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Imagining Early Melbourne

Kathryn Ferguson, LaTrobe University

As well as the more tangible bricks, mortar, and distinctive blue stones, Melbourne is built on layers and generations of stories. Interestingly, the popularised and embellished stories of John Batman and John Fawkner coming to the Port Phillip area in 1835 have, over the years, eclipsed subsequent stories of Melbourne's beginnings. By 1880, Melbourne was being compared to Rome, and Batman and Fawkner had taken on concomitantly mythic proportions; for instance, as Perkins writes, "True, Fawkner and Batman were not twins, but, like Romulus and Remus, they undertook to build a city, and quarrelled for precedence" (3).^[1] The contest for recognition as sole founding father outlived both the pastoralist Batman and the mercantile Fawkner, and, as Graeme Davison points out, "continues among antiquarians to the present day" (240). This article is a brief examination of some of the other stories of early Melbourne as a contested space. It is not a comprehensive recounting, reconstitution, or reconsideration of early settlers' impressions and struggles, but rather a selective examination of specific anxieties evoked by attempts to manage a geographic space in which a colonial city was to be either constituted or lost.

In this article, I will examine three elements that were posited by Melbourne's early surveyors as incompatible with the development of a city invested in post-Enlightenment commitments to the rational and orderly division of space: the indigenous population, the extant landscape, and the poor. Each of these 'problematic' features was, for the most part, posited as antithetical to the creation and sustainability of an ordered and orderly social space through which the settlement, the colony and the Empire invented and inhabits a place. Each element was, ostensibly, addressed in the founding strategies of Melbourne, with varying degrees of success, between 1836 and 1839. Thus, this article highlights the irrationality — the almost mythical foundations — of the city.

In March of 1836, Thomas Mitchell, Surveyor-General of New South Wales, set out from Sydney with a complement of twenty-three men to complete a survey of the Darling and Murray Rivers. From his earlier forays into the frontier, Mitchell had already ebulliently styled the south-western region of the state "Australia Felix" and would be equally lavish in his encomium of the landscape he would traverse on this expedition. He described the area as an untrammelled expanse of prelapsarian excellence, and would recall that: "this highly interesting region lay before me with all its features new and untouched as they fell from the hand of the Creator! Of this Eden it seemed that I was the only Adam; and it was indeed a sort of paradise to me, permitted thus to be the first to explore its mountains and streams" (171). On 30 September, towards the end of his survey and with equipment showing the strain of rigorous overland trekking, the company was obliged to wait for repairs to the carriage that carried the expedition's boats. Mitchell, who was responsible for reporting and not repairing, decided that he would climb the nearby mountain mass, which he had sighted from Mount Byng (Mount Alexander) a few days earlier. He had intended to connect his trigonometric survey with Port Phillip, and the breakdown of the boat carriage offered him a perfect opportunity to sight the nascent settlement. Thus, the surveyor and several of his party spent the morning encouraging their horses across thirty miles of waterlogged slough and up the wooded northern slope of the mountain. Mitchell passed a sunny afternoon avoiding wombat holes, re-naming the peak Mount Macedon, and trying to identify Port Phillip, which he sought some fifty miles to the southeast of his elevated perch.^[2] Exactly nine years after he first glimpsed Port Jackson, Mitchell scrutinized Port Phillip through his surveyor's glass.

Pastoralists, merchants, and officials from Van Diemen's Land were also interested in the area around Port Phillip and, despite injunctions forbidding lingering trespass upon Crown land, had already begun petitioning the Executive Council of New South Wales to allow settlement of the area as early as 1827. After some skirmishes and squabbles with squatters, Sydney relented and Governor Richard Bourke visited Port Phillip and rode the perimeters of the new township on 4 March 1837.^[3] He had the city grid, which covered an area two miles long and a mile wide, plotted by Robert Hoddle on 7 March.^[4] Two days later, the settlement was named after the current British Prime Minister, William Lamb, Lord Melbourne, and streets were christened for Bourke's wife Elizabeth, the royal family, and early explorers. By 25 March, conditions of sale for land plots had been arranged, the street levels had been decided, and at the end of April, Hoddle's plan of the new city was lodged at the government survey office in Sydney.^[5] On 1 June 1837, the first one hundred allotments of land were auctioned.^[6] In three months Bourke had, ostensibly, succeeded in imposing some kind of spatial European order on what had, for millennia, been a space untroubled with a Roman obsession with right angles, symmetry, or the contents of the British Empire's purse. Thirty-seven degrees and 49 minutes south longitude at 144 degrees 58 minutes east latitude had been mapped; it was now Melbourne.

Mitchell's 1836 view of Port Phillip from Mount Macedon (Mitchell 284) [7]

Hoddle's 1837 Survey (Hoddle, Plan of Melbourne)

Mitchell's Eden and Hoddle's grid are not, as they might appear at first blush, 'before and after' portraits of Melbourne's settlement; rather, they are parallel artefacts of rational ideology striving to impose a specific kind of spatial order into and onto an unfamiliar landscape. While Mitchell was squinting through his glass at Port Phillip, William Lonsdale was anchored in the bay with orders to make provisions for the authorised survey and sale of lands at Port Phillip, and Robert Russel's survey crew were putting supplies and equipment in order for their journey south. With only six months separating Mitchell's and Hoddle's surveys, it is hard to believe that a portion of Mitchell's primordial Garden of Eden was transformed into a snug and tidy gentleman's park quite so quickly.[8] In this case, a suspicious nature would be entirely warranted, as neither Mitchell's empty Eden or Hoddle's clear-cut grid reflected an extant reality. What these men described simply was not there.

Mitchell, having declared himself the only Adam, was standing upon a peak he later discovered was called Geboor, and gazing upon land that had been occupied by the Kulin people for millennia. He claims to have noticed "no signs of life about this harbour" (284) and would later assure his readers that the area was "open and available in its present state, for all the purposes of civilized man. ... It would be establishing a lasting monument of the beneficial influence of British power and colonization, thus to engraft a new and flourishing state, on a region so desolate and unproductive" (333-334). Beyond the incongruity of the area being a bountiful Eden for one argument and a "desolate and unproductive" region for another, Mitchell's assurances of the area's lack of inhabitants is, very simply stated, wrong. Mitchell may even have been aware that David Collins had been uneasy about moving an earlier and abandoned 1803 British settlement near Sorrento to the head of Port Phillip Bay because of the large number of Aboriginal people inhabiting the area in what would become Melbourne.

By conservative estimates, Melbourne and her environs have been populated for at least thirty thousand years. By the late date that Europeans arrived on Australian shores in 1788 there were at least fifteen thousand, and perhaps ninety thousand people living in what would later become the state of Victoria. This long history is still discernible around Melbourne in the scarred treed in Fitzroy Gardens, Brimbank Park, and Heide; the Corroboree trees in Burnley Park and St.Kilda; the Sunbury earth rings; and the Ricketts Point well. Gary Presland points out that "there is good evidence...of Aboriginal activity as long ago as forty thousand years. At the Dry Creek site near Keilor, charcoal from hearths has been radiocarbon dated and found to be 40,000 years old. This is one of the three oldest sites in Australia" (128). Mitchell, however, had specific criteria in mind when looking for signs of life at Port Phillip. He sought stockyards, cattle, tents, and vessels; he was looking for specifically, and exclusively, evidence of European inhabitation, perhaps even evidence that Lonsdale had landed. The notion of a vacant Eden, even a desolate and unproductive Eden, may well have pandered to a ready colonial maxim of humanitarian settlement rather than bloody conquest, but it was not an accurate representation.

Presented with a terrain largely untrodden by British explorers, Mitchell may have seen an Eden, but he regarded that Eden as "a country ready for colonisation" and seems quite pleased that "this territory, still for the most part in a state of nature, presents a fair page for any geographical arrangement, whether of county divisions — lines of communication — or scites of towns, &c. &c." (170). Mitchell brought a sweeping and entirely new spatial interpretation to the landscape; not only was it the subject of a trigonometrical geographic survey, it was the object of a survey which aimed to 'arrange' the landscape in a manner which would facilitate colonisation through division and "lines of communication". Hoddle's grid is a smaller utopia than Mitchell's Eden, but as Andrew Brown-May has suggested in Melbourne Street Life: The Itinerary of Our Days, the rigidity and uniformity of Hoddle's 1837 grid was a parallel enforcement of the Enlightenment ideals of regularity, rationality, and regency.[9] The city's early founders and surveyors, intent upon bringing social regulation and economic viability to the Antipodean wilderness, were bringing specifically British order and ideals to the site, and ignoring what was actually there. The early depictions of the settlement are more expressions of a colonial ideology than a physical reality.

In 1837 Hoddle was tracing, and perhaps pegging, streets and lanes that were variously occupied by huts, trees, pastures, and, in the case of Elizabeth Street, running along an old creek bed which was prone to seasonal flooding. Indeed, near the corners of Collins and Elizabeth streets, and the William and Flinders Streets, two natural watercourses were so impressive that they were unofficially named the Townsend and Enscoe Rivers. Garryowen recalls that four years after the laying of the grid "the thoroughfares (misnamed streets), ... were almost indescribable. In the dry season some of them were in places barely passable ... during winter, the streets were chains of water-holes" (Finn 108). William Westgarth recalls that although the streets may have appeared quite clearly on the map, they were not as easily distinguishable in reality. He remembers one night when, leaving a shop after dark, he and a friend managed to find "Collins street but had much difficulty in keeping its lines where there were not post-and-rail fences round the vacant allotments" (11). Westgarth and his companion, a man who was familiar with the area and the route to his own house, ended up wandering around for what remained of the evening in the rain. On 5 August 1841, the Port Phillip Patriot, successor to John Fawkner's

Advertiser, was also heard to complain: "What between stumps and gullies, rivulets, lakes, and bogs, it is rather a Herculean task to wade the streets of Melbourne in wet weather." Crossing the streets was a task at which several did not succeed: in November of 1856 the Argus reported a man drowned in six feet of water in Spencer Street, and, as Andrew Brown-May has discovered, it was not uncommon until well into the 1860s to read or hear about people drowning in the streets (32). The site of Melbourne, a space elegantly abstracted with mathematical precision on paper, was depicted significantly differently in 'lived' accounts of the settlement.

George Haydon presents a dramatic story of the disparity between early Melbourne as it appeared on paper and as it might be experienced in life:

"Melbourne," said Weevel, — "that Melbourne!! I have a plan of the town here," and he produced on from his pocketbook. "Pray point out the several churches marked on it. — Where is the custom-house? — Where the gaol? — Where the wharf? — Where is the government-house? — the barracks — the police office? — and in short, where is the town?" ... "What a country to live in!" said Weevel: "and this is the way the people in England are deceived? — Savages are called squatters; — sentry boxes, watch-houses, and custom-houses; a mud bank, a wharf; pig-sties, dwelling houses: — trees, churches; — and —" (44-47).

Weevel's understandable chagrin not only highlights the somewhat overly optimistic descriptions of Melbourne that were presented to prospective British immigrants, but also underscores the fact that Weevel came to Melbourne with an established notion of what a colonial city should be like.^[10] Interestingly, Weevel's mapped points of reference are all civic buildings associated with the regulation of colonial behaviour. Churches, gaols, wharves and customs houses, government house, barracks, and police offices are, at least to Weevel's way of thinking, what constitutes a town. For Weevel, a town is about the order, regularity, divine and governmental authority that stands quite clearly distinct from the ostensibly profane anarchy of savages, hovels, mud banks, and trees. The specifics of Weevel's expectations, it should be noted, were not based exclusively upon his own imaginings, but, rather, upon a tattered map — a town sketch — that had been consulted and considered many times since Weevel had left England. Weevel's map did not, as Weevel understandably expected, present Melbourne as it existed in the present, but as someone imagined it might exist as an attractive colonial outpost of order, progress, and regularity.

Putting the Melbourne grid on the map, a geometric wonder of right angles and symmetry in the midst of the wilderness, clearly signals the imaginative and provisional nature of the early maps of the city. Whoever had made Weevel's map did not include the fact that its civic buildings were makeshift. Mitchell did not include the fact that the land was inhabited. Hoddle did not include the fact that the entire east end of the grid was covered in trees, that the south end of Elizabeth Street was underwater for several months of the year, that houses were standing where streets were to be laid, and that the mapped streets had practically no corresponding pathways in reality. In his discussions of the ways that Siam emerged cartographically in the late Nineteenth Century, Thongchai Winichakul describes a similar colonial paradox:

In terms of most communication theories and common sense, a map is a scientific abstraction of reality. A map merely represents something which already exists objectively 'there'. In the history I have described, this situation was reversed, a map anticipated spatial reality, not vice versa. In other words, a map was a model for, rather than a model of, what it purported to represent. ... It had become a real instrument to concretise projections on the earth's surface (310).

The parallel I would like to propose here is that the early surveyors' representations of Melbourne are imaginary projections that dispelled or blatantly ignored the past. They prophesied a bold and grand colonial future, but did not represent an extant present. However, in some ways, they depicted early Melbourne with perfect metaphysical, if not physical accuracy; it was a space imaginatively caught between an obscured or unknown past and a brightly lit future — somewhere between a myth and a metropolis. The images of a romantic Eden, a rigid grid, and a cluster of civic edifices are blatantly Eurocentric and anthropocentric translations of landscape into a region habitable and understandable by White colonists, and marketable and divisible by colonial authorities.^[11] Mitchell's and Hoddle's surveys carried and reproduced the authority of a specific type of knowledge that dispossessed and neglected other ways of envisioning space. Radically revising the landscape around Port Phillip, on paper, Mitchell and Hoddle mapped and metaphorically cleared the area for colonisation.

According to J.B. Hartley in "Maps, Knowledge, and Power", maps embody their own unique violence of authority and "as much as guns and warships, maps have been the weapons of imperialism" (Cited in Birch 179). Mitchell's and Hoddle's depictions of the Port Phillip area are, in many ways, figural representations of an imaginative and violent clear-cutting where the land is cleared of that which does not accord with the idealities of colonial expansion and control. As Weevel's experiences suggest, the terrain does not, at least initially, change significantly. What does change is the way that the land is represented and understood. When the colonial frontier passed over the Port Phillip region, and the area was no longer largely unknown, unexplored, unmapped, un-owned, and uncontrolled by colonial authority, it becomes consolidated as part of the Empire. What does this do? Actually, it physically does very little, but what it does do is to change the status of that specific geographic space from terra nullus to territory.

As Ernest Geller explains, a significant aspect of the colonising project was a reinforcement of the notion

of a singular empire, and concomitantly an insistence upon a singular, and implicitly 'correct' system of knowing and communicating the contents of that empire. The Empire worked upon standardised measurement, standardised hierarchies, and standardised tropes. As Geller explains, that system of standardisation had to

assume the regularity of nature, the systematic nature of the world, not because it is demonstrable, but because anything which eludes such a principle also eludes real knowledge; if cumulative and uncommunicable knowledge is to be possible at all, then the principle of orderliness must apply to it. ... Unsystematical, idiosyncratic explanations are worthless — they are not explanations (90).

Turnbull adds that maps connect space with territory, and territory with social order and thus must rely upon a false hegemony of knowledge that "establishes a prescribed set of possibilities for knowing, seeing, and acting. They create a knowledge space within which certain kinds of understandings and of knowing subjects, material objects and their relation in space and time are authorized and legitimated" (7). Through this standardisation, "all sites would be rendered equivalent, all localness would vanish in the homogenisation and geometrisation of space" (19). The spaces marked and mapped by Mitchell and Hoddle were no longer unknown spaces, they were territory of the British Empire and they would be mapped, known, and divided as such. The Port Phillip region and the specific site chosen for Melbourne were articulated — described, disseminated — as unambiguous space within the British Empire. They would not confound and annoy the 'rational men' of European science as the 'water mole' would do for almost fifty more years.[12] but would be clearly and exactly parsed and parcelled in the rational terms of geometry and imperial science.

The assumption that the new territory, the rigidly controlled space of Melbourne, would be modelled upon extant ideals of rigid imperial order did not please all Melbourne's colonists. It was especially displeasing, I would assume, to those who had built upon the landscape before 1837, only to find a street running through their garden, pasture, barn, or woodshed. [13] In 1850, an anonymous critic of Melbourne's street plan complained that the surveyors' motto seemed to have been "the site must be made to suit the plan — not the plan to suit the site" (Cited in Annear 26). Hoddle's grid, like Mitchell's Eden, negated all that went before it. Insisting that the area was uninhabited and "ready for colonisation", Mitchell is not only devising his own origin myth for the region, but in so doing, erases thousands of years of the region's human history. As anthropologist Johannes Fabian succinctly points out in *Time and the Other*, "It is not difficult to transpose from physics to politics [the rule that] it is impossible for two bodies to occupy the same space at the same time" (35). Fabian's observations suggest that there can be only one history, and that as White habitation or fabrication of that history escalates, the category becomes, in effect, impossible for any others to inhabit. In superimposing a Judaeo-Christian archetype, a creation myth of westernised history, onto the landscape, Mitchell reassures himself and his readers that his imperial undertaking of mapping and measuring is not only of epic proportions, but it has been, in the infamous words of Lord Rosebery, "writ by the finger of the Divine" (Cited in Stokes 17-18).[14] As one historian has pointed out,

British colonisation was legitimated by naturalising a relationship between Europeans and the land Australia, thus denying any relationship between those who had been the first to be called Australians and Australia. Aborigines were further consigned to the past but not to history by dint of becoming the subject of anthropology rather than history (Attwood).

As thousands of years of history were erased, the Aboriginal peoples are effectively made strangers in their own land. Mitchell and Hoddle, in many important ways, present the space surrounding Melbourne and her environs as a tabula rasa prepared to receive the new town in the new land. Batman and Fawcner at least pretended to have made bargains with the existing inhabitants of the land; the larger colonial project treated them as anachronistic interlopers from the bush. As E.M. Curr recalls:

Another feature of Melbourne was the blacks, who constantly wandered about in large numbers, half-naked, and armed with spears in the usual way. To hear them cooeing and shouting to one another, in shrill voices and strange tongues, in the streets had a strange effect. These once free-born lords of the soil...might be seen a little before sundown retiring to their camps on the outskirts of the town" (20).

Curr's emphasis upon the 'strangeness' of seeing Aboriginal people in the town seems to somehow turn on end the reality that it was, in fact, the colonists who were strangers in a strange land. Here, however, it is also important to recall that as easily as Mitchell elided the first peoples of the land, so too did Hoddle ignore the White residents and residences of Port Phillip when he drew up his austere grid.

The question of whether or not the grid and its concomitant colonial idealities of precision and profit were specific to the founders of Melbourne was raised in an 1885 Royal Commission. During the inquiry, Robert Russell testified that Melbourne had simply been laid out according to a template that was simply superimposed over the landscape using Batman's hill as a datum point. Russell, Hoddle's predecessor and junior, insisted that "there was a plan in the Sydney office generally approved as suitable for laying out a new township and I had a copy of it," and it had been used as a model of Melbourne (Cited in James Grant 6). The British Army's Royal Engineers had already laid Cartesian grids throughout the empire while adamantly refusing to acknowledge that every township in the empire was not flat. Hoddle had served in the corps of Royal Military Surveyors and Draftsmen for at least seven years between 1812 and 1822, where it is almost certain he learned the economies of a straight line (Hoddle, *A Chapter on Port Phillip* v). Governor Ralph Darling's Board of Inquiry into settlement planning had also decided upon

the grid as the most expedient town plan for the interior, and Darling's Regulations of 1829 endorsed the rectilinear grid for its simplicity and ease of application (Brown-May 7).

Whatever its origin, whether it be Bourke's geometric fantasy of symmetry, Hoddle's military-trained precision, or Darling's dictums of town-planning, the layout of Melbourne's grid would, in some important ways, dictate the future of the city. As one anonymous commentator proclaimed in 1850:

Whatever is done now in planning towns ... receives augmented importance from the impress it must give to the future. The main streets and approaches of a new town are, so to speak, the skeleton to which every thing done subsequently must be referred and adapted. Collectively they form the rough sketch of the future city ... and so, if your first plan for a new city is defective, you may adorn, and alter, and contrive, and path, but you cannot rectify the fundamental error ("Melbourne as it is and ought to be" cited in Brown-May 11)

The city was, for better or for worse, to be based upon a symmetrical grid — a grid which is easily halved or quartered on the map, and one which would irrevocably affect the way the city was spatially imagined. For example, Weston Bate's 1994 *Essential but Unplanned* segments the town into four equal quadrants using Swanston and Bourke Streets as the dividing lines. Bate explains that "although they are artificial, the designated sectors are helpful in defining the city's character". He goes on to explain that each quadrant has a different tone: South-west, maritime; North-west, eclectic, North-east, "crowded and unsavoury"; and South-east, manufacturing and allied mercantile trades (19-27). The character of the city, over one hundred and fifty years after the grid had been plotted, could still be characterised, or imagined to be socially, commercially, and economically divisible according to lines that were somewhat arbitrarily mapped out in 1837.[\[15\]](#)

The transformation of space from empty Eden to orderly grid foregrounds the ideality that progress is marked by development, highlighting the ratiocination that civilisation is facilitated, enhanced, and indeed created by the imposition of orderly zoning, construction, and thoroughfares. The idea that urban development can, and indeed did, forge a city out of the wilderness was, however, fraught with its own perils. As Grant and Serle contend, Melbourne "tended to re-create, much more clearly than Sydney and Hobart, the atmosphere of an English town of the period" (11). However, English towns had just discovered a problem with urbanisation and spatiality. When Mitchell and Hoddle were sketching their maps of Melbourne, older English cities were recognising, defining, and examining the congested slums of urban centres. Slums were beginning to be mapped — traced out on paper for the sake of knowledge. Within the printed English language, the term 'slums' first found its way into something close to its current meaning in 1825 when C.M. Westmacott sent his hero to 'the back slums being in the rear of Broad St.' in *The English Spy* (II, 32).[\[16\]](#) The 'discovery' of the slums as a subject emerged very close to the founding and development of Melbourne. But Melbourne had no urban history, no centuries, or even decades, of urban decay and deterioration to contend with, had no fixed and archaic town structure unable to contend with an influx of industry and immigrants, no rigid town boundaries prohibiting expansion. Melbourne, which was largely pastoralist in the early years, did not have a large population of convicts as Sydney did, and for many years the entire town of Melbourne did not even have a population equal to the size of a single slum in London although the Port Phillip region covered an area approximately the size of England. Could any discussions of the urban poor in older and more populous cities relate to the newly founded town?

There would be five large-scale auctions of the town plots on Hoddle's grid: 1 June, 1837; 1 November, 1837; 13 September, 1838; 14 February, 1839; and 11 April, 1839.[\[17\]](#) However, even before the fifth and final land auction had decided who would own what spaces, the Deputy Surveyor General of New South Wales, Samuel Perry, had worries about the "serious mischief" that the townsfolk might get up to in the back alleys and lanes if Superintendent Lonsdale did not enforce a rigid control of the ingresses and egresses allowed in the recently demarcated back streets. Perry had just returned from launching the publication of his journal of discovery in London and may well have been influenced by the crowded conditions and horror stories of London's infamous East End:

It appears to me to be a matter of regret that the benefit which was intended by leaving open these spaces for the purpose of affording the accommodation of access to the stables and offices in the rear of the principal streets, is likely to be converted into a serious mischief by the public sanction that will thus be given to their becoming streets; for this is the consequence that will doubtless ensue from the naming of the lanes in question; and I would therefore submit the expediency of impressing upon the magistrates the necessity for enforcing a strict adherence to the Regulations with respect to preserving the footpaths free from any other breaks than those that are authorised in the original formation of the town; and by this means to check the disposition that is evidently already evinced to subdivide the allotments to such a degree as eventually to affect the healthiness of the town (Cannon and Victoria. Public Record Office.) [\[18\]](#)

Perry's prolix concern was that the almost half-acre lots would be subdivided, riddled with small lanes and alleys, and become congested with low-end housing. In an earlier letter to Lonsdale, Perry had already voiced his anxiety that, if the blocks became perforated with unauthorised and unplanned paths, "the houses will be huddled together, so as to impede a free circulation of air ... and Melbourne will be ruined before it has risen to maturity" (Cannon, "S.A. Perry to W. Lonsdale, 22 January, 1839"). Perry was obviously thinking of the future, as at the time of his letters, Melbourne's population had not yet reached three thousand.[\[19\]](#) Martin Sullivan has suggested that Hoddle and Bourke were also looking to the future and that the wide streets and lanes laid down by Hoddle's grid had been, in part, designed to deter

inhabitation by and congregation of the “submerged classes”. In insisting upon streets that were ninety-nine, rather than the usual sixty-six feet wide, and lanes, that were intended to be used exclusively as a rear entrance to buildings with frontages on the main streets, be measured at thirty-three-feet-wide, “the town planners had made it difficult for them [the submerged classes] to congregate in a labyrinth of narrow streets, lanes, and alleys as everyone knew they did in Sydney” (Sullivan 28).^[20] The very layout of the town, and a willingness to enforce the rigid regularity of Hoddle’s geometric design, were, in part, something of a pre-emptive strike against the emergence of slums. Although the ideal of ‘the slum’ was, in 1839, still nascent, Perry seems to be concerned that breaches of the regularity, regulation, and order of the grid would not only create congested and unhealthy living conditions, but, perhaps more importantly, threaten the entire town with a creeping disorder emerging from the misuse of space.

Perry argued in a letter to Robert Hoddle dated 13 May 1839 that the original plans made it impossible for “irregular areas” to become established:

I cannot impress too strongly upon your attention the necessity for insisting upon a strict adherence to the plan of the Town, which has been laid out in its original form with more regularity than perhaps any other Town in the Colony, and will if it not be deformed by the cupidity of small allotment speculators be one of the most striking ornaments in the southern world (Cannon).

Although J.M. Freeland contends that it was not until the 1890s that the term ‘slum’ entered into Australian town planning vernacular (255), Perry’s unease about “serious mischief”, “houses huddled together” and the possibility that Melbourne might be “ruined” suggests that the spectre of the slum — the deformity that had already disfigured Sydney — haunted Melbourne from its very beginning. The slums were accepted before they existed, feared before they were formed, and defended against before they existed.

Perry’s concerns, especially those for “the healthiness of the town”, may well have been at least partially motivated by the 1832 cholera outbreaks in Sydney and London.^[21] At the time, the miasma theory of disease, which emphasized the influence of environment on the spread of a disease, dominated medical opinion. It was largely credited that diseases such as cholera and typhus, which had both already taken their tolls in Sydney, were capable of spontaneously generating from city filth. It was believed that under certain atmospheric conditions the processes of decay released malignant miasmata that poisoned the air. The miasma was detectable by its foetid smell and, if some British meteorological reports are to be believed, might be heralded with a low-lying blue mist. There was little difficulty linking health to housing as abysmal drainage, questionable community water supplies, overcrowding, deficient, if not non-existent ventilation, and the proximity of polluting industries were not characteristics of middle class neighbourhoods.^[22] In 1844 Dr. William Duncan remarked upon the regularity with which in the past it had

been observed that where a poor population is densely crowded, a kind of poisonous matter of a highly contagious character, is generated in the system, affecting with typhus and other fevers, not only those in whom it first originates, but spreading with rapidity amid such a population, from individual to individual, from house to house, from street to street.^[23]

However, as James Kay pointed out, of perhaps even greater concern was that the disease would not stop when confronted with a well-to-do address, and may well “be unconsciously conveyed from those haunts of beggary where it is rife, into the most still and secluded retreat of refinement” (Kay 12).^[24] Crowded and impoverished slums had the ability, perhaps even the propensity, to infect an entire city with a disease originating in the squalor of the slums. If Perry had his way, the space of Melbourne would be controlled and be kept in blocks large enough that the city would not develop disease-producing slums.^[25] Controlling the spatial divisions of the city would control the demographics, health, and morality of the city.

The idea that “the unpropertied, the unsung, the unfortunate, and the unorganised” (Kelly 72) “dangerous classes” of the “lower orders”^[26] somehow managed to seamlessly blend “disease, distress, disorder, [and] disaffection” (Davidson 3), was due to the fact that, as Graeme Davison points out, “The moral atmosphere” people believed “was as polluting as the physical” (Davidson 3). It was also believed to be as contagious, and thus dependant upon spatial proximity. In 1839 Chief Justice James Dowling warned his son that “vice is so fascinating, that she cannot be looked upon without peril to the beholder (Cited in Sturma 1-2). Beyond Dowling’s specific gendering of vice, and the question as to whether his statement is a warning or an oblique confession, is the vague nineteenth-century usage of criminality and immorality as a ‘contagion’ and a social ‘contaminant’. Indeed, the “threat of criminal contagion” was being loudly proclaimed in 1838 by the Molesworth Committee on Transportation in London, at the same time that Perry was concerned about crowded conditions and “serious mischief” developing in Melbourne.

The poorest areas of town were believed to be disease-producing, madness-provoking, and morally bereft bastions of criminality. They were spaces of spatial disorder that led to social disorder. The spectre of disorderly slums — slums that did not yet exist in Melbourne — was already part of a complex and intertwined web of information emerging from newly-hatched and hatching social sciences willing to name urban slums as the epicentre of disease, insanity, crime, and immorality. Perry’s anxiety that “Melbourne will be ruined before it has risen to maturity” emerged near the beginnings of a broader and far-reaching discussion of the imagined dangers posed by the urban slum and what they meant for the society they bordered. Perry’s attempts to circumvent the development of slums was specifically directed

towards the management of urban spaces. Spatial order would dictate social order.

Mitchell, Hoddle, and Perry organised Melbourne's spaces. They struggled against the phantoms of disarray that they believed would cripple the burgeoning city, and strove to structurally define a rational and systemic order that they believed would facilitate the 'civilisation' and 'progress' of the township. Each surveyor seems to have grappled with his own real and imagined demons of disorder, and created, facilitated, and participated in a mythology of early Melbourne as an orderly centre in an otherwise chaotic hinterland of Empire. Inga Clendinnin has confessed the historian's secret frustration in when investigating such an interesting phenomenon: "much of what we most want to know, like the secret pulses of our subjects' affective lives, we cannot know. Or probably cannot know" (4). We can read the accounts of Mitchell, Hoddle, and Perry, but will never know if they believed in the myth, or were simply doing their jobs as colonial surveyors, and speaking the only language available to them. They were creating a colonial city in the midst of great hardship; was there any room for doubt or admissions of uncertainty in such a project?

Notes

- [1] This was not the first reference to the Port Phillip area as an Antipodean Rome. Lieutenant Tuckey predicted that Port Phillip would prove "a second Rome rising from a collection of banditti". Tuckey was part of the crew of Lieutenant Colonel David Collins in 1803 when he left with an expedition to settle Port Phillip to prevent French occupation of the area (Haskell 80).
- [2] Gregory Eccleston notes that Mitchell would have known that the hill was named Mount Wentworth by Hume in 1824. Eccleston suggests that in naming it Mount Macedon Mitchell was amusing himself with puns — connecting Port Phillip with Phillip II who ruled Macedon between 359 and 336 BC and was Alexander the Great's father. (Eccleston 120).
- [3] Batman had decided "This will be the place for a village" in 1835 (John Batman, Diary entry for 8 June 1835). Gary Presland notes that "the site selected by the first settlers for the village of Melbourne was precisely the place most favoured for Kulin inter-clan gatherings" and that "On March 28, 1839, when the settlement at Port Phillip was less than five years old, between 400 and 500 Koories gathered in a camp in part of what is now the Botanic Gardens" (Presland 47 & 35). 'If credence is to be given to the statements of some of the early annalists, the destiny of Melbourne was very nearly changed by a sharp shock of an earthquake a couple of days after Gov. Bourke's arrival, which so alarmed him that Melbourne trembled in the balance, and the site of the future city was all but abandoned.'" (Finn 13).
- [4] It does not appear as tidy in a metric system of measurement: 3.2 km long and 1.6 km wide.
- [5] The conditions of sale were to include an agreement (the fifth condition) that the purchaser would, within one year, build a permanent building worth at least £50. However, a mistake was made in the preparation of the title deeds and the bond of title included the two-year agreement that was used in other parts of the colony.
- [6] By chance, the town surveyor was the only man available and qualified to claim an auctioneer's license, and thus the man who planned the town sold the town. The auction has been the subject of numerous recountings and paintings — which have not yet definitively determined if Hoddle stood upon a stump or a fallen tree to auction the plots. The least expensive lot sold for £18 and the most expensive sold for £212, with the average price coming to rest at £36. The lots were 1 rood, 36 perches, which was 5 percent smaller than the usual size of half-acre lots.
- [7] Point A is Point Nepean and Point B is where Mitchell saw a white speck, which he took to be breakers or white sand on the point of the north eastern shore.
- [8] In 1802, the area surrounding Port Phillip was by seen by one observer on the Lady Nelson to fall "nothing short, in beauty and appearance, of Greenwich Park" (Cited in Haskell 80). The notion of Australia as a vast gentleman's park had been a popular trope since 1773. See, for example, *Inventing Australia* (White 29-30).
- [9] See especially Chapter One, 'The Desire for a City: Street Spaces and Images'.
- [10] From what source Weevel got his 'plan' of Melbourne is unclear. However, as G.J. Abbott points out, shipping companies and shipping agents benefited most directly from Australia's assisted passage schemes of the 1830s, and their advertisements became so misleading regarding the conditions that might be found in New South Wales that in 1840 the Colonial Office felt it necessary to step in and regulate their activities (2). Rita Kranidis adds that women emigrating to Australia faced an equally disconcerting vista as, expecting to be hired as skilled domestics and governesses, most found the demand for such employees vastly exaggerated. (passim).
- [11] See, for example, *Landprints: Reflections on Place and Landscape* (Seddon 16-18).
- [12] The platypus finally garnered the nomenclature *Ornithorhynchus anatinus*. W.H. Caldwell's famous 1884 telegram to reads: 'Monotremes oviparous, ovum meroblastic' which is, although more descriptive, not a great deal more telling than 'water mole' (Cited in Eco 284). The telegram was sent to the University of Sydney, where it was immediately forwarded to the British Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in Montréal Canada. The 'confirmation' of the platypus' scientific status was important insofar as it was knowledge that could be communicated throughout the empire. For an interesting consideration of the platypus and 'the telegram that closed a frontier' see Libby Robin, "Paradox on the Queensland Frontier: Platypus, Lungfish and

Other Vagaries of Nineteenth-Century Science" (Robin Part I).

[13] The owners of the buildings were given one month to vacate the property and remove their buildings if they so chose. It was made specifically clear that buildings were not included in the sale price of land. The Colonial Secretary wrote to William Lonsdale:

With reference to your letter of the 1st of April, I have the honour, by the direction of the Governor, to inform you that the building already erected in the Town of Melbourne should be removed within the time allowed for completing the purchases, and it should be declared that such buildings are not sold with the land, but may be removed within the above time mentioned.
— Colonial Secretary to William Lonsdale, 5 May 1837.

[14] Stokes later adds that it was a common feature of many colonial descriptions to effect 'the transference of religious emotion to secular purposes' (29).

[15] Bate includes here LaTrobe Street which was not added to the grid until 1838.

[16] In Westmacott's sketch, 'slums' referred to an impoverished and over-crowded area of urban London where the housing was squalid, living-conditions were wretched, crime was endemic, and sanitation abysmal. Indeed it was at the corner of Broad Street and Cambridge Street where the infamous 'Broad Street Pump Outbreak' occurred in August and September of 1854. Over 500 people died of cholera from drinking from the public well that had been contaminated by sewerage containing the cholera microbe.

[17] This sale, like the third and fourth sale, was held in Sydney. The final auction must be considered a failure as of the sixty lots on the auction block, only 24 were hammered down as sold.

[18] S.A. Perry to the Colonial Secretary, Edward Deas Thomson, 24 January, 1839.

[19] It should be noted here that his anxieties were not without foundation as speculation, subdivision, and champagne-enhanced sales were running amok. E.M. Curr recalls that, in 1839, 'people were always arguing that the value of that commodity [land] increased in proportion to its subdivision, and hence buying large lots, subdividing and reselling was constantly going on'. (Curr 13).

[20] Garryowen (Edmund Finn) contends that Hoddle had wanted the lanes to be wider, but that he compromised the width of the lanes in order to keep the ninety-nine foot breadth of the main streets. According to Garryowen 'it is solely owing to the persistent conscientiousness with he urged his views, that the city of Melbourne has its grand, broad highways of today...Mr. Hoddle may fairly be considered the best public benefactor the city ever had'. Alas, Garryowen's encomium is somewhat suspect as he claims the information to have been gleaned from his access to Hoddle's private journal for 1837; a text which, if not apocryphal, is missing (Finn 14-15).

[21] The 1832 cholera outbreak was the impetus behind Bourke's government passing the Quarantine act of 1832 and the opening of the Quarantine Station at North Head.

[22] Here it is interesting to note that in Victorian London, the prevailing wind was a westerly one, and the 'poor' end of town was the notorious east end. In Melbourne the prevailing wind is south westerly, and the 'slums' developed on the northeast quadrant of Hoddle's grid. As Weston Bate comments 'the most crowded, unsavoury lanes and alleys have been in sector III,' which is the northeast corner of Hoddle's grid. (Bate 24). Is it a coincidence that better quality housing and businesses were upwind?

[23] Dr. Duncan was soon to be named as Liverpool's first Medical Officer of Health.

[24] Kay's book would be the spearhead that led to sanitation reform being enacted in Manchester.

[25] Perry could not have foreseen the advent of the large blocks of high rise tenement towers that began to speckle the city in the twentieth-century. In 1967 High Living noted that:

Criticisms are now being levelled at the alleged evils of flat-dwelling. The points made are surprisingly like those uttered in past years about the evils of the slums. ... However, much we idealise life in the suburbs, there is still the fact that in the centre of this constellation of [Melbourne's] garden suburbs are acres of slums.
—A. Stevenson (8-10)

[26] Lynette Finch points out that 'During the early nineteenth century, terms which described the urban poor were used loosely and interchangeably: the lower orders, the working classes, and the urban poor were all used to designate the same vague grouping of people'. (Finch 9).

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