinking traveler to Rome. Rather than another study of the Grand Tour, however, it seeks to define the practice of walking in Rome as the foundation of new ways of representing the city verbally and visually, of organizing its disparate elements into creative narratives and pictorial visions. To begin, we look at walking in the city as a social practice that emerged in eighteenth-century Paris. This will lay the specific historical grounds for the way in which French travelers, in particular, brought a certain idea of mobile perception to the Eternal City. We will then explore the different ways in which the urban experience of Rome was reorganized into visual images that became particularly popular in those years and came to constitute a new pictorial genre.

The emergence of an aesthetics of walking

In eighteenth-century Paris, a new kind of walking had supplanted the prevailing practice of the conscious display of the moving body, of seeing and being seen. As Laurent Turcot has demonstrated, this older type of strolling had developed from the social construction of the seventeenth-century courtier, and was an activity that was focused more on expressing and maintaining certain forms of aristocratic sociability than it was on taking account of the surrounding environment. In its eighteenth-century manifestation, the new manner of walking was also concerned with health, well-being, and pleasure, attributes which were formed along routes of distraction that became the modern Parisian boulevards (figure 2). These boulevards, the product of the progressive dismantling of the ramparts of Paris by Louis XIV in the late seventeenth century, transformed promenading into a characteristic urban practice. With their tree-lined allées, the boulevards synthesized earlier closed gardens like the Tuileries or the Palais Royal with open networks of urban circulation.

Universal access and freedom of movement, which characterized the new boulevards, led to a mixed sociability and to new ways of using public streets. This condition was the physical basis for the emergence of the promenade as an individualized manner of walking. At the same time, the proliferation of manuals on polite behavior produced a paradox in which “the ideals of social distinction could not be widely diffused without leading to a homogenization of
The reaction was a literature that reconfigured promenading as an autonomous practice, giving this individual form of walking its particular meaning. A new genre of conduct manuals toward the 1780s sought to define a “truer, more sincere and more ‘natural’ form of promenading.” From these two factors, walking became a vehicle for social and urban discovery through a new kind of philosophical reflection. This peculiarly eighteenth-century way of walking must be seen as distinct from the aimless wandering later recommended by Baudelaire and the flâneurs of the nineteenth century who exploited the new “boulevards publics in a completely different way.”

As an example of the convergence of a new genre of urban literature and urban experience, Louis-Sébastien Mercier’s Tableau de Paris (1781) includes, for the first time in this context, a series of discourses on the past evoked by walking in the city. Mercier dramatizes this dynamic physical and mental interaction with urban space by transforming it into a narrative sequence of personal evocative images: “I cannot cross the rue de la Ferronnerie without seeing the bloody dagger pulled smoldering from Ravillac’s generous heart, who did not deserve to die the death of tyrants.” Mercier emphasizes the bodily mobility that produces these visions, how his own walking evoked the memory of collective movements in the past: “If I cross the Place des Victoires, I say to myself: people used to rush across this square in the middle of the day where now one sees the figure of a king who wanted to be a conqueror.” This evocation of an imagined tableau, represented as emerging directly from particular locales, pervades Mercier’s Tableau and Dupaty’s descriptions of Rome. It personalizes what was a public, collectively held memory inscribed into the physical contours of Parisian places. Dupaty’s letters perform a similar projection on the spaces of Rome. The shared cultural memory of the classical past becomes the generator of a series of meaningful encounters. Dupaty transposes Mercier’s contemplative mode of attaching historical events and persons to the sites in which they took place as a way of conjuring up that past as a personal memory made real by the topography of its occurrence. Both writers evoke the practice of walking as a necessary act to apprehend the city through dynamic and personal interactions with it. They articulate a new freedom in transforming this experience into an emotionally charged mode of writing that was peculiar to the French but was part of a more general practice through which visitors sought a common past in Rome’s material remains. Writers like Dupaty sought to transform Rome into a series of familiar encounters. For him, a foreigner educated in the mythological and political history of antiquity, Rome offered a rich cultural cache of narratives that walking could bring to life. His
techniques of description also produced a vivid set of images that evoked an affective response to what was, to many first-time visitors, a confusing topography of barely recognizable ruins.

Walking, from Paris to Rome
By deploying a first-person narrative “je,” promeneurs expressed their personal engagement through a language that combined vision with movement and led to a particular way of understanding the city as an amalgam of people, buildings, stories, and spaces. As Turcot noticed, phrases such as “je me trouve” (I find myself), “je passe” (I pass by), “je traverse” (I cross), “je vois” (I see), “je songe” (I think), “j’observe” (I observe), or “je remarque” (I notice) are frequently used in Mercier’s Tableau to structure his mobile gaze. In a similar manner, Dupaty evokes the various ways in which his body walks across the city: “j’errais” (I wandered), “je me promène” (I walk), “je foule” (I tread upon) etc. in order to conjure up a moving panorama of historical episodes and mythological scenes as if they were a living tableau before him. As outlined above, “errer” was the mode in which Dupaty oriented himself in the city. With “se promener,” on the other hand, Dupaty suggests certain itineraries with specific destinations as well as the leisurely exploration of streets, churches, and monumental sites. With “fouler”, finally, he insists upon his direct bodily connection with the material remains of the city that bring him into an immediate experience of the past. Each term, therefore, alludes to a specific kind of ambulatory gesture and relation to a spatialized knowledge; each term acquires a particular meaning in relation to the city of Rome.

Dupaty’s answer to the question he posed to himself about how to discover Rome was to imagine the city as an integrated whole. He did not to divide the city into distinct spatio-temporal zones but instead tried to disentangle the tripartite assemblage of Rome’s ancient, Renaissance, and modern aspects. Therefore, he began by exploring the modern city in order to discover the debris of the ancient one. Such wandering would frame his perception of the city’s most celebrated Roman monuments, the Colosseum and the Pantheon, but the fragmentary state of the Forum, a site he knows was at the heart of Rome’s ancient glory, presents him with an interpretive puzzle. So he goes on a search for the fragments through which he will attempt to reimagine the lost temples and palaces. This search leads him to an intense encounter and physical contact with them. He writes about having his back pressed against the wall that once displayed the tables of Roman law, then having his feet firmly planted on top of the prison where Catiline’s accomplices were led to death, and leaning on a column of the temple of Jupiter Tonans, where he takes in each scene before him. In three distinct static poses, therefore, Dupaty uses the ruins to arrest his body so that his eyes can then wander through the nearly empty space before him. His gaze moves through the remains of the temples of Concord, Jupiter Stator, and Antoninus and Faustina, the walls of the Treasury, the arch of Septimius Severus, ranges under the vaults of the Temple of Peace, crosses the ruins of Nero’s house (Domus Aurea) and, at length, comes to rest on a solitary column of white marble rising in the middle of the Forum Romanum. Between his stationary body and his roving eye, Dupaty describes how he never tired of walking through the wreckage of the Roman past, moving between one fragment and another, sitting on a broken column or a pediment. It was a singular great pleasure, he writes, to feel his feet treading upon the grandeur of Rome.

The affective power of such movement was a common trope at the time among French travelers to Rome, suggesting a conscious transference of the new genre of literature first exemplified by Mercier.

Such a dynamic, in which the city of Rome appears sequentially to the visitor, in tantalizing fragments that are framed by the modern city, even characterized the approach to the city itself, setting up the back and forth rhythm of discovery that Dupaty was describing in his itineraries through the forum. The poet and playwright Madame du Boccage described the exhilaration she felt at her first glimpse of St. Peter’s dome emerging on the horizon as she approached it from the north (figure 3). But she also noted her apprehension when it disappeared the next moment behind a hill. But she also notes her apprehension when it disappears the next moment behind a hill. Such a mobile perspective, where the city is encountered as if it were a staged representation in which the changing of scenes was dramatically choreographed by theatrical set changes, was a mode of viewing that French travelers brought with them. It was also, however, as much an attribute of the city itself, whose modern design principles directed viewers toward evocative perspectives of its material past.

The immersive gesture
Both of these authors articulate a particular kind of relationship between walking, seeing, and understanding the city as a complex multidimensional entity. The Enlightenment genealogy of walking as a synthetic activity, with which this article is concerned, was inflected, in every case, by aesthetic demands and anxieties specific to the education it carried, and the kind of artifacts it brought about (mainly travel guides and prints). At least in the eighteenth century and surely beyond, walking and representing what one experienced, in words and pictures, were mutually constituting activities. It was precisely by setting himself (and his gaze) in motion that Dupaty could make sense of fragments, ruins, and contemporary topographies. This kind of mobile viewing contained, for him, the evocative power of connecting directly to the ancient past through the concrete surfaces of the city.

Foreigners like Dupaty and Boccage, who traveled to Rome in the eighteenth century, invariably brought with them preconceived ideas about the city and its central role in structuring Western society, as well as expectations about the opulence of
the monumental material legacy they would find there. In the light of contemporary empiricist debates about the nature of human understanding in the eighteenth century (debates that placed renewed emphasis on the body’s sensorial experience as the foundation of knowledge), Dupaty could only “see” the ancient city through a fully embodied exploratory encounter with it. This was particularly necessary with respect to the antique city because the grandeur of ancient Rome that he had so profoundly internalized lay largely in incomprehensible ruins. For Dupaty and Boccage, treading over those ruins led to seeing, which led to knowing.

In his daily wanderings, Dupaty finds that there is a common mixture of profound material loss set astride the miraculous persistence of the city’s mutilated but once stunning monuments. To the wandering viewer, it was physical contact and imaginative engagement with ruined but evocative landscapes connected directly to ancient persons or events that made the past accessible. Such a dynamic is evident, for example, when Dupaty describes the experience of arriving at the cascades at Tivoli, east of Rome (figure 4). Walking under lofty poplars, he sees majestic plains, feels the verdant turf under his feet, smells the fragrant flowers, listens to a concert of birds, while he sees the fleecy whiteness of the flocks of sheep upon the slopes and hears the silver sound of their bells tinkling in the air. This sensual immediacy of the scene sets up Dupaty’s encounter with the stupefying view of the ancient temples and waterfalls that induce him to imagine the writers who preceded him and represented the beauty he now confronts: Horace, Zenobia, Lesbia, etc. Immersing himself in this reverie, Dupaty imagines Propertius coming to the same spot where he, too, fell into his own daydream, one that inspired the ancient writer to compose his poems, and where Dupaty imagined him, in the evenings, bringing his lover, Cynthia. Dupaty’s reverie leads him, therefore, to imagine how Propertius would have experienced the same emotional rapture by journeying to the same place. In this way, the
ancient writer becomes a proxy through which Dupaty can collapse the distance between the past and the present. He imagines how Propertius described the very same scene by guiding Cynthia’s distracted gaze towards the waves that rise like sheaves, the currents that glide in silver streams, and the shrubs undulating under the force of the River Anio’s waters. In other words, Dupaty transforms the experience of his roving, perceiving body within the timeless beauty of this fantasized scene into a vehicle which connects him to the moment in the past where he imagines that Propertius described the very same setting to guide his lover’s wandering gaze.73

Wandering into reverie

The kind of reveries that these walks stimulated were a “natural,” “logical” outgrowth and intensification of the reflective promenading whose foundations Turcot has located in the urban transformations of Paris. As the historian reminds us, Jean-Jacques Rousseau transposed this individualized practice of strolling with urban crowds into a solitary meditative walking in rural landscapes.44 According to Rousseau, this kind of walking was the vehicle for achieving a deeper integration of the self and nature, which was fully attainable only away from the crowds and far from the city. In his Confessions, Rousseau claimed that he could only meditate while walking and that when he stopped he could hardly think because his head worked only in concert with his feet.45 Such walking had no real destination. It was a form of wandering in which the changing scenes before him animated and enlivened his ideas, where his spirit depended on his body in motion. Rousseau was the consummate mobile spectator, whose itineraries transformed the idyllic countryside around him into a succession of pleasant perspectives with which his spirit was united through direct experience.46 As an Enlightenment thinker, Rousseau considered that everything we know comes by way of the senses and this sensual reason is the foundation of intellectual reason. In order to learn how to think, he declared, it is necessary to exercise our limbs, our senses, our interior organs, which are the instruments of our first intelligence.47 Therefore, walking was at the heart of perceiving and knowing the world, linking as it did what Rousseau called the three masters of our philosophy: our feet, our hands, and our eyes.48

It was precisely the interaction of these three parts of his body that allowed Dupaty to unlock Rome’s past from its extant remains: by moving, touching, and looking but only under certain conditions and only in particular places. For Rousseau, this meant a succession of pleasing natural settings laid out for his eyes, while for Dupaty it was an ensemble of sites evocative of specific episodes of the historical or mythical past; but for both, the landscape had to be mediated aesthetically and intellectually. As a result, Dupaty was gravely saddened when he failed to bring to life the memory of Cicero at Frascati, southeast of Rome, where the orator’s villa was all but obliterated from memory: “the door of the house once owned by Cicero […] to which the guarantor of the Roman republic used to return, preceded by twelve lictors and followed by two thousands Roman riders, is now but the paltry atrium of some winegrower.”49 What Dupaty was left with was the less-than-inspiring presence of the villas of the Ludovisi, Mondragon, and Pamphilji families, whose waters, woods, and lawns, he states, could never gratify the traveler who had once wandered in the French countryside around the town of Ermenonville.30

Dupaty’s invocation of Ermenonville at this point in the Roman campagna is particularly revealing because it was precisely in this landscape that Rousseau settled down late in his life. After decades of extensive walking that took him across Switzerland, France, and Italy, it was here that he composed his Rêveries, writings inspired by his solitary wanderings through its pleasant and charming woods, where walking took on a decidedly moral and aesthetic character.31 Dupaty’s memory of this place, therefore, suggests that he was intimately familiar with the role this landscape played in Rousseau’s late philosophical writings, as he lamented how wandering in the degraded landscape at Frascati could not produce the kind of heightened sensual experience that could be transfigured into direct knowledge about the past.30

In Rome Dupaty transformed Rousseau’s moralized philosophy into a historicized aesthetic in a series of letters suffused with a powerful emotional style that also recalled Mercier’s Tableau de Paris. His descriptions provided his readers with an effective means of reinscribing the intimate presence of history into their own wanderings through Rome. This kind of wandering in the imagined footsteps of the ancients was a way to see the world through a mobile gaze that connected the walker directly to the sights and sounds that had inspired writers from the past. This was a forceful trope, one that Boccage would emulate as she walked through the forest near Horace’s villa at Tivoli, imagining how the poet would wander through these same landscapes with his patron Maecenas, a setting that inspired her to create verses reminiscent of his style.33

The wandering artist reconfigures the Eternal City

As noted above, this creative way of engaging with the past also informed the practice of artists working in Rome throughout the eighteenth century. If Rousseau had described how he used to wander deep in the forest searching for the lost image of the origins of humankind, then painters made analogous itineraries by wandering extensively through the city and its countryside. Already by the early eighteenth century, painters in the French Academy in Rome were regularly searching for the beautiful ruins of antiquity in the Roman campagna. Its director in the 1720s, Nicolas Vleughels, was praised for his practice of teaching his students how to walk and at the same time develop an aesthetic appreciation for the landscape around them.34 “Mr. Vleughels does very well in walking [promener] the students; it would be a good thing if he could give them a good taste of the landscape,” wrote the director of the King’s Buildings, the Duc...
One of those young artists was Charles-Joseph Natoire, who later, as director of the Academy himself (1751–75), encouraged his students to make a practice of walking and drawing at the same time. Recalling a particular incident in which they accidentally ran into a herd of buffaloes, Natoire describes how the students “were going out to walk [se promener] and at the same time to draw some views around the pyramid of C. Cestius.” From this moment on, Natoire would frequently evoke in his correspondence with the administration of the arts in Paris the discoveries that students made of the Roman landscape. Conflating the activities of walking and drawing had a particular resonance in this context, where the concept of “se promener” developed above provided the basis for a new aesthetic apprehension and artistic representation of urban and rural spaces. This combination of walking, looking, and thinking was the foundation of a new artistic medium. The new idiom stemmed from an emerging conception of landscape as an independent mechanism that could bring the past to life in the modern city as an embodied experience: images that would visualize Dupaty’s encounter with the three Romes.

Within this idiom, artists would reimagine the ancient grandeur of these settings by recreating the integrity of the original edifice and by reconfiguring these monuments into an imaginary ideal view—as an image of the painter’s own personal reverie. Take, for example, a series of architectural capricci by the painter Hubert Robert, which depict different views of the Pantheon in Rome. These works show eloquently how Robert could imagine the same monument set within a variety of contexts, starting with a drawing he sketched in the Piazza della Rotonda (figure 5). Robert frames the ancient obelisk and the Pantheon’s façade beyond with two low-lying open air buildings that seem to have formed a series of market halls around the crowded square. The layout of these buildings can be seen in Giovanni Battista Nolli’s map of the piazza (1748) and in a contemporary engraving by Giovanni Battista Piranesi (figure 6). The latter creates a monumental scale for the square by raising the point of view, shrinking the relative size of the monument, expanding the depth of field, and filling the space with many figures and carriages that could not possibly have existed there. The effect is to distance the viewer from the scene and give the impression of a floating spectator taking in the view from below of a much more monumental city. Piranesi created dynamic compositions along with bold lighting effects that highlighted the drama of the city’s architecture. Robert, in contrast, depicts the scene from the vantage point of one standing directly in the square. He emphasizes the constricted sense of space created by these buildings, markers of a present that frames the vision of the past. In the background, one of Bernini’s bell towers that crowned the façade of the Pantheon can be seen in the upper left.

When Robert turns to paint a very similar scene, however, he begins to expand the scale and reorganize the scene by stressing the contrast between past and present (figure 7). The bell towers have been removed, alienating the Pantheon from its recent past and situating it much more firmly within a classical setting. Human activity in the present is confined to the vernacular structures in the foreground. Subtle changes emphasize the ancient grandeur. The buildings have been drawn further apart to allow a more dominating presence of the whole façade of the Pantheon. While the drawing had rendered a few vaguely defined figures, two of which (in the background) are clearly absorbed in taking in the view of the Pantheon, human activity in the painting is displayed in the foreground, where figures in contemporary dress draw water, cook, and attend to children. These small but significant changes represent the transformation from the wandering artist, who sought out particular views of the contemporary city, capturing their immediacy in drawings, to the painter who began to create imaginary reconstructions of the city’s ancient and modern heritage. In doing so, Robert was using his knowledge of the past to create the visual complement of Boccage’s poetic re-imagination of the topographical juxtaposition of a contemporary wanderer and the persistence of classical remains.

Explorations such as these could be taken even further, into completely new urban configurations, where ancient and
modern are harmonized into a grand new vista. In a 1766 view of the Porto di Ripetta painted for his reception at the Académie de Peinture et de Sculpture, Robert transports his towerless Pantheon to the banks of the Tiber, where it now forms the apex of a design ensemble that integrates the three Romes articulated by Dupaty upon his arrival (figure 8).39

Designed in 1704, the refurbished Porto di Ripetta foreshadowed the elaborate staircase and setting of Santa Trinità dei Monti, a connection that Robert makes explicit by recasting the port into a similar dramatic configuration in which the

Figure 6. Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Veduta della Piazza della Rotonda, c. 1751. 41 x 54.7 centimeters. Etching. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1937 (37.43-3 (52)). Photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY.

Figure 7. Hubert Robert, The Piazza della Rotonda, c. 1776. Oil on canvas. 54.2 x 72 centimeters. Location unknown. Photo: ArtNet.

Figure 8. Hubert Robert, Capriccio with the Pantheon and the Porto di Ripetta, 1766. Oil on canvas. 119 x 145 centimeters. École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, Paris, on deposit from the Musée du Louvre, MRA 123. Photo: Niall Atkinson.
Pantheon looms over the stairs instead of the imposing church. On its left, one can see the first two arches of Michelangelo’s façade of the Palazzo Nuovo, a building located on the Capitoline Hill. As a result, contemporary, Renaissance, and ancient Rome are orchestrated by the painter as an aesthetic dialogue between the three great ages of the city, an ensemble put together by Robert’s wandering eye and body. Such an experimental composition uses a low vantage point to “liberate” the Pantheon from its less dramatic actual setting in the Piazza della Rotonda, where Robert had depicted its grandeur in contrast to, rather than in harmony with, the more rustic and ramshackle buildings that framed it.

It was precisely such a view of the landscape, understood through a particular form of aesthetic mediation, that Dupaty and Boccage actively sought out on their walks in Tivoli. Boccage noted that the dramatic features of the landscape around Tivoli—woods, grottoes, mountains, precipices, and rushing torrents—presented a confusing assemblage to the viewer. She noted that painters had long endeavored to find ways of meaningfully representing these spectacular visual effects of the cascades. "40 The scene that confronted these travelers, therefore, was not simply an overwhelming effect of nature, but its mediation through the carefully organized pictorial translation of that scene by artists who rendered its confusion emotionally accessible. When travelers like Boccage evoked the poetry of ancient figures, while walking through the places in which those figures had lived, they were engaging in a similar practice of making the scene and its past meaningful, comprehensible, and available for aesthetic reflection. When Dupaty imagined historical events taking place right before him on the ruins of the past, he was mentally projecting a topographical coherence that those sites had long ceased to have. In a similar way, when artists like Robert were depicting their fantastic visions of Rome, they were responding precisely to these capricci, the visual analogue to their historical desires. Such desires were given aesthetic legitimacy as painted scenes that helped to drive the economy of memory for tourists in Rome.

**Visualizing the past in the present**

The visual conflation between modern and ancient was not a completely new phenomenon. The printed views produced by the Renaissance artist Hieronymus Cock offer some analogous examples of how the classical past was brought into direct confrontation with the present, where religious and fabulous scenes took place among ruins or buildings that were simultaneously real and ideal, contemporary and historical, worldly and mythical. "41 Such a scene takes place, for example, in an etching after a 1547 painting by Maarten van Heemskerck, where an imaginary landscape of ruins is strewn randomly with classical remains (figure 9). On the left are the Egyptian caryatids from Tivoli, the *Hercules and Antaeus* from the Belvedere, and the remains of the Temple of Saturn from the Forum. On the right, at the bottom of the steps, is the river god Tiber from the Capitol, combined with the group of Romulus, Remus, and the she-wolf. Behind them is the massive hulk of the Colosseum. In the foreground, the artist has depicted St Jerome, while the figures in the background (merchants with

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**Figure 9.** Hieronymus Cock, after Maarten van Heemskerck, *Roman Ruins*, 1552. Etching. 22.6 x 35.1 centimeters. Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels, Print Room, s.v. 90104. Photo: Royal Library of Belgium.
the camels, a donkey, and a lion running behind them) are all motifs that derive from Jacobus de Voragine’s *Legenda Aurea* (The Golden Legend), which recounts a story in the saint’s life about some camel-driving merchants who stole his donkey while guarded by a lion. The combination of Jerome contemplating the skull as a symbol of vanity and death, and surrounded by the remains of ancient Rome, strongly implies the idea of transience, which, when mediated through such ruins, accentuates even more emphatically the fleeting nature of human life.

The scene is transposed into the present not only through the depiction of two men in contemporary dress who look toward and comment on the sculpted group of the Tiber, but also by the transformation of the river god into a fountain (the water is spilling out from its cornucopia) into which another contemporary figure is pouring water.

These kinds of images invited viewers to meditate upon their place and role in a moralized universe of conventional symbols. However, by the eighteenth century, such clear Christian motifs would have disappeared, leaving viewers to grapple with a world unregulated by a deterministic spiritual mechanism. This scene can be compared with the one depicted in a watercolor by Natoire at the Albertina, Vienna, which presents a view of the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli (figure 10). Because of its affective power, this particular view would become a common *topos* for both artists and travelers alike. The scene arrested the aesthetic wanderer, whose mind, therefore, was set free to travel through space and time. On the hill in the background, contemporary figures are visiting the ruined temple. In the foreground, the past comes to life through the figure of the ancient Sibyl addressing her audience (a theme also illustrated by the Italian painter Gian Paolo Panini, whose close relationships with the artists of the French Academy are well known). The foreground and background appear, therefore, in a mutually constituting dialogue where each tells stories about the other; those on the hill learn about the past by closely inspecting the ruins, while the ancients below, who are listening to the words of the prophetess, hear tales of a possible future. Each scene brings the other into being, while the viewers of the painting become temporal wanderers as their eyes drift between foreground and background stimulating their mind to interrogate the relationship between past and present. The elision of the viewer’s experience and the painted scene is characteristic of the eighteenth-century representation of Rome, and does not play a didactic role in pointing viewers toward moral action.

However, it is not just the ruins of the past alone that evoke this cultural memory; the presence of the contemporary and natural worlds plays a crucial role in obliterating the remoteness of the past and offering it up as an embodied presence. In another watercolor by Natoire, in the Musée Atrger, Montpellier, two anonymous figures in ancient dress descend a staircase that leads them simultaneously into the gardens of the modern Villa Spada and into a mythological scene where Diana and her nymphs rest after bathing, while to the right, Acteon strides into the scene (figure 11).

But Diana’s story has to share space with the empty carriage of Venus, on the left, whose enigmatic and seemingly random presence echoes the way in which Rome’s heritage was always encountered as a series of disconnected, half-buried fragments. It is true

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*Figure 10.* Charles-Joseph Natoire, *The Temple of Vesta at Tivoli*, 1766. Brown ink, brown and grey wash, and watercolor over black chalk. 39.5 × 55 centimeters. Albertina, Graphische Sammlung, Vienna, no. 87. Photo: Susanna Caviglia.
that examples of biblical and mythological scenes taking place within contemporary settings can also be found in Cock’s engravings—it suffices to think of the series of *Landschap met Bibel en Mythus* after works by his brother Matthijs. However, Cock’s series reflects a particular Netherlandish genre (the so-called “cosmic” landscape initiated by Joachim Patinir, c. 1480–1524) consisting of panoramas aimed to stimulate the viewer’s imagination to enter into physical space. It is an important contribution to the contemporary landscape art of Northern Europe based on a particular interest in realistic topographical representations. At a time when a painting of pure landscape was still difficult to conceive as an autonomous genre, the narrative scenes (be they Abraham and Isaac, Judah and Tamar, Mercury and Argus, or Apollo and Daphne, to name only a few) were integrated as a pretext for the landscape to come into being as a legitimate setting for the story (figure 12). By the eighteenth century, painted landscapes had shed their necessary dependent status on narrative and had emerged as a fully recognized genre. And even when they provide space for the representation of fabulous scenes, the presence of contemporary figures who take in such scenes creates an analogue of viewing that complicates the ontological position of the viewer in front of the painting.

Such compositions initiate a blurring of the boundaries that separate viewers and the objects of their contemplation. Do such figures mediate our perception of the scene or do they invite the viewer to join them within the space of representation? Both the invention and the realism of such images seem to have led the eighteenth-century viewer to imagine entering into the scene not simply to transgress the barrier between the pictorial, historical, and contemporary worlds, but also to take part in these scenes as an active moving viewer—a practice that responds to one of the most important moments of aesthetic discourse in the eighteenth century, Denis Diderot’s *Promenade Vernet*, to which we will return. This represents a second order of wandering that projects the body into the space of representation. This projection was a necessary dimension of appreciating significant works of art, which Dupaty attempted to impart to a young artist he encountered in the Vatican Belvedere, who was struggling to render the *Laocoon* into a drawing. The work would immediately give away its mediocrity, he states, if it then allowed the sensitive viewer to turn away from the ensemble as a whole and go wandering in its details. If this admonishment seems like a classicizing call to focus on the essentials, it is good to keep in mind that Dupaty
thought that getting lost in details was not just possible but, in some cases, the most intense kind of aesthetic experience possible.

**Mental wanderings**

It is precisely this kind of mental wandering through details that Dupaty exercises in a letter written just before his frustrating visit to Frascati. He recalls how one evening, upon returning to his lodgings, he found himself walking through Piazza San Pietro when a fire suddenly broke out in a poor man’s house nearby and was threatening to engulf the Vatican itself. Always the sensitive viewer, Dupaty confesses that he was impressed by what he saw. Amid the swelling crowd of old men, children, soldiers, priests, rich and poor rolling across the square like a stormy sea, he chases after fearful families, flees from a mother faced with impossible choices, admires the body of a naked man hanging from a burning building and the majestic beauty of a mother leading her children to safety. As he cowers in the sudden silence before the wind picks up and sends furious flames across the square amid buildings crashing and mothers screaming, Dupaty sees the pontiff appear at the window of the Vatican, as the people bow down in supplication to hear the prayers that he addresses to the heavens. At this point, Dupaty exclaims rhetorically, “How shall I paint this scene which presented itself at this moment to my eyes?” as the flames finally die out and the darkness of night is restored.  

By describing how he wandered through the city at night, Dupaty was projecting his mind and body into the space of Raphael’s monumental decoration of the Vatican apartments, *The Fire in the Borgo* (1514–17), which commemorated a miracle performed by Leo IV (790–855) that stopped a potentially devastating conflagration in the neighborhood around the Vatican (figure 13). Dupaty imagines wandering across its details as a way of articulating the emotional intensity that drove the overall composition. In doing so, he constructs a mental mobile itinerary through a painting as if it were the city itself, experienced not as a historical Christian legend but as a contemporary disaster. If, at Frascati, Dupaty had made reference to Rousseau’s philosophical wanderings through the forests at Ermenonville as a method of excavating knowledge...
from one’s surroundings, here, by leading the reader to believe that he is walking through the real space of Rome when he is actually describing a painting, Dupaty recalls one of the most celebrated passages of Diderot’s art criticism. In his *Promenade Vernet*, the philosopher leads the reader on a similar journey through a series of landscapes over several days, only to reveal at the end that all along he has been standing in front of a group of paintings exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1767 (figure 14).

Diderot takes seven fictional walks through seven paintings by Joseph Vernet over a period of three days. Julie Hayes has identified a general tendency in these promenades for his wanderings to move from more systematic explorations of the landscape towards more random mental wanderings through imaginary spaces. She describes these changing itineraries as a series of lines, tracing the effects of straight and sinuous wanderings to spiraling and zigzagging movements that plunge into depths of the paintings while they also extend beyond the visible to reach distant points. Throughout, Diderot describes himself moving through the landscape, from the foreground to the background, across the scene and back out again, returning each day to where he started. In front of one painting, he imagines walking into its depths where he turns to look back out on the scene from behind, reversing the visual structure of the painting so that it gazes back out into the world. This collapsing of the borders between the real and the pictorial worlds plays a crucial rhetorical role in the mechanism of Diderot’s mobile gaze, a gaze which was becoming a central organizing paradigm for painters to structure the representation of experience. These critical interventions hinged on the way in which looking at a landscape or at a painting was always a dialogue between a wandering body and a wandering gaze. Artists, therefore, combined two modes of exploratory walks, two kinds of mobile viewing (one actual and the other imaginary), two kinds of embodied philosophies that brought the landscapes of Rousseau and Diderot together into a new kind of pictorial representation.

Later in the same Salon, Diderot encounters a series of paintings by Robert and describes their effects upon the viewer.

We attach our gaze on the ruins of a triumphal arch, a portico, a pyramid, a temple, a palace; and we turn back upon ourselves in anticipation of the ravages of time; and our imagination disperses these buildings across the earth on which we live.

He goes on to declare that Robert has included too many figures in his paintings, which seems to undermine the poetics of ruins that he seeks. Instead, he believes that there is only one kind of figure that is appropriate for the depiction of ruins. He imagines such a figure as a solitary man who would wander through the shadows, arms crossed over his chest and head bowed in thought. In such a scene the majesty, grandeur, and tranquility, its lonely darkness and muffled rumblings, would have made him tremble and he would not have been able to restrain himself from going to daydream under that vault, or sitting himself down between those columns, from entering, completely, into this painting.

Merging mental and visual wanderings: pictures/gardens

Such contemplative travelers as Dupaty and Boccage would have engaged with just such landscapes as they wandered through Rome. The architectural capriccio that contemporary paintings represent gathered together those monuments encountered over time into a single ensemble. The result is that the painting can then allow spectators to experience that mobile viewing as if it were real, their eyes, along with Diderot, moving from object to object, as their mind wanders across the ravages of time. Diderot expresses this feeling of being in front of the actual ruins when standing in front of Robert’s paintings. It is the painting, or one’s imaginary “embodied” journey into it, that produce such strong and ambivalent emotional effects on the beholder. It causes Diderot to want to flee in fear or to wander among them at his leisure. For Diderot, paintings had the power to allow his spirit to wander at will and provided a substitute stimulus to the kind of reverie that actual wandering produced for Rousseau.

The intimate reflection, or reverie, that confrontation with the real objects produced within travelers is brought to life when they find themselves in front of such paintings, even if, like Diderot, they are wandering through the memories of others. In his promenades, he takes that phenomenological transference produced by these paintings and builds it into a “poetics of ruins.” It was just such a poetics that closed the self-perpetuating circle of wandering bodies, eyes, and minds. If painters were inspired to reproduce this mobile experience in their work, travelers such as Dupaty showed how this poetics directed such contemplative movement back onto the experience of the actual ruins. When he finally arrived in Rome, Dupaty was perfectly predisposed to understand the connection between walking, seeing, and understanding the grandeur of the Eternal City.

Among the numerous eloquent engravings of Rome by Jean Barbault, one can be taken as an illustration of the multiple elements that drove these various movements, in and out of Rome, in and out of paintings (figure 15). Two contemporary figures are placed amid the ruins of Rome imaginatively reorganized into a single setting. They look and gesture toward figures that straddle the line between flesh and stone. Around them are sculptural and architectural fragments that include the Temple of Jupiter, the column of Trajan, a mausoleum, the Arch of Janus, and the Temple of Peace. The image dramatizes Diderot’s desire to stand before a painting that allowed his mind to enter and “stroll there at his will” (“s’y promener avec plaisir”).

The image goes beyond this, however, since the seated figure in the center has been able to draw out living figures from the ancient past to commune with them among the ruins. This was what both Dupaty and Boccage were doing when they invoked, for example, the poetry of Horace as a living presence while standing on the site of his villa. The standing figure who looks back out from the painting, a common trope since the Renaissance conception of history painting, takes on a new meaning in relation to the way Diderot himself could imagine being that figure. No longer simply the visual mechanism that indicated to the viewer what to look at, this figure comes to stand as a surrogate for every viewer, who now should be able to enter into the picture, not only to look back but also to wander about at will. For visitors to Rome, looking at paintings was never isolated from the act of walking through such scenes in real life. Dupaty remarked that he derived a singular pleasure from trampling on the surface of Rome with his feet. He also sought ways of understanding the jumbled presence of this material history upon which he trod through paintings. Images of the city taught him how to let his gaze wander through this vast territory and come to rest on the ruined fragments of capitals, entablatures, and pillars. The architectural capriccio that informed such promenades and paintings was a genre that gathered together, into a single ensemble, monuments that were actually widely dispersed and only encountered sequentially over time. At work in these practices was the seamless transition between the experience of the real and artistic worlds, between objects and places, where both were bound up in a rhetorical loop that generated affective, if highly

stylized, relations between past and present, which brings us back to Ermenonville.

Ermenonville was the site of an early French picturesque garden designed by the architect and surveyor Jean-Marie Morel in collaboration with its landowner, the Marquis de Girardin, which was under construction by the 1760s. Girardin invited his friend and mentor Rousseau to come and live on the estate toward the end of the philosopher’s

Figure 15. Jean Barbault, Architectural Capriccio, in Jean Barbault, with contributions from Georg Christoph Kilian, Denkmäler des Alten Roms oder Sammlung der vornehmsten und noch in Rom vorhandenen Alterthümer: nach Barbaults Zeichnung nebst einer Erklärung derselben (Augsburg: Stage, 1782), pl. 1; trans. of Jean Barbault, Les Plus Beaux Monuments de Rome Ancienne, ou Recueil des plus beaux morceaux de l’antiquité romaine qui existent encore (Rome: Bouchard & Gravier, 1761).

Figure 16. Jacques-Philippe Le Sueur, after designs by Hubert Robert, Rousseau’s Tomb, 1780. Marble. Ermenonville. Photo: Niall Atkinson.
life. When Rousseau died there, Girardin created a tomb-shrine for the philosopher in the garden (figure 16). Girardin would go on to write a treatise on landscape design, *De la composition des paysages* (1777), which was based on principles derived from his experience at Ermenonville and emphasized the link between painting and garden design, both of which relied on the imagination and study of topography. When designing the garden there, the Marquis de Girardin was inspired by Rousseau’s philosophy of nature (*Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*) and he insisted on designing the garden according to the rules of pictorial composition. Such rules included its winding paths around the lake, “but linked together in an un-Rousseauian fashion by a series of prospects and structures loaded with associative views intended to recall the works of admired painters.” Robert was certainly one of the painters, if not the painter he was thinking of. As a friend of the Marquis, he was no doubt involved in many discussions about the garden, and his representations of it clearly express the painterly qualities of its design. In 1778, Robert would be given the title of *Dessinateur des Jardins du Roi* (Designer of the King’s Gardens) and he was commissioned to collaborate on the design of the gardens at Méreville for the financier Jean-Joseph de Laborde. Here, he was charged precisely with setting pictures into the overall design as well as embedding architectural elements into it. As a result of his close engagement with these gardens, he would have been not only deeply committed to the aesthetic and practical issues of both painting and landscape as integrated arts, but also to translating his visual ideal from the one medium into the other and collapsing the distance between them.

It is in this context that Robert transposed his pictorial response to the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli so that it reappeared as the Temple of Philosophy at Ermenonville, a gesture that would link him directly to Rousseau’s ideas within a new visual idiom of garden design that was inspired by the unplanned aesthetic developed in Britain (figure 17). This idiom located the aesthetic experience within a series of views along paths of discovery linked together by the choreographed “wandering” of a contemplative traveler. However, rather than a mere imitation, the modern and deliberately unfinished temple was no longer a vanishing ruin from the remote past. Instead, it reoriented the viewer’s gaze confidently toward the future, becoming a metaphor for the always unfinished project and continual progress of philosophical work. Therefore, Rousseau’s philosophical reveries were not inspired by wandering in a “natural” landscape but in one conceived as a picture, by a painter who was inspired by walking in and around Rome. It was his close interrogation of the Eternal City, therefore, that allowed him to create a new space of experience designed specifically to facilitate the wandering, looking, thinking spectator.

### Walking, thinking, ordering

The question arises: what do such intense imaginative reflections, born of wanderings through places and images, tell us about the nature of interrogating the world and its past that was specific to eighteenth-century Enlightenment practices? In other words, what mental mechanisms connected the painter, the traveler, and the philosopher? To suggest a provisional answer, we would like to consider two moments in which the

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Figure 17. Jacques-Philippe Le Sueur, after designs by Hubert Robert, Temple of Philosophy, 1779. Marble. Ermenonville. Photo: Niall Atkinson.
intense emotional effects of mental and physical wanderings through nature and history were transformed into profound imaginative reflections through the apparatus of what one would now recognize as modern rational investigative methods. What emerges from these examples could be characterized as an Enlightenment *mentalité*, a practice of the self that links the sensations of a personal reverie to a more general rational, philosophical, even scientific statement about the world. In other words, out of the world of sensory perception comes reason.

It was wandering (errer, planer, s’égayer) in an orchestrated landscape, and not in the wilderness of nature, that made Rousseau “consider in detail for the first time the spectacle of nature which until then [he] had hardly contemplated except in a mass and in its wholeness.” Late in life, Rousseau admits how botany has become his only preoccupation and a way out of this “wholeness.” Taking up this activity that had remained unrealized since his youth was part of a therapeutic regime of physical and psychological self-discipline. Now deprived of books, memory, and strength, he occupied himself in becoming acquainted with every plant on earth. As the philosopher Viktor Gourevitch points out, botany for Rousseau was not a utilitarian or practical form of thinking, not connected to doing and making. Instead, Rousseau’s botanical endeavors were infused with the purity that characterizes his reveries, as a more basic form of mental activity (that is, thinking for its own sake). Of his reveries, Rousseau writes how “during these wanderings, [his] soul rambles and glides through the universe on the wings of imagination, in ecstasies which surpass every other enjoyment.” However, in the face of present misfortunes and the cultural exile in which he finds himself after a long career in the public sphere, Rousseau describes how his reveries now put his imagination in a precarious state. He was continually aware of how his troubles were pressing down on him, threatening to crush him under their weight. His natural instinct, in such a case, was to close down his free-ranging mental wanderings and to fix his attention squarely upon the objects that surrounded him. It was his fascination for the scientific study of plants that filled this void left by a suppressed imagination. In describing his turn to botany, Rousseau articulates how his relationship to nature was profoundly different when he let his mind wander freely as he walked. Then, he experienced the “delicious intoxication” of the full immersion in nature as a beautiful system in which he felt completely integrated and part of a unified whole. Now, he needed pragmatically to distinguish individual parts of this whole environment. Botany for him, therefore, had become the rationalized and necessary complement to the immersive essence of the reverie. This resulted from the sentimental self initially in search of total psychological tranquility, but then tempered by the cruel realities of corrupted social life, to which botany was, as a pure science, a salutary antidote. Attracted by the cheerful objects that surround me, I consider them, I contemplate them, I compare them, and finally I learn to classify them, and forthwith I am as much of a botanist as anyone needs to be who wants to study nature solely in order to keep finding new reasons to love it.

Although Rousseau abhorred scientism, he resorted to the one discipline that concerned itself with the living world of nature in an effort to rid himself and civilization of corruption and find a conduit to mental health and a purified soul. Through such practices, he purged his passions, experienced tranquility, and saw anew the truth in nature. If a rational model of scientific classification and ordering was the result of a desire to commune with nature, how pervasive would such a mechanism be in defining Roman itineraries of eighteenth-century fellow travelers?

On the eve of the French Revolution, Edward Gibbon published the final volume of his monumental history of Rome’s long decline and ruin. In the final lines he tells the reader how, more than twenty years earlier, he conceived the project while musing about the ruins of the Capitoline Hill (figure 18). This site had a long history of providing the stage upon which the roving mind confronted the ruined past that was now laid out before it. More than four centuries before Dupaty and Gibbon, Petrarch had sat on the same spot overlooking the Forum, writing to his friend about how he marveled at Rome’s past greatness. This experience would initiate a series of urban perambulations through which Petrarch developed a historical archaeology of Rome’s past by attaching his knowledge of Rome’s history to its ruined topography. If only Romans themselves could be awakened from their slumber, he believed, then Rome’s greatness could be rebuilt. Nearly a century later, the Florentine humanist Poggio Bracciolini contemplated the same scene and lamented the physical destruction of the ancient city, whose glory was now covered in vines and dung. Gibbon had referred to both authors in his final chapter to document the continued material loss and ruin of the city that had occurred between Petrarch’s, Poggio’s, and his own times. Much to his dismay, he concluded “that many stately monuments of antiquity survived till a late period, and that the principles of destruction acted with vigorous and increasing energy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.”

However, Gibbon’s personal lament at the fragmentary condition of Rome did not inspire a nostalgic response to this loss. And unlike other Enlightenment historians, he did not seek to find universal laws of human society or describe the cyclical motion of rising and falling powers. Instead, he sought to bring order to the chaos of historical events, “to reduce the domain of confusion and obscurity by establishing the smoothness of continuity and connection in place of fragmentariness and absurdity.” This drive toward narrative unity was based on historical causation, through which Gibbon establishes the
chronological narrative side by side with thematic commentaries to construct a straightforward and rational historical method. This impartial narrative, based so rigorously on primary sources and the classification of facts, gave Gibbon a platform to intervene effectively with his ethically driven critiques of folly, corruption, and hypocrisy. He was also insistent that this ancient history be brought into confrontation with the present age of liberal revolutions in which he lived, as instruction for future ages, given how much the present still assumed a historical bond with the start of Constantine’s mythical conversion to Christianity at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge and the embedding of this belief in the church’s institutional ties with society. Therefore, from a careful and critical reading of sources and using footnotes to let the reader follow the logic of his opinions, Gibbon orchestrated a method of history writing as “intellectual warfare,” wherein the reader was “continually cajoled, harried, and provoked.” By the end, Gibbon, who conceived of his work as a Mediterranean itinerary, had led the reader out from Rome and back again, where the weary pilgrim, now transformed into a classical and discerning traveler on the Grand Tour, could contemplate anew the scene from the Capitoline Hill (figure 19). Here, the reader was brought into a direct experience of the place where Gibbon first had his idea to write this book, where he expressed an emotionally charged engagement with Rome’s ruins that would have resonated intimately with Dupaty’s own encounter a generation later:

But at the distance of twenty-five years I can neither forget nor express the strong emotions which agitated my mind as I first approached and entered the eternal City. After a sleepless night, I trod with a lofty step the ruins of the Forum; each memorable spot where Romulus stood, or Tully spoke, or Caesar fell, was at once present to my eye; and several days of intoxication were lost or enjoyed before I could descend to a cool and minute investigation.

Such a cool and minute investigation, however imbued his opus was with his personal but well-documented opinions, was only possible for Gibbon after he had trodden over the ruins of the Forum and consumed its intense melancholic aura. Like Rousseau’s, Gibbon’s work was the result of both real and mental wanderings. He described how, after carefully reviewing the historical evidence he had at hand, he would take a solitary walk to reflect upon what he knew and what he believed about the subject. During these walks, when he contemplated his options in bringing narrative order to the chaos of historical facts, he became aware of his role in structuring the work with his own preoccupations, concerns, and experiences.

Both Rousseau’s botany and Gibbon’s history were inspired by a dedicated and ethical reflection upon a powerfully personal response to the ruinous state of their present lives: Rousseau’s own broken relations with the public world and Gibbon’s attempt to make sense of social crises and revolutions in the face of a broken city. Both were able to turn this melancholy into highly productive modes of analysis, where the personal interests of each could inhabit a rational world-making enterprise. What these examples suggest is that the
intense reactions to Rome by eighteenth-century travelers like du Boccage or Dupaty, as well as the mental framing and organization of the land- and city-scapes of Rome, formed part of a larger common set of practices that brought the individual into intimate contact with the world around her/him without effacing the subject’s autonomous position. In other words, Dupaty could feel the presence of the past through Rome’s ruins, while he was able to discern carefully the entangled layers of history before him. In a similar way, artists would organize those chaotic fragments into coherent narratives that were both archaeologically genuine and fantastic original constructions. That there was not a great divide between the methodological practices of the philosopher, the painter, the traveler, or the garden designer in the eighteenth century should not be a surprise. Nor should we find it impossible that rational organization and emotional responses to pictures, landscapes, cities, and ruins, far from undermining each other, could be mobilized into a highly engaging and widely shared habit of moving through the world.

And this brings us back to the beginning of this article. When Dupaty arrived in Rome, he also sought a means to order the chaos and confusion of the ruined city into a meaningful composition. He, too, wanted to be able to reflect upon the individual elements, the “facts” that constituted the three Romes, and the narratives he could unearth from a careful examination of the remains of each one. Just as Gibbon did in his own way, he sought the proper means to discipline his gaze by setting himself in motion. He combined the aesthetics of promenading developed by Mercier as an urban practice, embedded in the landscape of solitary reflection by Rousseau, and adapted to art criticism by Diderot into a comprehensive perambulatory system in order to make sense of the palimpsest of Rome.

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NOTES
1 – Charles-Marguerite-Jean-Baptiste Mercier Dupaty, Travels through Italy: In a series of Letters Written in the Year 1785 (Dublin: M. Mills, 1789), 129: “Cet air que je respire à présent, c’est cet air que Cicéron a frappé de tant de mots éloquents; les Césars, de tant de mots puissants et terribles; les papes, de tant de mots enchantés”; idem, Lettres sur l’Italie, en 1785, 3 vols (Rome: De Senne, 1788), i: letter 45, 179–80.
2 – Dupaty, Travels through Italy, i: 130.
4 – Ibid., 181: “Il faut que je commence par errer de côté et d’autre, pour user cette première impatience de voir, qui m’empêcherait toujours de regarder” (authors’ translation).
5 – For a multifaceted analysis of the 18th-Century capriccio as a vehicle of collective memory and imaginary expression, as well as its rebirth in the

6 Since the 1990s, the Grand Tour has increasingly become a subject of major interest to scholars exploring the historical connections between the intellectual and cultural development of European nation-states through an encounter with Italy’s cultural patrimony. Consequently, the following list consists only of works that are of particular relevance for this study. Cesare de Seta, *L’Italia del Grand Tour dalla Galleria al Goethe* (Naples: Electa, 1992); *Grand Tour. Viaggi narrati e dipinti*, ed. de Seta (Naples: Electa, 2001). On French travelers to Rome in the eighteenth century, see, in particular, *Parole et les Français*, exh. cat. (Rome: dell’Elefante, 1976); and Gilles Bertrand, *Le Grand Tour revisité, pour une archéologie du tourisme: Le voyage des Français en Italie* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2008).

7 One of the premises of this inquiry is that what eighteenth-century visitors were responding to was the realization of urban renewal projects, whose aesthetic and ideology were born in experiments carried out in the Renaissance. Such projects imposed a more coherent spatial design upon the city, while simultaneously preserving, framing, and sanitizing ancient ruins for a more aestheticized consumption. This later history constitutes a larger book-length study for which this article is a foundational statement.


10 Ibid., 78–79.

11 Ibid., 79.


14 “Si je traverse la place des Victoires, je me dis: on volait en plein jour sur ce terrain où l’on voit aujourd’hui la figure d’un roi qui voulait être conquérant”; ibid.


16 Ibid., 239.


18 The image of ancient and modern Rome had diffused vis-à-vis since the sixteenth century through the engravings such as those found in the various compendia that made up the *Speculum Romanum Magnificentiae* (Rome: Lafreri, 1573–77). During the eighteenth century, Maximilien Mison’s travel guide *Nouveau voyage d’Italie, avec un mémoire contenant des avis utiles à ceux qui vont entre faire le même voyage* (La Haye: H. van Bulderen, 1702), which was widely read for decades, was then accompanied by more specialized books—such as Charles-Nicolas Cochín’s *Voyage d’Italie*, 3 vols (Paris: chez Jombert, 1738)—which created a series of filters that would influence the perception of French travelers who arrived in Rome. In particular, see Marc Fumaroli, “Rome nell’immaginario e nella memoria d’Europa,” in *Image Urbis Romae. L’immaginario di Roma in età moderna*, ed. Cesare de Seta (Milan: Electa, 2005), 75–92.


23 Ibid., 251.


26 “Jamais je n’ai tant pensé, tant existé, tant vécu, tant été moi […] que dans ce que j’ai fait seul et à pied. La marche a quelque chose qui anime et attire mes idées […] il faut que mon corps soit en bradle pour y mettre mon esprit. La vue de la campagne, la succession des aspects agréables, le grand air, le grand apparté, la bonne santé que je gagne en marchant, la liberté du cabaret, l’éloignement de tout ce qui me fait sentir ma dépendance, de tout ce qui m’appelle à ma situation, tout cela dégage mon âme, me donne une plus grande audace de penser […] mon cœur courant d’objet en objet s’identifie à ceux qui le flattent, s’entoure d’images charmantes, s’enivre de sentiments délicieux. Si pour les fixer je m’amuse à les décrire en moi-même, quelle vigueur de pinceau, quelle fraîcheur de coloris, quelle énergie d’expression je leur donne!” I, 162; ibid., vol. 4.


28 “Nos premiers maîtres de philosophie sont nos pieds, nos mains, nos yeux. Substituer des livres à tout cela, ce n’est pas nous apprendre à raisonner”; ibid., vol. 2: 644.

29 “[La] porte de la faveur maison de Céciron […] par où le maître de la république romaine rentrait chez lui, précédé de douze licteurs et suivi de deux mille chevaliers romains, n’est plus que le chêft arium de quelque vigueron”; Dupaty, *Lettres sur l’Italie*, letter 38, 32.


33 Boccage, *Lettres de Madame du Boccage*, letter 96, 505–06.


35 “Le sieur Vleughels fait fort bien de promener les élèves; ce serait un bon coup s’il pouvait leur donner le bon goût du paysage”; Correspondance des


38 – Another painting by Robert recently for sale on the art market (Blouin Art Sales, June 3, 2015, lot 47) also represents a contemporary view of the Pantheon, in particular its portico animated by numerous figures in contemporary dress who are either circulating, looking at the building, talking or playing dice.

39 – The Porto di Ripetta became Robert’s most famous composition, one that he revised over a period of years in a number of different works, both painted and drawn. See Hubert Robert, exh. cat. (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2016).


43 – Henriamus Cock, no. 34, 158–59.

44 – Panini was connected by ties not only professional (he taught perspective at the French Academy) but also personal (he had married Vleughels’ sister-in-law, Marie-Thérèse Gosset). On the painter, see, in particular, Ferdinando Arioli, Gian Paolo Panini e i fasti della Roma del 1700 (Rome: Ugo Bozzi, 1980).

45 – Henriamus Cock, no. 94, 344–47.

46 – Ibid., 343.

47 – “Que son ouvrage seroit mediocre, s’il laissait l’eût d’un homme sensible libre si tot de quitter l’ensemble et d’errer dans les détails”; Dupaty, Lettres sur l’Italie, letter 72, 105.


51 – These transactions between the experience of paintings, ruins, and landscapes necessarily depend upon a certain rhetoric of excess or hyperbole. As Chloé Chard notes, the genre of travel writing necessarily included dramatic descriptions that heighten or reinforce the alterity of a foreign place that direct experience itself may not have elicited. Such hyperbole was created by eliding the transgression of topographical boundaries with rhetorical ones. From the 1740s, writers often consciously referred to this tendency by ironically undercutting the “affected” sublimity of their own and others writings; Chloé Chard, Pleasure and Guilt On the Grand Tour: Travel Writing and Imaginative Geography, 1600–1830 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 1–9.


53 – Adams, French Garden, 127.

54 – Ibid.


56 – Adams, French Garden, 131; Cayeux, Hubert Robert, 104.


58 – Ibid., 90.


60 – Rousseau, Reveries, 91.

61 – Ibid.

62 – Gourevitch, “Provisional Reading,” 508.

63 – Rousseau, Reveries, quoted in ibid., 509.


67 – Gibbon translates the relevant passage from Bracciolini’s De varietate Fortunar, Gibbon and Milman, History of the Decline and Fall, ch. 71. 68 – Ibid.


70 – Ibid., 44.

71 – Ibid., 45.

72 – Ibid., 46.

73 – Quoted in ibid., 49.

74 – Ibid., 51. Kelly also demonstrates how Gibbon would then explicitly confront the reader, through the use of footnotes, directly with the problem of historical accuracy by referring to other choices he had made in other parts of the work.

75 – Kelly refers to Gibbon’s concern to draw parallels from history for use in the present and instruction to future societies; ibid., 45.