

Settler Space: a spatial history of 19th century Sydney

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Abstract

This thesis develops an original critique of the production of settler space through the project of spatial history, applied to 19th century Sydney. It departs from settler-colonial studies by defending a historically- and geographically-materialist approach, which offers a renewed emphasis on the political-economic relationships that underpin Indigenous dispossession and settler space.

On a theoretical level, this thesis contributes to recent discussions of Lefebvre's theory of the production of space by reflexively examining and critiquing his ideas against the differential conditions of 19th century settler spaces. It elaborates his project of spatial history, grounded on the regressive-progressive method, and argues that this project and method is capable of comprehending how dispossession defines the production of settler space. At the same time, the specific features of his theory are limited to his European conditions, which require fresh conceptual development in order to enable the critique of settler space.

The key problematic of settler space concerns how Indigenous dispossession organises the production of space and how the production of space re-organises ongoing dispossession. This thesis introduces a renewed emphasis on the social relations of landed property in order to better understand the dispossession of Indigenous land. In particular, it draws on Marx's rent theory in order to appropriately characterise the dynamic tensions that underpin dispossession. The thesis therefore advances beyond accounts of dispossession and landed property which emphasise formal or linguistic features and relations.

Crucially, the thesis develops the concept of abstract settler space to characterise the space of the Sydney Basin by the end of the nineteenth century. Like Lefebvre's concept of abstract space, this is understood in

relation to the powers of capital and state to shape the production of space. Key to this concept, however, is the self-effacing character of settler space: the separation of histories of dispossession from the appearance of settler space. While other accounts recognise this self-effacing character, this thesis contributes a novel view by tracing the spatial history of this separation, and its relationships to the compulsions of capital and the abstractions of the settler state.

Introduction

West of the train tracks near Redfern Station was a field of open grass, gently sloping down and split in two by the asphalt remnants of the alley that ran between two rows of Aboriginal-owned houses, originally built in the 1880s as landlords sought to extract rents from workers at the then newly opened Eveleigh Railway Yards. Over a century before, it had been part of the watershed draining into what Europeans named Black Wattle Creek, a key watercourse within Aboriginal patterns of life and their socio-ecological management of nature.¹ The achievement of Aboriginal housing in the heart of Sydney was a symbol of Indigenous land rights: the reclamation of a space for an Aboriginal community, many of whom had been displaced by invasion and dispossession, and who migrated to the city for jobs at the rail yards. However, from 2003 to 2011, Aboriginal tenants were evicted and their homes demolished by the Aboriginal Housing Company, premised on a long-planned yet long-delayed redevelopment project that promised a mixed-use site with some Aboriginal housing. The absence of community direction in these plans, and the fact that Aboriginal housing would only materialise once revenue streams were in place, led Aboriginal elders and activists to set up the Redfern Aboriginal Tent Embassy on that field of open grass.

Across 2014 to 2015, I spent a great many sleepless night-watches there supporting the Embassy in its aim to ensure that development would restore affordable Aboriginal housing. A field of open grass, once houses for Aboriginal community, once sovereign Indigenous land, was now, if briefly, reasserted as a space of Indigenous resistance by dint of a few tents, a sacred fire, and the political will of Aboriginal elders and their community. This

¹ Paul Irish and Tamika Goward, 'Blackwattle Creek', Barani: Sydney's Aboriginal History, accessed 1 December 2023.

continuity of Aboriginal presence and politics forms part of what you could call the Aboriginal radical tradition, to borrow Cedric Robinson's phrase.² Much separates the arrival of settlers in the late eighteenth century from the space of the twenty-first century: one where an Aboriginal-run landholding company signs a deal with a private developer, but faces resistance from the community it purports to represent, all the while situated in a global city of a country with a fixation for property. That community, in a sense, were doubly dispossessed: first, by empire and its settlers; second, by the company's eviction and demolition of their homes. The relations of space that underpin these processes are thorny and knotted thickets of history and geography, and it is this which motivates the research undertaken in this thesis. In what ways are settler spaces shaped by their histories of violence and dispossession? How do these settler social relations affect the capitalist compulsions for profitable development of land (and vice versa)?

Settler spaces across the world exhibit similarly complex webs of spatial history. It is the intention of this thesis to contribute to the critique of the production of settler space. The route it takes is through the project of spatial history influenced by Henri Lefebvre, albeit one that is reconstructed for the conditions of settler societies. The task set here is to trace the reproduction, transformation, and ruptures within the historical development of settler space. As a consequence, the central research question is:

How can the project of spatial history advance the critique of the production of settler space?

What, then, is it that distinguishes settler spaces? This is a surprisingly difficult question to answer. Settler spaces originate as projects of settlement and colonisation. At the heart of these spaces is the violent dispossession of

² Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

Indigenous peoples and the mutating methods of settler dominion required to sustain that dispossession. For settler-colonial theorists, this maintenance of dispossession implies that the historical theft of land is an ongoing element within settler-colonial social formations. As Patrick Wolfe's famous slogan goes, "invasion is a structure, not an event," which insists that invasion and dispossession are not matters of mere historical interest and thus removed from contemporary concerns.³ As the Redfern Aboriginal Tent Embassy shows, the question of self-determined access to land remains potent for Indigenous communities. Deepening his account, Patrick Wolfe characterises this defining 'structure' of settler-colonialism as the "logic of elimination."⁴ Settler-colonial societies, on his view, express a flexible tendency towards the elimination of the native. This can mean the outright genocide of entire peoples, but the means of elimination can include "officially encouraged miscegenation, the breaking-down of native title into alienable individual freeholds, native citizenship, child abduction, religious conversion, resocialization in total institutions such as missions or boarding schools, and a whole range of cognate biocultural assimilations."⁵ Whatever the means, says Wolfe, the logic of elimination aims at "the dissolution of native societies" and the substitution of a settler-colonial society in their place.⁶ It's important to note that elimination is not seen as a completed project: rather, it is seen as an ongoing tendency that continues to define settler societies.

The making of settler cities was crucial to this process, as Libby Porter points out: "This is because the process of settlement – which is the very thing

³ Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (Cassell, 1999); Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (1 December 2006): 387–409.

⁴ Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native'.

⁵ Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', 388.

⁶ Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', 388.

that settlers as colonisers do – is made real through practices of building and shaping space. The establishment of towns and cities literally builds the settler-colony.”⁷ Similarly, David Hugill proposes that settler-colonial cities are characterised by the “enrichment of settler constituencies” as opposed to distant agents of empire, alongside the exclusion of Indigenous peoples from the urban economy.⁸ The settler production of urban space is expressed through the exclusion of Indigenous peoples, and the construction of a new space for the settlers. To the extent that this depends on racialised systems of property (i.e. quite a large extent), the avaricious hunger for Indigenous land is held at the core of the production of settler urban space.⁹ It is this obsession with land which is said to distinguish settler-colonialism from other colonial projects. As Lorenzo Veracini sharply puts it, “settler-colonialism is not colonialism” because the occupation of Indigenous land, not the exploitation of Indigenous labour, was the defining element for settler societies.¹⁰ As such, the dispossession of Indigenous lands differs from the dispossession that Marx described as primitive accumulation, implying a need to drill down into specific relations and mechanics of dispossession.¹¹

Yet the spatial scope of settler-colonial theory aims to encompass a wide array of cases: from Australia, New Zealand, and the Northern American states – to South Africa, Argentina, or Israel. The historical courses that these countries took are wildly different from one another, as were their means of colonial domination over their respective Indigenous peoples, or their

⁷ Libby Porter, ‘Indigenous Cities’, in *Understanding Urbanism*, ed. Dallas Rogers et al. (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2020), 20.

⁸ David Hugill, ‘What Is a Settler-Colonial City?’, *Geography Compass* 11, no. 5 (2017): 7–8.

⁹ Naama Blatman-Thomas and Libby Porter, ‘Placing Property: Theorizing the Urban from Settler Colonial Cities’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 43, no. 1 (2019): 30–45.

¹⁰ Lorenzo Veracini, ‘Introducing’, *Settler Colonial Studies* 1, no. 1 (1 January 2011): 1.

¹¹ Karl Marx, *Capital*, trans. Ben Fowkes (Penguin Books, 1991), 873–942; Álvaro Sevilla-Buitrago, *Against the Commons: A Radical History of Urban Planning* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 210.

structures of economic subordination and capital accumulation, or their relations of space that supported the whole edifice. Robin D.G. Kelley notes that South African colonisation was, clearly, a case of white settlement, but one where “they wanted the land and the labor, but not the *people* – that is to say, they sought to eliminate stable communities and their cultures of resistance.”¹² This is somewhat at odds with the centrality accorded to land by Veracini and Wolfe. In a recent critique, Jack Davies argues that the stretching of settler-colonialism results in “emptying it of all but a metaphysical settler will, an indomitable logic of elimination.”¹³ For Davies, settler-colonial theory (wrongly) unifies under the rubric of primitive accumulation an innumerable host of dispossessions.

The elimination of an Indigenous space and its substitution by a settler space takes us only so far for the purposes of this thesis: what of the reproduction and transformation of that space itself? The structural core of settler societies cannot, on its own, explain the transformations across history of the production of space in a given society. Moreover, relying on a sharp categorical distinction can lead to a relatively fixed and structuralist account of settler-colonialism. As Macoun and Strakosch put it, “by emphasizing continuities in colonial relationships between the past and the present, [settler-colonial theory] can depict colonization as structurally inevitable, and can be deployed in ways that re-inscribe settler colonialism.”¹⁴ Whether or not settler-colonial theory treats settler spaces as *inevitably* such, the emphasis on the ongoing presence of settler dominion overstates the nature of the continuity of settler spaces. As Hugill and Simpson suggest, “an

¹² Robin D. G. Kelley, ‘The Rest of Us: Rethinking Settler and Native’, *American Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (2017): 269.

¹³ Jack Davies, ‘The World Turned Outside In: Settler Colonial Studies and Political Economy’, *Historical Materialism* 31, no. 2 (2023): 207.

¹⁴ Alissa Macoun and Elizabeth Strakosch, ‘The Ethical Demands of Settler Colonial Theory’, *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, no. 3–04 (1 November 2013): 434–35.

over-reliance on the language of ‘structure’ might partly explain why the complexity of urban spatial productions has not always been accounted for.”¹⁵

In contrast, this thesis adopts a geographically and historically materialist framework, where the content of a definite structure is set in relation to the wider social totality. Borrowing from Álvaro Sevilla-Buitrago’s critical account of the discipline of planning, I regard the production of settler spaces as a set of “historical project[s] with multiple trajectories but also with regularities that provide structural coherence.”¹⁶ The point is to evaluate, on their own terms, the transformations within the production of settler space. Even if the logic of elimination (for example) expresses a formal resemblance across two different dates, its differing structural relations and functional roles imply distinct ways of making settler spaces. There is a need, then, for this thesis’ project of settler spatial history.

About a decade ago, Tracey Mar and Penelope Edmonds argued that “work exploring the distinctive and specific spatial histories of settler colonialism’s dispossession and marginalisation of Indigenous peoples has only just begun.”¹⁷ For them, there is a reciprocal relationship between the ideology of settler-colonialism and the space that it produces. The reimagining and reconstruction of Indigenous spaces as settler spaces hinged on ideologies of race, nature, and civilisation. To reiterate, this thesis tacks against this line of argument to the extent that it underappreciates the reproduction and transformation of given settler spaces. Yes, these works study the emergence of novel legal and spatial technologies,¹⁸ the changing regimes of segregation

¹⁵ David Hugill and Michael Simpson, ‘On Structures and Events’, *Urban Geography* 44, no. 2 (7 February 2023): 278–80.

¹⁶ Sevilla-Buitrago, *Against the Commons*, 7.

¹⁷ Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds, eds., *Making Settler Colonial Space* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), 2.

¹⁸ Brenna Bhandar, ‘Title by Registration: Instituting Modern Property Law and Creating Racial Value in the Settler Colony’, *Journal of Law and Society* 42, no. 2 (2015): 253–82; Nicholas Blomley, ‘Law, Property, and the Geography of Violence: The Frontier, the Survey,

and control,¹⁹ and a variety of other developments in settler power. But these arguments are not united within an account of the totality of social relations that compose the mutating production of settler space. This thesis, by contrast, can deliver such an account to the extent that it is grounded by a geographically and historically materialist framework.

The starting point for this thesis, then, is that the production of settler spaces does not happen all at once, but in fragmented fits and sporadic surges. The aim of this thesis is to inquire into the spatial history of settler space, not as a singular event, but as a contradictory series of structures, relations, and processes. These include the Eurocentric racial hierarchies that simultaneously defined colonisation and modernity, which are reproduced and reformulated in contingent and diverse ways within settler spatial history. On this point, Ari Jerrems notes that “spatial histories are needed to flesh out entanglements between the modern and the colonial inscribed in urban spaces.”²⁰ In order to accomplish this task, I critically re-develop Lefebvre’s theory of the production of space in service of the critique of settler space. Lefebvre aimed at a critique of space on the grounds that it was through space that capitalist social relations are sustained. In his words: “Social relations, which are concrete abstractions, have no real existence save in and through space. *Their underpinning is spatial.*”²¹ He goes on to say that analysis of such social relations “must imply and explain a genesis and constitute a critique” of the processes which produce the space in question.²²

and the Grid’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93, no. 1 (1 March 2003): 121–41.

¹⁹ Penelope Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers: Indigenous Peoples and Settlers in 19th-Century Pacific Rim Cities* (UBC Press, 2010).

²⁰ Ari Jerrems, ‘Theorising International Urban Politics’, *Millennium* 49, no. 1 (1 September 2020): 116.

²¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 404.

²² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 404.

In much the same manner, a critique of settler space is required because it is through space that settler social relations are sustained. Lefebvre's approach enables a critique of settler space which does not overstate the formal continuity of settler-colonial logics and, instead, traces the mutations and transformations of settler space through the project of spatial history.

The contribution of this thesis rests in how it weaves together these two strands: a critique of settler space inspired by Lefebvre and a critique of Lefebvre's theory impelled by settler history. The foregoing paragraphs have indicated some elements of these contributions, as well as my motivations for pursuing this critique. The remainder of this Introduction aims to canvass the argument of this thesis. I will first turn my attention to the issue of concrete abstraction in order to frame this thesis within geographical-historical materialism. Recall, earlier, that Lefebvre regards social relations as concrete abstractions. This may seem like a conceptual point, unmoored from the task of this thesis, but it is in fact a crucial foundation throughout my argument. It is because this notion of concrete abstractions that Lefebvre's project of spatial history can advance the critique of settler space. Subsequently, I outline the argument of this thesis and elaborate the contributions it makes, including how these contributions are enabled by this framework of concrete abstractions.

The twin routes to concrete abstraction

The great advantage of grounding my argument on the notion of concrete abstraction rests in how it links space and time, geography and history, and overcomes the alleged dichotomy between difference and abstraction. What I want to do is trace two routes towards concrete abstraction, found in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, which begin with labour and exchange,

respectively.²³ By no means, however, does this imply that these routes are orthogonal to one another. Rather, my view is that these two routes are complementary twins. Stressing just one side, as we will see, leads to a flawed critical theory. I begin by explaining Marx's notion of concrete abstraction in the *Grundrisse*, which stresses the historically-specific development of these abstractions. I then turn to Sohn-Rethel's account of real abstraction, which is built on the exchange-relation, and thus stresses the crystallisation of these concrete abstractions through the forms of capitalist society. In the latter case, I show how Sohn-Rethel follows one route to the exclusion of the other, causing his critique to operate in a transhistorical and formalistic manner. At the same time, his account stresses the structural interrelation of these forms in generating the patterns of domination that characterises capitalist society, just as Marx's critique aims to do in *Capital*. The general thrust of this argument is to show how the critique of concrete abstractions requires appreciating, on the one hand, the historical genesis of concrete social relations and, on the other hand, the crystallised structure of these relations.

But what is it that we are talking about when we are talking about abstraction? One starting point is Onora O'Neill's account of abstraction as bracketing. In her words, "abstraction is a matter of bracketing, but not of denying, predicates that are true of the matter under discussion."²⁴ For example, the category of 'manager' *brackets* out from the specificity of particular managers as absent, controlling, doddering, maleficent, and so on. In contrast, idealisation involves "[ascribing] predicates that are false of the case in hand, and so [denying] predicates that are true of that case."²⁵ Within

²³ Marx, *Capital*; Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Penguin Books, 1993).

²⁴ Onora O'Neill, *Towards Justice and Virtue: A Constructive Account of Practical Reasoning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 40–41.

²⁵ O'Neill, *Towards Justice and Virtue*, 40–41.

analytic philosophy, the famous example is Rawls' assumption of strict compliance, where all agents are fully compliant with the dictates of moral principle, which can be seen as untrue of the real world through the above example of managers.²⁶ Though this distinction is drawn from analytic philosophy, it is mirrored in Derek Sayer's critique of fetishised conceptions of base and superstructure: "These are, to use Marx's own vocabulary, 'idealisations' or 'abstractions' which falsely generalise from the misleading phenomenal forms our social relations take under capitalism."²⁷ In general, the appearance of separated political and economic spheres is an idealisation since they are, in fact, internally related.²⁸ That is to say, they are constituted through the same set of capitalist social relations that give rise to each 'sphere' and the phenomenal appearance of their separation.²⁹ Such apparent separation is "intrinsic to the perverted 'logic of essence' of capitalism, characteristic of the estranged, alienated ways in which bourgeois social relations manifest themselves to consciousness in all spheres of life."³⁰ Within settler societies, as this thesis diagnoses, a similar separation takes place between histories of dispossession and settler space. Note, however, that there are crucial differences between Sayer and O'Neill. The treatment of abstraction, in O'Neill's account, remains a more-or-less *individual mental* account of abstraction: these are devices of the human mind. In contrast, Marx deploys a series of *concrete* abstractions: that is to say, categories that

²⁶ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 123–26.

²⁷ Derek Sayer, *The Violence of Abstraction: The Analytical Foundations of Historical Materialism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), xii. Compare, for example: Charles Wade Mills, "Ideal Theory" as Ideology', *Hypatia* 20, no. 3 (2005): 165–84.

²⁸ Ellen Meiksins Wood, 'The Separation of the Economic and the Political in Capitalism', *New Left Review*, I, no. 127 (1981): 66–95.

²⁹ For more on the philosophy of internal relations, see: Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, *Global Capitalism, Global War, Global Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 11–20.

³⁰ Sayer, *The Violence of Abstraction: The Analytical Foundations of Historical Materialism*, 140.

are (re)produced within the social totality, with practical force, and which are independent from a given mind.

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx takes the identification of concrete abstractions as his task in his critique of capitalism, and he develops this method through the concept of labour. He credits Adam Smith for “[throwing] out every limiting specification of wealth-creating activity” – bracketing out the specific kinds of labour – in order to arrive at the abstraction of labour-in-general.³¹ He tells us that this is not merely a convenient analytical category, but something which becomes deducible under particular social conditions:

“As a rule, the most general abstractions arise only in the midst of the richest possible concrete development, where one thing appears as common to many, to all. Then it ceases to be thinkable in a particular form alone. On the other side, this abstraction of labour as such is not merely the mental product of a concrete totality of labours. Indifference towards specific labours corresponds to a form of society in which individuals can with ease transfer from one labour to another, and where the specific kind is a matter of chance for them, hence of indifference. Not only the category, labour, but labour in reality has here become the means of creating wealth in general, and has ceased to be organically linked with particular individuals in any specific form.”³²

Labour-in-general is an abstraction – it brackets out the specificity of concrete labour – and its formulation depends on a relatively generalised practice of indifference between labours. Yet this concept does not adequately specify labour within capitalist social relations, where the indifference between labours corresponds to their capacity to produce value and the

³¹ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 104.

³² Marx, *Grundrisse*, 104.

means by which a universal equivalence of such value can be produced. From the point of view of capital, it is irrelevant whether a worker is a nurse, a data scientist, or a giraffe-trainer. It is this concept which Marx refers to as ‘abstract labour’ and which marks out his critique of political economy from Smith and Ricardo. The key point here is that the abstract category of labour-in-general “becomes true in practice” within capitalist social relations as abstract labour, where it operates as the category of discipline which enables the appropriation of surplus-value and the exchange of commodities for commodities.³³ Thus, the apparently transhistorical character of labour-in-general turns out to depend on the historically-specific development of abstract labour.

It is through such concrete abstractions that Marx’s critique of political economy is organised, as opposed to beginning with the apparently most concrete elements of society: GDP, for example, or demographic statistics.³⁴ As he puts it:

“Thus, if I were to begin with the population, this would be a chaotic conception [Vorstellung] of the whole, and I would then, by means of further determination, move analytically towards ever more simple concepts [Begriff], from the imagined concrete towards ever thinner abstractions until I had arrived at the simplest determinations. From there the journey would have to be retraced until I had finally arrived at the population again, but this time not as the chaotic conception of a whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations.”³⁵

³³ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 105.

³⁴ Brenner and Schmid deploy these concepts to criticise claims that half the world’s population live in cities. Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid, ‘The “Urban Age” in Question’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 3 (1 May 2014): 731–55.

³⁵ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 100.

There are three important insights to tease out of the approach of the *Grundrisse*. First, when we talk about concrete abstractions, we are talking about abstractions that have real powers in the social world. Put differently, there are some abstractions which are produced through the collective activity of the social world. (As a consequence, the critical theorist, strictly speaking, always proposes a mental abstraction that they claim has a concrete abstraction as its referent.)

Second, the viability of these abstractions hinges on their successful re-integration within a historically specific totality of social relations. A given concrete abstraction cannot be presumed as an immutable proposition because this will dislocate it from the historical conditions that gives it its content. For Marx, this tendency for dislocation characterised the special case of bourgeois ideology. Bertell Ollman describes these as “a suborder of particularly ill-fitting mental constructs,” or which Marx sometimes called “false abstractions.”³⁶ Ollman elaborates: “Whether because they are too narrow, take in too little, focus too exclusively on appearances, or are otherwise badly composed, these constructs do not allow an adequate grasp of their subject matter.”³⁷ In O’Neill’s terms, they might wrongly bracket out certain predicates or otherwise assert false predicates.³⁸ The mystifying appearance of market operations as indifferent to race or gender, for example, requires differentiated processes of abstraction to pierce surface appearances and reveal the inner secrets of the origins and ongoing processes of capital accumulation.”³⁹

Third, the identification of a concrete abstraction is not as simple as

³⁶ Bertell Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx’s Method* (University of Illinois Press, 2003), 62.

³⁷ Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic*, 62.

³⁸ O’Neill, *Towards Justice and Virtue*, 40–41.

³⁹ Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, ‘The Dialectical Matrix of Class, Gender, Race’, *Environment and Planning F: Philosophy, Theory, Models, Methods and Practice*, forthcoming.

enumerating a list of properties encompassing a large set of entities. Such an exercise in analytical definitions creates a philosophical generality but, as Sayer argues, “does not adequately or immediately designate real empirical objects.”⁴⁰ In this case, Sayer is discussing the concept of property, which in abstraction excludes definite legal forms because it is the practical relations involved in exchange and circulation which are crucial. Sayer quotes Marx to this effect: “With [Wagner] there is first, the law, and then commerce; in reality, it’s the other way round; at first there is commerce, and then a legal order develops out of it.”⁴¹ But this does not consequently mean that these legal forms are not themselves internal to any particular form of property. Instead, Sayer proposes that the underlying “essential relations are concretised through a genuinely historical analysis of the actions of ‘real, living individuals’ in which, in the end, they entirely consist, and this is this ultimate explanatory (and demystifying) level of Marx’s theory.”⁴²

The focus on an avowedly historical critique is, thus, central for this route towards concrete abstraction. The fact that we must confront the social world as it actually exists demands recognition of how real empirical objects are not reducible to these abstractions, even as they may be governed by them. Moreover, the stress on ‘real, living individuals’ opens a connection to how Lefebvre grounds his critique on the conditions of everyday life. In Chapter One, I will argue that Lefebvre’s project of spatial history takes up this historical critique, and that this is detectable in his regressive-progressive method and through the course of argument in *The Production of Space*.⁴³

⁴⁰ Sayer, *The Violence of Abstraction: The Analytical Foundations of Historical Materialism*, 55.

⁴¹ Karl Marx, ‘Marginal Notes on A. Wagner, Lehrbuch Der Politischen Okonomie’, *Theoretical Practice*, no. 5 (1972), cited in; Sayer, *The Violence of Abstraction: The Analytical Foundations of Historical Materialism*, 55.

⁴² Sayer, *The Violence of Abstraction: The Analytical Foundations of Historical Materialism*, 132.

⁴³ Henri Lefebvre, *On the Rural: Economy, Sociology, Geography*, ed. Stuart Elden and Adam

Equally present within the project of spatial history is the other route to concrete abstraction, to which I now turn my attention. As I indicated earlier, this is undertaken using Sohn-Rethel's account of real abstraction as a foil.⁴⁴ (As a brief terminological note, the terms 'real' and 'concrete' abstraction are essentially interchangeable in current discourse.) My claim is that Sohn-Rethel illustrates a flawed account by relying on one route to concrete abstraction, through the exchange-relation, and those flaws oblige correction through the labour-relation.

Sohn-Rethel seeks to understand how a distinctive cognitive faculty emerged in lockstep with the historical development of commodity production and exchange. Put differently, his aim is to explain the division of intellectual and manual labour, as well as the characteristics of intellectual labour, based on the commodity-form and the logic of exchange. As such, he *agrees* with Kant in viewing the mental faculties as flowing from some source external to the individual subject but *disagrees* with Kant in locating that source as the transcendental subject: instead, he proposes that "Kant's transcendental subject shows features of striking likeness to the exchange abstraction in its distillation as money."⁴⁵ These similarities are somewhat technical, and not salient to my critique, but his point here is that the real abstraction of exchange through the money-form is responsible for the separation of intellectual and manual labour.⁴⁶ Exchange operates with "the compelling necessity of an objective social law," deriving from its separation

David Morton, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 59–76; Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

⁴⁴ Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology* (Brill, 2020).

⁴⁵ Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, 6.

⁴⁶ Sohn-Rethel initially explains this through a speculative account of a money-owner stuck in the contradiction between the real object of the coin and the fact that it possesses the abstract, indestructible, and ideal qualities of the Platonic forms. Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, 53.

from use-values.⁴⁷ On this basis, he proposes that there are two simultaneous spatiotemporal realities: the concrete and individual domain of use and the abstract and social domain of exchange.⁴⁸ As Alberto Toscano summarises:

“Sohn-Rethel is arguing - against any claim for the scientific autonomy of theoretical practice - that the fundamental forms of abstract thought (as manifest in the structure of scientific laws, the postulations of mathematics, or the constitution of the Kantian transcendental subject) all originate with the commodity-form and its introduction, into the social universe, of the principles of abstract exchange and calculability.”⁴⁹

It is worth pausing to note how astonishing this thesis is. For Sohn-Rethel, a separated intellectual labour – the capacities to abstract, to reason, to create non-empirical ideas – must have a source, and if we are to avoid idealist dependence on Platonic Forms or Transcendental Subjects, then it must be a material source – and that source is the exchange abstraction mediated through money. A corollary: any society lacking monetary exchange – for instance, many Indigenous societies – must lack the division between manual and intellectual labour. What this implies about the capacities for inference, reason, and abstraction in such societies is left for the reader to speculate.

However, the arguments so far are hypothetical in nature: these are formal resemblances only, and thus Sohn-Rethel attempts to ground them in the historical development of abstraction and exchange. Egyptian geometry, for instance, is presented as a practical exercise for appropriating agrarian surpluses: a complex system of measuring ropes without a corresponding

⁴⁷ Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, 21.

⁴⁸ Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, 47.

⁴⁹ Alberto Toscano, ‘The Open Secret of Real Abstraction’, *Rethinking Marxism* 20, no. 2 (1 April 2008): 180.

system of mathematical theorems.⁵⁰ By contrast, the Greeks developed a theory of geometry separate to the practice of measurement. For Sohn-Rethel, this means that “the manual operation became subordinated to an act of pure thought which was directed solely towards grasping quantitative laws of number or of abstract space.”⁵¹ The rise of such abstraction depended, he says, on the generalisation of a monetary / exchange economy within Greek society.⁵² Both exploitation and alienation, however, were absent from this society, since the money-form and exchange were expressed only through the circulation of ‘merchant’ and ‘usurer’ capital. During the Renaissance, however, the increasing control over production by merchant capital was reflected by fresh developments in intellectual labour.⁵³ The generality of monetary circulation during early capitalist history thus leads to nothing less than Galileo’s concept of inertia. Sohn-Rethel states:

“Our explanation of the principle of inertial motion is that it derives from the pattern of motion contained in the real abstraction of commodity exchange. This motion has the reality in time and space of the commodity movements in the market, and thus of the circulation of money and of capital. The pattern is absolutely abstract, in the sense of bearing no shred of perceptible qualities, and was defined as: abstract linear movement through abstract empty continuous and homogeneous space and time of abstract substances which thereby suffer no material change.... Although continually occurring in our economic life the movement in this description is not perceivable to our private minds.”⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, 74–76.

⁵¹ Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, 85.

⁵² Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, 78–83.

⁵³ Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, 91.

⁵⁴ Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, 106.

To be clear, Sohn-Rethel is not asserting that principles underpinning inertial motion are caused by commodity exchange; rather, he claims that our epistemic specification of the laws of inertial motion originate from our epistemic access to the laws of commodity exchange. The law of inertia states that objects in motion, or at rest, will maintain that state unless acted on by some force. Sohn-Rethel, citing Alexander Koyre's work on Galileo for support, argues that no empirical object ever satisfies these conditions: all objects are always acted on by some force (e.g. gravity).⁵⁵ How, then, can we have a concept of inertia if it is impossible to glean from nature? – or so Sohn-Rethel wonders. For Koyre, Galileo represents a structural break with the traditions of medieval scholarship, and that break was marked by a mathematical Platonism that saw nature and science as mirrors of mathematical forms.⁵⁶ Sohn-Rethel, by contrast, argues that the abstraction underpinning Galileo's ideas was delivered by the exchange-relation.

Quite obviously, this depends on a rather startling claim that the properties of commodity exchange happen to be useful for articulating inertial motion, and such an articulation then happens to offer explanations for natural phenomena.⁵⁷ Never mind, too, that Galileo was engaged in experiments aimed at understanding the principles of bodies in motion; or that such an understanding might make it possible to abstract away from ordinary conditions to conceptualise the underlying process; or that his principal concern was with establishing inertial relativity, not inertia as such.⁵⁸ What I am trying to illustrate through Sohn-Rethel's treatment of

⁵⁵ Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, 103–5.

⁵⁶ Alexandre Koyré, *Metaphysics and Measurement* (Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1992), 16–43.

⁵⁷ For an alternate view, see Anselm Jappe, who endorses the historical evidence of Sohn-Rethel as "what is maybe the most convincing part of his analysis." Anselm Jappe, 'Sohn-Rethel and the Origin of "Real Abstraction": A Critique of Production or a Critique of Circulation?*', *Historical Materialism* 21, no. 1 (1 January 2013): 4.

⁵⁸ An example of 'inertial relativity' is when you drop a ball on a uniformly moving train; it

inertia are the perils of his approach to real abstraction. By foregrounding exchange, and building his conception of real abstraction on it, he generates a highly formalistic account of intellectual labour. Such formalism lends itself to reasoning by means of resemblance, as he does between inertial motion and the exchange-relation. Moreover, this formalist approach means that Sohn-Rethel's account of commodity exchange is transhistorical. He expressly divorces it from relations of production: "...the formal structure of commodity exchange ... remains the same throughout the various stages of commodity production."⁵⁹ This is the motor of his argument that enables him to link exchange and money to thought and abstraction. Granted, the increasing articulation between money/exchange and wider social relations determines the degree of separation between intellectual and manual labour, but this remains a linear developmental structure that is grounded on the formal identity of exchange-in-general across history. Yet *even if exchange is formally identical across history*, its structural and functional roles – its content and meaning – categorically differs due to transformations in the wider ensemble of social relations, just as the transhistorical concept of labour-in-general receives its concrete specification through abstract labour.

Capital, famously, begins with the commodity, and the abstract equivalence of different commodities (so much linen equals so many coats) and their different use-values with one another through exchange-value. The choice to begin here, as David Harvey suggests, emerges from Marx's realisation that "to unlock the secrets of the commodity is to unravel the

falls to the ground by your feet. Thus uniform motion, like the rotation or orbit of the earth, is indistinguishable from a stationary state. Sohn-Rethel ends up conflating this Galilean relativity with Newtonian mechanics. Stillman Drake, 'Galileo's Experimental Confirmation of Horizontal Inertia: Unpublished Manuscripts (Galileo Gleanings XXII)', *Isis* 64, no. 3 (1973): 291–305; Robert DiSalle, 'Space and Time: Inertial Frames', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2020 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2020).

⁵⁹ Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, 19.

intricate secrets of capitalism itself.”⁶⁰ Put differently, the critique of the commodity and exchange deciphers the taken-for-granted forms of appearance of capitalist society (while setting these in relation to abstract labour). As Chris O’Kane argues, Sohn-Rethel’s critique develops “the ‘formal,’ rather than ‘labour’, aspects of Marx’s analysis of the commodity.”⁶¹ In part, this is understandable given Marx’s own focus on these formal aspects as he begins his argument in *Capital*, although it remains grounded on the historical specificity of capitalist social relations. By sharply disentangling the formal and labour aspects of the commodity, Sohn-Rethel captures the crystallisation of hierarchical relations of authority and dependence through the real abstraction of intellectual labour. Yet this goes too far, to the extent that the continuity of a separated intellectual labour presumes the structural inevitability, and thus universality, of these relations. As Moishe Postone puts it, arguing along similar lines: “[Sohn-Rethel’s] emphasis on exchange, which excludes any examination of the implications of the commodity form for labor, restricts his social epistemology to a consideration of forms of static, abstract mechanical thought.”⁶² It is precisely this same formalist tendency which characterises the ‘structural inevitability’ embedded in elements of settler-colonial theory, as I indicated earlier.⁶³

One way of understanding Sohn-Rethel’s account is to see it as the impossible apogee of concrete abstractions. His theory suggests the aspirational heights of concrete abstractions: transhistorical, structurally

⁶⁰ David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), 1.

⁶¹ Chris O’Kane, ‘The Critique of Real Abstraction: From the Critical Theory of Society to the Critique of Political Economy and Back Again’, in *Marx and Contemporary Critical Theory: The Philosophy of Real Abstraction*, ed. Antonio Oliva, Ángel Oliva, and Iván Novara, Marx, Engels, and Marxisms (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 270.

⁶² Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 179.

⁶³ Macoun and Strakosch, ‘The Ethical Demands of Settler Colonial Theory’.

inevitable, and universal. This is an important point, for this is precisely how such abstractions appear within capitalist society: the division between nature and society, the universality of exchange, the geometric configuration of space, the linear progress of history, and so on. Yet this is an illusion. As Gyorgy Lukács argues in his account of reification, “this rationalisation of the world appears to be complete, it seems to penetrate the very depths of man's physical and psychic nature. It is limited, however, by its own formalism.”⁶⁴ Likewise, the twin routes to concrete abstraction sketched here understands these aspirational heights as *tendencies* or *projects*: always incomplete, and in fact reliant on constant differentiation and heterogeneity throughout the everyday life of capitalist societies.

The significance of this account of concrete abstraction, for the purposes of this thesis, can be summarised along two lines. First, it clarifies how this thesis sidesteps accusations that Marxist accounts of space are totalising: that they reduce and eliminate difference to abstract logics of capital. Such criticisms have been prominent in the debates in urban geography over planetary urbanisation theory, which maintains that the contemporary production of space is no longer marked by traditional divides between urban and rural.⁶⁵ Drawing on Lefebvre's 1989 statements about the “planetary urbanisation of the urban,” they argued that our spaces were becoming increasingly defined by a process of urbanisation articulated at a planetary scale.⁶⁶ Critics rejected these propositions, with many objections pinning

⁶⁴ György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1971), 101.

⁶⁵ Neil Brenner, ‘Theses on Urbanization’, *Public Culture* 25, no. 1 (2013): 85–114; Brenner and Schmid, ‘The “Urban Age” in Question’; Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid, ‘Towards a New Epistemology of the Urban?’, *City* 19, no. 2–3 (4 May 2015): 151–82.

⁶⁶ David Wachsmuth and Neil Brenner, ‘Introduction to Henri Lefebvre's “Dissolving City, Planetary Metamorphosis”’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32, no. 2 (1 April 2014): 199–202.

their arguments to the accusation of a totalising logic of abstraction.⁶⁷ Angelo and Goh identify the common thread of these critiques: “to posit ‘difference against abstraction.’”⁶⁸ To the extent that this thesis posits a set of concrete abstractions that condition the production of space – including, yes, the logic of capital – such criticisms might be taken to apply to my argument. However, the account of concrete abstraction outlined here provides a set of conceptual linkages between differentiation and abstraction. These themes are explored in greater detail in Chapter One, where I explain the project of spatial history, and which is situated in relation to the twin routes to concrete abstraction here.

Second, the critique of Sohn-Rethel delivered here highlights the perils of formalist accounts of the social world. Such accounts tend to regard definite forms as determinative of the social totality: for instance, that the forms of property determine the relations of property, as Derek Sayer pointed out, or that the form of exchange determines the separation of intellectual and manual labour. As I have argued, the ‘structural inevitability’ of some strains of settler-colonial theory is mirrored by the structural inevitability embedded in Sohn-Rethel’s account of real abstraction.⁶⁹ Although this objection was levelled at the temporal inevitability of settler-colonialism, it is equally

⁶⁷ Cian O’Callaghan, ‘Planetary Urbanization in Ruins: Provisional Theory and Ireland’s Crisis’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 11 December 2017; Rajyashree N. Reddy, ‘The Urban under Erasure: Towards a Postcolonial Critique of Planetary Urbanization’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 14 December 2017, 0263775817744220; Sue Ruddick et al., ‘Planetary Urbanization: An Urban Theory for Our Time?’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 36, no. 3 (June 2018): 387–404; Alex Loftus, ‘Planetary Concerns’, *City* 22, no. 1 (2 January 2018): 88–95; Linda Peake et al., ‘Placing Planetary Urbanization in Other Fields of Vision’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 36, no. 3 (1 June 2018): 374–86; Cindi Katz, ‘Planetary Urbanization’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 45, no. 4 (2021): 597–611.

⁶⁸ Hillary Angelo and Kian Goh, ‘Out in Space: Difference and Abstraction in Planetary Urbanization’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 45, no. 4 (2020): 732–44.

⁶⁹ Macoun and Strakosch, ‘The Ethical Demands of Settler Colonial Theory’.

applicable to the spatial universality of the concept. As Ran Greenstein points out, “settler colonialism as a model does not establish any *specific social-theoretical dynamics* unique to it, which may serve to distinguish it analytically, not just descriptively, from other types of societies, be they colonial or not.”⁷⁰ The effect is an account of settler societies that, *in extremis*, formalises a hierarchical settler–native binary without accounting for the social relations that constitute that hierarchy.⁷¹ More generally, there is a slippage from the agency and projects of specific settlers and settler institutions towards a singular settler hegemony. In contrast, a dialectical account of concrete abstraction permits this thesis to examine the contradictions and tensions within the settler social formation to reveal an original critique of the production of settler space.

In sum, the reason why this elaboration of concrete abstractions is important is because it illuminates the critique of settler space undertaken by this thesis. Toscano argues that “Marx’s intuitions regarding real abstraction allow us to confront some crucial social realities of capitalism to which classical philosophy and much social theory are simply blind.”⁷² Similarly, Marx’s notion of concrete abstraction enables this thesis to confront the production of settler space. The account delivered by this thesis stresses the dominating and totalising powers and forms that organise settler space, while always situating these in terms of their contingent and concrete historical geneses. Thus the inscription of hierarchical relations of settler space is always regarded as a partial, incomplete, and ongoing project.

⁷⁰ Ran Greenstein, ‘Colonialism, Apartheid, and the Native Question: The Case of Israel/Palestine’, in *Racism After Apartheid: Challenges for Marxism and Anti-Racism*, ed. Vishwas Satgar (Wits University Press, 2019), 77.

⁷¹ See, for example: Patrick Wolfe, ‘Recuperating Binarianism: A Heretical Introduction’, *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, no. 3–04 (1 November 2013): 257–79.

⁷² Alberto Toscano, ‘The Culture of Abstraction’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 4 (1 July 2008): 71.

Importantly, this means that the key structuring conditions within the production of settler space can undergo vast mutations over time, which suggests that the adoption of a singularising logic or frame of reference can entail limitations for the critique of settler space.

Outline of the argument

The objective of this thesis is to develop an account of the distinctive production of settler space through Lefebvre's project of spatial history. It is grounded on the critique of the space of the Sydney Basin, more-or-less from 1788 to 1888. The colony of New South Wales was a project of the British empire during the elongated heyday of its worldwide territorial ambitions and inter-imperial rivalry with other European powers. As with its other colonial enterprises, the Australian colonies were planted on sovereign lands of the Indigenous peoples. The Aboriginal nations across the Sydney Basin include the Eora, Dharug and Dharawal peoples, who both resisted and survived the settlement of their lands. Unlike other colonies, many of the Australian settlements began as penal colonies, although there are some ambiguities about the breadth of British ambitions for the colony, which included geopolitical interests in the South Pacific.⁷³ As a result of the program of penal settlement, the bulk of settlers in the first few decades were made up by convicts who had been found guilty of usually petty crimes in the United Kingdoms.

I focus on the space of the Sydney Basin because it presents a relatively confined geographic zone to illustrate the dynamics within the production of settler space, allowing me to dance between levels and scales of analysis,

⁷³ Bill Gammage, 'Historical Reconsiderations VIII: Who Gained, and Who Was Meant to Gain, from Land Selection in New South Wales?', *Australian Historical Studies* 24, no. 94 (1 April 1990): 104–22.

from the abstract to the everyday, the global to the local. The Sydney Basin is defined by mountains to the west (which the Europeans found difficult to cross until the mid-1810s), rugged terrain to the north and south, and ocean to the east. More significantly, the pastoral economies that were crucial to both Australian capital accumulation and settler relations of landed property were chiefly based in the plains to the west of the mountains. This has led, however, to a naturalised spatial dichotomy between putatively ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ interests within both Marxist and traditional historiography of nineteenth century Australia.⁷⁴ Indeed, the categories of urban and rural space are less than useful for the task at hand, except to the extent that they form objects of analysis in themselves. In part, I owe this perspective to scholars working with planetary urbanisation theory, which regards the nominal spatial divisions between urban and rural as an artificial and ideological separation.⁷⁵ On this view, the restructuring of hinterland regions into ‘operational landscapes’ for capitalist development is internally related to processes of urbanisation and industrialisation.⁷⁶ Likewise, in this thesis I trace the restructuring of social relations of landed property and the pastoral political economy of Australia, following how these contextualise specific mechanisms and projects of the production of settler space within the Sydney Basin.

The historical arc of my argument is bookended by the landing of settlers in 1788, and the colonial violence that ensued, and the centennial celebrations

⁷⁴ The spatial dichotomy arises from the political division between rural pastoralists and urban merchants and financiers, which oversimplifies matters. See: Robert William Connell and Terence H Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History: Poverty and Progress*, 2nd ed (Melbourne: Longman House, 1992); Mark Peel and Christina Twomey, *A History of Australia* (Macmillan Education UK, 2011).

⁷⁵ David Wachsmuth, ‘City as Ideology: Reconciling the Explosion of the City Form with the Tenacity of the City Concept’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32, no. 1 (1 February 2014): 75–90.

⁷⁶ Neil Brenner, *New Urban Spaces: Urban Theory and the Scale Question* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019); Sevilla-Buitrago, *Against the Commons*, 69.

of 1888, which were accompanied by a spate of state activity in shaping urban space. I do not propose to give an exhaustive accounting of developments or demographics for each decade of this period. Such a history, in my view, attempts a rather different task than the one that this thesis aims to accomplish. Instead, I employ post-holing as method: digging into specific moments within the spatial history of settler space in order to reveal the elements that are integral to the production of settler space. As Richard Sennett explains: “‘Posthole’ methods try to depict the sweep of historical forces and at the same time some of the richness of detail which comes from delving into a specific moment.”⁷⁷ This approach thus “invites theory about why historical change occurs and demands a theoretical perspective of history beyond explanations of immediate contingencies or sheer chance.”⁷⁸

The table below indicates the approximate historical coverage of the last four chapters of the thesis (with Chapters One and Two concerned with theoretical matters). However, this should not be taken to imply a strict historical continuity. Chapter Four, for example, is the most narrowly confined, arguing that the viceregal authority in command of the settler state sought to consolidate a moral order of space. Yet the tendencies that define this space emerge from the interplay of nature, violence, and land in Chapter Three.

The remainder of this thesis is divided into three parts, each with a pair of chapters that work in concert to advance this thesis’ contribution to the critique of settler space through the project of spatial history.

⁷⁷ Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Vintage Books, 1978), 42.

⁷⁸ Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism, Global War, Global Crisis*, 23.

	Title	Period
Chapter Three	Nature, violence, and dispossession	1788–1810
Chapter Four	The moral order of space	1810–1821
Chapter Five	The origins of settler abstract space	1821–1850
Chapter Six	The nature of settler abstract space	1850–1888

Table 0.1. Periodising the spatial history of settler space in the Sydney Basin

The first part addresses the possibilities and prospects for a critique of settler space derived from Lefebvre’s theory of the production of space and the project of spatial history.⁷⁹ I deliver an account of the project of spatial history and how it is integrated within Lefebvre’s critique of space. However, this account must overcome the limits to Lefebvre that emerge from how he grounds his critique on a European history of space. My central aim is to show how the underlying method and orientation of Lefebvre’s theory and the project of spatial history are adequate to the purpose of this thesis.

Chapter One develops an account of the project of spatial history. It begins by canvassing what is meant by ‘spatial history,’ and distinguishes this project from comparable strains of research. The intention of this thesis is not to offer a history of a particular space: of the people and things in a delimited zone. Rather, the focus is on the underpinning social relations that define the distinctive production of settler space. Drawing on Lefebvre, I frame this task in terms of his concept of the *open totality*, which admits the possibility for a highly fractured and disordered social formation.⁸⁰ In the context of settler space, this enables this thesis to comprehend the uneven

⁷⁹ Stuart Elden, *Mapping the Present: Heidegger, Foucault and the Project of a Spatial History* (London: Continuum, 2001); Christian Schmid, *Henri Lefebvre and the Theory of the Production of Space* (Verso, 2022).

⁸⁰ Sirma Altun et al., ‘The Life-Nerve of the Dialectic: György Lukács and the Metabolism of Space and Nature’, *Review of International Political Economy* 30, no. 2 (4 March 2023): 584–607; Riki Scanlan, ‘From Lukács’ Philosophy of Praxis to Lefebvre’s Metaphilosophy of Everyday Life’, *Science & Society* 87, no. 2 (April 2023): 222–28.

reproduction of settler relations in the context of the ruptures of preexisting Indigenous social relations. To clear the ground for this thesis, I turn to Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay*, which he frames as a spatial history.⁸¹ He deploys what I term a linguistic method of spatial history, which I see as consistent with the formalist tendencies identified above. In so doing, I argue that his analysis presents a critique of imperial representations of space, rather than a critique of settler space. How empires and settlers represent the spaces that they invade matters, of course, but these representations do not exhaust the critique of settler space. Instead, I argue that the project of spatial history can be better served by Lefebvre's regressive–progressive method.⁸² Here I draw explicit links to the earlier discussion of the twin routes to concrete abstraction, shedding fresh light on this element of Lefebvre's thought. This method provides the requisite conceptual tools for the task of this thesis by linking space and time, geography and history.

Chapter Two flips the script by investigating the limits to Lefebvre. It opens with treatments of Indigenous dispossession and primitive accumulation offered by Indigenous and settler-colonial scholars, since these rank amongst the premiere differences within colonial and settler spaces, as compared to Western Europe.⁸³ Drawing on these insights, I argue that a theory of the social relations of landed property is missing from standard treatments of dispossession. If settler-colonialism is a land-based project, then explaining the production of settler space requires a theory of landed property. Lefebvre, however, can only take us so far on this front. Deepening our understanding of how his rural sociology of the 1950s was integrated with

⁸¹ Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

⁸² Lefebvre, *On the Rural*, 59–76.

⁸³ Glen Sean Coulthard, *Indigenous Americas: Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Robert Nichols, *Theft Is Property!: Dispossession and Critical Theory*, 2020.

his nominally ‘urban’ theories of space, the chapter critically evaluates how Lefebvre took up Marx’s theory of ground-rent and landed property. Crucially, his approach was unable to fully appreciate how Indigenous dispossession becomes integrated within settler landed property. Armed with these insights, the chapter concludes with critical reconstruction of Lefebvre’s own spatial history within *The Production of Space*.⁸⁴ I show how the particular conceptualisation of abstract space that emerges from his spatial history hinges on its European conditions. Nevertheless, the limits to Lefebvre rest in the *particularisation* of his account, not in the underlying framework or method, elaborated in Chapter One. Crucially, this analysis advances one of the original contributions of this thesis, which is to develop an account of abstract settler space.

The second part opens the historical inquiry into the production of settler space through a study of the early colony in the Sydney Basin, from the arrival of settlers with the First Fleet in 1788 until the 1820s. Crucial to this early spatial history are the foundational roles of colonial violence and Indigenous dispossession and the links that these bear to the production of space and the relations of landed property.

Chapter Three situates dispossession and colonial violence at the heart of the production of settler space, framing this in terms of twin fragments of nature and violence. My claim is that relations of violence and nature were intertwined within the Sydney Basin, and thus within processes of dispossession and the formation of settler landed property. I begin by criticising spatial binaries of the frontier concept, which render the frontier as somewhere ‘out there,’ opposed to the urban and civilised heart of civilisation. The chapter shows how the uneven application of these frontier ideologies to Australian historiography emphasises the need to integrate a

⁸⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

theory of landed property. Next, I dig into the early historical development of the colony to illustrate how the settler transformation of an Indigenous management of socio-ecological relations was tied to colonial violence. I frame this through the concept of the twin fragments of nature and violence, which reconceptualises Lefebvre's account of absolute space as premised on fragments of nature.⁸⁵ On this basis, I analyse the early formation of settler landed property. The formal objective of the imperial land policy was to fix the convicts: to fix them in place and fix their morals. Convicts and free settlers were able to adapt these to their own ends, but the twin fragments of nature and violence remained baked into the patterns and relations of landed property. Taken altogether, the chapter advances the central claims of this thesis by positioning colonial violence as a constitutive relation for the production of settler space.

Chapter Four develops this argument through a close study of the production of space under the viceregal tenure of Governor Macquarie (1810–1821). I argue that the settler state, directed by Lachlan Macquarie and his wife, Elizabeth, attempted to consolidate a moral order of space within the Sydney Basin. During this period, the basic conditions of space discussed in the previous chapter were retained and reformulated, even as the political economy of the colony was beginning to shift towards the pastoral sector as a means of capital accumulation. The chapter characterises this moral order of space in terms of a romanticism of nature, extractivism of land, and moralism of the colonial subject, which I situate in reference to the ideology of improvement. The settler state not only strove to consolidate this moral order of space but also aimed to entrench settler dominion through a violent logistics of space. In making these connections, I trace the development of roads, townships, and their mobilisation through punitive expeditions

⁸⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 234.

against Aboriginal people. These foundations of moral superiority and colonial violence were the infrastructure for what I call the logic of devisualisation. The Macquaries engaged in a wide array of public works: buildings, landscapes, towns, and roads. The effect, I argue, is the devisualisation of the residues of an Aboriginal management of socio-nature.

The third part turns to the origins and nature of settler abstract space from the 1830s to the 1880s. I trace how imperial circuits of capital in the pastoral sector became increasingly significant to the production of settler space. At the same time, the nineteenth century witnessed a steady, if slow, rise in state capacities to manage space, which reinvigorated the logic of devisualisation within settler abstract space.

Chapter Five focusses on the earlier decades of this period, arguing that the rise of pastoral capital accumulation was integral to the origins of settler abstract space. It begins by identifying how the relation between settler landed property and world market conditions came to drive extensive dispossession through the pastoral sector. Notably, this was not mediated through formal title to property but through bald expropriation that was left formally unsanctioned by imperial authorities. The increasing integration of the settler political economy with imperial circuits of capital led to shifts within the spatial history of the Sydney Basin. Drawing on advertisements of real estate auctioneers during this period, I then examine the generalisation of property speculation and financing and the effects that this had on settler ideologies of land and space. I argue that the incorporation of the pastoral sector into imperial circuits of capital began the transformation of landed property relations into the abstract, homogeneous, and fungible units of space that characterises abstract space.

Chapter Six builds on this argument by examining a set of state interventions into space, nature, and landed property in the latter half of the nineteenth century. I argue that the rising capacity of the state to shape the

production of space was instrumental for the consolidation of settler abstract space. As with the preceding chapter, it begins by addressing the reproduction and transformation of settler relations of landed property. The concentration of land in the hands of the squatter pastoralists had become a flashpoint of settler politics, resulting in a series of land reform acts. I show how these tensions over landed property relate to debates over the use and improvement of land within the Sydney Basin: specifically, through struggles over the residual settler commons and the resulting intensive dispossession. Despite the diverging pathways of these commons, I show how they were linked to speculative interests in property. In my central case of the Sydney Common, and its slow remaking into Moore and Centennial Parks, I show how its ‘improvement’ linked the transformation of nature, debt-financed urban development, and the erasure of Indigenous presence. I then track the rising capacity of the state through a range of other parks and reserves to illustrate the nature of settler abstract space.

Overall, this thesis advances a geographically and historically materialist critique of settler space that critically reworks the arguments of settler-colonial studies. At the heart of this argument is the tradition of critical theory that emerged from Marx’s notion of concrete abstractions. Rather than placing a singularising structure or logic at the heart of my theory, this thesis seeks to reconstruct the spatial history of the Sydney Basin, following its transformations and ruptures on its own terms. In so doing, this thesis contributes to the critique of the production of settler space.

Chapter One: The project of spatial history

My intention in this thesis is not to provide a mere history of Sydney as a settler space. Rather, I am interested in examining what it is that makes a space a settler space: what are the social relations underpinning the production of settler space in Sydney? How did they come about and how did they mutate? How do our present structures and logics emerge from the long accretion of historical events? I take it that these questions imply a set of conceptual issues, relating to spatial history, totality, and abstraction, which must be cleared away before we can offer useful insights for understanding the origins of settler space. Equally, these questions imply the need for a method to frame the project of spatial history, which this chapter develops through Lefebvre's regressive–progressive method.

The basic issue which we must sweep away first is whether space has a history. Not a specific space, nor the physical–scientific space of Newton and Einstein, nor even a given typology of space, but the fabric of the social world that we call space. It was this issue which consumed Lefebvre's attention in *The Production of Space*, and he concluded that not only does space have a history, but that this is crucial for understanding capitalist society.¹ What this chapter offers is twofold. First, I provide a conceptual analysis of Lefebvre's views on the production of space, situated within his wider oeuvre and philosophy, through a reproduction of his project of spatial history and his regressive–progressive method. This is useful for advancing our collective understanding of Lefebvre's thought. Second, and more directly relevant to my thesis, my account of spatial history and the regressive–progressive method sets up the critique of settler space conducted by this thesis. That is

¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

not to say, however, that Lefebvre is imported into settler space. Instead, you can read this chapter as setting up the punchlines of the next chapter: here I introduce Lefebvre's framework, there I expose his frame of reference. As we will see, a critical reconstruction of Lefebvre is necessary for accounting for the production of settler space.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section distinguishes the project of spatial history from *histories of space* and *spatialised history*. Drawing these distinctions permits me to indicate the essential features of spatial history. The basic concern is with the social relations that underpin space, which I take to be organised within an open totality. To tease out and defend this point, I contrast both Phillip McMichael's method of incorporating comparison and Deleuze-inspired postcolonial urban comparative methods.² The second section then addresses Paul Carter's approach to spatial history within settler Australian history.³ Here I critique his method for its treatment of space as subject primarily to linguistic acts of making space. Viewing the social world through the lens of open totality enables me to avoid the reductive claims that settler space arrives with the acts of naming. The third section then sets out Lefebvre's approach to spatial history with a focus on the regressive–progressive method. I situate this method within his wider philosophy and propose that his project was primarily aimed at comprehending the spatial history of space as *such*. Rather than a focus on linguistic acts, Lefebvre sees the origins of abstract space in the same

² See: Philip McMichael, 'Incorporating Comparison within a World-Historical Perspective: An Alternative Comparative Method', *American Sociological Review* 55, no. 3 (1990): 385–97; Jennifer Robinson, 'Cities in a World of Cities: The Comparative Gesture', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35, no. 1 (16 December 2010): 1–23; Jennifer Robinson, 'Thinking Cities through Elsewhere: Comparative Tactics for a More Global Urban Studies', *Progress in Human Geography* 40, no. 1 (1 February 2016): 3–29; Jane M. Jacobs, 'Commentary—Comparing Comparative Urbanisms', *Urban Geography* 33, no. 6 (1 August 2012): 904–14.

³ Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*.

methodological terms as Marx saw the origins of abstract labour. Consequently, my earlier discussion of the twin routes to concrete abstraction re-enters the argument here to illustrate how his regressive–progressive method links space and time, geography and history, synchronic and diachronic. It is this method which lends substance to his treatment of the totality as open and fragmented. Moreover, the underlying approach may be mobilised for this thesis’ analysis of settler space *despite* the limits to Lefebvre.

1.1 What is (not) spatial history?

The term ‘spatial history’ is employed for varying purposes under different research programmes, broadly connoting historical inquiries about space or employing spatial tools. Nevertheless, this chapter distinguishes a specific project of *spatial history* from alternative projects, which we may call *histories of space* and *spatialised history*.⁴ Here I am expanding on Stuart Elden’s distinction between histories of space and spatial history, where the former is historical inquiry applied to space and the latter is historical inquiry integrated with space.⁵ ‘Histories of space’ is a nebulous category, including histories of specific places, spatial units, or geographies alongside histories of specific spatial forms, technologies, or relations. It is as expansive as space is inescapable. Moreover, it is the necessary base matter for both spatialised history and the project of spatial history. ‘Spatialised history,’ for my purposes, refers to the study of things in space. Here I draw on Lefebvre’s turn from the analysis of mere things in space and to the production of space: he advocates “an approach which would analyse not things in space but space

⁴ In homage to Lefebvre, this tripartite division includes two terms that differ by merely a suffix.

⁵ Elden, *Mapping the Present*, 116–19.

itself, with a view to uncovering the social relationships embedded in it.”⁶ The project of spatial history, then, is historical inquiry integrated with space just in so far as it attends to the production of space. As a consequence, it must attend to the totality of the social world, which this section will introduce through a discussion of encompassing and incorporating comparison.

Let me begin with an example of what I take to be spatialised history. Richard White, then Director of the Stanford University Spatial History Project, argued that “historians [have been left] open to the charge from geographers that they write history as if it took place on the head of a pin.”⁷ This project of spatialised history is “a means of doing research” with its own questions and objects of analysis that may go unidentified without the methods of spatialised history.⁸ The objective is to “to reconstruct past landscapes in order to understand how they were produced, experienced, and ultimately transformed.”⁹ For example, the distribution of railroads, the scheduling of trains, and the time-space compression of rail transport allow fresh understandings of the historic development of the Californian region.¹⁰ The objective here is to comprehend how the Californian economy developed through transformations to geography, necessitating some kind of spatial theory to explain those transformations and the historical processes which led to them. By contrast, Butlin’s analysis of Australian economic

⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 89.

⁷ Richard White, ‘What Is Spatial History?’ (Stanford University Spatial History Lab, 1 February 2010), 1.

⁸ White, ‘What Is Spatial History?’, 6.

⁹ Erik Steiner, ‘The Spatial History Project Intelligent Cities: Case Study’, The Stanford University Spatial History Project, para. 5, accessed 28 September 2020.

¹⁰ The Stanford University Spatial History Project is now defunct, but an archive of their work on Californian historical development and railroads can be found here: Richard White, ‘Shaping the West’, Stanford University Spatial History Project, accessed 17 July 2023. See, also: Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (WW Norton & Company, 2011).

development in the late nineteenth century focusses on public sector investment, especially in railways, but does not conduct a spatialised analysis of the reorganisation of regional linkages.¹¹ What spatialised history offers, then, is a promise to explain how things in space are organised.

In a sense, then, we can liken it to the description of a forest by way of specifying the coordinates of each tree and even the ecological interactions between each tree. But these are treated as externally interacting things, rather than a holistic approach aimed at the underlying relations. As Henri Lefebvre explains, what is necessary is “an approach which would analyse not things in space but space itself, with a view to uncovering the social relationships embedded in it.”¹² The analysis of things in space is necessary, but not sufficient, for that task. In a striking formulation, Lefebvre connects ‘things’ to ‘relations’: “Even the commodity and money, which *reify*, are not completely things, but relations pulled onto the path of things. It is important not to conceive them in terms of crude reification and objectivity.”¹³ Lefebvre admonishes a misinterpretation of the Marxist critique of commodity fetishism that asserts that commodities are wholly concrete, wholly objectified, wholly alienated from social relations. At the same time, he suggests that the analysis of the thing *qua* thing is permissible (even necessary) if undertaken in a sophisticated manner – namely, by a holistic approach that incorporates the object of analysis within a social whole. Spatialised history, then, misses the totality of the forest for the catalogue of the trees.

The sense in which I use totality here is the same as the method of

¹¹ N. G. Butlin, *Investment in Australian Economic Development, 1861-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964).

¹² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 89.

¹³ Henri Lefebvre, *Metaphilosophy*, trans. David Fernbach (Verso Books, 2016), 89, emphasis in original.

incorporating comparison, which I situate within a trajectory of Marxist thought that is concerned with open totalities. I therefore want to suggest some useful connections between spatial history, incorporating comparison, and the regressive–progressive method, discussed later in this chapter.¹⁴ McMichael’s method of incorporating comparison is set against Tilly’s schema of comparative strategies which includes, amongst others, *encompassing comparison*. The method of encompassing comparison aims to place “different instances at various locations within the same system, on the way to explaining their characteristics as a function of their varying relationships to the system as a whole.”¹⁵ A classic example of this kind of method is the studies undertaken within global cities theory: where the account of command-and-control functions of the global economy sets the hierarchy of cities across the world, and comparison takes place within that hierarchy.¹⁶ Encompassing comparison enfolds all cases within a single unit of analysis, with that unit variously described as a ‘totality’ or ‘world-system’ – or, in a Hegelian fit, ‘world-spirit.’ As we shall see, Phillip McMichael proposes the method of incorporating comparison in order to avoid the presumption of a given logic or content to that encompassing unit of analysis.

McMichael criticises encompassing comparison on the basis that it is “a strategy that presumes a ‘whole’ that governs its ‘parts.’”¹⁷ The method of incorporating comparison rejects this kind of approach because it “has no choice but to prefigure history.”¹⁸ Put differently, the point of departure for

¹⁴ Stuart Elden and Adam Morton have made similar suggestions, see: Stuart Elden and Adam David Morton, ‘From the Rural to the Urban and the Production of Space’, in *On the Rural: Economy, Sociology, Geography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), xix.

¹⁵ Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (Russell Sage Foundation, 1984), 115.

¹⁶ Saskia Sassens, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹⁷ McMichael, ‘Incorporating Comparison within a World-Historical Perspective’, 386.

¹⁸ McMichael, ‘Incorporating Comparison within a World-Historical Perspective’, 391.

encompassing comparison is a theoretical elaboration of the content of the social totality with the objective of understanding how particular cases are articulated within that pre-given system. That approach implies an epistemology where we begin with knowledge of the whole which delimits our knowledge of the particular. In concrete terms, the ‘conventional’ conceptual model of world economic development presumes (i) separated nation-states (ii) within an international states-system (iii) alongside a division between the economy and ecology; the corresponding challenge, McMichael says, is “...how to transcend the ontological assumptions embedded in the conventions of the comparative method.”¹⁹ In an illuminating comment, McMichael points out that we cannot lump different spaces into this or that developmental bin because “social and political processes are interwoven across space, where commodity frontiers, settlement patterns, trade circuits and technologies distribute according to changing geopolitical, geoeconomic and geocological conjunctures.”²⁰ Part of my aim in this chapter is to advance the question of space latent in these comments, and the thesis overall treats the production of settler space without presuming a definite territorial unit of analysis.

McMichael makes two manoeuvres to develop this method. First, he treats totality as ‘conceptual procedure’ rather than ‘conceptual premise.’ Second, he reconstructs units of analysis as moments within that conceptual procedure rather than as given parallel cases. As a result, incorporating comparison seeks to reconstruct the totality from the historical material under examination. Encompassing comparison, by contrast, assumes the content of its unit of analysis – e.g. the view that the world-system expresses a pre-given logic of development organised through nation-state or city

¹⁹ Philip McMichael, ‘Incorporating Comparison in Ontological Encounters’, *Revista de História Comparada* 13, no. 1 (30 July 2019): 213.

²⁰ McMichael, ‘Incorporating Comparison in Ontological Encounters’, 212.

hierarchies. In McMichael's terms, our inquiry must begin with the analysis of the "mutual conditioning of parts," with an eye towards the socially produced systems and logics of power.²¹ Read through his recent concerns with ecological crisis, he "propose[s] a form of comparison in which the ontological encounter between these principles [of capitalist economies and social ecology] express an unfolding totality."²²

To summarise, incorporating comparison does not seek to accumulate facts in an attempt to give an exhaustive specification of the world – or a catalogue of trees, like spatialised history. Instead, it seeks to discern the underlying social relations through which we can best comprehend the social whole. As we shall see in the third section of this chapter, the regressive–progressive method is grounded on similar epistemological precepts, precisely because it is likewise built on Marx's concept of concrete abstractions.

Postcolonial urban theorists share McMichael's suspicion of encompassing comparison. For example, in rejecting such approaches, Jacobs frames her comparisons of the urban high-rise / skyscraper form explicitly as a Deleuzian method, arguing that it is a "project of decentring [that] assumes multiples" and rejects a "convergent or unified understanding of urbanisation or the urban condition."²³ This method depends on Deleuze's conceptual link between difference and repetition, where repeated instances of a phenomena do not imply some order of generality.²⁴ Deleuze insists on the internality of difference to repetition: "Might we not form such a concept [of repetition] once we realise that variation is not added to repetition in order to hide it,

²¹ McMichael, 'Incorporating Comparison within a World-Historical Perspective', 391.

²² McMichael, 'Incorporating Comparison in Ontological Encounters', 216.

²³ Jacobs, 'Commentary—Comparing Comparative Urbanisms', 904.

²⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

but is rather its condition or constitutive element, the interiority of repetition par excellence?”²⁵ This view on the high-rise urban form insists that high-rise development is not a structural-functional result of the see-saw flows of capital across the planet as a series of sites for spatiotemporal fixes for capital, á la David Harvey or Neil Smith.²⁶ The Deleuzian method rejects explanation through world-historic theory or encompassing comparisons because it rejects the concept of totality. On this view, comparisons that move from the identification of repeated instances to explanation via a general process are only possible “if there is an active elision of the logics of contingency and its force.”²⁷ The putative end result of this lacunae on contingency is a “schizophrenic parochial universalism in which the (academic’s) home town [stands] for the world.”²⁸ In Jennifer Robinson’s gloss on Jacob’s argument, this means that “the global/local distinction, then, is erased in favour of attending to the specific interconnected processes creating outcomes.”²⁹ (Note, here, the similarity with McMichael’s refusal to endorse a pre-given unit of analysis.) This provides her a productive step towards her long-held ambition of placing all cities “within the same field of analysis.”³⁰

Placing all spaces within the same field of analysis in this way differs from the objectives of global cities theory, world-systems theory, or even incorporating comparison. These Deleuzian approaches rest on a claim that radical difference is basic to social ontology, such that the existence of reproducible social forms, functions, and structures occurs only via a process

²⁵ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, xvi.

²⁶ Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*; Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*, 3rd ed. (London: Verso, 2010).

²⁷ Jacobs, ‘Commentary—Comparing Comparative Urbanisms’, 908.

²⁸ Jacobs, ‘Commentary—Comparing Comparative Urbanisms’, 909.

²⁹ Robinson, ‘Thinking Cities through Elsewhere’, 15.

³⁰ Jennifer Robinson, *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development* (Routledge, 2006).

of concept-formation. Robinson draws on Deleuze's concept of the 'virtual' which "would index the multiplicity of interconnected possibilities for bringing objects (any urban outcomes) into conceptualisation (determining outcomes)."³¹ Each instantiated urban outcome is treated as a 'singularity' which cannot be seen as originating from an overarching structure. Robinson's Deleuzian manoeuvre denies that tokens (specific urban outcomes) are instantiations of types (the urban in general) – in other words, it is an exceptionally strong anti-essentialist proposition. It is in this sense that she claims that universalising urban theorists "misread historical difference as empirical variation."³² Rather than a variation on a theme, where the theme comes first and the reprises are secondary, her ontology begins with difference and themes are only identified in an eternally revisable process of concept-formation.

Despite the basic differences in social ontology within this thesis, Robinson's perspective helps shed light on the nature of totality common to Lefebvre's project of spatial history and the method of incorporating comparison. To wit: she suggests it may not be possible even to understand the totality on the basis of incorporating comparison. In her own words: "the assumption that units of comparison and their connections add up to a historically and analytically meaningful 'whole' cannot necessarily be sustained."³³ If so, then a 'system' or 'whole' may not be discernible as a result of McMichael's method. However, her criticism does not fully undermine the method. What her argument suggests is not that there cannot be a 'whole' but that it may not be a coherent or singular logic. This is not

³¹ Robinson, 'Thinking Cities through Elsewhere', 15.

³² Jennifer Robinson and Ananya Roy, 'Debate on Global Urbanisms and the Nature of Urban Theory', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 40, no. 1 (21 December 2015): 184.

³³ Robinson, 'Cities in a World of Cities', 8.

unexpected. We can insist on the relations between moments of analysis, but not presume a systematic rational coherency amongst those relations or moments. The rejection of teleology, of course, does not imply that we cannot understand the movement of history, only that we cannot understand the movement of history as a necessary outcome of a singular and definite logic. At issue here is the difference between seeing the totality as open or closed – a difference which has long dogged Marxist accounts of totality.

Here I stake a position within the tradition stemming, if unevenly, from Lukács, where “the category of totality is not a unified condition with all contradictions resolved but is instead a commitment to internal relations and processes, demanding that we situate and contextualise our analysis within the totality.”³⁴ The commitment to totality does not entail a logical or authoritarian restriction of difference. As Lefebvre argued in 1955: “the dialectical notion of totality is no more compromised by fascist ‘totalitarianism’ than those of nation and socialism by Hitler’s National Socialism.” In a more recent intervention, Goonewardena concurs that ‘totality’ does not entail ‘totalitarian’ – and that some limits to totality-theory rest in insufficient totalising, not too much!³⁵ Nevertheless, Lefebvre was not afraid to criticise Lukács for his uneven conceptualisation of totality: “He did not distinguish between the notion (logical and metaphysical) of closed totality – and the dialectical notion of the open totality.”³⁶ This argument culminates in *Metaphilosophy* with the demand to “[explore] a ‘totality,’ the modern world, in order to know the ruptures that break this totality.”³⁷ These

³⁴ Altun et al., ‘The Life-Nerve of the Dialectic’.

³⁵ Kanishka Goonewardena, ‘Planetary Urbanization and Totality’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 9 March 2018, 0263775818761890. The debate in question concerns the accusation against planetary urbanisation theory that it ‘totalises’ and reduces difference.

³⁶ Henri Lefebvre and Patrick Tort, *Lukács 1955* (Paris: Aubier, 1986), 60.

³⁷ Lefebvre, *Metaphilosophy*, 160.

are not ruptures in the mind only, but the possibilities that emerge from differential space, everyday life, and social movements. On this last point, Ari Jerrems highlights the role of everyday agency by connecting these ruptures to the ‘events’ of assembly politics, arguing that they can be understood “as a specific intervention within a greater totality-in-multiplicity.”³⁸ As I have elsewhere argued, “the highly original conception of historical materialism in *Metaphilosophy* identifies both the totality and its ruptures through a critical eye toward the residues and survivals of a history and geography devastated by the rise of capitalism.”³⁹

With respect to the project of spatial history, what does this perspective on totality and incorporating comparison offer? First, it clarifies the meaning of my shift from the analysis of *things in space* to the *production of space*, from spatialised to spatial history. Rather than a catalogue of trees, it approaches the totality of the forest: in short, a preference for the internal relations which organise space viewed as a whole. Second, it presumes neither the content of those underpinning social relations nor that they are rationally cohered. Put differently, this admits the possibility for a highly fragmented and disordered social whole, where the ensemble is pulled in many different directions, but which might express certain overall tendencies. In the context of settler space, these two insights become especially significant, since the process of violent dispossession necessarily ruptures preexisting Indigenous social relations and unevenly reproduces settler relations, which are themselves pulled in multiple different directions. Whether settler society then adopts a more-or-less coherent order depends on the historically specific projects of making space that various agents

³⁸ Ari Jerrems, “‘An Opening Toward the Possible’: Assembly Politics and Henri Lefebvre’s Theory of the Event’, *Global Society* 34, no. 2 (2 April 2020): 243.

³⁹ Scanlan, ‘From Lukács’ Philosophy of Praxis to Lefebvre’s Metaphilosophy of Everyday Life’.

conduct under wider structuring conditions. The project of spatial history is thus concerned with the production of space, framed through its underpinning social relations and a conception of totality as open and fragmented. Relatedly, I suggest that inquiring into settler society by means of spatial history helps us understand the contours of the space and society that we have inherited. The insights gathered together in this section, then, inform the central inquiry of this thesis into the production of settler space.

1.2 The Road to Botany Bay: best not taken

So. We have delved into some high theory. But how do we go about the project of spatial history within settler spaces?

A troublesome answer is given in Paul Carter's spatial history of Australia: *The Road to Botany Bay*. For Carter, spatial history is a corrective to mainstream history, which he describes as 'imperial history' because it reproduces an impartial view from nowhere.⁴⁰ This perspective of the universal spectator redefines the uncertainty of the colonial space in terms of inexorable progress towards civilisation. The basis of Carter's argument is his critical reading of the journals and maps of explorers and surveyors of colonial Australia. He shows how they attempted and failed to reconcile the world around them with representations of the world they came from. He argues that these inscriptions produced colonial Australia as a legible territory. In his words: "Such spatial history—history that discovers and explores the lacuna left by imperial history—begins and ends in language."⁴¹ For Carter, the project of spatial history demands the critique of how the colonial archive generated representations of space:

⁴⁰ Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, xv–xvi.

⁴¹ Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, xxiii.

“The historical space of the white settlers emerged through the medium of language. But the language that brought it into cultural circulation was not the language of the dictionary: on the contrary it was the language of naming, the language of travelling.”⁴²

Paul Carter situates this practice of naming as a convention of the colonial travel journal *qua* genre. The names of places and the lines on the chart thus “[preserve] the trace of encountering them.”⁴³ Anyone who has played an old-school table-top role-playing-game is familiar with the sketching of a map of a dungeon, with lines stretching off into the unknown, dangling threads to be pursued at a later time. Carter explains that it is this incomplete quality of colonial maps which is generative: “They were open-ended; their very accuracy invited further exploration, pre-empted premature possession.”⁴⁴ Additionally, the naming of places pins them down by calling them into being. By naming a paddock ‘Chilwell’:

“The Austins were bringing into being a place by announcing their intention to do so: from that time on, whether it mushroomed foundations and roofs or remained a paddock, Chilwell was a point of reference; it had become an intentional object; a place had been linguistically settled.”⁴⁵

Carter’s linguistic method of spatial history is influential.⁴⁶ Penelope Edmonds, for example, credits him with the insight that colonial and settler

⁴² Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, 67.

⁴³ Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, 23.

⁴⁴ Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, 32.

⁴⁵ Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, 137.

⁴⁶ Examples who pay homage to his linguistic method include: Marc Trabsky, *Law and the Dead: Technology, Relations and Institutions* (Routledge, 2019), 29; Stuart Cooke, ‘Eventing: Wandering Through the Physiology of Australian Narrative’, *Antipodes* 21, no. 2 (2007): 119; Iain Chambers, ‘The Stones in Language’, *Southerly* 66, no. 2 (2006): 59; Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*, 54–55.

“spatial history begins not in time or place but, culturally, in the act of naming.”⁴⁷ Thinking alongside Carter, she concludes that “the overcoding of Indigenous space with European cultural fantasies prepared the way for and was vital to colonization.”⁴⁸ However, Carter does not conceptually specify his own method: in Stuart Elden’s survey of the project of spatial history, Paul Carter is placed among a group of scholars who are credited with “excellent spatial analyses using Foucauldian concepts, though none of [them] undertake the detailed analysis this book purports to.”⁴⁹ This is no surprise, since Carter’s merits rest in his critique of Australian history, rather than his contribution to the philosophy of spatial history. In his eagerness to undermine imperial history by revealing the linguistic uncertainty that plagued explorers, he has bent the stick too far in the direction of language and naming. As Chapter Three shows, the ramifications of frontier violence exceed the paths the explorer has marked, the topographies the cartographer has traced, or the sights the artist has sketched.

In early colonial Sydney, the foundation of settler space is not the linguistic acts of men but the structural scope of frontier violence. Though the act of naming from afar may in some cases temporally precede the dispossession of Indigenous space, such linguistic acts do not define the production of settler spaces, even as they signify the cultural shape of colonial domination. Casting our eyes forward, Chapter Five resists the similar temptation to locate the origins of settler abstract space within representations of space stemming from the state. Such abstract spatial technologies are important, but their origins are not the same as the origins of settler abstract space. William Rankin suggests that this instinct is “a response to a particular ideal of representation—especially mapping—that has

⁴⁷ Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*, 74.

⁴⁸ Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*, 74.

⁴⁹ Elden, *Mapping the Present*, 179, fn 2.

never been as monolithic, hegemonic, or successful as one might presume.”⁵⁰ The ‘monolithic’ power of naming and mapping more aptly characterises the modern state than it does the nineteenth century colonisers. Neither the linguistic nor cartographic acts of the settlers were quite as capable or culpable as we might assume with our shared disadvantage of hindsight.

In sum, what Carter has accomplished is a critique of imperial representations of space, which is a rather different task from a critique of the production of settler space.

Nevertheless, rejecting the linguistic method of spatial history does not imply we cannot inquire into spatial history through linguistic means. Elleza Kelley’s recent analysis of the black production of space through the ‘hidden archive’ of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (a) reveals how ‘fugitive mapping’ was part of black resistance to plantation slavery in the American South and (b) suggests how this black radical tradition was deposited within the (black) literary tradition from which Morrison emerged.⁵¹ Kelley expands our horizons of spatial history through exploring how black resistance produced their own spaces, and her material for that argument is literature. Similarly, Adam Morton argues that “the literary production of space is an alternative gateway to the concerns of the historical-geographical restructuring of cities, regions, spaces, places, streetscapes, neighborhoods, and territories across both urban and rural worlds.”⁵² Taking a step beyond literary geographies as an epistemic gateway, Morton suggests that “the conception of spatial history

⁵⁰ William Rankin, ‘How the Visual Is Spatial: Contemporary Spatial History, Neo-Marxism, and the Ghost of Braudel’, *History and Theory* 59, no. 3 (2020): 319. Here Rankin is concerned with the earlier tradition of Marxist scholars who decry mapping as abstract and reductive.

⁵¹ Elleza Kelley, “Follow the Tree Flowers”: Fugitive Mapping in *Beloved*, *Antipode*, 2020. The emergence of a signal figure from a suppressed yet generative tradition pays homage to Cedric Robinson’s argument in *Black Marxism*: Robinson, *Black Marxism*.

⁵² Adam David Morton, ‘The Urban Revolution in Victor Serge’, *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 108, no. 6 (2 November 2018): 1566. See, also: Brett Heino, ‘The Spaces of Australian Capitalism: Making “Place” out of “Space” in The Unknown Industrial Prisoner’, *Political Geography* 85 (March 2021): 1–11.

in geographical studies thus reveals insights about literature while in turn literary productions contribute to the constitution of spatial history.”⁵³ Our scopes can be broadened, here, to include aesthetic products and relations as constituting elements within the production of settler spaces, as this thesis does at various points. The point I am making, for now, is that project of spatial history cannot be collapsed into an essentially discursive method, as Carter’s analysis does. In sum, literary evidence is legitimate for claims about spatial history – but this does not entail that space is linguistic in nature or can be ‘read.’

Lefebvre’s frequently recited axiom that you cannot read space like a book summarises my critique of the linguistic method of spatial history. Space is not textual: “Its mode of existence, its practical reality’ (including its form) differs radically from the reality (or being-there) of something written, such as a book.”⁵⁴ For Lefebvre, only if specific conditions are met may space be ‘read’. In Chapter Two, we will see that these conditions are met for Lefebvre primarily by the Renaissance code of space, and I want to suggest that something like this was sought after, though not quite achieved, within the moral order of space under the Macquaries, analysed in Chapter Four. (Governor Lachlan Macquarie and Elizabeth Macquarie, his wife, controlled the settler colony in Australia for a decade after 1810.) Unlike such spaces, capitalist spaces exhibit a reflexive and generative complexity because capitalist space is at once the target, terrain, and technique of struggle.⁵⁵ This

⁵³ Adam David Morton, ‘The Warp of the World: Geographies of Space and Time in the Border Trilogy by Cormac McCarthy’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 18 September 2015, 833.

⁵⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 142.

⁵⁵ Bob Jessop’s theory of the state bears a resemblance to Lefebvre’s theory of space on this point. Jessop argues that the capitalist state is simultaneously the site, generator, and outcome of class struggle. See: Bob Jessop, *State Theory: Putting the Capitalist State in Its Place* (Cambridge, U.K: Polity Press, 1990); Bob Jessop, *The Future of the Capitalist State* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

reflexivity of space impedes legibility of the strategies of power, implying that ‘reading’ space will lead to distorted conclusions: “Power’s message is invariably confused—deliberately so; dissimulation is necessarily part of any message from power.”⁵⁶

These objections, however, only cause serious but not mortal wounds to the linguistic method of spatial history. The crucial point is what this picture of space implies. It emphasises language over production despite ontological priority flowing the other way. As Lefebvre puts it: “In short, ‘reading’ follows production in all cases except those in which space is produced especially in order to be read.”⁵⁷ For Carter, the act of naming carves out an empty form, which is filled with the content of European invasion. This is what he means by arguing that James Cook’s journals and maps produced a “cultural space in which places might eventually be found.”⁵⁸ Yes, the naming of places has some significance, but that does not entail that it comes first in chronology or first in importance: sometimes a space is occupied before it is named, and sometimes its name is irrelevant until the occupation. In contrast, Lefebvre correctly emphasises the strategies of struggle within and about the production of space. For Lefebvre, the term ‘strategies’ implies a social group, where such a group is constituted in part through its tactics, strategies, and wagers.⁵⁹ Such groups might be classes or class fractions, but they include a wide variety of other agents that may coalesce around determinate interests or objectives—including, for example, such groups as ‘convicts,’ ‘military officers,’ ‘the state,’ or the varying Indigenous peoples that inhabited the Sydney region.

⁵⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 142.

⁵⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 143.

⁵⁸ Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, 32.

⁵⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: The One-Volume Edition*, trans. Moore John (Verso Books, 2014), 400–401.

That is not to say that the elements which Carter emphasises are of no importance, but that we should accord them their proper place within the wider set of relations that were at play at the time. The proper place of naming, for instance, is best expressed by Barry Corr's study of the 'language of settlement' on the Hawkesbury. The available written sources represent, overwhelmingly, the views of the men on the ground, who were "opportunistic, often self-made, men thwarted by the barriers of class and inherited-wealth from realising their ambitions in Britain."⁶⁰ Corr argues that these sources evince "a self-reflective relationship between the process of settlement and the language of settlement."⁶¹ The legitimating function of the 'language of settlement' is part of the process of settlement, and weighs down on cultural memory, literature, and heritage, but this does not imply that the production of space should be seen as initiated by the inscriptions of language about or upon space.

So far in this chapter I have been outlining a specific conception of the project of spatial history suitable for evaluating the production of settler spaces. In Stuart Elden's case for spatial history, he argues that "space should not be simply an object of analysis but part of the conceptual armoury we have for analysis itself. This is the difference between a spatial history and a history of space."⁶² The theoretical coordinates for Elden's account of spatial history are Foucauldian, not Lefebvrian, but the gist remains the same. Elden reads Foucault from "the perspective of the suggestion that space is fundamental in any exercise of power."⁶³ For Elden, the significance of this

⁶⁰ Barry Corr, 'Pondering the Abyss: A Study of the Language of Settlement on the Hawkesbury Nepean Rivers', Nangarra, 2016, 13. A summary of Corr's ideas is available here: Barry Corr, 'Pondering the Abyss', *Meanjin*, 2018.

⁶¹ Corr, 'Pondering the Abyss: A Study of the Language of Settlement on the Hawkesbury Nepean Rivers', 13.

⁶² Elden, *Mapping the Present*, 151.

⁶³ Elden, *Mapping the Present*, 120.

reading rests in how it “allows us to recast Foucault’s work not just as a history of the present but as a mapping of the present.”⁶⁴ By contrast, Elden briefly indicates that Carter failed to attend to the “theoretical underpinnings” of Foucault’s project of spatial history.⁶⁵ For Elden, what distinguished Foucault’s project of spatial history were these interconnections between the present and the past through the question of space. As we shall see in the next section, Henri Lefebvre’s regressive–progressive method supplies a comparable method for the project of spatial history. In staking this position, my account diverges from Stuart Elden’s initial claim that “it can appear that he [Lefebvre] is writing a history of space, and not a spatial history.”⁶⁶ Three years later, Elden moderated his view: “Lefebvre’s work then can be understood as more than simply a history of space. It would, I believe, also be a step forward in the project of a spatial history.”⁶⁷ Here, however, Elden does not sharply demarcate the analyses of the production of space and things in space, of spatial history and spatialised history:

“Histories need to be written with attention paid to the where rather than just the when, with location and landscape central parts of the analysis. The impact of the production and regulation of space on those who pass through it needs to be taken into account; the reverse is of course also true.”

By contrast, my view is that Lefebvre engages in the project of spatial

⁶⁴ Elden, *Mapping the Present*, 152.

⁶⁵ Elden, *Mapping the Present*, 93.

⁶⁶ Stuart Elden, ‘Politics, Philosophy, Geography: Henri Lefebvre in Recent Anglo-American Scholarship’, *Antipode* 33, no. 5 (1 November 2001): 817. The evidence for this claim was uncharacteristically thin, being a few quotes of ‘history of space’ in Lefebvre’s text; *pace* Elden, the absence of ‘spatial history’ and presence of ‘history of space’ has more to do with the later arrival of ‘spatial history’ *qua* conceptual term than the conceptual structure of Lefebvre’s argument.

⁶⁷ Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible* (London: Continuum, 2004), 194.

history – with a twist. Unlike Foucault’s spatial history of madness, for instance, Lefebvre conducts a spatial history of *space as such*. Thus, *The Production of Space* develops its critique of (capitalist) space through a critical reconstruction of the historic production of space *in general*. As such, the title has a double meaning: it promises a theory of how specific spaces are produced as well as how space was produced *qua* space. This is why, for example, the book begins with a critique of the idealist concept of mental space within philosophy and science.⁶⁸ By undermining this idealist theory, Lefebvre clears the way for an account of the material origins of space within its own spatial history. If spatial history rests in the integration of space as a mode of inquiry, then this is an apt characterisation of Lefebvre’s rhetorical query (vis a vis the emergence of the space of capital accumulation) that:

“Inasmuch as space is the locus of all such chronologies, might it not constitute a principle of explanation at least as acceptable as any other?”⁶⁹

What, then, is the method for such an explanation?

1.3. The regressive–progressive method

Earlier, I turned to the method of incorporating comparison to illuminate the issue of totality. Here, we address the regressive–progressive method, in part because McMichael’s method is relatively weak with respect to the social production of space.⁷⁰ In his own work on settler agriculture, space appears primarily as a scalar relation between world and national markets and a hint

⁶⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 1.

⁶⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 275.

⁷⁰ Gillian Hart, ‘Relational Comparison Revisited: Marxist Postcolonial Geographies in Practice*’, *Progress in Human Geography* 42, no. 3 (June 2018): 371–94.

of a core-periphery relation in his argument that London “spun a web of commercial credit and competitive relations around staple production.”⁷¹ Gillian Hart suggests that his analysis treats “space as a passive backdrop” separate from “time as an active force.”⁷² Consequently, she draws on Lefebvre’s regressive–progressive method as “an explicitly spatialized understanding of Marx’s method” – which is seen as a philosophy of internal relations and concrete abstractions.⁷³ In addition to these conceptual considerations, there are good reasons to turn to this method on the basis of how settlers shape the production of space.

Settler societies flatten, stretch, pull, and twist their histories. The spatial crystallisation of settler social relations is made all the more complex by the settlers interceding directly in the *appearance* of its own historical genesis. In a 1976 news report, on the conflict in then-Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), a club cricketer professes that white settlers shall retain power because their nation “has fought for itself since time immemorial.”⁷⁴ In the real world, British colonisation had begun in the territory less than a century beforehand, and Zimbabwean independence was achieved a few years later. If there are sometimes decades where nothing happens and weeks where decades happen, then for such an immemorial chain of settlers, there must be days where centuries happen. We could easily dismiss the Rhodesian cricketer as a hyperbolic nationalist, but within the hyperbole is an insight into how settlers shape the production of space. The production of settler space involves the attempt to create the *appearance* of a history, and this is done through more than just what they say, like the cricketer, but in their

⁷¹ McMichael, ‘Incorporating Comparison within a World-Historical Perspective’, 395; Philip McMichael, *Settlers and the Agrarian Question: Capitalism in Colonial Australia* (Cambridge University Press, 1984).

⁷² Hart, ‘Relational Comparison Revisited’, 377.

⁷³ Hart, ‘Relational Comparison Revisited’, 377–81.

⁷⁴ *Rhodesia 1976*, 2011.

buildings, streets, and landscapes. In Chapter Four, I term this the logic of devisualisation through the architecture of Macquarie period and in Chapter Six I trace the incorporation of this logic within settler abstract space through the making of parks and reserves within the Sydney Basin.

My proposal is that the regressive-progressive method is useful for sifting through these complexities of settler spatial history. I want to say that this method is capable of demystifying the illusions of settler spatial history, and thus enabling this thesis' critique of settler space. The reason it can do so, I think, is because of how it draws on Marx's notion of concrete abstractions. In the Introduction to this thesis, I interpreted this notion through the twin routes of the labour- and exchange-relations, corresponding to the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. That discussion intended to frame the general orientation of this thesis but has special relevance to my present argument. Here, I suggest that these frames of reference link to diachronic and synchronic analysis or, simply put, to history and space. The one route emphasises the historical genesis of social relations; the other emphasises the spatial crystallisation of social relations. These twin routes are intertwined within Lefebvre's regressive-progressive method and, thus, his project of spatial history. The conceptual throughline from concrete abstractions to the project of spatial history is essential groundwork so that this thesis can deliver a critique of the production of settler space.

Lefebvre was attentive to the conceptual differences that I am highlighting here, asking us to: "witness the fact that the exposition in *Capital* by no means follows exactly the method set forth in the *Grundrisse*; Marx's great doctrinal dissertation starts off from a form, that of exchange value, and not from the concepts brought to the fore in the earlier work, namely production and labour."⁷⁵ The necessity of this intertwining both sides of this method

⁷⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 67.

emerges from the difficult nature of concrete abstractions: such concepts are born from the historical development of society itself, but that society is difficult to critique without appraising its historical development. As Lefebvre puts it:

“The production of space, having attained the conceptual and linguistic level, acts retroactively upon the past, disclosing aspects and moments of it hitherto uncomprehended. The past appears in a different light, and hence the process whereby that past becomes the present also takes on another aspect.”⁷⁶

In other words, the conditions of possibility for the *theorisation* of (social) space are found in its own (historical) *production*. In the terms of the previous section, the history of space as *such* is necessarily a spatial history. The infamously difficult structure of *The Production of Space* originates in this vicious circularity. Lefebvre must elaborate the concept of space in order to shed light on the history of space – but, at the same time, he must elaborate the history of space in order to shed light on the concept of space. In his words:

“A new concept, that of the production of space, appears at the start; it must ‘operate’ or ‘work’ in such a way as to shed light on processes from which it cannot separate itself because it is a product of them.”⁷⁷

This mirrors Marx’s analysis of abstract labour within the *Grundrisse*: the equivalence of diverse labour-powers through the dominance of the exchange relation (i) emerges with the historical development of capitalist social relations, (ii) explains and critiques those social relations, and (iii) reveals

⁷⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 65.

⁷⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 66.

the unity of labour-in-general and its mediation through abstract labour. It is an abstract form, but no less powerful in the concrete world for that. Lefebvre draws express links between Marx's account of the commodity in *Capital* and his own critique of space, too:

“What is a commodity? A concrete abstraction. An abstraction, certainly - but not an abstraction in spite of its status as a thing; an abstraction, on the contrary, on account of its status as a social 'thing', divorced, during its existence, from its materiality, from the use to which it is put, from productive activity, and from the need that it satisfies. And concrete, just as certainly, by virtue of its practical power.”⁷⁸

Here, the double-sided nature of the commodity as both an abstract form and a concrete power comes to the forefront. These practical powers of the commodity are internally related to social agents: “the commodity as concrete abstraction acts as the power of determinate 'beings' (human groups, fractions of classes).”⁷⁹ Crucially, Lefebvre continues by pointing out that “the commodity is a thing: it is in space, and occupies a location,” and, consequently, “space thus understood is both abstract and concrete in character: abstract inasmuch as it has no existence save by virtue of the exchangeability of all its component parts, and concrete inasmuch as it is socially real and as such localized.”⁸⁰ Just as the commodity is both homogeneous – as a singular abstract form – and differentiated – as many concrete objects – space is equally “homogeneous yet at the same time broken up into fragments.”⁸¹ Moving beyond the space-commodity relation, Lefebvre

⁷⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 340.

⁷⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 341.

⁸⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 341–42.

⁸¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 341.

makes the claim that “social relations, which are concrete abstractions, have no real existence save in and through space. Their underpinning is spatial.”⁸² In *Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche: the realm of shadows*, Lefebvre repeats this argument that “the support of social relations is space” and proceeds to trace how finance capital depends on sites of transfer, registration, and documentation while simultaneously intervening in specific spaces for investment or political overthrow.⁸³ In a gloomy portrait of the global dominance of capitalist exchange relations, he suggests that “the planet lives under the stormy clouds of concrete abstraction, in the shadow of recent forms of finance capital, both opaque like substances and supra-real like concepts; and without agreement between nation-states, even in conflict with them.”⁸⁴

Let’s pause for a moment. What I have sought to establish so far is that we can usefully understand Lefebvre’s critique of the production of space through the two routes for conceptualising concrete abstractions: labour vs commodity, *Grundrisse* vs *Capital*, diachronic vs synchronic. But I must stress that these are dialectically interwoven. Even in the picture of global capitalism in *Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche*, this space is understood as “elaborated and constructed practically by different societies in the course of their genesis.”⁸⁵ I want to now make a more directly exegetical claim: that this method is substantively integrated within the structure of Lefebvre’s argument within *The Production of Space*, specifically within the second chapter.

The structure of Lefebvre’s argument in the second chapter of the book

⁸² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 404.

⁸³ Henri Lefebvre, *Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche: Or the Realm of Shadows*, trans. David Fernbach (Verso Books, 2020), 76.

⁸⁴ Lefebvre, *Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche*, 77.

⁸⁵ Lefebvre, *Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche*, 76.

exemplifies the problem that Lefebvre has set himself.⁸⁶ He aims, at once, to theorise the *nature* of the production of space in light of its political *problematic* and to generate a *critique* of space that is open to revolutionary transformation. But, because of the problem of circularity in giving a spatial history of space *qua* space, Lefebvre must develop a historical *method* that enables him to approach the nature, problematic, and critique of space. The theoretical nature of space is understood through an expanded concept of production, which reveals the social relations at the heart of all things.⁸⁷ The political problematic of space is brought about by the expansive nature of the production of space in so far as it poses distinctive and omnipresent problems.⁸⁸ As a result, Lefebvre argues, a fresh critique of space is required – and the method for such a critique of space is found in the historical materialist tradition of Marx's *Capital* and *Grundrisse*.⁸⁹ That method is opposed to reductionism and positivism just in so far as it is grounded on a dialectical approach to the time–space relation (considered as a social relation).⁹⁰ At this juncture is the methodological heart of the chapter: an excursus on the history of space, beginning with the nation, but rapidly

⁸⁶ In what follows, I have operated on the interpretative principle that Lefebvre's argument is deliberately ordered, if complexly structured, and that the structure of his argument can reveal his motivating concerns. The aim in this paragraph is only to give a sketch of the overall structure of his argument in the chapter, while the footnotes here unpack some of the detail.

⁸⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 68–85. Along the way, Lefebvre exemplifies this analysis through the spatial history of Venice, which is deployed here to show how its history is integral to its production of space.

⁸⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 85–92. In this connexion is Lefebvre's infamous statement that the problematic of urbanisation has displaced industrialisation (pp. 89). Within this point, however, is Lefebvre's view that the social world continuously poses new problematics that demand new critiques.

⁸⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 92–105. Lefebvre asserts that Marx's method forms the core of his approach, but that due attention must be paid to new developments in the social world since Marx's time (pp. 102) and to the insights of what Lefebvre calls the specialised disciplines of the social sciences (pp. 103).

⁹⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 105–11. Reductionism is linked to the fragmented approach of the 'specialised disciplines,' and Lefebvre calls for a unitary theorisation of space. For Lefebvre, a dialectical unity of time and space accords with this call.

broadening in scope until Lefebvre arrives at the crucial role of historical and dialectical materialism for comprehending the spatial history of space as such.⁹¹ The question of method, then, is central to Lefebvre's argument in this chapter – so much so that it is here that he proceeds to dwell on the limitations and lessons of linguistic and semiotic methods for the critique of space.⁹² In the closing sections of the chapter, Lefebvre addresses a further set of methodological themes that had long preoccupied him but which he now turns to the critique of space: the questions of form, function, and structure; scale, level, and dimension; and domination and appropriation.⁹³ The methodological emphasis in the chapter, then, plays a crucial coordinating role within Lefebvre's larger argument in the book just in so far as it sets out the basic theoretical tools and ambit for the spatial history of space *qua* space.

The highly compressed exegesis in the preceding paragraph is significant to the argument of this thesis because it stresses how Lefebvre's method of spatial history plays a fundamental role within his argument. The significance that I am alluding to will recur in Chapter Two, where I will show that the limits to Lefebvre's account of space originate not in his method but

⁹¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 111–30. A central part of Lefebvre's argument here is the general significance of (spatial) history (especially: 110–111, 116–118, 128–130). In addition, he surveys a range of alternative but limited approaches to the history of space: specifically, Heidegger (pp. 120–122); the Bauhaus, (pp. 123–126); Gideon and Zevi (pp. 126–127). The opaque tenth section of the chapter (pp. 130) is best understood in this context as a compressed survey of philosophical ideas about 'time in space,' all of which fail to comprehend the contradictions of the time–space relation.

⁹² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 130–47. It is in these pages that Lefebvre's rejection of the linguistic method of 'reading space' is found, which we discussed earlier in this chapter. At the same time, however, Lefebvre is careful to maintain (1) that the readability of space can be made possible under specific historic conditions and (2), drawing on Nietzsche, that the *metaphorisation* and *metonymisation* of space can be integral elements of the production of space – but that this is distinct from the transparency implied by the 'reading' of space (pp. 138–140).

⁹³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 147–68. See Volume II of *The Critique of Everyday Life* for analyses of each of these themes for the purposes of the eponymous subject.

in his subjective position. For now, let's turn to the task of extracting lessons from the method underpinning Lefebvre's project of spatial history. As I have indicated, Lefebvre called this the 'regressive–progressive method.' The first chapter of *The Production of Space* (1974) concludes with a brief statement of this method, although this was in fact the third statement of his method: the previous statement appears in *The Urban Revolution* (1970) and its first appearance was in a 1953 article on rural sociology. There, he outlined three key moments of the regressive–progressive method:

“a) Descriptive. Observation, but with an eye informed by experience and by a general theory. In the foreground: participant observation in the field. Careful use of survey techniques (interviews, questionnaires, statistics).

b) Analytico-regressive. Analysis of reality as described. Attempt to give it a precise date (so as not to be limited to an account turning on undated 'archaisms' that are not compared one with another).

c) Historico-genetic. Studies of changes in this or that previously dated structure, by further (internal or external) development and by its subordination to overall structures. Attempt to reach a genetic classification of formations and structures, in the framework of the overall structure. Thus an attempt to return to the contemporary as previously described, in order to rediscover the present, but as elucidated, understood: explained.”⁹⁴

The three moments of the method – descriptive, analytic, genetic – enable us to shift between synchronic and diachronic analysis, between historical genesis and formal crystallisation.⁹⁵ The connective tissue across these three

⁹⁴ Lefebvre, *On the Rural*, 69.

⁹⁵ Lefebvre, *On the Rural*, 61–62. Lefebvre refers to 'horizontal' and 'vertical' complexity.

moments is the critical focus on the total array of social forms, functions, and structures present within the space under examination. As a method, it is not intended to be mobilised in the mode of a sequential experiment design but as a systematic orientation towards the critique of a space. Lefebvre makes this clearer in *The Urban Revolution*. He explains that “it may appear that I have been describing and analyzing the genesis of the city as object and its modifications and transformations” but that his “initial concern has been with a virtual object.”⁹⁶ The complete urbanisation of society is this virtual object – a condition that Lefebvre argued was coming into being.⁹⁷ (This hypothesis has recently been taken up within planetary urbanization theory.)⁹⁸ Only with the emergence of this virtual object, Lefebvre argues, is it possible to shed new light on the history of urban space.

“With the arrival of time and historicity, our awareness is able to grasp two opposing movements: regressive (from the virtual to the actual, the actual to the past) and progressive (from the obsolete and completed to the movement that anticipates that completeness, that presages and brings into being something new).”⁹⁹

The meaning of ‘regressive’ and ‘progressive’ refers to a conceptual dynamic between the ‘virtual’ (*viz.* future), ‘actual’ (*viz.* present), and the ‘past’ (*viz.* past) where every moment mutually conditions the others. There

⁹⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 23. The concept of a virtual object is elaborated in 1961 in: Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: The One-Volume Edition*, 411–12.

⁹⁷ Lefebvre’s most provocative version of this statement can be found here: Henri Lefebvre, ‘Dissolving City, Planetary Metamorphosis’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32, no. 2 (1 April 2014): 203–5.

⁹⁸ See: Wachsmuth and Brenner, ‘Introduction to Henri Lefebvre’s “Dissolving City, Planetary Metamorphosis”’; Neil Brenner, ‘Urban Theory without an Outside’, in *Implosions/Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization* (Berlin: JOVIS, 2014); Brenner and Schmid, ‘Towards a New Epistemology of the Urban?’; Brenner, *New Urban Spaces*.

⁹⁹ Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 23–24.

are key resonances with his analysis in *Metaphilosophy* of the historic role of *residues*. Lefebvre claims that “every activity that becomes autonomized tends to constitute itself into a system, a ‘world.’ In this way, it constitutes, expels and defines a ‘residue.’” Some examples will help clarify this claim. Language, as a system of grammar, syntax, etc., organises relations between signifiers and signified, necessarily leaving a *residue* in the form of speech, gestures, and linguistic chaos.¹⁰⁰ Abstract space is totalising, homogenising, and reductive – yes – but necessarily incomplete, necessitating a residue: differential space.

Lefebvre wants to have his cake and eat it too: “In a sense, up to a certain point, all is total or becomes so, or seeks to become so... In a sense, too, nothing is total. Nothing exhausts the totality. By placing itself within a particular entity (state, philosophy, mathematics, etc.), a residue is displayed, which becomes essential.”¹⁰¹ Crucially, every new systematisation must confront the past terrain of totality: incorporating old residues and expelling new ones. Let me reiterate this in the terms of the regressive-progressive method provided in *The Urban Revolution*. Every system presupposes a ‘virtual’ object, where its totalising project is complete; every system produces an ‘actual’ object, with its corresponding residues; every system proceeds from a ‘past’ object, with its own presuppositions and productions. Much the same argument is delivered by *The Survival of Capitalism*, where the term ‘survival’ denotes both the ongoing reproduction of capitalism as well as the ‘survivals’ (read: residues) of social relations (capitalist or not). The result is a conception of capitalist society as an open and fragmented totality: where the projects and logics of power presuppose

¹⁰⁰ Lefebvre, *Metaphilosophy*, 247–48. This view on the irreducible ‘residue’ of language characterises Lefebvre’s repeated critiques of formal linguistic analysis esp. linguistic structuralism.

¹⁰¹ Lefebvre, *Metaphilosophy*, 323.

both their virtual completion but their actual incompleteness.¹⁰²

In part, this thesis' original contribution to the critique of settler space rests on this concept of residues. This concept is crucial for the critique of settler space because (i) the residualised histories of dispossession are 'expelled' from the production of settler space but can never be wholly eliminated and (ii) settler interventions in the production of settler space often reformulate its own residues in service of new projects.

The strength of Lefebvre's method here is not only in how it can trace the links between the two routes for conceptualising concrete abstractions. Rather, the regressive–progressive method has critical power by highlighting the internal relation between the emergence of these concrete abstractions and the possibilities for their revolutionary dissolution. As Lefebvre puts it: "The concept of labour went together with the preconditions for non-labour. In an analogous manner, it is in their current dissolution that we grasp what the town and the city were."¹⁰³ Conditions of existence imply conditions of dissolution. From another angle: "Every system leaves a residue that escapes it, resists it, and from where an effective (practical) resistance can take off."¹⁰⁴ A contrast might be drawn to the critical theory of Nancy Fraser, which draws on non-capitalist spheres of life as contested normative spaces from which resistance might spring forth.¹⁰⁵ However, as Chris O'Kane argues, Fraser's social ontology emerges from Habermasian divisions between social spheres (with the state as referee) rather than perceiving how "all of these spheres are inherent to the contradictory crisis-ridden process

¹⁰² For more on the open and fragmented totality within the arc of Lefebvre's oeuvre, and in contrast to Lukács, see: Scanlan, 'From Lukács' Philosophy of Praxis to Lefebvre's Metaphilosophy of Everyday Life'.

¹⁰³ Lefebvre, *Metaphilosophy*, 44.

¹⁰⁴ Lefebvre, *Metaphilosophy*, 299.

¹⁰⁵ Nancy Fraser, *Cannibal Capitalism: How Our System Is Devouring Democracy, Care, and the Planet and What We Can Do about It* (Verso Books, 2022).

of capital accumulation and reproduction.”¹⁰⁶ Fraser’s non-capitalist spheres and norms might be likened to Lefebvre’s residues but the comparison falls short. In line with O’Kane’s account of critical theory, such residues ought to be regarded as internally related and reproduced within the social totality. For Lefebvre, then, the analysis of concrete abstractions through the regressive–progressive method is not merely a function of theory but plays a crucial role in highlighting the possibilities of social transformation. As Stuart Elden highlights, the regressive–progressive method “allow[s] us to explore the possible, that is both a historical analysis of the conditions of possibility for the present and a revolutionary, progressive analysis that opens us to the future, to the possible.”¹⁰⁷

As should be abundantly clear, the regressive–progressive method is a quintessential Marxist method. Andy Merrifield, for example, also connects Lefebvre’s “epistemological shift” in his critique of space to Marx’s “quantum leap” in his critique of political economy, though my work advances on these claims by characterising the regressive–progressive method in terms of the twin routes for conceptualising concrete abstractions.¹⁰⁸ Lefebvre’s characteristic idiosyncrasy and theoretical eclecticism can lead to incorrect impressions of his method, however. For instance, his conceptualisation of time and ruptures owes a debt to Nietzsche, but this attention on historic ruptures can wrongly lead to the impression that his analytic focus was shifting ‘away’ from the production relations of class and capital.¹⁰⁹ Elisa

¹⁰⁶ Chris O’Kane, ‘Critical Theory and the Critique of Capitalism: An Immanent Critique of Nancy Fraser’s “Systematic” “Crisis-Critique” of Capitalism as an “Institutionalized Social Order”’, *Science & Society* 85, no. 2 (1 April 2021): 228.

¹⁰⁷ Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, 39. On the following page, Elden notes that Lefebvre’s understanding of Marxian concrete abstractions has a praxical orientation as well.

¹⁰⁸ Andy Merrifield, *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 106.

¹⁰⁹ Indicative of Lefebvre’s approach to Nietzsche is his admonishment that his analysis is “not a matter of bringing Nietzschean thought into the concepts of Marxist thought or attempting an eclecticism condemned in advance.” Lefebvre, *Metaphilosophy*, 122. For more on Lefebvre’s relation to Nietzsche, see: Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, 73–76.

Bertuzzo, for example, suggests that Lefebvre “detached himself from historical materialism’s focus on the issue of the class-determined production of social order” and that this detachment led him to develop the regressive–progressive method.¹¹⁰ Contrary to this reading, Fraya Frehse’s makes clear that the original “Perspectives” article was situated between an earlier paper that drew on Lenin’s theory of uneven development and the later paper that examined ground-rent.¹¹¹ (The following chapter of this thesis traces this context in order to develop a critical appraisal of the limits to Lefebvre.) Given that Lefebvre was a card-carrying member of the PCF during these years – and his commitments to socialist thought did not decline after his expulsion – the Marxist overtures of the regressive–progressive method should not be surprising. That he expanded his critical sight to include wider residues of the capitalist social totality does not entail he eliminated the central organising role of capitalist social relations.

Indeed, in *A Search for a Method*, Jean–Paul Sartre gave a glowing testament to the earliest 1953 statement of the regressive–progressive method: “We have nothing to add to this passage, so clear and so rich,” adding that his “only regret [is] that Lefebvre has not found imitators among the rest of Marxist intellectuals.”¹¹² Stuart Elden suggests that Lefebvre “was reluctant to accept credit for this, and his response to Sartre was dismissive.”¹¹³ Indeed, in reply to Sartre, Lefebvre pointed out his debt to

¹¹⁰ Elisa T. Bertuzzo, ‘During the Urban Revolution – Conjunctures on the Streets of Dhaka’, in *Urban Revolution Now: Henri Lefebvre in Social Research and Architecture*, ed. Christian Schmid, Łukasz Stanek, and Ákos Moravánszky (Burlington: Ashgate Pub, 2014), 53.

¹¹¹ Fraya Frehse, ‘For Difference “in and through” Sao Paulo: The Regressive-Progressive Method’, in *Urban Revolution Now: Henri Lefebvre in Social Research and Architecture*, ed. Christian Schmid, Łukasz Stanek, and Ákos Moravánszky (Burlington: Ashgate Pub, 2014), 245–46.

¹¹² Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Search for a Method*, trans. Hazel E Barnes (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1963), 52, fn 8.

¹¹³ Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, 38. See, also: Elden and Morton, ‘From the Rural to the Urban and the Production of Space’, xviii.

Marx's account of concrete abstractions.¹¹⁴ Lefebvre had a critical relationship with Sartre, although here he reserved ire for third-party commentators who attributed the regressive–progressive method as Sartre's original contribution.¹¹⁵ In this connexion, Lefebvre suggests that “what is involved here is actually the trajectory of Marxist thought itself.”¹¹⁶ This trajectory is the ‘search for a method’ that escapes the double binds of reductive determinism and abstract universalism through a return to Marx's method of conceptual abstraction through historical inquiry.¹¹⁷ As such, this methodological tradition helps navigate this thesis between difference and abstraction, between seeing space like capital and seeing space like difference. However, the application of this method must adequately grapple with the historically and geographically specific conditions of the settler production of space if we are to offer an adequate critique of settler spatial history, as this thesis aims to do.

Conclusion

What I have traced through this chapter is the potential for an avowedly Marxist method for the project of spatial history: a Goldilocks method, which is neither too encompassing nor too differentiating. As with McMichael, it is *incorporating*, defined by its attention to the internal relations of space and driven by the need to critique the origins of space so that we might chart a path forward.¹¹⁸ My objective in this thesis is to critique the spatial history of

¹¹⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 65–67.

¹¹⁵ For more on Lefebvre and Sartre's relationship in the context of this method, see: Michael Kelly, ‘Towards a Heuristic Method: Sartre and Lefebvre’, *Sartre Studies International* 5, no. 1 (1999): 1–15.

¹¹⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 66, fn 37.

¹¹⁷ Sartre, *The Search for a Method*.

¹¹⁸ McMichael, ‘Incorporating Comparison within a World-Historical Perspective’; McMichael, ‘Incorporating Comparison in Ontological Encounters’.

settler space: how the space of Sydney was produced and reproduced throughout the nineteenth century. Necessary to that task is a conceptual reconstruction of the project of spatial history.

I have defended, in the first section, a conception of this project that is founded on treating the social world as an open totality and, in the second section, an approach to this project that rejects the immediate enclosure of social relations within linguistic or cartographic acts. If such enclosures take place – and by no means do I deny that they do – they take place *mediately* i.e. through a specific arrangement of social relations and structures that involve a definite production of space. Such a perspective develops from my views on open totality: the irony, here, is that some settler-colonial critiques, as with Paul Carter, too readily close the loop between settler intentionality and the spaces they produce *despite* parallel criticisms of other heterodox thinkers as reductive or totalising. This builds on my critique of formalism and the resultant structural inevitability of some settler-colonial accounts from the Introduction. The third section then offers my route beyond these issues: Lefebvre's regressive–progressive method. My account is grounded within his wider thought in order to illuminate how this method is substantively integrated within his oeuvre, especially within *The Production of Space*. What we gain from our search for a method is an approach capable of unpicking the thorny web of settler spatial history, one defined by its philosophy of internal relations and conception of open totality. Such an approach delivers on the task of this thesis to contribute to the critique of settler space.

What we miss, however, is a sense of its limits. It is to this issue that we turn in the next chapter.

Chapter Two: The limits to Lefebvre

Lefebvre was marked as much by his parochial method of thought as he was by his commitment to an open and fragmented conception of totality. The rich material upon which he built his thought was mined from the tradition of European history and philosophy, with a special emphasis on the French debates that he was immersed within. Consequently, a healthy dose of suspicion is a sound starting point for drawing out the implications of his ideas into scenarios that he was less accustomed to. At the same time, however, Lefebvre saw himself as engaged in a critique of the tradition of philosophical and conceptual inquiry that he was embedded within. Indeed, his basic commitment was to “the idea of a *radical critique*” – which he inherited from both philosophy generally and Marxism specifically, and which he then aimed to turn back upon philosophy.¹ The aim of his project of metaphilosophy was not to replace an existing system with a renewed structure, grounded on novel principles, but instead was oriented towards “seeking the meaning, the content, the limits of concepts, that is to say, their conditions of validity.”² Put differently, the ‘limits’ to philosophy have a special meaning: the domain within which they possess validity, which Lefebvre finds within the relations of everyday life. Part of what this chapter does is a telescoped version of this critique, applied back upon Lefebvre, to discuss the limits to Lefebvre: the conditions of validity embedded within his account of spatial history. The polemic question is: Did the Frenchman tell us a Frenchman’s story? The answer, Lefebvre might say: Yes, and no.

The main task for this chapter, however, is to offer some theoretical guideposts for the critique of settler spatial history that this thesis aims to

¹ Lefebvre, *Metaphilosophy*, 101.

² Lefebvre, *Metaphilosophy*, 102.

deliver. As I indicated in Chapter One, this task is framed by a perspective on totality as open and fragmented. Thus, we must ask how these limits to Lefebvre strengthen our ability to evaluate the production of settler spaces. To what extent do these conditions of validity emerge within settler spatial history? How are they transmuted, and what are the implications of such mutations? What differences might there be which reroute the production of space?

I therefore pick up from the critiques of dispossession and primitive accumulation offered by Indigenous scholars and settler-colonial studies. The dispossession of First Nations lands and colonization by settlers is the basic historical feature that defines settler-colonial societies. In particular, I examine how these critiques draw upon Marxist theories of primitive accumulation as a means to explain Indigenous dispossession and its implications. These critics maintain that settler primitive accumulation differs from the historic primitive accumulation of Europe to the extent that the enclosure of the land was not accompanied by the proletarianisation of the dispossessed. I take this to be an essential starting place for the critique of settler spatial history but offer some complicating wrinkles to the standard settler-colonial accounts. First, the binary between land and labour is overstated. Second, we need an account of property formation within settler spaces – which a theory of ground-rent attuned to settler conditions can deliver.

This motivates the turn, in the second section, to Marx's theory of ground-rent and Lefebvre's uptake of that theory in the 1950s, in the midst of his research in rural sociology. Accompanying the regressive–progressive method, discussed in Chapter One, his other major theoretical resource was the Marxist-Leninist theory of ground-rent. It was this theory which he saw as capable of explaining the rural social world. If the regressive–progressive method demanded a dialectical relation between space and history, the theory

of ground-rent described that relation within rural society, or at least was an illuminating route into it. I therefore explain Marx's theory and the ways that Lefebvre took up the theory. This provides a theoretical basis for my later account of the process of property formation in settler Australia, from Chapter Three onwards. At the same time, however, I examine the limits to ground-rent, and Lefebvre's account of it, that emerge with the contrast to settler space. In brief, our theory of ground-rent needs to start from the historic process of Indigenous dispossession. An account of the social relations of landed property is, I think, indispensable for understanding the formation of private property in land within settler spaces, yet it is missing from many contemporary accounts of settler-colonialism.

The final section of this chapter moves forward to a critical reproduction of Lefebvre's spatial history in *The Production of Space*. I examine how he narrates the origins of abstract space from absolute space. The limits of this concept – its conditions of validity – are brought into focus, so that we might learn from them for the critique of settler space. This section works, too, as a practical example of Lefebvre's regressive–progressive method, as discussed in the previous chapter. I show how Lefebvre depends on a Western European history of space for his project of spatial history, and how his prior work on the rural informs his theory of the production of space. I indicate how the landed property and the town–country relation is sustained throughout this spatial history, reinforcing the turn to ground-rent theory.

Crucially, this argument advances one of the original contributions of this thesis, which is to develop an account of abstract settler space, which provides novel conceptual resources for the critique of space writ large as well as within the spatial history of settler spaces. The project that Lefebvre embarked on was aimed at developing a unitary theory of space: neither (i) taking settler society to be the mere interpellation of European capitalist social relations into another space nor (ii) taking it to have a radical and

separate constitution. Building on these insights, this thesis contributes to the task of comprehending and criticizing abstract (settler) space as a historically and geographically variable formation.

2.1 Dispossession, primitive accumulation, and settler property

The outcome of dispossession, naturally, was property. After all, settlers today control the vast majority of Indigenous lands through either private property or state ownership, with forms of native title construed within the ‘possessive logic’ of property rights.³ In the Australian context, the contemporary distribution of landholding is inherited from the stunning avarice for land that characterised the nineteenth century, with recent data indicating that 19 of the top 25 largest *global* landowners are Australian enterprises.⁴ Amongst these is the Australian Agricultural Company, founded in 1824 as the first corporate enterprise for agrarian and minerals production in the colony of New South Wales.⁵ For Aileen Moreton-Robinson, the white possessive logics that underpin this settler domination of Indigenous land are counterposed to the Indigenous ontological relationship to the land, where their title to the land consists in an embodied relationship with the land.⁶ As Tuck and Yang point out, the significance of land “is both because the settlers make Indigenous land their new home and source of capital, and also because the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence.”⁷ The contemporary form of

³ Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

⁴ Madison Trust Company, ‘The World’s Largest Landowners’, accessed 28 November 2023.

⁵ Matthew Ryan, “‘Our Land Abounds in Nature’s Gifts’: Commodity Frontiers, Australian Capitalism, and Socioecological Crisis’ (Thesis, Sydney, University of Sydney, February 2023).

⁶ Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*, 11–13.

⁷ Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang, ‘Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor’, *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society 1, no. 1

property as fragmented yet homogeneous lots of abstract space expresses an “ontological separation between space and those who possess it” which Naama Blatman-Thomas and Libby Porter argue enables property to be “continuously enrolled as an object or as a form of redress that in turn maintain settler dominance over dispossessed lands.”⁸ Not only are contemporary settler societies marked by a radical transformation of the distribution of the land but the social relations of landed property are grounded on very different premises. The making of property through dispossession has dramatic implications for the production of settler spaces and, thus, for the project of spatial history that this thesis embarks upon.

In the imperial heartland, historical dispossession is typically regarded in terms of the expropriation of the direct producers from common lands and their consequent release from the reciprocal bonds and duties of feudal tenure into the formal freedom of the wages-system. Settler-colonial studies departs from this usual story by pointing out that the dispossession of First Nations was not followed by or premised on their subsequent proletarianisation. Patrick Wolfe puts this directly: “settler colonies were not primarily established to extract surplus value from indigenous labour. Rather, they are premised on displacing indigenes from (or replacing them on) the land.”⁹ Consequently, settler-colonialism is governed by a “logic of elimination,” which at times manifests as a genocidal tendency, but “in its specificity to settler colonialism, is premised on the securing—the obtaining and the maintaining—of territory. This logic certainly requires the elimination of the owners of that territory, but not in any particular way.”¹⁰ Put differently, the elimination of the native is the precondition for settler

(2012): 5.

⁸ Blatman-Thomas and Porter, ‘Placing Property’, 39, 42.

⁹ Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, 1.

¹⁰ Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, 402.

ownership and their use and improvement of the land. As we will see, especially in Chapters Three and Four, these three terms – elimination of the native, settler property, and improvement of the land – are closely related within the spatial history of Sydney. Lorenzo Veracini develops these propositions into a sharp distinction between colonialism and settler-colonialism, arguing that “colonialism reproduces itself, and the freedom and equality of the colonised is forever postponed; settler colonialism, by contrast, extinguishes itself.”¹¹ Colonialism reproduces itself because it is a condition of domination (with or without hegemony) of the colonised population – while settler-colonialism is aimed at the annulment of the settler-Indigenous relation.¹² For Veracini, the difference between colonialism and settler-colonialism is not mere “conceptual distinction” but a “dialectical opposition”: “colonial and settler colonial forms should not only be seen as separate but also construed as antithetical.”¹³ Thus, Veracini concludes, settler-colonialism is not colonialism – and neither are its processes of dispossession akin to those found in the origins of capitalism in Western Europe.

A number of questions and issues are buried within these claims, which we will need to sort through in order to develop a critique of settler spatial history. How should we characterise dispossession under settler-colonial conditions? What relationship does it bear to accounts of primitive accumulation? What are the implications of this process upon the formation of private property in land? Lastly, how can this discussion then offer insights to guide the critique of settler spatial history pursued in later chapters?

The critique of dispossession contains an apparent paradox, sometimes

¹¹ Veracini, ‘Introducing’, 3.

¹² Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, Convergences. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

¹³ Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), 11–12.

levelled at Indigenous lands rights activists. As Robert Nichols points out, dispossession basically refers to an act of theft yet, in so doing, it seemingly presumes a system of property rights.¹⁴ Since First Nations activists often regard their claims for land as antithetical to the settler system of property rights, the critique of dispossession apparently runs at odds with the critique of property. How can you at once denounce the system of private property and declare that First Nations were dispossessed (of their property)? Note, however, that Nichols' paradox vanishes for Indigenous activists and scholars who assert an alternate ontology for Indigenous relations of ownership and sovereignty.¹⁵ The usefulness, however, of this seeming puzzle is in how it lets Nichols illustrate the character of settler-colonial dispossession. He proposes that it is "a process in which new proprietary relations are generated but under structural conditions that demand their simultaneous negation."¹⁶ The settlers came to the land; they saw the land as property; they conquered the land as 'always' their own. The dispossessed find themselves as retroactively specified as owners, yet at the same time *denied as such*, leading Nichols to call this process 'recursive dispossession.' Embedded within this recursive logic of dispossession is the self-erasing dynamic commonly found within settler-colonies: the erasure of prior habitation, often accompanied by an imagined history of the settlers. Drawing on Glen Coulthard, the outflow of this logic into wider social relations can then be regarded as 'structured dispossession.' For Coulthard, settler formations of power are "structured into a relatively secure or sedimented set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the dispossession of

¹⁴ Nichols, *Theft Is Property!*, 6.

¹⁵ Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*; Tuck and Yang, 'Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor'.

¹⁶ Nichols, *Theft Is Property!*, 8.

Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority.”¹⁷ This provides the background for his main critique of how, in contemporary settler societies, these processes manifest within a liberal politics of recognition.¹⁸ Gathered together, these lines of argument depict how dispossession is an ongoing structuring condition for settler-colonial spaces – or, as Patrick Wolfe memorably put it, how “invasion is a structure not an event.”¹⁹

Both Nichols and Coulthard develop their accounts of dispossession through a critique of Marx’s concept of primitive accumulation. Appearing at the close of *Capital Volume I*, the chapters on “so-called primitive accumulation” trace the “historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production” and thus indicate “the pre-history of capital.”²⁰ Marx objects to an idyllic story of effort and thrift dividing the haves from the have-nots: instead, by violence capital is born “dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt.”²¹ In brief, primitive accumulation concerns the violent dispossession of the many by the few. But Marx is equally concerned with how it relates to the transformation of social relations (to wit, the rise of capitalism). Though there are substantial debates over the interpretation of primitive accumulation, it has periodically resurged as a necessary ongoing basis for capitalism. Two-thirds of Rosa Luxemburg’s *The Accumulation of Capital* is devoted to explaining a structural deficiency within Marx’s schema of the expanded reproduction of capital, which leads her to conclude that ongoing primitive accumulation is necessary to capitalism.²² David Harvey, in similar vein, proposes the impressively gymnastic concept

¹⁷ Coulthard, *Indigenous Americas*, 7.

¹⁸ Coulthard, *Indigenous Americas*.

¹⁹ Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, 388.

²⁰ Marx, *Capital*, 875.

²¹ Marx, *Capital*, 926.

²² Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, trans. Agnes Schwarzschild (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963).

of accumulation by dispossession.²³ Part of the attraction, no doubt, is the promise of primitive accumulation to go beyond the capital-labour relation – in the present context, to explain Indigenous dispossession. Yet the use of primitive accumulation to understand settler spaces is not an unproblematic task.

For Coulthard, the concept of primitive accumulation places an undue emphasis on proletarianisation over dispossession and, consequently, on capitalist domination over colonial domination.²⁴ After all, if settler colonies are distinguished by a logic of eliminating rather than proletarianising Indigenous peoples, then the solid nexus of expropriation and exploitation invoked by Marx melts into air. As Coulthard puts it, in the Canadian case, “the history and experience of dispossession, not proletarianization, has been the dominant background structure shaping the character of the historical relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state.”²⁵ Consequently, the adaptation of Marx’s ideas can be “accomplished by *contextually shifting* our investigation from an emphasis on the *capital relation* to the *colonial relation*.”²⁶ Nichols follows this line of argument by seeking to disaggregate primitive accumulation into its component elements.²⁷ Rather than assuming the package deal that Marx found in Western Europe is guaranteed elsewhere, Nichols prefers “an analysis that contemplates alternative possible relations between these elements.”²⁸ In part, this is because Indigenous dispossession takes place in the context of

²³ David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

²⁴ Coulthard, *Indigenous Americas*, 10–13.

²⁵ Coulthard, *Indigenous Americas*, 13.

²⁶ Coulthard, *Indigenous Americas*, 10.

²⁷ Robert Nichols, ‘Disaggregating Primitive Accumulation’, *Radical Philosophy*, no. 194 (2015).

²⁸ Nichols, *Theft Is Property!*, 70. Nichols lists dispossession, proletarianisation, market formation, and the separation of industry and agriculture; but note that these features are drawn from Luxemburg’s account of ‘the struggle against the natural economy’ and not from Marx. See: Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, 349–50.

already-existing capitalist societies at the other end of the imperial chain of power, rather than being concerned with “the strange alchemy of capital’s emergence out of noncapital.”²⁹ Taking a step further, the bundling of proletarianisation and dispossession together within the concept of primitive accumulation leads Nichols to accuse Marx of a functional account of dispossession:

“The enclosures of the commons and the clearing of the land are undertaken in order that a labor market will emerge. This formulation is, however, vulnerable to the same criticisms Marx lodged against the traditional political economists. Proletarianization cannot be the motivational impetus behind the enclosure of the commons since this would, again, presume the very context it is meant to explain. Marx comes close to committing this error at times because he does not always clearly differentiate between functional and explanatory accounts.”³⁰

Let’s take stock of these ideas. The usefulness of the above discussion of primitive accumulation is this: it starkly indicates the differences of settler-colonial societies from the heart of Europe. Dispossession without proletarianisation is the ground that grew the logic of elimination. From recursive dispossession was property made, and so flowed the settler’s structural domination of land.³¹ The ontological premises of private property conflict with the enduring ontological relationships to the land of the First Nations, entailing a perpetual disavowal of Indigenous presence and history which is sometimes sublated into liberal forms of recognition.³² Settler-

²⁹ Nichols, *Theft Is Property!*, 69.

³⁰ Nichols, *Theft Is Property!*, 72–73.

³¹ Nichols, *Theft Is Property!*; Coulthard, *Indigenous Americas*.

³² Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*; Tuck and Yang, ‘Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor’; Coulthard, *Indigenous Americas*.

colonialism is about land, not labour; expropriation, not exploitation. In a parallel line of argument, this division between social spheres (esp. exploitation and expropriation) has been advanced by Nancy Fraser as part of a project to provide an 'expanded conception of capitalism,' which shares the motivation to account for differential conditions of social formations.³³

Yet a set of recent interventions have troubled this conception of settler societies. Taken together, they undermine the land-labour distinction that Wolfe and Veracini use to divide colonialism and settler-colonialism. Desiree Poets shows that in Brazil the settler-colonial logic of elimination is present without the land-labour binary.³⁴ With respect to Argentina, Lucy Taylor argues along similar lines, suggesting that the binaries of settler-colonial studies depend on their theoretical-geographical origins within developed Anglophone nations.³⁵ Kai Herzog situates the coercion of unfree labour in 19th century Namibia-Cape Colony border region as a critical element of the broader formation of settler-colonialism in the region.³⁶ Sai Englert, meanwhile, reinstates the usual concept of primitive accumulation within settler-colonial studies by arguing that the concept of accumulation by dispossession allows a theoretically nuanced account of the specific formations of settler-colonial relations with Indigenous land and Indigenous labour.³⁷ Rather than seeing land-labour or expropriation-exploitation as *binaries*, these interventions use them as flexible indexes for examining

³³ For a critique of the conceptual structure underpinning Fraser's account, see Chris O'Kane's response. Fraser, *Cannibal Capitalism*; O'Kane, 'Critical Theory and the Critique of Capitalism'.

³⁴ Desiree Poets, 'Settler Colonialism and/in (Urban) Brazil: Black and Indigenous Resistances to the Logic of Elimination', *Settler Colonial Studies* 11, no. 3 (2021): 271-91.

³⁵ Lucy Taylor, 'Four Foundations of Settler Colonial Theory: Four Insights from Argentina', *Settler Colonial Studies* 11, no. 3 (2021): 344-65.

³⁶ Kai F. Herzog, 'Violence and Work: Convict Labour and Settler Colonialism in the Cape-Namibia Border Region (c.1855-1903)', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 47, no. 1 (2 January 2021): 17-36.

³⁷ Sai Englert, 'Settlers, Workers, and the Logic of Accumulation by Dispossession', *Antipode* 52, no. 6 (2020): 1647-66.

(settler) colonies.

I began this section by saying that the natural outcome of dispossession was property. This is, of course, as distant from the truth as dispossession was from private property. Quite a lot of capitalist and settler society gets in the way before our more-or-less fully fledged system of private property emerges, with its fragmented yet homogenised allotments of abstract space. The same distance in fact characterises Marx's account of the relationship between dispossession and proletarianisation. This is rather different from the putatively functionalist and circular account of capital acting, all at once, to dispossess the peasants, turn them into workers, and produce itself. Marx details in Chapter 27 how the expropriation of the commons was conducted by the landed aristocracy, assisted by the devices of Parliament.³⁸ Only in Chapter 29 does he turn to 'the genesis of the capitalist farmer,' noting that "the question remains: where did the capitalists spring from? For the only class created directly by the expropriation of the agricultural population is that of the great landed proprietors."³⁹ The capitalist farmer wormed their way within the dissolution of the old feudal tenures, Marx explains, coming to dominate both landed property and the worker. William Clare Roberts draws out this historical narrative at length, concluding that:

"Despite the prevalence of this reading, the story told by chapters twenty-six through thirty is not one of capitalists originally amassing capital via plunder, and then switching over to the exploitation of labor power once they had monopolized the means of production. Rather, it is the story of landlords amassing land through plunder, thereby creating at the same time the modern proletariat, and of capitalists cropping up in between these two

³⁸ Marx, *Capital*, chap. 27.

³⁹ Marx, *Capital*, 905.

classes and rising to dominate both of them through the exploitation of the newly available labor power. Primitive accumulation ‘incorporated the soil into capital,’ not by making the capitalist the owner of the soil, but by making the owner of the soil, the landlord, dependent, for the cultivation or other utilization of the soil, upon the mediation provided by the capitalist.”⁴⁰

This suggests a crucial point for the argument of this thesis. Primitive accumulation is not simply about the capital relation – seen as the relationship between workers and capitalists – but about the other capital relation – between landed property and capital. The story of primitive accumulation, then, is usefully augmented by a story of landed property. As we will see in the next section, Lefebvre’s deployment of Marx’s ground-rent theory did so with the insistence upon the capitalist trinity of labour, capital, *and land*. Thus, if we are to shift to the colonial relation, we are not well served by wholly setting aside the capital relation – either one of them! My general view is that Marx’s account of primitive accumulation is useful in its methodological instincts, even if the historical details are not adequate to settler spaces. For instance, when Marx turns to his infamous discussion of the Australian settler-colony, his argument glosses over the actually existing social relations. The argument concentrates on Wakefield’s theory of systematic colonisation, where the price of land in the Australian settler-colony was set high enough to bar the free labourer from purchasing land and thus escaping the wage-system. Even Roberts follows Marx in characterising this in the same terms as primitive accumulation within the imperial heartland: the expropriation of the land from the direct producers. Yet, during the period that Wakefield-style policies were introduced, the vast

⁴⁰ William Clare Roberts, *Marx’s Inferno* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 205.

majority of settler workers were already landless, barring a few pockets of emancipated convicts who had not sold and poor workers who had managed to buy. Rather than a restorative measure on the part of capital, the Wakefieldian system had prevention as its aim. Marx is concerned primarily to indicate how the Wakefieldian system exposes, baldly, the truth of exploitation he has been painstakingly developing throughout *Capital*. As Roberts himself points out, Marx wanted to rebut “the strategy of worker separatism” – the attempt to set up a worker’s paradise outside the dominion of capital. Notably, this leaves unexplained the dispossession of First Nations, the formation of landed property, and thus the character of primitive accumulation in the colony. Given these limitations, Coulthard’s call to shift from the capital to colonial relation remains a useful provocation – but only if we attend to the other capital relation.

The critique of dispossession informs my analysis of the basic structuring conditions for the production of settler space. My view is that the history of settler colonialism cries out for a theoretically attuned account of landed property and its capitalist formations – the natural supplement to accounts of primitive accumulation. The theory in question is the theory of ground-rent. As we will see in the next section, Lefebvre’s deployment of Marx’s ground-rent theory did so with the insistence upon the capitalist trinity of labour, capital, *and land*. I suggest that the flexible index of land and labour indicated by recent interventions can be married to an account of settler primitive accumulation that is attentive to the peculiar formation of landed property. In developing this insight, this thesis critically reworks the settler-colonial accounts of dispossession discussed earlier by tracing the geographical and historical shape of landed property within production of settler space.

What I am attempting to signal here is my emphasis on the concrete abstractions that underpin the production of settler space, set against a

tendency towards abstract formalism. Let me unpack this. First, *contra* Veracini's claims, above, the alleged difference between settler-colonial and colonial isn't a dialectical opposition: if anything, it's the exact inverse of a dialectical opposition! For Veracini, settler-colonialism and colonialism are antithetical opposites reified through abstract conditions of exploitation or expropriation. No matter how much he protests that colonialism and settler-colonialism overlap in the real world, his core definitions remain untethered abstractions.⁴¹ Second, the tendency to abstract formalism expressed by Veracini manifests in the conceptual throughline from Indigenous dispossession to settler property. Despite the turn to primitive accumulation in Nichols and Coulthard, the process of property formation and the role of landed property is underexamined. As we shall see across this thesis, the result is an account of dispossession and property that does not fully distinguish the abstract and formal attributes of the property system from the concrete and substantive processes that (re)produce that system. One key contribution of this thesis, then, is to tease out within settler spatial history how landed property and its formation is crucial to the production of settler spaces.

2.2 The theory of ground-rent

The capital-landed-property relation is a defining contradiction within capitalist social formations: even where landed property is subsumed within capital, it presents unique tensions. As Joe Collins points out:

“Capitalists cannot simply start investing in agricultural production. If Elon Musk suddenly decided that producing potatoes

⁴¹ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 2010, 12.

crossbred with marijuana was a good idea, he would still need to pay a landowner for access to the land to plant his new ‘baked potatoes’.”⁴²

The alternative for Musk’s baked potatoes is to dispossess some prior occupant, pay whatever dues to the state are necessary to satiate it, and enjoy the highs of profiting without renting. This is a crude simplification of settler landed property, of course, but it captures the core idea that I want to illuminate here through Marx’s theory of ground-rent.

Marx wrote to Engels in 1862, declaring that he had finally got to the bottom of “this shitty rent business.”⁴³ Here I propose only to address a few key insights and not get to the bottom – only to the middling depths – because the issues involved are complex, contentious and call for an exposition of the broader dynamics of Marx’s value theory. For my purposes, all I need show is (1) the potential for surplus profits to accrue through land and (2) the potential for distributional conflict internal to the capital–land relation. Crucially, these insights of Marx’s theory of ground-rent, especially as taken up by Lefebvre, demand an examination of the historically and geographically specific configuration of landed property. Thus, these key insights must be appropriately situated within settler conditions, which neither Marx nor Lefebvre attempt, where we need to address (1) how surplus profits originate from the dispossession of Indigenous land and (2) the ways in which its distribution shapes both ongoing dispossession and enters into the structuring conditions of settler space.

The first statements of Lefebvre’s regressive–progressive method came amidst a period of work on rural sociology, which was defined by his interest

⁴² Joe Collins, *Rent* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022), 32.

⁴³ Karl Marx, *Marx & Engels Collected Works* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), vol. 41, 380.

in Marx's theory of ground-rent. He explained that "rural sociology, by understanding [en pénétrant] sociological and historical facts in depth, finds itself confronted with economic facts and laws, and eventually with a theory of political economy: the theory of ground rent...."⁴⁴ Here we see how the historical and vertical complexity that impelled the regressive–progressive method equally drives Lefebvre towards the theory of ground-rent. As Saad-Fihlo and Fine point out, for Marx, "rent is the economic form of class relations in agriculture, and it can be understood only by examining the relationship between capital and land." Put differently, ground-rent is the means by which surplus-value is appropriated by landed property in the course of production due to its social powers over the land. Ground-rent, as the economic form of landed property, therefore, usually depends on the legal entitlements of landowners, which are responsible in part for the balance of power between capital and landed property. Marx tells us, however, that "nothing is settled with the legal power of these persons to use and misuse certain portions of the globe."⁴⁵ What matters is how these formal, *de jure* powers are enacted socially – which will be a crucial theme in Chapter Five, where I examine settler-colonial critiques of the Torrens title as an abstract form of landed property. Marx instead frames landed property in terms of a historically-specific class within capitalist society: as he puts it, "the form of landed property with which we are dealing is a specific historical form, a form transformed by the intervention of capital and the capitalist mode of production."⁴⁶ This view on landed property reinforces the argument of the previous section, where I argued the relation between capital and land is crucial for appreciating Marx's analysis of historical primitive accumulation, especially within settler spaces.

⁴⁴ Lefebvre, *On the Rural*, 105.

⁴⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume III*, trans. Ben Fowkes (Penguin Books, 1991), 753.

⁴⁶ Marx, *Capital: Vol III*, 751.

Although the capitalist form of landed property is defined by ground-rent as its abstract condition of existence, this does not on its own entail the emergence of specific concrete formations of landed property or the degree to which they successfully appropriate surplus-value. In Harvey's discussion of the complexity of the land-capital relation, he indicates that "the evident tensions in all of this admit of a variety of possible solutions."⁴⁷ In the face of such complexity, Joe Collins argues that the theory of ground-rent nevertheless "permits the investigation of not just how rent is distributed among competing interests but why this process occurs."⁴⁸ The general case made here is that landed property must be considered in terms of its historical form – although, it must be noted that shifts in its economic or legal forms have implications for its historical form. Put differently, the distribution of ground-rent and the forms of legal title imply a different structural disposition of landed property within capitalist society. In turn, this affects the production of space.

Lefebvre argues along similar lines. For him, the elaboration of a theory of ground-rent is the missing element within Marx's *Capital* to arrive at "an analysis and presentation of a concrete society, with all its various classes and social layers."⁴⁹ Lefebvre highlights how, towards the end of *Capital*, "Marx now proposed his trinity formula according to which there were three, not two, elements in the capitalist mode of production and in bourgeois society" – namely, land, capital, and labour.⁵⁰ The relationships here that govern ground-rent are complex. As a preliminary point, note that Marx and Lefebvre characterise agriculture as relatively backward sectors with lower rates of capital investment and, consequent on Marx's value theory, higher

⁴⁷ Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*, 365.

⁴⁸ Joseph L. Collins, 'Possession Vis-à-Vis Power: Rent Theory, Global Mining and Modern Landed Property in Australia 1861-2014' (PhD Thesis, Sydney, Western Sydney University, 2016), 124.

⁴⁹ Lefebvre, *On the Rural*, 123.

⁵⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 325.

rates of profit than in the industrial sectors (i.e., sector-wide surplus profits). Normally, these sector-wide surplus profits would be distributed across the economy or eroded by the movement of capital into agriculture, but this condition fails to obtain where landed property intervenes.⁵¹ Marx presents land ownership as “an alien force” to capital which constrains the “general equalisation of surplus-value to give the average profit” and thus leads to an “excess of commodity value above its prices of production, this being transformed into rent....”⁵² For clarity, the price of production is simply the cost price of a commodity plus average profits: Marx is saying here that agricultural production involves the generalised sale of goods at higher than average rates of profit, part of which – the sector-wide surplus profit – is converted into rent. The outcome is that mere possession of land desired by the capitalist enables the landlord to claim a minimum compensation, which Marx calls absolute rent – though its size is limited by wider economic conditions. As Lefebvre puts it:

“The price of production is determined by the average profit of capital, and as absolute rent does not enable the formation of this average profit, it establishes a cost or price of individual production upon the foundation of the monopoly.”⁵³

Ground-rent is not defined by absolute rent alone. To the mix must be introduced differential rent, which Marx divides into two types. Differential rent is set by variations in productivity between different lands: either through its ‘natural’ features (differential rent 1) or application of capital

⁵¹ For more, see: Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*, 61–68; Ben Fine and Alfred Saad-Fihlo, *Marx’s ‘Capital’*, 6th Edition (Pluto Press, 2016), 110–18.

⁵² Marx, *Capital: Vol III*, 896.

⁵³ Lefebvre, *On the Rural*, 134. Note, however, that absolute rent is not mere monopoly and is governed by the structure of investment within agriculture and, thus, by the relative composition of capital between agriculture and other sectors. See: Fine and Saad-Fihlo, *Marx’s ‘Capital’*, 144–47.

(differential rent 2). Unlike absolute rent, which is related to a sector-wide surplus profit, differential rent relates to the surplus profits of specific enterprises. Individual surplus profits are not unique to agriculture: some firms run more efficient techniques of production than others and thus produce more cheaply than their competitors while selling at the same market prices.⁵⁴ Within agriculture, differential rent 1 is typically understood in terms of the varying fertility in the land or distance from the market. The relative advantages of some places over others represents a surplus profit that can be extracted by landed property in the form of differential rent 1. It is important to note that the ‘natural conditions’ as such do not produce surplus profits: what matters is the pattern of social use, defined by conditions of agricultural production, and whether landed property is able to exploit the resultant productivity gradient.⁵⁵ As Lefebvre explains: “In short, the notion of the fertility of land [fertilidad de la tierra], frequently understood to be natural and absolute, is in reality relative and historical. It is relative, with regard to the particular state of the technology used, and to the productive forces.”⁵⁶

Meanwhile, differential rent 2 can be understood, at first, as the application of different quantities of capital to equal lands. This variation in techniques of production produces surplus profits, forming the basis of differential rent 2. Some of these improvements might be permanent, outlasting the lease period, and their value returns to the landowner.⁵⁷ Others are relatively transient flows of capital on the land, and thus might be taken

⁵⁴ For simplicity’s sake, we assume that all supply is absorbed by demand and no firm possesses monopoly power, in which case prevailing market prices are fixed. In other cases, surplus profits provide a buffer that enables firms to exert market power or secure increasing market share through diminishing prices.

⁵⁵ Fine and Saad-Fihlo, *Marx’s ‘Capital’*, 140.

⁵⁶ Lefebvre, *On the Rural*, 119. 9

⁵⁷ Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*, 356.

to be immune from appropriation as differential rent 2. However, Marx always views differential rent 2 in relation to differential rent 1, with the aim of understanding how “while the first is the basis of the second, [they] at the same time place limits on one another.”⁵⁸ Put differently, Marx always considers the differing application of capital to differing lands. In part, this is because the ‘best’ and ‘worst’ lands and the ‘normal’ capital investment are not exogenous or independent conditions but are jointly determined.⁵⁹ To give a simple pair of examples: land suitable for wheat might not be suitable for rice; fertilisers suitable for one soil might not suit another.⁶⁰ As a consequence, David Harvey explains that we cannot “distinguish what is due to the flow of capital and what is due to the ‘permanent’ effects of natural differences in fertility.”⁶¹ This permits the capture of transient surplus profits in the form of differential rent 2. Moreover, this means that landed property cannot invoice capital for differential rent 1 and differential rent 2 as if they were separate line items.⁶² (Similarly, absolute rent exists in relation to differential rent: Fine and Saad-Fihlo indicate how absolute rent is jointly determined with differential rent 2.⁶³) In the end, Lefebvre explains that:

“the landowner will look for a capitalist who is happy to settle for the average profit, and who will leave to the landowner the surplus profits (differential rent). In this way, private property does not create differential rent but instead transfers it from the hands of the capitalist entrepreneur to those of the landowner.”⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Marx, *Capital: Vol III*, 871.

⁵⁹ Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*, 357; Fine and Saad-Fihlo, *Marx’s ‘Capital’*, 142–43.

⁶⁰ David Harvey explains Marx’s reasoning in detail: Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*, 356–57.

⁶¹ Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*, 357.

⁶² Hypothetically, a regression analysis might be able to decompose rents into these component parts, but this would not alter the phenomenal appearance of rent as a singular price.

⁶³ See: Fine and Saad-Fihlo, *Marx’s ‘Capital’*, 145–46.

⁶⁴ Lefebvre, *On the Rural*, 127.

Together, then, the theory of absolute rent and differential rents (1 and 2) defines the distribution of surplus-value between landed property and capital. Or, rather, they define the potential basis for that distribution and its limits. In practice, landowners demand as much rent as they think they can get. The appropriation of ground-rent depends on the balance of social forces, regulated by the degree of competition (on the side of both capital and land) as well as how the state organises landed property. Whether these surplus profits are distributed to landed property in the form of ground-rent depends on the concrete formations at play – on the distributional conflict between various social interests. In the settler context, this may include the mercantile clearing houses and banks, stationed in London or Sydney, that handle the shipping of goods from settler-colony to imperial markets. As we shall see in Chapter Five, especially, this means that the wider pace of dispossession across New South Wales has great implications on the production of settler space in Sydney by dint of its spatial articulation within these imperial circuits of capital. There, I develop the concept of ‘extensive dispossession,’ where the pattern of dispossession is set in relation to the appropriation of value defined by differential rent 1.

For Lefebvre, the changing agrarian structure of the mid-century could be usefully understood through Lenin’s notion of the double monopoly. While landlords might have a monopoly over the land, capital has a monopoly over the exploitation of that land. As he puts it, there is a “monopolization of the exploitation of land as a means of production: as the object of the economy and not as the object of the right to property.”⁶⁵ With the formation of large capitalist farmers, the balance of social forces transmuted from the laissez-faire capitalist system bolted onto a vestigial system of feudal landed property. In this situation, capital is increasingly able to retain a greater

⁶⁵ Lefebvre, *On the Rural*, 125.

share of surplus profits, as for example when landed property is not distinct from capital: “When the landowner is at the same time the one who exploits the land, the rent is no more than one part of the profit [ganancias] and superprofit [superganancias].”⁶⁶ Meanwhile, at the other extreme:

“[the] peasant land holder [ejidatario] finds himself very often in the poorest conditions (mediocre plots of land, far from transport networks and markets, lacking in both capital and farming equipment, etc.), in the majority of cases he receives neither rent nor the average profit from his capital, which anyway is at best very meager and at worst nonexistent.”⁶⁷

Crucially, however, the double monopoly is presented as the confrontation of capital with a preexisting formation of landed property. In order for the appropriation of ground-rent to take place, “a monopoly of land ownership, with historically precapitalist origin, must already exist.”⁶⁸ Here we should clarify that Lefebvre does not necessarily mean that the full system of landed property itself developed, temporally, before capitalism. Rather, the ‘dating’ of landed property refers to the social relations that it expresses, as we have seen him reason within the regressive-progressive method. Notably, the idea of the double monopoly parallels Marx’s reasoning around historical primitive accumulation, discussed in the prior section, where we saw that the process of primitive accumulation resulted in the dependency of landowners “upon the mediation provided by the capitalist.”⁶⁹ The ability of landed property to extract rents depends on the generation of surplus profit by capital.

⁶⁶ Lefebvre, *On the Rural*, 128.

⁶⁷ Lefebvre, *On the Rural*, 128.

⁶⁸ Lefebvre, *On the Rural*, 127.

⁶⁹ Roberts, *Marx’s Inferno*, 205.

Let me summarise the main ideas of ground-rent as it relates to this chapter and its relevance to this thesis' critique of the production of settler (abstract) space. The land-capital relation that Marx describes, and which Lefebvre draws on, is characterised by convulsive tensions over the distribution of surplus profit. The quantity of this disputed surplus profit is historically and geographically variable, depending on wider economic conditions (including the world-market), putatively natural conditions, and the structure of capital investment on the land. The broader framework of the theory of ground-rent theory, which sits behind this summary, can be mobilised to explain the historical patterns of agrarian development – which is what drove Lefebvre's interest – but is less necessary to the particular task that this thesis is concerned with. My interest is in the exploration of the production of settler space: what are the implications of the differences in its spatial history from the European spatial history with which Lefebvre was centrally concerned? The argument at hand supports the need for a theory of ground-rent to explain the formation of settler landed property that originates in Indigenous dispossession, as indicated in the previous section. As Chapter Five and Six will argue, the theory of ground-rent can be mobilised to understand extensive and intensive dispossession or, put differently, the ways in which settler landed property appropriates surplus profits from dispossession. The upshot of this approach is that it enables a historically and geographically specific account of the production of settler spaces.

The limits of Lefebvre circumscribed the ability of his 1950s rural sociology to explain settler society, even with his account of ground-rent in hand. In the previous chapter, we saw how Sartré praised Lefebvre's regressive-progressive method. That praise opens the way for a revealing indictment of Lefebvre's treatment of rural (settler) space in the USA. Lefebvre's objective was to comprehend how transformations in rural society were integrated within the social process, as a whole, and especially within

the historic and uneven development of national and world markets: “There isn’t a peasant today, even in Africa and Asia, who has not been touched by worldwide events⁷⁰,” as Lefebvre tells us.⁷¹ Necessarily, this task requires the treatment of horizontal and vertical complexity. It was this which piqued Sartre’s interest. He highlighted how Lefebvre’s comparison of rural society in the USA and Europe hinges on the diverging history of the town–country dialectic. In Europe, urban development occurred on the basis of the development of the country. In the USA, however, the country developed on the basis of the towns. In North America, Lefebvre explains that the town–country dialectic was set by the facts of “colonisation ... and settlement on *open land*” and, specifically, the absence of “landed property of feudal origin.”⁷² Two implications emerge from this for Lefebvre. First, the nonexistence of feudal ‘fetters’ on development enabled rapid capitalist growth. Put differently, the absence of feudal landed property implied a competitive advantage on the world market through surplus profits. Second, the corresponding absence of a preexisting peasant culture suggests that rural culture in the USA “represents only a slow degradation or slow assimilation of urban culture.”⁷³ Sartre, in agreement, gives a clear summary:

“The settlers came into free territory and occupied the land when cities were already long established (whereas the city in Europe developed in the midst of a rural setting). Here we will find the reason why rural culture is, strictly speaking, nonexistent in the U.S.A. or is at most a degraded urban culture.”⁷⁴

It is clear that the absence of feudal landed property is significant, though

⁷⁰ Lefebvre, *On the Rural*, 61.

⁷¹ Lefebvre, *On the Rural*, 60–61.

⁷² Lefebvre, *On the Rural*, 63, emphasis in original.

⁷³ Lefebvre, *On the Rural*, 63.

⁷⁴ Sartre, *The Search for a Method*, 52.

here Lefebvre does not situate this in relation to Indigenous dispossession. How the tension between capital and landed property is expressed has major implications for the development of agrarian sectors and on the production of settler space. If landed property is relatively subsumed within capital – e.g., where landowners and capitalists are one and the same subject – then the heightened rate of profit impels a greater rate of investment, potentially exacerbating the pace and violence of dispossession. Since dispossession is not a mechanical expansion of settler occupation but a dynamic and ongoing set of social relations, then this implies that the land-capital relation is shaped by dispossession from the outset. For one, the ‘natural’ features that drive part of the surplus profits were produced by Indigenous practices that shaped the socio-ecology of these spaces.⁷⁵ For another, the dispossession of the land is paid, in part, in blood and violence: both because First Nations are coercively displaced and through the resistance of Indigenous people to invasion. On this view, the forms of settler property title and their spatial representations are internal to the social relations of dispossession that are, in turn, integral to the land-capital relation. Put differently, we cannot comprehend the origins of settler property without comprehending the land-capital relation. The settler state is thus essential from the start, even where it has limited capacities to manage space and is but a sullen instrument of the imperial state, because it typically controls the greater share of the power of violence and sets the patterns of land – and often stands in for landed property to the extent that it seeks to extract rents from settler production. The perspective on ground-rent that informs Lefebvre’s rural sociology, then, enables this thesis to advance a fresh set of insights around dispossession and property through the land-capital relation, which is crucial for the project of settler spatial history.

⁷⁵ Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu: Black Seeds Agriculture or Accident?* (Magabala Books, 2014).

However, just as Lefebvre did not follow the implications of dispossession, he likewise misses how these spaces were already alive with Indigenous societies, with their own relations to the land and techniques of production upon it. In other words, he absorbs the ‘recursive dispossession’ of First Nations by identifying settler spaces as mere ‘empty lands.’⁷⁶ Since settler societies hinge on the mystification of their own conditions of existence, the appearance of settler rural culture as “nonexistent” or as a “degraded urban culture” results from the systematic erasure of dispossession and violence which is inscribed into settler landed property (amongst other things). The mystification here stretches into the academy: Lefebvre criticises U.S. rural sociologists for their “statistical formalism,” which he says emerged from the fact that the USA is “a country without a history,” where “human reality is placed flat on the ground, so to speak.”⁷⁷ The implicit premise that such spaces were a social vacuum is misguided. Both Lefebvre and Sartre, then, were overtaken by the illusions of the settler societies. However, this does not vitiate a rejection of the regressive–progressive method or the theory of ground-rent. The failure lies in an inadequately holistic view on settler social relations – that is, an inadequately totalising account. Keeping this in mind, my argument is that the regressive–progressive method must ground itself on the constitutive role of violent dispossession to comprehend the production of settler space. It is through this principle that the approach of this thesis helps advance our understanding of settler spatial history.

2.3 The limits to Lefebvre’s spatial history

My task in this section is to develop an immanent critique of Lefebvre’s

⁷⁶ Nichols, *Theft Is Property!*

⁷⁷ Lefebvre, *On the Rural*, 64.

spatial history, set out in *The Production of Space*. My aims are threefold: (a) to show how the premises of his spatial history depend on a Western European history of space, (b) to show how his spatial history relates to his earlier forays in rural sociology and not just his interest in the urban, and (c) to learn from the limits to Lefebvre for the critique of settler spatial history undertaken by this thesis. The first aim draws on a longstanding recognition of Lefebvre's subjective position within Europe, with Christian Schmid recently pointing out that Lefebvre "writes his histories of space from the perspective of the spatiotemporal development of France."⁷⁸ The limits to Lefebvre for his uptake by postcolonial urban geography, Schmid argues, rest in the grounding of his theory on the history of (Western) European space. To follow this line of argument, I undertake a close reading of the fourth chapter of *The Production of Space*. Christian Schmid offers a similar project of reading these passages but traces different themes.⁷⁹ His analysis emphasises the ruptures between different moments of Lefebvre's spatial history, whereas mine locates those ruptures within the continuity of these moments. The second aim here builds on a strand of work conducted by Stuart Elden and Adam Morton, aimed at highlighting how the rural is integral to Lefebvre's theory of the production of space. They state that during his turn to the urban question, "the question of the rural never entirely disappears for Lefebvre: it is fundamental to his project of the political economy of space."⁸⁰ Neglecting the rural and privileging the urban in the reception of Lefebvre's ideas leads to a one-sided account of the production of space – which is a crucial lesson for the critique of settler spaces. Later chapters of this thesis dance between nominally urban and rural spaces to trace the production of settler space. This speaks to the third aim of this section, which takes a leaf

⁷⁸ Schmid, *Henri Lefebvre and the Theory of the Production of Space*, 501.

⁷⁹ Schmid, *Henri Lefebvre and the Theory of the Production of Space*, 333–42.

⁸⁰ Elden and Morton, 'From the Rural to the Urban and the Production of Space', xv.

from the book of postcolonial urban comparison. Concepts developed about one place (Western Europe) may have validity for other places because they were materially reproduced in these other places or because they generate novel ways of “thinking cities through elsewhere.”⁸¹ Claiming that *The Production of Space* is Eurocentric, then, should not foreclose its value but rather function as a stepping-stone towards a closer understanding of its theoretical purchase and limits.

In the beginning, there was the space of nature. Or, rather, as Lefebvre puts it, there were the “fragments of nature” upon which is produced *absolute space*, the agro-pastoral space of antiquity. Dominated by politico-religious forces, absolute space expresses the overlap between the investiture in nature of sacred powers and the exercise of those powers by political elites: “its mystery and its sacred (or cursed) character are attributed to the forces of nature even though it is the exercise of political power therein which has wrenched the area from its natural context...”⁸² The link between space and nature, for Lefebvre, is a difficult issue: the idea of space as an empty physical container, an envelope for things and relations, “depends on this hypothetical initial ‘purity’, identified as ‘nature, and as a sort of ground zero of human reality” – yet such empty space or nature is merely a representation.⁸³ Instead, he argues that all bodies imply and produce space, which he terms “an intelligence of the body” that precedes “the analysing, separating intellect.”⁸⁴ In absolute space, the fragments of nature are invested with sacred power and prohibition, thus enabling divisions of labour and authority. Crucial amongst these divisions is a specific expression of the town–country dialectic: “the political and religious centre is marked by the

⁸¹ Robinson, ‘Thinking Cities through Elsewhere’.

⁸² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 234.

⁸³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 190.

⁸⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 174.

conflict between town and country, between urban space and agrarian space.”⁸⁵ The town “exacts tribute” from the country, drawing off its surplus product, both dominating and appropriating the rural space about it.⁸⁶ From the outset, the significance of the rural is embedded in Lefebvre’s spatial history, with the “town and its surrounding thus [constituting] a *texture*.”

At first, absolute space is identified with quasi-natural grottos, mountain peaks, and lakes. Lefebvre, however, goes on to identify absolute space within the architectural forms of Greek and Roman monuments: in the volumes of space that they carve out or fill up, respectively. “In the West,” Lefebvre summarises, “absolute space has assumed a strict form: that of volume carefully measured, empty, hermetic, and constitutive of the rational unity of Logos and Cosmos.”⁸⁷ Roman space, however, differed to the extent it was governed by civil ‘Law’ rather than the unity of Logos and Cosmos:

“The Greek unification of form with function and structure precluded any separation. But the Romans split up what had thus been unified, reintroducing difference, relativity, and varying (and hence civil) aims into a Greek space in which the fusion of politics on the one hand and mathematical rationality on the other had been able to effect a metaphysical (eternal) closure.”⁸⁸

The transition from the unity of form and function to its separation is a defining moment for Lefebvre, which will recur in the long transition to abstract space with the Renaissance revival of the Roman Vitruvian code. Here we can see his regressive–progressive method in action – and, equally, the usual coordinates of a European history that traces itself from Greco–

⁸⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 234.

⁸⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 234–35.

⁸⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 234. Lefebvre bases this claim on his analysis of the Roman architect Vitruvius and 19th century architectural theorist Viollet-le-Duc.

⁸⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 239.

Roman antiquity.

Within absolute space, the relation of form and function is partnered with that between abyss and summit, subterranean and heavenly. The ‘fragments of nature’ are not merely physical spaces but enter into representational space. Just as he based his preceding analysis on Greek and Roman monumental architecture, this abyss–summit relation is based on the Roman history of space. The representational space of the abyss is grounded in a mundane spatial practice: a pit or hole, known as a *mundus* and used as a “public rubbish dump.”⁸⁹ Such a space collates a wide variety of meanings: of “the hidden, clandestine, subterranean spaces which were those of fertility and death, of the beginning and the end, of birth and burial.”⁹⁰ Lefebvre argues that the abyss is the hidden centre of Roman society, its Other: “Rome was itself the exorcist of the forces of the underworld, challenging those forces by representing them in a graspable manner... If the *mundus* played a part in the formation of the Roman mind it was an inverse and corollary one: the figure of the Father.”⁹¹ With the reorganisation of the Republic into the Empire, this figure of the Father “reconstituted the space around him as the *space of power*.”⁹² This has a specifically urban expression: the “city was not as one space among others but instead as something vaster: the city constituted their representation of space as a whole, of the earth, of the world.”⁹³ ‘Rome’ stands-in for city, empire, world: to be outside Rome is to

⁸⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 242. *Mundus* is Latin for both ‘world’ and a pit. It is the root of the French word ‘mondialisation,’ meaning ‘worldwide,’ which has special theoretical meaning for Lefebvre. It is not hard to speculate that this special meaning shifted alongside his study of the history of the *mundus*. For more on this term, see: Stuart Elden, ‘Introduction: A Study of Productive Tensions’, in *Metaphilosophy*, by Henri Lefebvre (London: Verso Books, 2016), xiii–xv.

⁹⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 242.

⁹¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 243.

⁹² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 243.

⁹³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 244.

be outside the civilised world.⁹⁴ Without the project of spatial history in mind, it is hard to make sense of Lefebvre's analysis of the abyss, of the *mundus*. One may be forgiven for interpreting it as a metaphoric mode of philosophy. But by locating it within the project of spatial history, it becomes clear that Lefebvre analyses the abyss because of its significance within the historic production of space. He explains that the *mundus*, "this representational space would in turn become Christianity's 'foundation' – and its basic resource. This occurred during the long decline of the Empire and the city."⁹⁵ Lefebvre traces the development of absolute space during the mediaeval period in part by following the metamorphosis of the representational space of the abyss—and, as we shall see, this metamorphosis becomes key to understanding the centrality of the 'logic of visualisation' within abstract space.⁹⁶

The foundation of Christian and mediaeval European space on the abyss was connected to a transformed town–country relation. Once again, the question of the rural is integral to his theory of the production of space, and here we see his attention turn to the specific formation of landed property expressed by the Roman villa and how it shapes the production of space. After the decline of the (Western) Roman empire, the distribution of towns and villages was superimposed on the distribution of villas. Moreover, the villa included a new relation of space: the social power of land ownership. "It was the concretisation, within agro-pastoral space, of a codified, law-bound

⁹⁴ This theme was clarified for me by the excellent novel *A Memory Called Empire*, by Arkady Martine.

⁹⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 245.

⁹⁶ Lefebvre indicates that the origins of absolute space in Greek and Roman society has dramatic implications for art history in so far as the thematic resources of mediaeval and Renaissance artists are found in the residues of Greek and Roman absolute space: thus, pits, crags, abysses, and summits feature prominently because these artworks reflect the representational spaces in which they were created. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 251.

spatial practice, namely private ownership of the land.”⁹⁷ This principle of landed property “pointed the way towards the mastery which transforms instead of simply interpreting.”⁹⁸ But for this to take place, Lefebvre credits the rupturing effect of “the barbarians arrival on the scene ... for in violating the sanctity of property these intruders fertilised it.”⁹⁹ (Lefebvre is referring to post-Roman ‘agrarian reforms’ led by so-called barbarian kingdoms.) This transformation of the town–country relation contained “necessary but not sufficient conditions for the subsequent development of a historical space, a space of accumulation.”¹⁰⁰ Once again, Lefebvre’s prior research on the rural defines his spatial history, with the ‘vertical complexity’ of the historical sedimentation of land ownership entering into his critique of space.

Though the villa with its renewed property relations “retained not a trace of the sacred,” that absence was more than compensated for by the ever-present Catholic Church.¹⁰¹ The Church “revolved around those underground places, church crypts” thus leading Lefebvre to argue that, in Catholicism, “absolute space was identified with subterranean space.”¹⁰² The abyss, then, survives the decline of Roman society by latching onto the space of the Catholic Church. The abyss, now named as crypt, can be understood as a general condition of European space just in so far as the Church was omnipresent: “This underworld [of the Catholic Church] broke through here and there – wherever the Church had a ‘seat,’ from that of the lowliest country priest to that of the Pope himself; and wherever it thus pierced the earth’s surface, the ‘world’ emerged.”¹⁰³ Lefebvre is suggesting that Church’s cryptic

⁹⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 253.

⁹⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 253.

⁹⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 253. Here we see Lefebvre’s masculinist tendency.

¹⁰⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 253.

¹⁰¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 252.

¹⁰² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 254.

¹⁰³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 255.

space not only had its own space but played an essential role within the wider constitution of space. By asserting the generality of this space, Lefebvre can impute great significance to any metamorphosis of this space.

Lefebvre explains that the ‘twelfth century’ marks a turning point in his spatial history. What was this transformation? “The urban landscape of the Middle Ages turned the space which preceded it, the space of the ‘world,’ upon its head,” Lefebvre announces.¹⁰⁴ Where the subterranean crypt had predominated, now the cathedrals soared into the sky. Their architectural form “assert an inversion of space” by ‘decrypting’ the abyss-crypt that was essential to the Catholic Church and its absolute space. Lefebvre notes here that, in doing so, these cathedrals “concentrate the diffuse meaning of space onto the mediaeval town.”¹⁰⁵ Though he focusses here on the transformation of religious architecture within the towns, he is careful as ever to note that this was premised on surplus production in the countryside.

This argument is elaborated through a critique of architectural historian Erwin Panofsky. According to Lefebvre, Panofsky sought to identify in Gothic architecture “a unity of homologous parts itself analogous to the unity of the Divinity.”¹⁰⁶ Panofsky, however, comes under sustained fire for prioritising the ‘mental space’ of the Divinity over the social space of the cathedral.¹⁰⁷ Within the scorched remnants of Panofsky’s argument, Lefebvre discovers a single worthy insight: “What Panofsky discovered—or, at least, what emerged from his work—is the idea of a ‘visual logic.’”¹⁰⁸ The visual logic, for Panofsky,

¹⁰⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 256.

¹⁰⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 256.

¹⁰⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 258.

¹⁰⁷ Lefebvre explains that: “One would indeed have to be a person of great religious faith to see nothing objectionable in such an argument, which is in reality a fine example of the abuse of a concept—the concept of production in the event—by blindly divorcing it from all content and context.” He continues to excoriate Panofsky for justifying himself only by “the adduction of would-be scientific concepts” and accuses him of “an idealism and spiritualism of the most irresponsible and facile variety.” Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 258–59.

¹⁰⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 259.

is grounded in the architectural forms of Gothic cathedrals; for Lefebvre, however, it has wider significance in so far as it provides a way of understanding the ‘decrypting’ of absolute space during this period: “The point is, though, that this goes far beyond Gothic architecture and involves the towns, political action, poetry and music, and thought in general.”¹⁰⁹ The kind of space that resulted from this logic of visualisation—this decrypting of space—was “not merely a space of ideas, an ideal space, but a social and a mental space.”¹¹⁰ Lefebvre indicates, here, that this visual logic is the precondition for the ‘mental space’ of the early modern philosophers that he has already criticised.¹¹¹ Moreover, this logic of visualisation was “in collusion on the one hand with abstraction, with geometry and logic, and on the other with authority.”¹¹² Lefebvre gives this identification of visualisation with power a psychoanalytic twist by describing it as a ‘Phallic’ space: “In the space to come, where the eye would usurp so many privileges, it would fall to the Phallus to receive or produce them.”¹¹³ By locating at this juncture the triad of visualisation, geometric space, and the Phallus, Lefebvre foreshadows his later analysis of abstract space. For now, however, Lefebvre is careful to disclaim that the mediaeval logic of visualisation has not yet come to its full culmination.

After all, Lefebvre wants to argue that the production of space within capitalist society results in its distinctive space of power: abstract space. Thus, he must integrate the history of accumulation – that is to say, primitive accumulation – within his spatial history. In a highly original account, Lefebvre argues that the logic of visualisation and the decrypting of space

¹⁰⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 260.

¹¹⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 260.

¹¹¹ This criticism is found on the opening pages of the book.

¹¹² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 261.

¹¹³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 262.

were spatial preconditions for Western Europe to become “the space of accumulation.”¹¹⁴ Here he is at pains to stress that the space of commerce that emerged in this period did not immediately entail the commodity- and money-forms of capitalism. Rather, the significance rests in the transformation of urban space: whereas the merchant was previously external to the town, “the mediaeval revolution brought commerce inside the town and lodged it at the centre of a transformed urban space.”¹¹⁵ If the cathedrals represented the decrypting of space from its subterranean fastnesses, the campanile (a bell tower) and the clock tower represented both a liberation of space – and a new domination of space.¹¹⁶ Liberation, here, consisted in the new municipal freedoms of the towns, sometimes granted readily and sometimes violently demanded. Key to this commercial and urban space were the networks of trade, communication and exchange that united them – and though Lefebvre characterises it as a “space of exchange” he quickly qualifies this ‘commercialisation model’ of space. For one thing, “religious space did not disappear with the advent of commercial space.”¹¹⁷ For another, referring back to Panofsky, Lefebvre indicates that the mediaeval social structure retained a ‘homology with the *Summa Theologica*’ i.e. “that one and the same illusion sustained the belief that the tops of the city’s towers grazed the vault of Heaven.”¹¹⁸ In other words, though the decrypting of space was underway, the abyss–summit relation from absolute space retained its power, though in a different form. For the time being, then, “the economic sphere was subordinate to relationships of dependence; violence itself had a sovereign clarity.”¹¹⁹ The decrypting of space was a

¹¹⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 263.

¹¹⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 265.

¹¹⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 265.

¹¹⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 266.

¹¹⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 267.

¹¹⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 267. On the thin evidence of these pages, it remains, at

necessary step towards abstract space, but it was a slow, unsteady, and uneven process.

Indeed, the process of decryption that Lefebvre describes here stretches over half a millennium to arrive, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, at what Alexander Koyre calls a revolution in European philosophy and science. For Koyre, this period was marked by the dissolution of “the conception of the world as a finite, closed, and hierarchically ordered whole (a whole in which the hierarchy of value determined the hierarchy and structure of being, rising from the dark, heavy and imperfect earth to the higher and higher perfection of the stars and heavenly spheres)”.¹²⁰ Note, here, the parallels in Lefebvre’s treatment of the abyss–summit relation. In its place arrived “an indefinite and even infinite universe which is bound together by the identity of its fundamental components and laws, and in which all these components are placed on the same level of being.”¹²¹ Scientific transformations in the place of humans and our world within the universe went hand-in-hand with transformations in social and natural ontology. With regard to space, Koyre concludes that “it became more and more the void of the atomists, neither substance nor accident, the infinite, uncreated nothingness, the frame of the absence of all being; consequently, also of God’s.”¹²² In the Introduction to this thesis, I outlined how Sohn-Rethel deployed Koyre’s insights on Galileo to argue that the exchange-relation was the model for abstraction in science and space. Unlike Sohn-Rethel, however, Lefebvre does not attribute to these changes to a singularising and

best, ambiguous whether Lefebvre is committed to a ‘commercialisation model’ of the origins of capital. For our purposes, however, the debate over the transition to capitalism is beside the point.

¹²⁰ Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), 2.

¹²¹ Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, 2.

¹²² Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, 275.

transhistorical exchange-relation but draws on the wider transformations of space. Thus, Lefebvre concurs with Koyre on these points in terms of the history of ideas – i.e. the abstract concept of space – but contends that “the fact remains that this ‘Renaissance’ being continued to situate himself in his town.”¹²³ What was true of mental space might not be true of concrete spaces.

Thus, Lefebvre argues that the decrypting of space had culminated in the sixteenth century, but that this did not yet signal an abstract space in all respects. The significance of the town was at its peak: “the town overtook the country” and urban space begins to play its role in “the historical mediation between medieval (or feudal) and the capitalist space which was to result from accumulation.”¹²⁴ The social powers of rural land ownership were declining, Lefebvre suggests, in contrast to the rising power of the towns and their burghers. Implied by this process was a rupture in the town–country relation: an “abstraction in action” which hints at the later rise of the state.¹²⁵ Alongside this transformation in the role of the town was a transformation in the town itself: crucially, the town became produced according to a ‘code of space.’ Lefebvre returns to Vitruvius to define this concept: it expresses a well-defined system for corresponding social significance with spatial forms. But the Roman code of space missed the forest for the trees: it failed to identify or explain urban space as a whole, as an ‘organic unity.’ Lefebvre argues that this is what distinguishes the town of the sixteenth century from its preceding urban forms – and, notably, the abyss–summit relation remains implicit: “Together with its territory, the Renaissance town perceived itself as a harmonious whole, as an organic mediation between earth and

¹²³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 272. In a rare instance of citational engagement, Lefebvre points to Koyre at footnote 31 on this page.

¹²⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 268. Lefebvre shortly thereafter states that “the economic sphere was destined to burst out of its urban context,” suggesting that it is this qualitatively distinct moment that characterises the transition to capitalism.

¹²⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 269.

heaven.”¹²⁶ It is at this point that we find Lefebvre’s famous treatment of the façade and perspective: they indicate an organised (and organising) system of surfaces. This code of space allows the possibility for the ‘reading of space.’ In an indicative example, Lefebvre argues that “the basic configuration of space applied equally to the whole and to each detail.”¹²⁷ The code of the Renaissance town expresses itself as a legible and organic whole, even if (or precisely because) it was deliberately produced in the interests of power. By identifying itself as organic, the code of space masks its service to the elite: “The ideological appeal to the organism is by extension an appeal to a unity, and beyond that unity (or short of it) to an origin deemed to be known with absolute certainty, identified beyond any possible doubt—an origin that legitimates and justifies.”¹²⁸ The outcome was a well-defined and well-ordered rationality of space. Yet, for Lefebvre, the culmination of a specific production of space usually is linked to its conditions of supersession: “By the time [the town] thus asserted itself, however, its eclipse by the state was imminent.”¹²⁹

If the rise of the town represented ‘abstraction-in-action,’ then the rise of state power and state violence was “a second spiral of spatial abstraction.”¹³⁰ Through violence did the space of accumulation emerge and through violence was the sovereign state constituted. Lefebvre claims that “violence is in fact the very lifeblood of this space” and that this space of violence and warfare is “the space of history, of accumulation, of investment, and the basis of the imperialism by means of which the economic sphere would eventually come into its own.”¹³¹ Before capitalism, “the part played by violence was extra-

¹²⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 271.

¹²⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 274.

¹²⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 274–75.

¹²⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 271.

¹³⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 269.

¹³¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 277.

economic,” but under capitalism “it assumed an economic role in the accumulation process.”¹³² Lefebvre notes that “neither Marx and Engels nor Hegel clearly perceived the violence at the core of the accumulation process ... and thus its role in the production of a politico-economic space” – a space which was “the birthplace and cradle of the modern state.”¹³³ The foundation of state space is sovereignty over violence: “Sovereignty implies ‘space,’ and what is more it implies a space against which violence, whether latent or overt, is directed—a space established and constituted by violence.”¹³⁴ State space and state violence, however, are not autonomous forces: they are the expression of the “*balance of power* between classes and fractions of classes, as between the spaces they occupy.”¹³⁵ Lefebvre traces these state spaces as “a violence everywhere glorified in triumphal arches (Roman in origin), gates, squares, prospects.”¹³⁶ The rise of imperialism is part of this analysis, including primitive accumulation in the form of “the conquest and plunder of the oceans and continents by Europeans.”¹³⁷

Flowing from this nexus of primitive accumulation, violence, and the state was capitalist society and abstract space. As Lefebvre puts it, “in this way the capitalist ‘trinity’ is established in space – that trinity of land–capital–labour.”¹³⁸ Even as urban space becomes increasingly important in Lefebvre’s theory of the production of space, he insists on the trinity of land, labour, and

¹³² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 276. An illustrative contrast is Ellen Meiksins Wood’s argument that, under capitalism, there is an “apparent separation of the economic and political.” It is *apparent* because this is, in fact, an ideological illusion that the economic is not subject to the political and the political is not subject to the economic. In reality, the pair may not be separated, though they may be distinguished—and it is this which demarcates capitalism from feudalism. See: Wood, ‘The Separation of the Economic and the Political in Capitalism’.

¹³³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 279.

¹³⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 280.

¹³⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 281.

¹³⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 276–77.

¹³⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 276.

¹³⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 282.

capital that defined his interventions in rural sociology in previous decades. The theory of ground-rent therefore forms a point of departure for the critique of the production of space.¹³⁹ The capitalist trinity is the foundation for abstract space, which Lefebvre expresses through three formants of space: the geometric, visual, and phallic formants. First, the geometric formant is our familiar culprit: the mental space of Euclidean and Cartesian space.¹⁴⁰ Second, the visual formant is the extension of “the ‘logic of visualisation’ identified by Erwin Panofsky as a strategy embodied in the great Gothic cathedrals [and which] now informs the entirety of social practice.”¹⁴¹ The visibility of social space takes precedence over all other senses: “all of social life becomes the mere decipherment of messages by the eyes, the mere reading of texts.”¹⁴² Yet, unlike the ‘readable’ Renaissance code of space, this abstract space is only *apparently* readable. Lefebvre quips, “that which is merely seen (and merely visible) is hard to see.” The dominance of the visual, however, is highlighted as a contingent outcome within Lefebvre’s spatial history: “the predominance of the visual ... was not arrived at without a struggle.”¹⁴³ In the eighteenth century, it was opposed by music (and music theory), which “gave birth to an idea with infinite repercussions – the idea of harmony.”¹⁴⁴ Although harmony (which is a crucial concept within Lefebvre’s rhythmanalysis) did not win the day against the visual, for Lefebvre it may

¹³⁹ See: Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 321–40, but especially 323–25.

¹⁴⁰ Incidentally, objections to critiques of mental space on the basis that mathematics possesses a wide variety of spaces, many of which are non-Cartesian, are right to complain that Cartesian spaces are not universal but are wrong to insist that this undermines the critique of mental space. The critique, properly construed, does not hinge on Cartesian space *specifically* but on the conflation of (social) space with mental space *generally*. Describing social space with eight dimensions and negative curvature is still displacing it with mental space. That being said, Lefebvre at times does conflate Cartesian space with mental space.

¹⁴¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 286.

¹⁴² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 286.

¹⁴³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 284.

¹⁴⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 284.

yet supply conceptual resources for an alternative to abstract space.¹⁴⁵ Third, the phallic formant is grounded in the necessity to ‘fill’ this emptied-out space with political power: “Phallic erectility bestows a special status on the perpendicular, proclaiming phallocracy as the orientation of space, as the goal of the process...”¹⁴⁶

I indicated earlier three aims that I wanted to pursue through this reading of *The Production of Space*: (i) to show how his spatial history is Eurocentric; (ii) to demonstrate a throughline from his work on rural sociology within his critique of space; (iii) to learn from the limits to Lefebvre for the critique of settler spatial history. These tasks are significant for the purpose of this thesis in developing the requisite conceptual resources to explain the production of settler abstract space without diminishing the differential conditions within settler societies. Let us see how we have fared on each front.

The concrete abstraction of abstract space, for Lefebvre, is revealed by the project of spatial history, just as this thesis offers a critique of settler space through the project of settler spatial history. But Lefebvre’s spatial history depends on a Western European history of space. What that means is that his analysis of the production of space originates from a set of categories that emerge from the distinctive space of Western Europe. Let me reinforce this point by summarising the arc of the abyss. Lefebvre’s lineage from absolute to abstract space begins with fragments of nature, including abysses and summits, which were transposed into the Roman representational space of the *mundus* as abyss. The *mundus*-abyss in turn piggy-backed on early Christianity to become an omnipresent element within the production of space. The twelfth to sixteenth century Renaissance decrypting of space

¹⁴⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time, and Everyday Life*, trans. Stuart Elden (London; New York: Continuum, 2004).

¹⁴⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 287.

through the logic of visualisation turned this world inside out: it raised above the surface what was previously subterranean. That transformation of space set in train the mental space of geometry, the dominance of visuality, and the powers of the state, empire, and capital. These themes then culminate within abstract space under the rubric of the three formants: geometric, visual, and phallic. Yet the concrete grounding of this spatial history and the concept of abstract space within a distinctively European history of space poses a *prima facie* problem for its use in other spaces with other histories. How can we comprehend the logic of visualisation within a settler society that has no Catholic churches with centuries-old crypts?

Turning to the significance of the rural, I have been at pains to stress the role of the country within Lefebvre's spatial history, paying special attention to the town-country relation and the role of landed property. Although Christian Schmid is right to note that "what stands out in this history of space is the way Lefebvre uses non-economic aspects for his periodisation," the extraction of surplus product from the countryside and thus the relation between urban and rural is a continual theme. It begins with the organic unity of the town and country that characterises antiquity, travels through the inheritance of the Roman villa in the early medieval period, and continues with the rise of the town that accompanied the Renaissance and modernity. As Lefebvre argued, contemporary society is characterised by an implosion-explosion of space that produces a peculiar entanglement of spaces across the planet.¹⁴⁷ Standing behind this historical arc of urban and rural is the spectre of landed property and the theory of ground-rent. I have attempted to tease out those themes in order to show the ongoing vitality of his previous work on the rural within *The Production of Space* as well as to motivate my turn to the theory of ground rent to understand the formation of landed property

¹⁴⁷ Lefebvre, 'Dissolving City, Planetary Metamorphosis'.

within settler spaces. If landed property was important for Lefebvre's project of spatial history, its importance is redoubled under settler conditions where land was the fulcrum of violent dispossession and primitive accumulation.

My final aim was to discern the limits to Lefebvre's spatial history for the critique of settler spaces. Some of this is apparent from the foregoing discussion, but some conclusions are yet to be distilled. Many of the specific features of the Western European history of space are, obviously, not reproduced in settler spaces. For instance, I have already indicated how the relations of land or the arc of the abyss differ. Now, there is one line of argument within *The Production of Space* that concerns colonial spaces: namely, the consideration of Latin American colonial towns. Lefebvre situates the colonial cities in Latin America as birds of a feather with the Renaissance cities that came after the 'decrypting' of space and the emergence of the logic of visualisation.¹⁴⁸ The purpose of these spaces was to assert an imperial economic structure on the colony: i.e. a relationship of colonial appropriation, which Lefebvre points out is produced "by violence in service of economic goals."¹⁴⁹ That power of violence is expressed through the grid-form of these cities:

"Geometrical urban space in Latin America was intimately bound up with a process of extortion and plunder serving the accumulation of wealth in Western Europe; it is almost as though the riches produced were riddled out through the gaps in the grid."¹⁵⁰

These are tantalising comments, but they do not amount to a full theory of the production of colonial or settler spaces, to which task this thesis aims

¹⁴⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 151.

¹⁴⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 151–52.

¹⁵⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 152.

to contribute. The explanation, here, is of the particular form of Latin American colonial cities at a particular time: the grid form was a consigliere for empire. In the same passage, North American grid forms are described as a means of accumulating capital “*on the spot*,” which Lefebvre rightly takes to imply that “the same abstract form may have opposing functions and give rise to diverse structures.”¹⁵¹ What is shared, however, between these spaces is the destruction of the “pre-existing space.”¹⁵² Even so, the ways in which violence and dispossession are bound up with the production of colonial or settler space are left undifferentiated from the treatment of European spaces by dint of a lack of specificity. What did the destruction of Indigenous relations of space entail for the settler and colonial production of space?

Nevertheless, this theoretical orientation – the idea that the outcomes of abstraction are diverse – is one of the signal contributions of Lefebvre’s critique of space. Flexibility is one of the defining features of abstract space. Lefebvre explains that “abstract space *is not* homogeneous; it simply *has* homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, its ‘lens.’ And, indeed, it renders homogeneous. But in itself it is multiform.”¹⁵³ Drawing on the analysis of Chapter One, where I highlighted Lefebvre’s open and fragmented conception of totality, we can see a parallel in his treatment of abstract space. There are enormous differences in the historical and geographical material from which abstract space is produced, but this does not imply its impossibility: only that the specific social mediations through which it is produced (if it is produced) will be as varied as the world is differentiated. We therefore arrive at a crucial set of questions: what elements of settler societies enter into their production of settler abstract space? Where Lefebvre began with fragments of nature in antiquity, can we not begin with fragments of nature and violence

¹⁵¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 152.

¹⁵² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 152.

¹⁵³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 287.

in invasion? Rather than the logic of visualisation, which succeeds the abyss-*mundus*, might we not think through a logic of devisualisation that expresses the attempted erasure and elimination of Indigenous sovereignty? How are these elements of settler spatial history internally related to the social relations of landed property, the abstract power of capital, and the rise of the settler state? It is these questions which guide the project of settler spatial history that this thesis embarks upon in later chapters, where I trace the dynamics of the production of settler space within the Sydney Basin.

Conclusion

What this chapter offers is an accounting of the limits to Lefebvre, understood as the conditions of validity for his project of spatial history. Understanding how his critique of space was specified by his spatial history helps clear the ground for a critique of settler space drawing on settler spatial history. This then offers fruitful lines of inquiry for the critique of settler spatial history that this thesis tasks itself with undertaking. The starting point, signalled by the first section of this chapter, is the question of dispossession and its implications for the production of settler space. There, I argued that settler-colonial critiques of dispossession and property call for an account of landed property in order to understand how primitive accumulation plays out within settler spaces.

As a result, the chapter turns to Marx's theory of ground-rent and Lefebvre's uptake of it during his 'rural sociology' period, predating his theory of the production of space. This theory was the flipside to the regressive-progressive method, discussed in Chapter One. I highlight how the different formations of landed property implied by dispossession were missed by Lefebvre's approach to rural sociology – but that the theory of ground-rent can be extended to provide useful insights into settler spaces.

First, it is crucial that we trace the elementary formation of the social relations of settler landed property – through violence, nature, and dispossession – because it is upon this basis that capitalist relations of landed property are constructed. Chapter Three takes up this task. Second, the generation of surplus profit and its accrual to settler-capitalist landowners (and other settlers) provides a political-economic account of dispossession, as well as of distributional conflict within settler society over the rewards of dispossession. Chapter Five proposes that surplus profit in the form of ground-rent is a central mechanism for appropriating value within processes of extensive dispossession, lending a fresh perspective on debates over primitive accumulation and enclosures.

With these insights in hand, the third section of the chapter turns to a close reading of *The Production of Space* in order to comprehend the limits to Lefebvre's spatial history. I showed how his spatial history was tied to Europe. With some irony, perhaps his most famous concept – abstract space – is usually discussed in abstraction from this history. In part, this reflects its own concrete powers of abstraction: the reductive and totalising production of space within capitalist society comes to be unmoored from its own origins. Abstract space coats the planet like a thin film of oil on highways after rain: hard to see, slippery, and dangerous. But the specific nature of abstract space depends on its variegated origins, its spatial histories, all across the planet. In Chapter Four, I argue that what I call the logic of devisualisation – the erasure of Indigenous presence and its substitution with the settlers – was the 'progressive' outcome of the attempt to consolidate a moral order of space. This logic was not an intentional outcome but is 'regressively' revealed through the critique of settler space. In Chapter Six, I trace how this is drawn into the nature of settler abstract space through state strategies of shaping urban space.

In sum, this chapter clears the conceptual ground necessary for this thesis

to deliver a critique of the production of settler space. By superseding the limits to Lefebvre, I can productively engage with settler spatial history. In turn, this highlights the original contributions of thesis: a critique of Lefebvre impelled by the critique of settler space, which in turn provides a fresh reading of settler spatial history and settler abstract space. Such an approach is made viable by the historically and geographically materialist conception of space, totality, and abstraction set out in Chapter One.

The next part of this thesis focusses on the early colonial period, beginning with the formative relations of violence, nature, and dispossession in Chapter Three and a close study of the Macquarie years in Chapter Four to understand the differentiated production of settler space.

Chapter Three: Violence, nature, and dispossession

In traditional Australian history, the arrival of the soldiers and convicts of the First Fleet on January 26, 1788, signalled at once the unsteady first steps of settlers onto Indigenous Eora land (a place later named Sydney Cove) and the production of a European, modern, and urban space. This moment indicates how settler ideologies rely on the constitutive expulsion of the frontier from the urban in order to generate an imaginary of the urban as the distinctive space of whiteness, development, and modernity.¹ In traditional Australian historiography, this constitutive expulsion of the frontier from the urban is collapsed into the originating moment of settlement. In the words of an Australian historian, Captain Arthur Phillip “unfurled the British flag at Sydney” and set about “shaping a disciplined community out of fractious elements and replacing wild forest and scrub with a planned, orderly township.”² Other historians represent the moment similarly: “the new town was ‘crisned’” by a *feu de joie* – a rifle salute.³ History begins with European civilisation: “No other country had such a birth, and its pangs may be said to have begun on the afternoon of January 26, 1788.”⁴ Watkin Tench, a British naval officer and colonial diarist, explained that “through the unwearied diligence of those at the head of different departments, regularity was, however, soon introduced, and, as far as the unsettled state of matters would allow, confusion gave place to system.”⁵ Erasmus Darwin, grandfather to a

¹ See: Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*.

² Ernest Scott, *A Short History of Australia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1916), 47.

³ C. M. H. Clark, *A History of Australia: From Earliest Times to 1838*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 and 2 (Carlton, VIC: Melbourne University Press, 1999), 87.

⁴ Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: A History of the Transportation of Convicts to Australia, 1787-1868* (London: Collins Harvill, 1987), 33.

⁵ Watkin Tench, *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay with an Account of New South Wales, Its Productions, Inhabitants, &c.*, 3rd ed., Eighteenth Century Collections Online. (London: printed for JDebrett, Opposite Burlington House, Piccadilly, 1789), 60. It is

Charles Darwin of some fame, poetically imagined the ‘natural’ space of Sydney transformed into a city filled with “broad streets” and “stately walls,” punctuated by monuments to European civilisation: a “proud arch, Colossus-like” alongside “tall spires, and dome-capt towers.”⁶ In an illuminating study of this poem, Grace Karskens concludes that, for the poet, “Sydney Cove was not a real place but an abstract space, characterised by what it lacked.”⁷ The claim that Sydney Cove was an abstract space, however, applies only to the poet’s representational space of Sydney. (In passing, this reveals how abstract spaces are not exclusively ‘representations of space,’ as they are usually regarded. Poetry can produce abstract space just as much as planning, albeit here only a prefigurative abstract space.)⁸ Erasmus Darwin’s imagination of Sydney owes more to the history of European space than it does to the conditions on the ground: as we saw in the previous chapter, the geometric, visual, and phallic formants of abstract space emerge within European spatial history. Converted into an ideology of space, this formation of abstract space would, of course, play a role in the production of settler space.

But the making of settler space is accomplished not through symbolic flag-unfurling, nor proud rifle salute, nor industrious camp-making, nor grand poetic recital, though all these play a role. The ideological expulsion of the frontier from a settler urban space depended first on its concrete enactment

important to note that the texts of colonial diarists were often explicitly pitched towards European audiences, with a corresponding set of ideological axioms. Tench even secured a publishing deal for his book before he left Britain in 1787 (see: Peel and Twomey, *A History of Australia*, 26.). Despite the unmitigated bias of Tench, his account of the opening moments of settlement at Sydney is dominant.

⁶ Erasmus Darwin, ‘Visit of Hope to Sydney Cove, near Botany Bay’, in *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay: With an Account of the Establishment of the Colonies of Port Jackson & Norfolk Island*, by Arthur Phillip (London: John Stockdale, 1789), v.

⁷ Grace Karskens, *Colony: A History of Early Sydney* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2010), 70.

⁸ Compare the more common association of abstract space with “the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers.” Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 38.

through dispossession and violence. That is to say that colonial violence, dispossession, and primitive accumulation are crucial elements within the spatial history of settler space. By drawing attention to the underlying material social relations, this thesis can then offer a critique of the ideological concept of the frontier-as-border or -zone and its spatial binaries of urban/rural and civilised/savage. Dispossession and colonial violence are general to the production of settler space, and not purely phenomenal features found on the edges of an expanding zone of colonial modernity with an allegedly pristine urban space at its heart. As Ari Jerrems argues: “An interrogation of modern/colonial urbanisations promises to illuminate the processes through which diverse boundaries and divides are spatialised.”⁹ In turn, the critique of the frontier further justifies across this thesis why attention must be sustained on dispossession beyond the Sydney Basin and the accompanying hinterland restructuring even when the primary object of analysis remains the space of the Sydney Basin.¹⁰

The basic aim of this chapter is to establish how fragments of nature and violence define the production of space within the early settler colony of Sydney and how these are integrated within the initiating social relations of landed property. The first section of this chapter delivers the aforementioned critique of the ideological concept of the frontier and its spatial binaries to clear the way for this task. In Chapter Two, my critical evaluation of Lefebvre asserted that violence, dispossession, and landed property are crucial for the spatial history of settler spaces. Borrowing from his treatment of absolute space, which originates from ‘fragments of nature,’ the second section of this chapter characterises the making of settler space through fragments of

⁹ Jerrems, ‘Theorising International Urban Politics’, 116.

¹⁰ A similar approach is undertaken by Álvaro Sevilla-Buitrago in tracing the origins of (urban) planning through the enclosure of agrarian commons: Sevilla-Buitrago, *Against the Commons*.

nature and violence. Here, I indicate that the contradiction between the socio-ecological relations of Indigenous people and the settlers is expressed in colonial violence, and that this is a defining attribute of the production of settler space. The third section then appraises the social relations of landed property that was at play during this period. I argue that these fragments of nature and violence were internal to these relations, drawing on accounts of the ideology of improvement to develop this case.¹¹ The social relations of landed property were, however, an incoherent ensemble, with diverse agents pulling the structure of landed property in different directions. Within these contradictions was a moralised system of rehabilitation alongside a pecuniary order of wealth and prestige.

3.1 The frontier and the urban-rural binary

The traditional view on the frontier originates in the late nineteenth century through Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis.¹² His objective was to study how the character of a nation developed in the new circumstances of frontier societies. Like Lefebvre and Sartre in the p, Turner saw settler nations as young societies; but unlike the Frenchmen, Turner wanted to lend historical heft to these new worlds by granting them a character independent of their European forebears. He proposed that the American national character was produced through the successive waves of frontier expansion. The frontier was the crucible of the rugged individualism of the American (property-owning) democratic man. That man was born from a germ of European society set loose upon and set upon by the wilderness of

¹¹ Brenna Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership* (Duke University Press, 2018).

¹² Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (Penguin UK, 2008).

the American frontier. Thus, the central element in Turner's narrative is the transformation of European society by the conditions of frontier expansion and consolidation – where, crucially, these conditions are understood in terms of a geographic–environmental determinism, with Indigenous society and resistance forming part of those conditions (and consequently, without any notice of their agency or the implications of colonisation on their lives). The frontier was not just a social outcome: it was the social process itself. The nation did not produce the frontier—the frontier produced the nation. Within this 'processual' approach, Turner relies on a racist spatial binary through the meeting of civilisation (inside) and savagery (outside). Not only was the frontier the social process that made the nation, but as it expanded over space, it marked out the progress of humanity from the Indigenous savage to the European settler. As a result, Turner's frontier thesis sets out an ideological concept of the frontier as the celebrated crucible of the nation.

Even as his concept of the frontier was nationalist, racist, and settler-colonial, it marked a turning point away from conceptualising the frontier as a linear spatial border. Greg Grandin's account of the use of the concept of the frontier tracks this development across United States history. He explains how the concepts of frontier and border "were essentially interchangeable at the beginning of the 1800s" and that "'frontier' held no special civilizational or emotional meaning, as it would come to later, as a liminal zone associated with a distinct culture."¹³ Along with the westward expansion of the frontier across the 1800s, the "'frontier' came more frequently to mean the line separating Indian country from white settlement" and it "had come to mean not a line but a way of life, synonymous with freedom."¹⁴ Grandin traces how the frontier provides a critical 'safety valve' function for U.S capitalism:

¹³ Greg Grandin, *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America*, 2019, 47.

¹⁴ Grandin, *The End of the Myth*, 47.

through continual expansionism in increasingly widened domains, the U.S. is able to displace internal strife onto the frontier. However, over the course of his argument, Grandin gradually elides the constitutive violence of settler invasion and Indigenous dispossession in the formation of the frontier and, by the end of the book, emphasises the ‘end of the myth of the frontier’ through the symbolic act of Trump’s U.S.–Mexico border wall. In spite of this weakness, Grandin provides us a sound case for the conceptual disentanglement of the frontier and border during the nineteenth century.

Meanwhile, Turner’s frontier thesis had a late arrival on Australian shores. In Australian historiography, the frontier concept was so absent that in 1959 it was possible for one historian, J.A. la Nauze, to remark that “the introduction of the word ‘frontier’ would add little to the understanding of our history.”¹⁵ It seems, however, that Nauze missed the publication of Russel Ward’s influential book *Australian Legend* the preceding year on precisely that theme, which inverted Turner’s thesis by highlighting how the dominance of ‘big men’ in acquiring land produced a radical egalitarian character within the Australian working class (as opposed to an individualist character within the American yeomen).¹⁶ For Ward, the radical egalitarianism of Australia – the ethos of ‘mateship’ – resulted from the inability of workers to acquire land holdings and become yeomen smallholders as was possible under American conditions.¹⁷ Humphrey McQueen, a decade later, criticised Ward’s view on the basis that he overstated the restrictions on the ‘small men’ from acquiring land, showing that for at least some of these men the acquisition of land was in fact an

¹⁵ J. A. La Nauze, ‘The Study of Australian History, 1929–1959*’, *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand* 9, no. 33 (November 1959): 5.

¹⁶ Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1966).

¹⁷ Ward, *The Australian Legend*.

aspirational possibility.¹⁸ Ward's error rested in over-emphasising the inability to purchase frontier lands: McQueen points out that towards the end of the nineteenth century, small farms could be purchased nearer to established settlements. By 1891, some of these 'small men' worked for wages on large frontier runs to supplement their own small farm operations. Yet even McQueen was able to agree with Nauze that the frontier "has received scant attention in Australia."¹⁹

The contrast between the American studies of the frontier and the Australian debates illuminates the significance of landed property within settler social relations. The relative degree of access to land by the everyman settler defines a key question of settler social struggle: how will the benefits of dispossession be distributed? Where it is live, the concept of the frontier plays varied ideological roles, including the justification of dispossession as the transition to civilisation as well as supporting the claims of those who own the land or, as with Russel Ward, those who do not. The relative absence of the frontier within Australian popular discourse and, consequently, scholarly discourse is tied to the ways in which Australian settlement rapidly elided its constitutive conditions of dispossession and invasion. The project of spatial history that this thesis embarks upon will reveal how settler abstract space is defined by this elision. Understanding this elision, however, requires analysis of those constitutive conditions, which is delivered by this and the following chapter.

The decades that followed McQueen and Nauze's comments reversed the trend of the 'great Australian silence' regarding First Nations history and struggle. These emphasised conflict between White and Indigenous society, often located somewhere on the 'edge' of settler society across the nineteenth

¹⁸ Humphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia* (Blackburn, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1970), 169–71.

¹⁹ McQueen, *A New Britannia*, 169.

century and early twentieth century.²⁰ That emphasis led, eventually, to the widely-discussed debates regarding ‘black armband’ history, which refers to a strand of historiography that is variously charged with (a) taking ‘the side’ of Aboriginal people, (b) postmodernism, and (c) rough and ready treatments of the evidence.²¹ Later commentators have observed that ‘black armband’ history never existed in the form it was criticised.²² It was at this juncture that Patrick Wolfe reformulated the genocidal tendencies of settler-colonial society through his classic slogans: ‘invasion is a structure not an event’ and ‘the logic of elimination.’²³ To recapitulate the discussion in Chapter Two, Wolfe proposed that “settler colonialism is an inclusive, land-centred project that coordinates a comprehensive range of agencies, from the metropolitan centre to the frontier encampment, with a view to eliminating Indigenous societies.”²⁴ For Lorenzo Veracini, “settlers are destroyers, not exploiters of indigenous lifeworlds” and, therefore, “settler colonialism is not colonialism.”²⁵ Colonialism exploits; settler-colonialism destroys.

Alongside these interventions came a fresh view on the ideological content of the frontier concept. Wolfe explains:

“The principal ideological effect of the frontier was that it rendered spatial coexistence anomalous. As a linear metaphor that expressed the invasion's zero-sum polarity, the frontier divided 'us' and

²⁰ For example: Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2006).

²¹ For a triple threat, see: Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: The Stolen Generations, 1881-2008* (Macleay Press, 2002).

²² Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier*, 11.

²³ Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*; Wolfe, ‘Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native’.

²⁴ Wolfe, ‘Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native’. Incidentally, Wolfe’s literal framing here is much less sharp than settler-colonial literature that came after him.

²⁵ Lorenzo Veracini, ‘What’s Unsettling about On Settling: Discussing the Settler Colonial Present’, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 17, no. 2 (4 March 2014): 235–51; Lorenzo Veracini, *The Settler Colonial Present* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015).

'them' into discrete and homogeneous domains whose relative proportions were constantly shifting in favour of 'us'."²⁶

While this was the ideological function of the frontier, Wolfe notes that "in practice, rather than fixed (as in the visual metaphor of the dividing line), the Australian 'frontier' was shifting, contextual, negotiated, moved in and out of and suspended."²⁷ Since the ideological concept of the frontier refers to a historic process of colonial expansion into Indigenous land, it implies that "expropriation [is] a past event rather than an ongoing practice."²⁸ For Wolfe, the concept of the frontier is useful in so far as it is a means to analyse the ideological constitution of settler-colonial societies. Veracini, meanwhile, identifies a genealogical origin of the concept of settler-colonialism within the post-Turner work of Isaiah Bowman (whose role within American imperialism Neil Smith has chronicled), Louis Hartz, and others.²⁹ These thinkers may have considered the role of the frontier within their projects of understanding settler society but, Veracini argues, failed to theorise the colonial dimension of those societies. All the following steps in the genealogical chain that Veracini traces proceed to develop the concept of settler-colonialism, with a special eye towards its distinctions from colonialism *per se*, but in so doing there is no longer any reference to the concept of the frontier. Instead, the emphasis is on the relations of hierarchy implied by various conceptualisations of settler societies, and how these relations of hierarchy can be seen to lead to the concept of settler-colonialism. The result, for both Wolfe and Veracini, is an approach that examines the

²⁶ Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, 169.

²⁷ Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, 165.

²⁸ Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, 166.

²⁹ Lorenzo Veracini, "Settler Colonialism": Career of a Concept', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41, no. 2 (1 June 2013): 314–17; Neil Smith, *American Empire: Roosevelt's Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization*, American Empire (University of California Press, 2003).

frontier in relation to the constitution of settler-colonial society rather than one interested in how the frontier conditions the production of space. Conceptually, this necessitates that all spaces are settler-colonial, not merely putative edge-zones, but it does not treat the production of space as an equal partner within the development of settler social relations. What this thesis aims to do is show how we can further illuminate settler societies by attending to their spatial history.

Indeed, the failure to integrate the production of space within the terms of analysis can cause a subtle reiteration of the frontier–metropolitan binary that characterises traditional frontier analysis. Witness how Wolfe defined settler-colonialism, above, through projects that range “from the metropolitan centre to the frontier encampment.”³⁰ Consequently, within Australian historiography, it is only in recent years that the frontier has been located within the urban. For example, Penelope Edmonds examines the ‘urbanizing frontier’ of Melbourne by tracing the presence, agency, and regulation of Indigenous people. The urbanizing frontier, she explains, was overlooked by historians as a result of an ideological conflation between the urban and settler modernity. As she puts it:

“Historians of the colonial frontier have traditionally ignored the settler-colonial city as a crucial locus of unequal power relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and relied instead on triumphalist narratives of empire building that ignore the presence of Indigenous peoples in the city.”³¹

In other words, the ideological definition of the urban under settler-colonial conditions depends on an invented opposition of the urban and frontier. A city is not urban, nor modern, if it contains traces of Indigenous

³⁰ Wolfe, ‘Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native’, 393.

³¹ Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*, 34.

people. The fact that Indigenous people continued to be present – and were repeatedly the subject of attempts to displace or expel them – is inconvenient but does not prohibit this ideological formation.³² The key point, here, is that the spatial binary of the frontier-as-border is linked to the spatial binary of urban and regional, both in ideological and praxical terms. Although Edmonds' concept of the urbanising frontier rejects this binary, it does not aim to integrate settler cities with their extensive frontiers in hinterland spaces, which this thesis does in order to deliver a critique of settler spatial history.

Hints towards a critical account may be found in Martin Legassick's critique of South African frontier historiography, which featured a distinctive divide between Afrikaans nationalist-regional and British liberal-urban approaches.³³ Loosely, the nationalists located the formation of the nation on the (Afrikaans) frontier whereas the centrepiece of liberal historiography were the (British) metropolitan forces. Like Edmonds, Legassick sought to show that the frontier was not simply situated 'out there' at the limits of white society but that these regional spaces and their inhabitants were integrated with urban spaces and their inhabitants.³⁴ Writing within the South African tradition of racial capitalism, as Zachary Levenson and Marcel

³² In addition to Edmonds, see also: Marcia Langton, 'Urbanizing Aborigines', *Social Alternatives* 2, no. 2 (August 1981): 16–22; Janice Ireland, 'The Case of Agnes Jones', *History Australia* 10, no. 3 (1 January 2013): 236–51; Paul Irish, *Hidden in Plain View: The Aboriginal People of Coastal Sydney* (Sydney, N.S.W: University of New South Wales Press, 2017); Corr, 'Pondering the Abyss: A Study of the Language of Settlement on the Hawkesbury Nepean Rivers'.

³³ Martin Legassick, 'The Frontier Tradition in South African Historiography', *Collected Seminar Papers. Institute of Commonwealth Studies* 12 (1972): 1–33. For a wider set of concerns regarding South African historiography on the frontier, see: Richard Elphick and Hermann Buhr Giliomee, *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840* (Maskew Miller Longman, 1989); Leonard Guelke, 'The Making of Two Frontier Communities: Cape Colony in the Eighteenth Century', *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 12, no. 3 (1985): 419–48; John Omer-Cooper, 'The South African Frontier Revisited' (African Studies Conference, Canberra, 1985).

³⁴ Legassick, 'The Frontier Tradition in South African Historiography'.

Paret puts it, Legassick wants to show how the totality of social relations drive the development of South African class and race relations.³⁵ That is, he rejected the view that it was the frontier, “seen as a social system distinct and isolated from a parent society, which produced a new, or even intensified an old, pattern of racial relationships,” and instead identifying frontiers as a socially produced ideology and, thus, the necessity of examining “the formation of the Cape colonist as a whole.”³⁶ The argument here signals the need to integrate the concept of totality within the critique of settler space, as Chapter One proposed. This account of the internal relations between nominally urban and rural spaces aligns with the interventions signalled in the Introduction, where the study of cities or planning is hollowed out if it sticks only to its discrete territorial units.³⁷

As I suggested in Chapter Two, the fact that the frontier – seen here in ideological terms – conditions the production of settler-colonial spaces implies a different trajectory of spatial history. We cannot begin from a conception of absolute space grounded on fragments of nature, alone, as Lefebvre had it in Europe. Instead, this chapter seeks to ground the production of settler space on the weave between fragments of nature and fragments of frontier violence. Rather than emphasise the monumental volumes of Greek and Roman architecture—“stately walls and proud arches”—the concept of settler absolute space grapples with the grisly violence of dispossession and primitive accumulation.

³⁵ Zachary Levenson and Marcel Paret, ‘The South African Tradition of Racial Capitalism’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 46, no. 16 (10 December 2023): 3403–24.

³⁶ Legassick, ‘The Frontier Tradition in South African Historiography’, 20.

³⁷ Sevilla-Buitrago, *Against the Commons*; Brenner and Schmid, ‘Towards a New Epistemology of the Urban?’

3.2 Fragments of nature, fragments of violence

As was discussed earlier, the imagination of the arriving Europeans attested to aspirations for urbane civilisation and modern development. Yet they were equally struck by the natural bounty and beauty of the little inlet they named Sydney Cove, so called after Lord Sydney, the architect of the convict transportation plan. (The Gadigal people called that land *Warrane*.) In oft-quoted words, Lt. Col. David Collins described how the settlers encountered a ‘pristine’ natural space: a quiet creek that ran through a thick wood with “ancient inhabitants” (*viz.* the trees, not the people). Collins hoped that “on taking possession of nature, as we had thus done, in her simplest purest garb, we might not sully that purity by the introduction of vice, profaneness, and immorality.”³⁸ A Garden of Eden awaited the settlers, one that they would labour upon to bear fruits, if only they would not fall into temptation. David Hempel claims that this demonstrates how “the moral rehabilitation of the convicts ... is intricately entangled with the agricultural reorganisation of the land.”³⁹ Though he is strictly right, Hempel has omitted Collins’ pessimistic disqualifier: “But this, though much to be wished, was little to be expected; the habits of youth are not easily laid aside, and the utmost we could hope in our present situation was to oppose the soft harmonising arts of peace and civilisation to the baneful influence of vice and immorality.”⁴⁰ In contrast to Collins’ rhetorical exercise, aimed at a public audience, Governor Phillip’s governmental report concerns the prosaic details of the fresh water supply, the soil, and the harbour – though he

³⁸ David Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, Second (The Strand: T. Cadell Jun. and W. Davies, 1804), 10.

³⁹ Daniel Hempel, ‘The Interplay of Utopia and Ideology in Visions of Australia’ (PhD Thesis, Sydney, University of New South Wales, 2016), 121.

⁴⁰ Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, 10.

permits himself some small wonder at the sheer size of the trees, “most of which are so large that removing them off the ground after they are cut down is the greatest part of the labour.”⁴¹ It is, in part, on the basis of the size of these trees that Tim Flannery speculates that Warrane was a sacred site.⁴² Since the chief tool within Aboriginal environmental management were carefully calibrated fire regimes, it is possible (though not at all clear) that Warrane was cultivated for this purpose.⁴³ If this was the case, then the landing and settlement at Sydney Cove was not just the beachhead for invasion but one of the earliest destructions of Indigenous sacred sites in Australian history.

The environmental structure produced by Indigenous peoples across Australia forms a carefully calibrated and socially managed ecosystem: a patchwork of open plains, thick woods, wetlands, and maritime zones that persisted for thousands of years as part of the socio-ecological reproduction of Indigenous communities.⁴⁴ The Indigenous management of socio-ecological relations is accompanied by an “ontological relationship to land [which] is a condition of [Indigenous] embodied subjectivity,” argues Aileen Moreton-Robinson, which is characterised by an “intersubstantiation of ancestral beings, humans, and land.”⁴⁵ In Bill Gammage’s telling, with the arrival of the settlers in 1788 “an ancient philosophy was destroyed by the completely unexpected, an invasion of new people and ideas. A majestic

⁴¹ F.M. Bladen and Alexander Britton, eds., *Historical Records of New South Wales* (Sydney: Charles Potter, Government Printer, 1892), 122–24.

⁴² Tim F. Flannery, *The Birth of Sydney* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1999), 20.

⁴³ A general view of Aboriginal environmental management of Sydney Cove is available in: Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia* (Crows Nest, N.S.W: Allen & Unwin, 2011), 284–88; Michael Macphail and Timothy Owen, ‘What Was Growing along the Tank Stream Valley, Sydney Cove, in 1788?’, *Australasian Historical Archaeology* 36 (2018): 16–28. A closer examination of Flannery’s speculation is available in: Karskens, *Colony*, 74–79; Grace Karskens, ‘Seeking Sydney From the Ground Up: Foundations and Horizons in Sydney’s Historiography’, *Sydney Journal* 4, no. 1 (2013): 184.

⁴⁴ Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth*; Pascoe, *Dark Emu*.

⁴⁵ Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*, 12, 17.

achievement ended.”⁴⁶ This was so because the environmental structure that the settlers sought to produce was formulated on rather different premises. The plan for the colony was to establish agrarian self-sufficiency, initially through public government farms laboured on by convicts, though this was intended to be replaced by the individual self-sufficiency of emancipated convicts and settler soldiers.⁴⁷ In a recent intervention, Stephen Gapps has argued that the first thirty years of Sydney should be understood as a more-or-less sustained period of conflict that he calls the Sydney Wars.⁴⁸ The conflict began with an Eora containment strategy of British convicts and soldiers at Sydney Cove, and extended into wider and wider arrays of conflict on the Cumberland Plain and the Hawkesbury and Nepean Rivers that encircle the plain. This conflict continued until the merciless campaigns of Lachlan Macquarie in the late 1810s that signalled the end of the three decades of ‘small wars’, which I discuss in the following chapter.⁴⁹

The plans for the early colony had assumed fertile farmland in the vicinity of the landing, led on by optimistic appraisals from Captain Cook’s survey in 1770. A Government Farm was established alongside the initial camp yet was soon found to be unsuited to agrarian purposes. Worsening the situation, the typical convict heralded from the British urban working class, lacked the generational knowledge for farming, and resented the conditions of exile and labour enforced by the state and the military. A low ceiling of skill narrowed the range of viable lands; to make matters worse, the geological conditions

⁴⁶ Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth*.

⁴⁷ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 1 pt 2., 90, 257.

⁴⁸ Stephen Gapps, *The Sydney Wars: Conflict in the Early Colony, 1788-1817* (NewSouth, 2018).

⁴⁹ The term small wars originates in contemporaneous imperial military strategy as a way of describing imperial wars against Indigenous adversaries, which were characterised by being ‘small’ in so far as battle was rarely delivered, combatants were often few, and the empires were at once powerful yet impotent. For more, see: Dierk Walter, *Colonial Violence: European Empires and the Use of Force*, trans. Peter Lewis (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2017).

of the Sydney Basin were substantially unlike British soils. Around Warrane were “skeletal sandy soils” or wetlands that would require draining before use for farming; most of the land across the Sydney Basin was suitable only for grazing, if that.⁵⁰ The search for better land propelled the first state-orchestrated expansion in 1789 to Parramatta and the Government Farms at Prospect and Toongabbie and the second settler-orchestrated expansion in 1794 to the Hawkesbury River (see fig. 3.1). In the meantime, the colony’s sustenance depended on its stores, supply runs, a few farms on the volcanic soil at Norfolk Island – and the supplies of food found in the harbour: fish.

Seafood was a dietary mainstay for the Aboriginal peoples that lived around Sydney Harbour, especially so for those that lived by the lower estuaries, including the Gadigal people near Warrane.⁵¹ Settler documentary evidence points to the use of spearfishing and angling as the main Aboriginal fishing techniques, although analysis of archaeological evidence has inferred the existence of tidal traps and small nets. Attenbrow and Steele conclude that the archaeological evidence “raise[s] doubts about the reliability of the First Fleet records to provide a full description of the fishing methods used in Port Jackson prior to and/or at contact.”⁵² That unreliability is in part because they did not witness these fishing techniques, but likely the settler blindness to unfamiliar Indigenous techniques of production played a role as well. The settlers relied primarily on large nets (seines) to supply the large quantities of fish necessary to supplement their stores of food and meagre harvests.⁵³ The harbour was assumed by planners to be abundant in seafood,

⁵⁰ RJ Haworth, ‘The Shaping of Sydney by Its Urban Geology’, *Quaternary International* 103, no. 1 (1 January 2003): 41–55.

⁵¹ Val Attenbrow et al., ‘Aboriginal Fishing in Port Jackson, and the Introduction of Shell Fish-Hooks to Coastal New South Wales, Australia’, in *The Natural History of Sydney*, 2nd ed. (Mosman, NSW: Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales, 2010).

⁵² Val Attenbrow and Dominic Steele, ‘Fishing in Port Jackson, New South Wales - More than Met the Eye’, *Antiquity* 69, no. 262 (1 March 1995): 46–60.

⁵³ For example: Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, 80; Tench, *A*

yet it turned out that fishing was an unpredictable, if significant, resource. Collins explains that:

“It had been imagined in England, that some, if not considerable savings of provisions might be made, by the quantities of fish that it was supposed would be taken; but nothing like an equivalent for the ration that was issued to the colony for a single day had ever been brought up.”⁵⁴

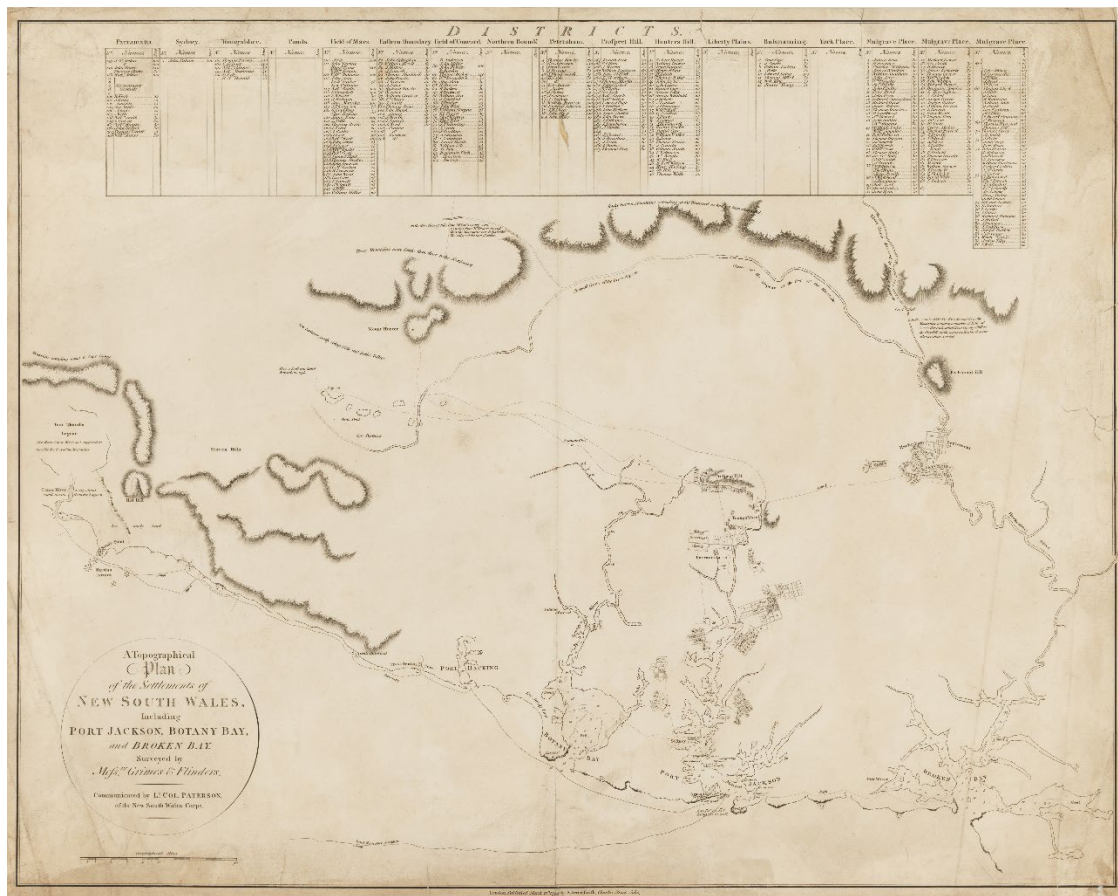


Figure 3.1. A topographical plan of the settlements of NSW, 1799.⁵⁵ North is to the right, with settlements following the course of the harbour inland, with the Hawkesbury settlements to the right of the map.

Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay, 176.

⁵⁴ Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, 68.

⁵⁵ Charles Grimes, *A Topographical Plan of the Settlements of New South Wales, Including Port Jackson, Botany Bay and Broken Bay [Cartographic Material] / Surveyed by Messrs. Grimes & Flinders; Communicated by Lt. Col. Paterson of the New South Wales Corps.* (London: Arrowsmith, 1799).

Collins, in general, is pessimistic about the prospects for fishing in supplying food for the colony; White, however, lays the blame at the lack of fishing boats and equipment, saying “the scarcity of boats will prevent our being so well supplied with fish as otherwise might be expected.”⁵⁶ Tench dramatised the uncertainty by declaiming that “the universal voice of all professed fishermen is that they never fished in a country where success is so precarious and uncertain.”⁵⁷

To make matters worse, the colonial commentators reported that the onset of winter exacerbates the scarcity of fish. Though they lacked the advantage of long experience, they pointed to observations of starvation on the part of Aboriginal people who relied on the fish, suggesting that this maritime phenomenon predated their arrival.⁵⁸ But it is unlikely *in extremis* that Aboriginal people underwent annual starvation due to the seasonal disappearance of the fish. For one thing, even though all documentary sources blame the cold weather, the fact that later Sydney fishermen were able to fish in winter suggests that these early settler fishermen lacked the requisite local environmental knowledge.⁵⁹ For another thing, it is more likely that the arrival of the settlers ruptured the ecological metabolism that had been carefully calibrated by Aboriginal people over generations. Overfishing by settlers exhausted the bounty of a carefully managed socio-ecology, a pattern

⁵⁶ John White, *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales* (Debrett, 1790), 182. That being said, Collins’ account pays far greater attention to fishing than White’s. It may simply be that Collins estimates the labour necessary to fish sufficient quantities to be so great as to be a waste.

⁵⁷ Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, 118.

⁵⁸ Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, 34.

⁵⁹ This claim originates in J.M. Thomson, *Fish of the Ocean & Shore* (Sydney: Collins, 1974). cited in Julian Pepperell, ‘The Good Old Days? Historical Insights into New South Wales Coastal Fish Populations and Their Fisheries’ (Pepperell Research & Consulting Pty Ltd, n.d.). See, also: William Macleay, ‘1880 Report of the Royal Commission into the Fisheries of NSW’ (Sydney: Government Printer, 1880). A lack of local knowledge married to a relatively small zone of fishing means that the effects of even a small decline in the number of fish would be magnified.

that would recur again and again for the settlers. As a result, fish became a violent point of conflict between the settlers with (sometimes) large hauls in their seines and Aboriginal people who saw the fish as their rightful sustenance. In one instance amongst several, Stephen Gapps highlights how the fishermen “had been directed to always offer them ‘a part’ of the catch,” yet the inadequacy of that portion led Indigenous people to arrive, armed with spears, to take a larger share.⁶⁰ Drawing on the same evidence, Clendinnen concludes that Aboriginal demands upon settler fishing indicated their belief that they “thought themselves the owners of the fish.”⁶¹ Fishing on the harbour, then, was a volatile intersection point between the dramatically different Aboriginal and settler relationships to nature.

What I am attempting to highlight here is that the space that the settlers occupied and transformed was not as simple as the structures they erected at Warrane, nor the carved marks in the trees around the camp that indicated its borders, nor the further afield patrols of soldiers in redcoats with muskets.⁶² It is true that these lineal borders of the frontier were concrete elements of the space of Sydney: according to Stephen Gapps, these borders were defined at once by a buffer zone generated by the British and a containment strategy of the Eora people to confine settler activity to a definite zone. However, the fragments of nature upon which the settler production of space hinged overflows the space of the frontier considered merely in terms of these lineal borders and areal zones. By imposing their own relationship to nature, the settlers violently ruptured the existing set of relationships with nature that the Aboriginal people had produced and, thereby, set in train the remaking of the space of the Sydney Basin. It was

⁶⁰ Gapps, *The Sydney Wars*, 38. For other instances, see Gapps, *The Sydney Wars*, 44, 48–49.

⁶¹ Inga Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers* (Melbourne: Text Publishing Company, 2005), 84.

⁶² Gapps, *The Sydney Wars*, 28–29.

this transformation of nature and space which inaugurated the slow roll of primitive accumulation within settler spatial history.

That is not to say, however, that the everyday rhythms of frontier violence suggested by military patrols, watches, garrisons were not integral to the settler production of space. In the spring of 1788, Governor Phillip led an expansion of the settlement to Rose Hill near the mouth of the Parramatta River, where he left a detachment of soldiers and convicts “to finish a small redoubt.”⁶³ In Stephen Gapps’ narrative, this expansion “had all the elements of a full-blown military expedition into enemy territory.”⁶⁴ Such small fortifications, housed with small garrisons that were tasked with watching and patrolling the immediate surrounds, were endemic to the imperial strategy of frontier warfare, and it was no different in Sydney’s early history of space.⁶⁵ Governor Phillip, before embarking on the voyage to Australia, contemplated that “on landing in Botany Bay it will be necessary to throw up a slight work as a defence against the natives.”⁶⁶ Though these were not on the scale of the largest fortifications built in North America, for example, and they were never required in a moment of combat, their role in exerting power in and over space cannot be understated. Such fortifications acted as nodal points for the everyday rhythms of patrols and watches, which were in turn defined by the sites of habitation, agriculture, and foraging. That is, they were set by the socio-ecological demands for reproducing the colony. Within the bounds of the Sydney Cove encampment, a convict nightwatch was established in 1789 – in part to secure the provisions from theft, both by the soldiers and by convicts – although military sentinels and patrols predated

⁶³ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 1 pts 2, 212.

⁶⁴ Gapps, *The Sydney Wars*, 47.

⁶⁵ Walter, *Colonial Violence: European Empires and the Use of Force*, 73; Gapps, *The Sydney Wars*, 151–52.

⁶⁶ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 1 pts 2, 52.

this nightwatch, and continued thereafter.⁶⁷ For example, Collins indicates on February 2, 1789, that “all stragglers at night who, on being challenged by the patrol, should run from them, should be fired at,” meaning these watchmen were soldiers.⁶⁸ Though these orders were aimed at enforcing convict curfews, any Aboriginal people would no doubt have taken note of their presence, and stayed well away.

Certainly they would have taken note of armed garrisons at outlying farms and townships, which were set for the general defense of these localities from Aboriginal resistance. About the Rose Hill township were three clusters of farms, each with the same guard of three soldiers, “indicating a standard policy rather than any particular threatened area.”⁶⁹ With every expansion of the settlement – north of the inner Harbour, north-west to the Hawkesbury river, south-west to the Camden area, and everywhere between – the strain on the colonial military grew ever greater as a wider array of spaces demanded the attentions of an ever understaffed military force, who at once had to keep watch on both surly convict rebelliousness or outright insurrection and the waxing and waning prospect of Aboriginal resistance. Continual requests from successive governors for more troops suggests that they never felt they had adequate manpower to totally secure the region, which is consistent with the imperial experience of warfare in colonial theatres.⁷⁰ These rhythms of military power were templates of an established

⁶⁷ An incident which may have contributed to the formation of the convict nightwatch was a conspiracy in late 1788 of seven soldiers to steal from the public stores whenever one of them was posted sentinel at the door. Governor Phillip to Lord Sydney, 1 February 1790 Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, 288–93; Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, 59–60. For more on the everyday life of convict larceny see: William M. Taylor, ‘Pilfering and the Tasman World: Convict Commerce and the “Securitisation” of Space in Early Colonial Sydney’, *Fabrications* 29, no. 3 (2 September 2019): 402–23.

⁶⁸ Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, 53.

⁶⁹ Tench, *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay*, 149–52; Gapps, *The Sydney Wars*, 99–100.

⁷⁰ Walter, *Colonial Violence: European Empires and the Use of Force*.

imperial strategy and, though they do not cast a long shadow over the spatial history of Sydney, they were ever in the background of the experience of those that inhabited the space.

What I have sought to show is how these fragments of nature and violence illuminate the contradiction between the socio-ecological relations of the Indigenous peoples and the settlers. This brings into view the wider ramifications of dispossession as it took place at the time, rather than emphasising isolate instances of occupying specific tracts of land. Equally, it permits us to reframe the frontier not as border or zone but as a defining element of the social relations of space.

3.3 Settler land, at first

Nevertheless, land, naturally, was important. The Instructions issued by the Home Office for the colony set out a planned distribution of landed property amongst convicts – after they served their term, of course – as well as the military and free settlers. Emancipated convicts were to be granted thirty acres, with an additional twenty if they were married and a further ten per child. Retired soldiers had a similar distribution, but with an additional fifty or hundred acres, to be doubled after five years on condition of “proper demeanour” (for private and non-commissioned officers, respectively).⁷¹ After ten years of free occupation, grantees were expected to pay an annual quit rent in perpetuity – although in practice this rarely collected – and were provided twelve months’ worth of supplies to clear the ground and begin farming.⁷² The intent of this policy was to root the emancipated convict in place as a small, landowning farmer capable of subsistence and a little

⁷¹ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 1 pt2, 90, 257.

⁷² Ibid.

surplus to be sold to the government. The Home Office instructed that each grant should be apportioned equally between the better and worse soils, extending in rectangular strips from a watercourse, and separated at regular junctures by land held in reserve for the Crown.⁷³ As Grace Karskens puts it, the vision of convict landed property implied that “their farming was not to be concerned with profits, markets, or efficiency.”⁷⁴ Karskens continues by arguing that the emphasis on individual grants of land to men, accompanied by their families, “was a modern individualist ethos which would guarantee productive family units and a commitment to modest private property.”⁷⁵

The initial attempt to set this policy in place was propelled by the inadequacy of the soils near Warrane, as I discussed above. The expansion from Warrane to the farms about Parramatta – at Rose Hill, Toongabbie, and Prospect Hill – was driven by this necessity to expand the agricultural base of the colony. Stephen Gapps suggests that the timing of this expansion was selected to coincide with a lull in conflict with Aboriginal people.⁷⁶ However, In May 1788, Governor Phillip set out from the head of the harbour (i.e. the mouth of the Parramatta River) to explore the land westward, failing to find a route to the Blue Mountains but succeeding in discovering “a country that might be cultivated with ease” and which “shall be settled and cultivated early in the spring.”⁷⁷ As it turned out, the plans for settlement were delayed a couple of months from the start of spring in September to November, possibly as a result of the Eora containment strategy. By 1791, an overeager Tench could report the success of this expansion:

“Of my Sydney journal, I find no part sufficiently interesting to be

⁷³ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, 258.

⁷⁴ Karskens, *Colony*, 109.

⁷⁵ Karskens, *Colony*, 110.

⁷⁶ Gapps, *The Sydney Wars*, 46–47.

⁷⁷ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, 138.

worth extraction. This place had long been considered only as a dépôt for stores; it exhibited nothing but a few old scattered huts, and some sterile gardens: cultivation of the ground was abandoned, and all our strength transferred to Rose Hill. Sydney, nevertheless, continued to be the place of the governor's residence, and consequently the head-quarters of the colony.”⁷⁸

By this point, around 920 acres (or 370 hectares) were in cultivation around Parramatta.⁷⁹ Of this was included a few settlements of soldiers and emancipated convicts. Yet even at this early stage, the plan of landed property set out by the Home Office presented problems. The separation of grants by reserves of Crown land complicated the task of securing the expansion from Indigenous raids and resistance. Governor Phillip informed Lord Grenville that the settlers were “in consequence of that disposition, surrounded with timber, out of sight and out of hearing of each other, [and so] they were exposed to a tribe of natives.” The anxiety of conflict was spurred on by a number of raids by Aboriginal people.⁸⁰ Tench reports, in September 1790, that two Aboriginal people “said that they were inhabitants of Rose Hill, and expressed great dissatisfaction at the number of white men who had settled in their former territories.” He determined that a policy of closer settlement would provide mutual security to the settlers and prohibit concealment in the foliage for Aboriginal people (see, above, fig 3.1). The trees were felled, and the interstitial Crown lands settled. Stephen Gapps concludes that:

“The originally planned system of land grants, which would have

⁷⁸ Tench, *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay*, 107.

⁷⁹ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, 539.

⁸⁰ In an especially notable case, a raid was met with a chase by the watchmen, who returned with the severed head of one of the Aboriginal combatants. Gapps downplays this incident relative to ‘other historians’ (viz. Grace Karskens). See: Gapps, *The Sydney Wars*, 105–6; Karskens, *Colony*, 649–51.

shaped a very different landscape in the Sydney region, was transformed by defensive measures against the Sydney people. While land was being cleared for agriculture to feed the colony, a defensive ring of contiguous farmsteads was also being created.”⁸¹

In addition to the risk of Aboriginal attack, Phillip explained that the separation of settlers inhibited their capacity for mutual aid in developing and securing their land and crops – in this case, from convict thieves.⁸² The spatial form of this expansion of the colony’s agricultural base, then, was adapted to the conditions of colonial violence that the settlers brought in their wake. But it was also adapted to ensure the collective productivity of these farms, which was the highest priority for the governor given the fears of failing to achieve self-sufficiency. Unlike the individualised independence of the mythical frontiersman, the pattern of space reflected the necessity of settler interdependence posed by limited agrarian productivity, convict larceny, and colonial violence. Just as we saw with the fish, however, the underpinning process here was a transformation of nature from the environmental regime of the Aboriginal inhabitants to that of the British settlers. The British were, of course, blind to both the nature of the Aboriginal environmental regime and their society–nature relations. They did not see how the patchwork of farms and pastures, organised for mutual security and aid, was overlaid upon a patchwork of denser wooded areas and open spaces, which shaped the patterns of animal movement. Thus, the ‘defensive ring of contiguous farmsteads’ expressed the same fragments of nature and violence that characterised the violent transformation of socio-ecological relations wrought by settlement. At one level, this space was expressly produced to ensure mutual security; at another, in installing the settler relations with

⁸¹ Gapps, *The Sydney Wars*, 97.

⁸² Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, 537.

nature, it implicitly disrupted the socio-ecological conditions that underwrote Aboriginal society. (In response, Aboriginal people would, time and again, appropriate the crops and flocks of settlers, amongst a wide array of other strategies for survival.) The demands of settler security in the face of colonial violence were central to the shaping of landed property.

In 1794, such frontier violence continued in the form of the expansion of the settlement's domain of agrarian settlement to the Hawkesbury region in the north-west of the Sydney Basin. Unlike the state-orchestrated invasion of Parramatta, these settlers were a mixture of soldiers and ex-convicts whose occupation of the Hawkesbury Grace Karskens characterises as "a deliberate, and successful, attempt to...escape the colony." The significance of the Hawkesbury lay in the greater prospects of the river for agricultural production than even the land about Parramatta. Though these settlers claimed land without state consent (let alone Aboriginal consent), Lieutenant-Governor Grose soon demonstrated his eagerness to permit the invasion, granting the lands already seized and granting yet more lands up and down the river.⁸³ Grace Karskens' narrative of the Hawkesbury as a settlement of small, independent farmers suggests that they were not primarily interested in primitive accumulation via the dispossession of land in order to form capital.⁸⁴ Yet, as Chapter Two argued, the gap between the dispossession of land and the formation of capital only weakens the concept of primitive accumulation if we neglect the historical development of landed property.

The independence that these Hawkesbury settlers sought perhaps resembles Humphrey McQueen's 'small men' seeking small farms in order to

⁸³ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*.

⁸⁴ Grace Karskens, *People of the River: Lost Worlds of Early Australia* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2020).

achieve personal independence from the ‘big men,’ the capitalists.⁸⁵ But they sought to be independent from the settler state, in its form of military-vice-regal authority, rather than from the large pastoral landowners that characterised mid-nineteenth century Australian capitalism. What’s more, these settlers were, if anything, some of the ‘bigger’ men within the colony at Sydney. Thus, their occupation of the Hawkesbury River signalled an attempt to take into their own hands the principles of the system of land grants. As we have seen, the system of land grants sought to provide land for the emancipated convicts to sustain themselves in their not-quite-exile and for former soldiers to settle the land as part of the system of incentives built into military service.⁸⁶ These free grants of land were intended at once to assist in achieving the self-sufficiency of the colony and to rehabilitate the convicts from their vices. This was not a policy of landed property predicated on an abstract logic of capital; instead, this social structure was intended to rehabilitate the convicts through mixing their labour with the earth on their own small plots.

That is not to say, however, that capitalist social relations were not present within the colony. The colonial state, for example, was crucial to the early decades of the experiment in Australian penal colonisation, dominating the organisation of convict labour and the distribution of land, and acting in defence of private property. Liz Humphrys positions the Australian state “as an arm of the British capitalist mode of production,” arguing that the Australian colony ought to be understood as integrated within the wider British social structure, irrespective of the vast seas separating London from

⁸⁵ McQueen, *A New Britannia*.

⁸⁶ Some provision was made for free men, at a higher rate than even the soldiers, but this was never envisaged to be a critical component until later in the colony’s history. The officers, as a rule, rebelled against their lack of privileges in land and did all they could to get their hands on as much land as possible.

Sydney.⁸⁷ At the same time, the specific expression of the colonial state as an arm of British capitalism does not mimic its origins but is modulated by the requirements for warfare against Indigenous people and repression of the convict population.⁸⁸ It is the double-sided violence – the greater part against First Nations and the lesser part against convicts – of the state–military nexus during this period which is the characteristic departure (or extension) of the colonial state from its British origins. If the colonists of the Hawkesbury were ‘escaping’ anything, as Karskens puts it, they sought to escape the repressive authority of the colonial state. A better interpretation, however, is that the state they desired was the genteel defender of liberty and property that they recalled from England, and it was this remembered state that they called upon when their farmsteads were threatened by Aboriginal raids and resistance.

Embedded in the colonial state and its policy of landed property were a set of racialised moral precepts that lay at the heart of the production of settler space in the Sydney Basin. As indicated earlier, David Hempel argues that convict rehabilitation “strikes directly at the foundation of the imperial vision for the colony.”⁸⁹ Added to this moral vision of land, rural labour, and space was a religious dimension. Meredith Lake shows that the spatial imaginary of the Protestant clergy in Australia – in the Hawkesbury, in particular – was infused with the narratives of the Bible, not least through metaphors of exodus and a promised land.⁹⁰ They transmitted into the

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Humphrys, ‘The Birth of Australia: Non-Capitalist Social Relations in a Capitalist Mode of Production?’, *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, no. 70 (2012): 121. The issues involved here are complex and contentious, but it is thankfully not necessary to render a full verdict on the historical emergence of capitalist social relations in Australia for this thesis: it suffices to point out that landed property was not internalised within capital accumulation at this early stage. See, also: Collins, ‘Possession Vis-à-Vis Power’.

⁸⁸ Connell and Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History*, 35.

⁸⁹ Hempel, ‘The Interplay of Utopia and Ideology in Visions of Australia’, 121.

⁹⁰ Meredith Elayne Lake, ‘“Such Spiritual Acres”: Protestantism, the Land and the Colonisation of Australia 1788 - 1850’ (PhD Thesis, Sydney, University of Sydney, 2008).

nascent settler society the notion that “worldly toil had a sacramental quality when performed in a spirit of worship to God.”⁹¹ An Aboriginal Barry Corr, in his sprawling inquiry into the Hawkesbury region, argues that the key racial-territorial concepts of the settlers originated not in the legal doctrine of *terra nullius*, but that “the Book of Genesis and the classical concept of the Great Chain of Being were the sources for the denial and denigration of Aboriginal peoples’ humanity.”⁹² What was distinctively racial *and* territorial about this religious conception was the fact that the hierarchy of the Great Chain of Being was determined by the capacity to make use of the land – to render it productive and improve upon it.⁹³ Critically, Corr explains that the origins of Western civilisation, according to this racial-territorial concept, rested in the rural labours of farmers and shepherds – not the ‘untamed’ life of hunters and gatherers.⁹⁴ If the familiarity of this concept is not apparent, allow me to quote, once again, Lefebvre’s statement of absolute space as a “fragment of agro-pastoral space, a set of places named and exploited by peasants, or by nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists.”⁹⁵ The argument in Chapter Two concerning the limits to Lefebvre’s spatial history concentrated on connecting its sequence of spatial concepts to its distinctive European history of space; here, Barry Corr’s analysis of the Hawkesbury region reveals the implicit settler-colonial assumptions underpinning even the opening concept of

⁹¹ Lake, “Such Spiritual Acres”, 308.

⁹² Corr, ‘Pondering the Abyss: A Study of the Language of Settlement on the Hawkesbury Nepean Rivers’, 30. On the same page, Corr explains that “I have found no reference to Terra Nullius in any of the primary sources relevant to this work. Terra Nullius only began to appear gradually in English works during the Eighteenth Century and was not articulated as a justification for the colonising of Australia until the twentieth century.”

⁹³ Martin Legassick refers to the same ‘Chain of Being’ in South Africa, where he positions this amongst a set of racial attitudes that would harden into the racial ideologies that justified exploitation, dispossession, and violence. Legassick, ‘The Frontier Tradition in South African Historiography’, 10.

⁹⁴ Corr, ‘Pondering the Abyss: A Study of the Language of Settlement on the Hawkesbury Nepean Rivers’, 71.

⁹⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 234.

Lefebvre's spatial history.

Thus, even as the Hawkesbury settlers 'escaped' the state and military control of the colony, they retained the moral, religious, and racial-territorial dimensions that characterised landed property in the colony. It is important to note that, unlike the violent transformation of socio-ecological relations, these features of settler landed property are contingent: not all settler spaces are penal colonies, after all, and the dimension of moral and judicial rehabilitation is specific to the conditions of convict settlement. Yet the racialised territoriality that sustained this moral order took root in many soils.

Because of their underpinning racial-territorial concept of space and land, the settlers were structurally incapable of understanding the frontier violence that arrived with every expansion of the settlement. The first conflicts on the frontier river were understood by the settlers as Aboriginal interruptions to their agricultural activities, even though precisely the opposite was the case. Corr urges that we consider "the possibility that fighting was precipitated by the settlers interrupting Aboriginal activities such as the eel harvest ... or that there were other undisclosed reasons for Aboriginal people being on farms and for fighting."⁹⁶ (Corr, as an Aboriginal historian, elsewhere indicates that he has access to stories that he is not prepared to transmit to a non-Indigenous audience.) Just as we saw with the fish in Sydney Harbour, conflict followed the transformation of nature from the environmental regime of Aboriginal people to that of the settlers. In general, every expansion of in land grants was followed by upticks in frontier violence. The precise objectives of Aboriginal people, as they understood them, defies easy analysis due to the historical record reflecting the settler

⁹⁶ Corr, 'Pondering the Abyss: A Study of the Language of Settlement on the Hawkesbury Nepean Rivers', 38.

perspective. Nevertheless, Corr suggests that Aboriginal objectives for frontier violence focussed on the defense and maintenance of Aboriginal Law and that “concepts of defending the land emanate from western ideas of property ownership.”⁹⁷ Put differently, Corr contends that Aboriginal resistance ought not to be interpreted as the defence of Indigenous *property* as such but as the defence of Aboriginal Law (which, likewise, cannot be assimilated into the Western concept of law).

South of the Hawkesbury settlements, across the Cumberland plain and following the winding course of the Hawkesbury–Nepean River system, there was a region known as the Cowpastures. Escaped cattle had fled there in 1788, multiplied in the wild, and were rediscovered some years later. This region proved to be good grazing land, although pastoral production would not be taken up until the early 1800s, and then only on a limited scale. The Instructions issued to the early Governors did not envision the granting of large landholdings, and they did not at first permit military officers to receive grants. Nevertheless, the officers were able to acquire land through sale – some emancipated convicts and retiring marines preferred cash over labouring on the land – or through personal favour and networks of privilege. The colonial economy at the time was dominated by a cartel of officers, who controlled (i) the supply of money, in both the limited minted currency and the surrogate currency of rum and (ii) the import and export of goods. While free labour was a lesser partner to convict labour, there was nevertheless a labour market consisting of a minority of free workers and convicts granted a ‘ticket of leave’ either in replacement or substituting for their unfree labour. The officers thus had a ready source of cheap labour – paid in wages or board – with which they could generate a modest stream of goods for export to

⁹⁷ Corr, ‘Pondering the Abyss: A Study of the Language of Settlement on the Hawkesbury Nepean Rivers’, 39.

counterbalance their import business or for sale to the government. Consequently, these officers and their associated merchants were able to amass wealth and secure landholdings across the colony, as part of these initiating patterns of primitive accumulation.

In an infamous story, John Macarthur, an officer in the NSW Marine Corps, smeared Governor King's reputation, duelled his superior and wounded him, was forced back to London for court-martial, escaped any repercussions, curried favour with the Colonial Secretary, and thus received a grant for 5,000 acres of prime grazing land in the Cowpastures, which he planned to use for Merino wool production.⁹⁸ (The officers' power was so great that when the next governor sought to curtail the power of the officers by striking at their control over rum, Macarthur led a successful if short-lived *coup d'état*.)⁹⁹ Phillip McMichael situates these early forays into the wool industry as a crucial precondition for the later development of the capitalist pastoral sector, but at this time they were significant neither within the local economy or in British markets.¹⁰⁰ Consequently, the role of landed property within the accumulation of capital was restricted in scope until the pastoral sector was articulated within imperial circuits of capital, starting in the 1820s and accelerating in the 1830s, which forms the focus of Chapter Five.

The point that I am driving at here is that the system of land grants aimed at the moral rehabilitation of the emancipated convicts, underpinned by a racial-territorial conception of land, but was taken up in differing directions by distinct groups. The Hawkesbury settlers 'escaped' the colonial state, while the officers manipulated the state towards their own pecuniary

⁹⁸ Margaret Steven, 'John Macarthur (1767–1834)', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 18 vols (Canberra: National Centre of Biography, Australian National University), accessed 10 October 2023.

⁹⁹ The 'Rum Rebellion' is a much-beloved incident of traditional Australian history, but a full exposition does little for the argument here.

¹⁰⁰ McMichael, *Settlers and the Agrarian Question*, 54–78.

interests. The racial-territorial elements of settler landed property, however, were retained, as were the constitutive role of the fragments of nature and violence that accompanied the radical restructuring of socio-ecological relations across the Sydney Basin. Regardless of the status of the settlers – emancipated convict, free immigrant, privileged officer – the full force of military violence backed their occupation of the land. Every expansion of settler landed property – whether around Warrane, at Parramatta, up in the Hawkesbury, or down in the Cowpastures – was accompanied by upticks in colonial violence.

A cycle of Aboriginal resistance and settler reprisal characterised the expansion of settler territories. The specific objectives of these expeditions varied in scale and kind, but the chief general aims that they sought to accomplish were (a) to enact reprisals against Aboriginal people for raids or attacks, (b) to drive away Aboriginal people from the farmlands of settlers, and (c) to project force in order to diminish the morale of Aboriginal resistance. In November 1790, in the immediate Sydney region, Governor Phillip ordered a punitive expedition to kill and capture Aboriginal people in response to the killing of a forager, McIntire – an expedition that aimed to recover the severed heads of dead Aboriginal people.¹⁰¹ In May–June 1795, in the Hawkesbury region, Acting Governor Paterson ordered close to a hundred troops to kill Aboriginal people.¹⁰² Again, in June–September 1804, Governor King ordered soldiers to the Hawkesbury in response to a concerted series of raids on the settlers' crops.¹⁰³ Significantly, he also authorised a paramilitary reprisal party led by a local magistrate.¹⁰⁴ The next year much the same

¹⁰¹ Gapps, *The Sydney Wars*, 84–90. Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers*, 173. Inga Clendinnen suggests that McIntire had done something 'deeply vile' based on the loathing of him by Bennelong.

¹⁰² Gapps, *The Sydney Wars*, 113–17

¹⁰³ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales* vol. 5, p. 596

¹⁰⁴ Gapps, *The Sydney Wars*, 162–64

occurred, and Andrew Thompson, another local official, led another paramilitary expedition – with Aboriginal guides – and ambushed an Aboriginal camp, killing a number of those present.¹⁰⁵ The colonial capacity for frontier violence thus was not limited to the military detachments, but relied on a growing settler paramilitary capacity for raids and defense. This is evident in the increasing role of paramilitary reprisal parties above, and in the establishment of a constabulary, militias, and loyal associations.¹⁰⁶ The selected expeditions above are only some of the largest officially sanctioned expeditions during these early decades.

Dierk Walter argues that “punitive expeditions were the classic instrument of power on the militarised frontier” and which had the aim of “[providing] a violent object lesson in superiority and inferiority in the relations between the empire and the periphery.” Such imperial campaigns were distinguished by their emphasis on securing land and territory:

“The act of violence was aimed at gaining control over the land, not at the people. The objective of total war was not intentional, it was functional—leaving aside the fact that it was often not even a stated aim, since the displacement and extermination of the original users of the land was such a gradual and individual process comprising a succession of acts of violence that the ‘disappearance’ of the indigenous [sic] population could sometimes take decades, even centuries, and was seen by the perpetrators rather as a suprapersonal and involuntary process—as a kind of fact of Social Darwinism.¹⁰⁷”

¹⁰⁵ Gapps, *The Sydney Wars*, 172–74; Karskens, *Colony*, 576–77. Grace Karskens adds that those present potentially included women since the Aboriginal guides expected to ‘seize a wife’ from the camp.

¹⁰⁶ Gapps, *The Sydney Wars*, 144–45, 189

¹⁰⁷ Walter, *Colonial Violence: European Empires and the Use of Force*, 135–36

So it was in the space of Sydney.

Conclusion

This chapter establishes the basic elements of the production of settler space within the early decades of the colonial enterprise in the Sydney basin. The dispossession of First Nations land by the settlers is at the heart of this story, but this chapter argues for framing this process as a relational struggle, not as a linear or areal conception of an expanding frontier. Such conceptions of the frontier, as discussed in the first section, not only rely on a spatial binary of civilisation and savagery but preclude an adequate appraisal of the ongoing nature of dispossession: its means of consolidation and modes of reproduction. Land, as Patrick Wolfe argues, is central to this project of dispossession, but this chapter emphasises the socio-ecological relations that underpin the struggle over land during these years, and its transition into landed property. Indigenous dispossession, then, is not simply a matter of seizing some tracts of land, but the transformation of the socio-ecological relations that are crucial to the production of space – a transformation backed by colonial violence. In this sense, we can view these processes as part of the initiating patterns of primitive accumulation, with the account provided here enriched by its emphasis on the social relations of landed property.

Drawing on Lefebvre's concept of 'fragments of nature,' I develop the conceptual tool of the twin fragments of nature and violence to make sense of this early spatial history of settler space. Two conceptual moves are at play here. My argument focusses first on how settlers transformed the carefully calibrated environmental structure of Aboriginal people, rather than on how they secured particular tracts of territory. The occupation of this acre or that acre is important for detailing the socio-ecological transformations underway, but it does not exhaust the story of the production of settler space.

Second, these transformations lead to instances of colonial violence: from conflict over fish to the seizure of grain and livestock. However, this is not simply a cause-and-effect model but instead ought to be positioned as an internal relationship: colonial violence and socio-ecological transformation are recursively embedded processes. The specific expression of the mutual articulation of these fragments of nature and violence is highly variable, even within the confines of a relatively small area, but the framing I offer here may assist, for other cases, in situating the production of settler space in socio-ecological terms.

These fragments of nature and violence may be treated as variable indices within the production of settler space that help guide the critique of settler spatial history. In some cases, where the project of settlement is tied to imperatives for Cheap Natures, the specific expression of these fragments may be integrated with these world-ecological dynamics.¹⁰⁸ In other cases, like the early decades of the colony at Sydney, such dynamics have a less significant contribution. The theoretical contribution that I am staking out here is an approach to the critique of settler spatial history which emphasises the co-integration between the transformation of socio-natures and frontier violence.

The third section of this chapter shows how these fragments of nature and violence were internalised within the relations of landed property as they developed during this early period of the spatial history of Sydney. The spatial pattern of landed property was adapted in line with these constitutive relations, shifting from spatially separated lots to a contiguous ring of farmsteads for mutual security and productivity. The intent of the land grants system was to provide for the moral rehabilitation of the convicts, underpinned by a racial-territorial notion of agrarian labour on the land as a

¹⁰⁸ Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life* (Verso, 2015).

signifier of civilisation. Yet the planned system set down by the imperial state in distant London mutated on the ground as agents took up its formal attributes and adapted them to their own ends. Critically, however, this did not supplant the key role of the fragments of nature and violence nor the racial-territorial sensibilities. Rather, land was a means of liberty from the colonial state for the Hawkesbury settlers on their riverside farms, or a limited means of primitive accumulation, for the officers on their expansive pastures.

The following chapters trace out how the spatial history of the Sydney Basin developed from these fragments of nature and violence. These fragments are integral to the critique of settler space undertaken by this thesis, because they establish how colonial violence and dispossession are at the roots of the production of settler space. Their articulation within the social relations of landed property, in particular, forms the foundation of the Macquaries' attempt to consolidate a moral order of space, which Chapter Four discusses. Their interventions into the production of space, however, were undermined by the gradually heightening role of imperial circuits of capital, which came to dominate the production of space, as Chapter Five examines. Nevertheless, the foundational transformation of the socio-ecological relations within the Sydney Basin, and the ensuing frontier violence, retains a crucial role in the production of settler space.

Chapter Four: A moral order of space

The viceregal tenure of Governor Macquarie, from 1810 to 1821, witnessed a concerted attempt to consolidate the production of settler space towards a moral order of space. To borrow a metaphor from Amy Offner, the Macquarie tenure ‘sorted out’ the preexisting elements of settler space, prioritising some and reformulating others to produce a moral order of space.¹ These years are useful for drawing out some insights into the spatial history of settler spaces because they elucidate both the conditions that constituted the settler production of space as well as those that led to its supersession by a settler abstract space. The spatial history of most places is visited by periods of consolidation within the production of space: a project, consciously envisioned or otherwise, to crystallise a specific set of social relations within space. These projects, and the measure of their success, are useful guides to the patterns of a given space. They enable interpretation of the conditions constituting the production of space as well as the conditions under which that space is superseded.

The production of settler space during the Macquarie period was premised on the twin fragments of nature and violence, discussed in Chapter Three, and it was coordinated through a system of landed property that aimed at ‘fixing’ the convicts. They were to be fixed both spatially, so they could not return to Britain, and morally, so that they might be reformed subjects of the Crown. At the same time, settlers of varying stripes continued to take up that system towards their own ends. With the arrival of Lachlan and Elizabeth Macquarie, his wife, the settler state under their viceregal authority sought

¹ Offner proposes that the turn to neoliberalism was a process of ‘sorting out’ elements of the mixed economy (i.e. loosely, the Keynesian-welfare state and economy). See: Amy Offner, *Sorting Out the Mixed Economy: The Rise and Fall of Welfare and Developmental States in the Americas* (Princeton University Press, 2019).

to deepen and entrench the aims of the penal colony to improve the convicts through the improvement of the land. This project did not depart from the structuring conditions discussed in the previous chapter: rather, frontier violence and dispossession remained central, even as they were modulated. Even as they sought to consolidate the settler space of the Sydney Basin, however, the foundational conditions for their project were already eroding: the culmination of a moral order of space was accompanied by the conditions of its dissolution into a settler abstract space.

As a consequence of the military coup in 1809 (the 'Rum Rebellion'), the British Home Office dispatched Lachlan Macquarie to replace Governor Bligh, accompanied by a fresh regiment of troops to replace the NSW Marine Corps. His orders were to bring the unruly settlement to heel and oversee its moral and economic development.² The space that confronted them upon their arrival both over- and under-whelmed their expectations, and over the next decade they strove to shape what they took as its leading elements towards their own vision of space. The hierarchical premises of space that they brought with them were centrally mandated through their viceregal authority: the embodied representative of the Crown, instructed to restore the political structure of the colony after the embarrassment of the coup. Its economic structure was already shifting, fermenting the preconditions for the later pastoral sector, which presented some thorns that the Macquaries could not prune from the colony. The tasks that confronted the Macquaries, however, were not limited to the restoration of imperial authority and the rehabilitation of settler convicts. Indigenous resistance waxed anew, and the settler state responded with punitive expeditions that culminated in the infamous Appin Massacre of 1816. Violence and dispossession, backed by a violent logistics of space, remained central to the production of settler space.

² Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 7, 143-146.

I should pause to clarify a terminological and then methodological point. Much of this chapter concentrates on the vision and projects of the Macquaries. Lachlan's presence predominates over Elizabeth's in the colonial archive, due to the unequal distribution of gendered power within both settler and British society. There is, however, good reason to think that their relationship was a partnership in some key domains: it is certain that Elizabeth's contributions were crucial for the architecture and landscape aesthetics discussed in the third section and it is probable that their views on nature and morality were intertwined.³ I therefore generally refer to their project as shaped by their joint authorship: the *Macquaries'* moral order of space. (Consequently, I refer to the Macquaries by their first names when disambiguation is required, rather than restraining reference by last name only to the male figure.)

However, this focus on the Macquaries is but a useful shorthand for the real tasks of this thesis. Drawing on my discussion of post-holing as method in the Introduction, my interest in their project rests in what it reveals about the underlying social relations that shape the settler production of space: the elements that are taken up within their attempt to consolidate a moral order of space and the elements that are primed for the emergence of a settler abstract space. The contribution of this thesis rests in my identification of a contradictory dynamic within settler social relations, where elements of both tendencies are incorporated within the origins of settler abstract space.

This argument proceeds over three sections. I begin by establishing the central features of the Macquaries' moral order of space: romanticism of nature, extractivism of land, and moralism. These motifs were a way of articulating the ideology of improvement: improving the land was covalent

³ Lenore Coltheart and Peter Bridges, 'The Elephant's Bed? Scottish Enlightenment Ideas and the Foundations of New South Wales', *Journal of Australian Studies* 25, no. 68 (January 2001): 19–33.

with improving the convicts. Building on my arguments in Chapter Three, I show how these principles were expressed within the system of landed property – as well as how they were ignored or subverted, by ordinary emancipated convicts or by the gentlemen settlers who preceded pastoral capital. Next, I turn to how the settler state under the viceregal authority of the Macquaries entrenched settler power by producing a violent logistics of space. This was necessary to ensuring settler dominion over the space in the face of Indigenous resistance and indicates how dispossession is structurally integrated within the spatial history of settler spaces. These spatial logistics were bound up with the pattern of landed property, and therefore form an interconnective tissue between colonial violence and the moral order of space. Third, I turn to the interventions in colonial architecture and landscape aesthetics which were the signal achievements of the Macquaries: their best-known claims to fame, due in part to their residual presence within the urban fabric of contemporary Sydney. Here I frame these interventions through a logic of devisualisation: a settler counterpart to Lefebvre's logic of visualisation, which was a necessary precedent within the spatial history of abstract space. The logic of devisualisation expresses the structural tendency of the production of settler spaces to efface the practical and representational presence of Indigenous life. This was not an intended outcome for the Macquaries; what they sought was to exemplify their moral order of space through the colony's architecture and landscapes.

For that achievement, they were first torn down by the imperial state, and then decades later recuperated by an emergent nationalism of the Australian settler colony. Traditional historians vindicate Lachlan as the 'Father of Australia,' for shepherding it from convict to egalitarian society, and for his architecture and public works. In this vein is Stephen Roberts' evaluation of Governor Macquarie: his merits rest in a table of figures showing the demographic and economic growth of the colony over the 1810s, which is

attributed to his wise and beneficent egalitarian policies and state-sponsored construction projects.⁴ The only sticking point is that the governor impeded the expansion of capitalist pastoral production. In developing this argument, Stephen Roberts follows Governor Macquarie's own telling of his governorship. In 1821, the British government ordered a Commission of Inquiry into the colony of New South Wales. The commissioner, J.T. Bigge, panned the Macquarie administration for his 'humanitarian' approach to convicts and his 'wasteful spending' on public works. In his reply, shortly before his death, Macquarie defended his policies by showing how he brought the colony from decrepitude to prosperity – even supplying similar figures as Roberts provides.⁵ In his now-famous words:

“I found the Colony barely emerging from infantile imbecility, and suffering from various privations and disabilities; the Country impenetrable beyond 40 miles from Sydney; Agriculture in a yet languishing state; commerce in its early dawn; Revenue unknown; threatened by famine; distracted by faction; the public buildings in a state of dilapidation and mouldering to decay; the few Roads and Bridges, formerly constructed, rendered almost impassable; the population in general depressed by poverty; no public credit nor private confidence; the morals of the great mass of the population in the lowest state of debasement, and religious worship almost totally neglected.”⁶

Of course, this report came a decade after the fact, as part of his self-justification and attempt to recuperate his reputation. Some exaggerative

⁴ Stephen H. Roberts, *History of Australian Land Settlement, 1788-1920* (Psychology Press, 1968), 24-25.

⁵ Traditional historians either take Macquarie's or Bigge's side in this debate.

⁶ Frederick Watson and Peter Chapman, eds., *Historical Records of Australia* (Sydney: Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1914), vol. 10, 671-672.

license may be seen here, as Grace Karskens points out, but the same applies to his glowing reports of the state of the colony during his viceregal tenure.⁷ Regardless of any exaggeration, Lachlan and Elizabeth Macquarie – both Scots and both firmly entrenched within the modernising and colonising systems of privilege in the British Empire – saw the colony in 1810 as ripe for improvement.

4.1. Improve the land to improve the morals

First amongst the instructions to Lachlan Macquarie (that is, after the template orders and those instructions pertaining to the coup) were orders to improve the morals of the colony, followed by its economic security. Viscount Castlereagh wrote that “the great objects of attention are to improve the morals of the colonists, to encourage marriage, to provide for education, to prohibit the use of spiritous liquors, to increase the agriculture and stock, so as to ensure the certainty of a full supply to the inhabitants under all circumstances.”⁸ On his arrival, no small part of the perceived immorality concerned the behaviour of women, engaged in non-marital relationships. Property and the rights of inheritance were at issue: some women claimed the estates of deceased partners by right of cohabitation. For Lachlan, such rights were permissible in the context of a “sober, decent, and industrious” marriage, but must be strictly forbidden otherwise.⁹ The optimal circumstance for the moral improvement of the colonists was a stable marriage within an agrarian community of smallholding settlers, with households headed by men.

In November 1810, after some months in Sydney spent resolving the

⁷ Karskens, *Colony*, 192.

⁸ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 7, 145.

⁹ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 7, 293.

tensions of the coup, the Macquaries ventured on a tour of the colony with the aim of surveying the colony, as if they were lords of a new demesne. Travelling in tents commissioned from India, valued at princely £551, and accompanied by wagonloads of supplies and servants, their circuit took them in a wide arc through the southwest, west, and northwest of the Sydney Basin. (On being queried about the public expense for these tents, Macquarie swore they were for public service only, and “not for any private View or Caprice of Mine.”)¹⁰ The aim, Lachlan wrote, was “to make [himself] better acquainted with the nature of the soils, and of the progress hitherto made by the settlers in the cultivation and improvement of the country.”¹¹ (His receipt of part of the late Andrew Thompson’s estate – valued at perhaps £5000 – no doubt spurred him on, and Thompson’s many properties are woven throughout the journey.)¹² Lachlan was the son of a tenant farmer, made rich by marriage and an associate of privilege through the military, and the ideals of British high society were preeminent in his mind. In a study of Lachlan’s 1807 journey from India to London through Persia and Russia, Anthony Page argues that:

“By the turn of the century the notion of links between the sophistication of agriculture and commerce and levels of civilisation had become central to the mindset of enlightened Britons. Thus Macquarie constantly noted the degree to which land was cultivated and the standard of the architecture in towns and cities.”¹³

¹⁰ A measure of skepticism seems warranted. Watson and Chapman, *Historical Records of Australia*, vol. 7, 712.

¹¹ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 7, 443.

¹² J. V. Byrnes, ‘Andrew Thompson (1773–1810)’, in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 18 vols (Canberra: National Centre of Biography, Australian National University), accessed 23 November 2023.

¹³ Anthony Page, ‘Enlightenment, Empire and Lachlan Macquarie’s Journey Through Persia

The same sentiments of civilisation are found across his 1810 and 1815 tours of the Sydney Basin as Page reveals in the 1807 journals. For the purposes of this chapter's argument, the tour of the Macquaries demonstrates three key motifs of their vision for a moral order of space: romanticism, extractivism, and moralism. Romanticism and extractivism went hand-in-hand to generate their view of land and nature; extractivism and moralism blended to generate their view of labour. Yet the nature and labour that was envisaged by Macquarie was not an abstract nature or abstract labour: a capitalist orientation to surplus value and the free gifts of nature was set beneath a moral framework. My argument is that these three motifs were linked through the acquisition and improvement of land as the central feature of the moral order of space that the Macquaries encountered and strove to consolidate. In this respect, their efforts to shape the space of the Sydney Basin selectively reformulated the twin fragments of nature and violence discussed in Chapter Three. The transformation of socio-ecological relations across the Sydney Basin was renewed and consolidated within the shaping of settler space embarked upon by the Macquaries and, as we shall see in the next section, this continued to rely upon frontier violence.

At the time, however, direct military conflict between settlers and Aboriginal people was limited. The preceding decade or so had seen a sustained current of colonial violence around Parramatta and the Hawkesbury, but the first few years of the new governor's tenure were relatively peaceful. On 16 November, venturing through the Cow-pastures region to the south-west, Lachlan Macquarie was struck by the romantic beauty of the natural scenes he observed, praising them with his customary double- or triple-barrelled adjectives. Assimilated within these romantic vistas were Aboriginal people, likely a majority of whom came from the

and Russia', *History Australia* 6, no. 3 (1 January 2009): 70.6.

Dharawal people. He described how they travelled "through a very fine rich Country and open Forest," meeting "two or three small Parties of the Cow-Pastures Natives" who, two evenings later, "entertained" them with "an Extraordinary sort of Dance after their own manner" (at least, it was entertainment to the colonial gaze, anyway).¹⁴ These included a Dharawal man, 'Koggie,' as Lachlan rendered the name here (a.k.a. Goggey, which I use from here, following other sources), and who he described as "the Native Chief of the Cow-Pasture Tribe."¹⁵ The identification of 'chief,' however, was often a superimposition by colonial observers onto Aboriginal society of a model of Indigenous chiefs drawn from other colonial settings, sometimes with the objective of subverting traditional leadership structures or imposing new ones on societies torn by dispossession, disease, and violence.¹⁶ Regardless, it is likely the dance played a different role than mere entertainment for the Aboriginal people involved, but I cannot conclude what was the precise intent and social significance. That this white stranger and his entourage were important must have been clear to them, and they likely were better informed about the state of colonial affairs, and the arrival of a new Governor, than Lachlan's diary entries suggest.¹⁷ Goggey had been a guide for an expedition in 1802 and was clearly conversant in the colonial tongue. Perhaps he and those with him were – rightly – anxious to establish

¹⁴ Lachlan Macquarie, 'Journal of a Tour of Governor Macquarie's First Inspection of the Interior of the Colony' (Macquarie University Library, 2011), ML Ref: A778 pp.1-45, Lachlan and Elizabeth Macquarie Archive, originally held in Mitchell Library, Sydney, 16–18 November 1810.

¹⁵ Macquarie, 'Journal of Macquarie's 1810 Tour', 18 November 1810.

¹⁶ Dennis Foley, 'Leadership: The Quandary of Aboriginal Societies in Crises, 1788 – 1830, and 1966', in *Transgressions*, ed. Ingereth Macfarlane and Mark Hannah, Aboriginal History Monographs (ANU Press, 2007).

¹⁷ Francis Barralier, 'Appendix A: Barralier's Journal', in *Historical Records of New South Wales*, ed. F.M. Bladen and Alexander Britton, 7 vols (Sydney: Charles Potter, Government Printer, 1892), 749–825. For more on Goggey's entanglements with colonial society, see: Annemarie McLaren, 'Reading the Entangled Life of Goggey, an Aboriginal Man on the Fringes of Early Colonial Sydney', *Ethnohistory* 65, no. 3 (1 July 2018): 489–515.

good relations with an important colonial authority.

The following evening, on 19 November, Governor Macquarie placidly records an after-dinner stroll with Elizabeth "along the Road leading from the River to enjoy the cool of the Evening and the tranquil scenes of the Forest around us!"¹⁸ Enjoyment of picturesque landscapes was shared between the Macquaries from the start of their relationship, with Elizabeth supervising genteel landscaping in the United Kingdom.¹⁹ In 1815, the Macquaries ventured to the "new discovered country" over the Blue Mountains, and Lachlan's admiration is couched in much the same terms: "a very extensive deep romantic Glen" catches his attention, as does "a fine plain verdant Country of open Forest Land" and a "Water Fall at least one Thousand feet in Height to be seen here in awful grandeur."²⁰ The romanticism of Lachlan Macquarie was continuous with his predecessors. As the previous chapter showed, settlers framed Aboriginal land as a primeval nature, ripe for appropriation and improvement. The romantic vision of nature enables settlers to either erase the presence of Indigenous people or render them as vanishing creatures of nature, as with the dance performed for the Macquaries; as such, it functions as an imperial technique of control.²¹ Within such representational spaces, the primeval nature of idyllic pastoral scenes or wilderness beyond the range of settlement is set in ideological opposition

¹⁸ Lachlan Macquarie, 'Journal of a Tour of the Newly Discovered Country West of the Blue Mountains. 25 April 1815 - 19 May 1815' (Macquarie University Library, 2011), ML Ref: A779 1-10v, Lachlan and Elizabeth Macquarie Archive, originally held in Mitchell Library, Sydney, 19 November 1810.

¹⁹ Coltheart and Bridges, 'The Elephant's Bed?'

²⁰ Macquarie, 'Journal of a Tour of the Newly Discovered Country West of the Blue Mountains. 25 April 1815 - 19 May 1815', 25 April, 29 April, 17 May 1815.

²¹ See, for example: Nicholas Smith, 'Blood and Soil: Nature, Native and Nation in the Australian Imaginary', *Journal of Australian Studies* 35, no. 1 (1 March 2011): 1-18. For a broader view on the role of romanticism in natural history and writing, see Alan Bewell, 'Romanticism and Colonial Natural History', *Studies in Romanticism* 43, no. 1 (2004): 5-34; Alan Bewell, *Natures in Translation: Romanticism and Colonial Natural History* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2017).

to the urban, as Chantelle Bayes argues.²² At the same time, no grander of an achievement could be made than to ornament nature with the work of man: on their voyage to Sydney, Elizabeth had admired how the city of “Rio Janeiro is not only highly favor’d by nature, but also much adorn’d by the art of Man.”²³ Her efforts in landscaping, discussed later, aimed at much the same effect. In line with the regressive-progressive method of spatial history, outlined in Chapter Two, the settler romanticism of this early period remained a residue within representational spaces of Australian literature across the nineteenth century, even as utilitarian and extractivist modes of appropriation from nature came to predominate.²⁴

That is not to suggest, however, that an extractivist orientation to nature was absent from the settler-colonial production of space during the early settler-colonial decades. In colonial Victoria’s forest management, Libby Porter identifies a tension between romantic and utilitarian philosophies of nature and space which “began to generate a distinct hierarchy of space.”²⁵ Similarly, Lachlan Macquarie’s romantic vision of nature was tempered by his extractivist leanings. For every praiseworthy natural scene, he comments on the quality of soil for pasturage or agriculture. In one tract of the Cow-pastures, he remarks that “the Country I rode through was generally very indifferent, and unfit for Tillage, but some of it is good Pasturage.”²⁶ At the Hawkesbury, he notes that along the river “the Soil of which in general is

²² Chantelle Bayes, ‘Renegotiating Nature: Writing the Post-Romantic Australian City’, *TEXT* 21, no. Special 41 (2017): 1–12.

²³ Elizabeth Macquarie, ‘Elizabeth’s Journal’ (Macquarie University Library, 2011), ML Ref: C126 pp.1-111, Lachlan and Elizabeth Macquarie Archive, originally held in Mitchell Library, Sydney, 6 August 1809.

²⁴ See, for example: Andrew McCann, ‘Romanticism, Nationalism and the Myth of the Popular in William Lane’s *the Workingman’s Paradise*’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 25, no. 70 (January 2001): 1–12.

²⁵ Libby Porter, ‘Producing Forests: A Colonial Genealogy of Environmental Planning in Victoria, Australia’, *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 26, no. 4 (1 June 2007): 466–77.

²⁶ Macquarie, ‘Journal of Macquarie’s 1810 Tour’, 19 November 1810.

extremely good, and yield at this present time very fine Crops.”²⁷ In the 1815 journey to the Bathurst region, he places the same emphasis on the appropriateness of the soil for pastoral or agrarian pursuits.

Although this extractivist mindset was aimed at dispossessing and enclosing new lands for settler agrarian production, it was not governed by a profit motive. Rather, the Macquaries believed in the normative equation between convict transportation, agricultural landholding and labour, and criminal and moral rehabilitation. In his despatch to London, summarising the 1810 tour, Macquarie describes the colonists’ “considerable progress in the cultivation of their lands, taking much greater pleasure in honest industry than heretofore, and becoming daily more temperate and more religious.”²⁸ Before his attention turned to the agrarian countryside, his orders and instructions within Sydney focussed on moral matters of women and marriage, as discussed earlier, and attempting to assert control over the trade in spirits. His vision was not aligned with specifically capitalist production, in agriculture or pastoralism. Instead, some of the best candidates for rural capital accumulation, Wentworth and Macarthur, who owned large pastoral runs in the Cowpastures region, are marked out for criticism to London. Rather than alienating further lands in the region for private use, Macquarie proposed that public ownership would “prove a source of considerable wealth to the government” due to the herds of wild cattle and thus restrain the burden of the colony on the budget of the state.²⁹ (Do not infer, however, that Macquarie was a penny-pincher: he likely sought savings here so he could fund his public works, as this chapter later discusses.)

The settler society of the Sydney Basin was at this time a commercial society, albeit one with a widespread system of rationing for convicts on

²⁷ Macquarie, ‘Journal of Macquarie’s 1810 Tour’, 3 December 1810.

²⁸ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 7, 600.

²⁹ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 7, 601.

assigned labour to free settlers or working on the public account. From 1812–1815, it experienced a sustained slump and, after the close of the Napoleonic wars, was oversupplied with labour from 1816.³⁰ But the existence of market exchange and commerce does not alone establish the dominance of capitalist imperatives within production.³¹ On 8 June 1811, Lachlan issued orders indicating that all future land grants would be conditional grants that (i) limited the recipient from sale or alienation of the grant for a period of five years and (ii) required the recipient to clear and improve some portion of the allotted land within the same period.³² These conditions inserted by Lachlan would be retained across the many mutations of the colonial system of landed property during the nineteenth century: Chapter Six, for example, analyses the similar conditions attached to landed property under the Robertson Land Acts. In line with the critique of formalism from the Introduction to this thesis, however, the content of these conditions changes in line with wider social relations. The objective, for Lachlan, was to constrain the use of land as a commodity in favour of a systematic project of improvement; by the 1860s, the question was not the commodification of land but the distribution of the rewards of dispossession.

The ideology of improvement that underpins these conditions links improvement of the labourer to the improvement of the land. Within this relation is expressed a hierarchy of civilisation based on a teleological view of historical progress: from hunter-gatherers, through pastoral herding, to sedentary farming, and finally to the scientific improvement of the modern period. David Graeber and David Wengrow have recently laid down a gauntlet

³⁰ Margaret J. E. Steven, 'The Changing Pattern of Commerce in New South Wales, 1810–1821', *Business Archives and History* 3, no. 2 (1963): 139–55.

³¹ See: Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View*, New ed. (London: Verso, 2002).

³² Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 7, 542.

to the mythologisers of agrarian progress in human pre-history, arguing that the meta-narrative of agrarian development, urbanised elites, and social inequality “was invented [during the Enlightenment] largely for the purpose of neutralising the threat of indigenous critique.”³³ This meta-narrative of social progress became attached to a scale of human evolution, where the degree of ‘improvement’ of the land was an index for the general development of the people themselves. Chapter Three touched on these ideas in Barry Corr’s discussion of the ‘Great Chain of Being,’ from the ‘lowest’ animals to the ‘highest’ humans.³⁴ Brenna Bhandar explains this ideology in the context of William Petty’s colonial survey of Ireland:

“Land and the labor of men ought to be conceptual equivalents; they are inextricably bound to one another. The improvement of one requires the improvement of the other. If the men are not industrious and productive workers of the land, the land will be, like them, worth less, perhaps even worthless.”³⁵

For Bhandar, the ideology of improvement defines the racial regime of ownership found in colonial social relations.³⁶ Landed property comes to be shaped by these conditions of improvement, and so justifies the negation of Indigenous sovereignty to the extent that their management of the land and care for country are not counted as proper ‘improvement.’ Chapter Five will return to Bhandar’s arguments again, where I argue that they overstate the degree to which these (and related) conditions imply an abstract space. For this chapter, her work is useful in teasing out the ongoing connections

³³ David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (Penguin Random House, 2021), 32.

³⁴ Corr, ‘Pondering the Abyss: A Study of the Language of Settlement on the Hawkesbury Nepean Rivers’.

³⁵ Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*, 42.

³⁶ Notably, Martin Lessagick points to how William Petty deploys the Great Chain of Being within his work. Legassick, ‘The Frontier Tradition in South African Historiography’, 10.

between improvement and the racialisation of landed property.

In the Sydney Basin, evidence of moral improvement was linked to property improvements. The grant of property rights was accompanied by ideological and moral obligations on the recipient to follow-through on improving the land. Thus one can imagine the immense disappointment of Governor Macquarie upon witnessing small farmers with good soil yet “mean and paltry” houses.³⁷ At first, the governor was willing to put this down to the liability of the Hawkesbury to flood. But it became clear that small settlers elsewhere had houses that were “very bad, mean, and inconveniently constructed” and were themselves “badly clothed, and apparently very ill and poorly fed.”³⁸ Instead of comprehending the economic limitations of emancipated convicts unfamiliar with farming, with little in the way of capital, and, aside from the Hawkesbury, subsisting on soils unfit for intensive farming,³⁹ Macquarie berated them:

“I spoke to and admonished many of them to pay more attention in future to their own Personal cleanliness and comfort and to build themselves better Houses to live in; promising to such as followed this good advice every reasonable assistance and encouragement from Government.”⁴⁰

A similar admonition followed four days later in the Concord district.⁴¹ The Macquaries, in general, placed great virtue on personal health and hygiene as a marker of character. For instance, during their many months

³⁷ Macquarie, ‘Journal of Macquarie’s 1810 Tour’, 30 November 1810.

³⁸ Macquarie, ‘Journal of Macquarie’s 1810 Tour’, 8 December 1810.

³⁹ Outside of the Hawkesbury floodplains, Sydney’s soils are generally characterised by a mix of shale and sandstone bedrock, neither of which are especially dense in nutrients required for intensive farming that characterised European agrarian production. See: Haworth, ‘The Shaping of Sydney by Its Urban Geology’.

⁴⁰ Macquarie, ‘Journal of Macquarie’s 1810 Tour’, 8 December 1810.

⁴¹ Macquarie, ‘Journal of Macquarie’s 1810 Tour’, 12 December 1810.

long voyage from Britain to the colony, Elizabeth approvingly recorded how her husband paid “minute care & attention” to the hygiene and presentation of his soldiers and sailors, including twice daily inspections.⁴² On his return to Sydney, Lachlan penned a public notice to the settlers “expressing his regret” for their failures to “erect commodious residences” and their “miserable cloathing [sic].”⁴³ With “economy and temperance,” these defects might be rectified. Perhaps in recognition that stiffness of character might not suffice, Lachlan extended to the poorer settlers an offer of stock from the government herds, payable in grain or money after eighteen months – but only to those settlers who could “bring unquestionable vouchers for their honesty and industry.”⁴⁴ In spite of these stern words and incentives, Lachlan’s aims were stymied. In 1815, revisiting the path he took in 1810, he noted his continued disappointment with the situation of the small settlers:

“In this ride I was truly concerned to observe that the Settlers have not made the smallest improvement on their Farms since I first visited them in November 1810, near Five Years ago! — No Fences or Enclosures or Gardens made, and no new Houses built or old ones repaired, and the Settlers themselves living in the same Poverty and Sloth as they did then. — This is a melancholy and mortifying reflection, but I fear there is no remedying these lazy habits during the existence of the present old Generation.”⁴⁵

Better to blame the settlers than to accuse your own administration. As it turned out, the conditions of improvement inserted by Lachlan for new grants

⁴² Macquarie, ‘Elizabeth’s Journal’, 10 December 1809.

⁴³ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 7, 468. 8

⁴⁴ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 7, 469.

⁴⁵ Lachlan Macquarie, ‘Journal of a Tour Made by Govr. Macquarie and Suite, into the Interior Parts of the Colony of N. S. Wales in Octr. 1815’ (Macquarie University Library, 2011), ML Ref: A780 1-41, Lachlan and Elizabeth Macquarie Archive, originally held in Mitchell Library, Sydney, 11 October 1815.

were beyond the capacity of the settler state to universally enforce. By the end of the Macquarie administration, as Grace Karskens summarises:

“The appearance of order and ‘progress’ often hid unruly reality: over half a million acres of Aboriginal land was generously granted to settlers, but two-thirds of it remained unsurveyed and no titles had been issued at all... Quit-rents were never collected; the agreements about settling and building were unsupervised and many grantees soon sold their land on to speculators.”⁴⁶

In the previous chapter, I noted how settlers had taken up the system of landed property towards their own ends. Likewise, the Macquaries’ moral order of space – founded on romanticism, extractivism, and moralism – could only be incompletely asserted on the practical conditions of everyday life and thus the production of settler space. Yet an incomplete project within the production of space can reveal insights into settler spatial history. Indeed, since all such projects are incomplete to some extent, this fact alone does not mar the critique undertaken here. I first want to point out that the requirements for settlement and improvement were asserted at least in two notable cases, suggesting that it was an uneven and partial condition of settler spatial practice.⁴⁷ This is supported by the fact that Macquarie’s concern was primarily with ‘gentlemen settlers’ with large estates, and consequently the alienation of smaller grants may not have weighed as heavily on his attentions. Second, my argument here aims primarily at establishing the ideological dimensions of the Macquaries’ vision of settler space that links improving the land with improving the morals of the colony,

⁴⁶ Grace Karskens, *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney* (Allen and Unwin, 2009), 225–26.

⁴⁷ Both cases involve figures with some stature, and large estates, in the colony. In the one case, the grantee was forced to stay in the colony and occupy his property; in the other, the grantee died within the year, and thus the issue was void. Watson and Chapman, *Historical Records of Australia*, vol. 7, 551–553, vol. 8, 393–394.

premised on romanticism, extractivism, and moralism. I position this as an attempt to consolidate a moral order of space, even as the conditions that enabled such an order were dissolving and those which were fundamental to the origins of settler abstract space were emerging. As such, it is a crucial juncture of the project of settler spatial history that this thesis is developing. As we will see, this vision of settler space was integral to their interventions into the spatial logistics and built environment of the Sydney Basin, even if it was incompletely asserted across the differentiated landed properties of the settlers.

The counterweights to this profound moral disappointment were the impressions left on Governor Macquarie by the state of those emancipated convicts who had risen to wealth and prosperity. The estate of Andrew Thompson represents a continual contrast to the impoverished state of most emancipated convicts. In Liverpool, they found his farm “in excellent order and in a most improving flourishing state.”⁴⁸ Lachlan reports that Elizabeth “was much pleased with the beautiful situation of this Farm, the Picturesque scenes around it, and the great order and regularity in which the worthy deceased owner of it had left it in, notwithstanding he had had possession of it only for about 8 or nine months previous to his much lamented Death.”⁴⁹ In the Hawkesbury, they cross the river on Thompson’s barge and, the day after, visit his gravesite and two of his estates. Governor Macquarie was not exclusively impressed by Thompson: he would be impressed with anyone who managed to build a ‘neat elegant’ house, grow ‘luxurious rich’ crops, and raise ‘well-mannered church-going’ children. During his 1815 journey, the governor was so impressed with the improvements made by one farmer – one already in possession of 200 acres, more than the average emancipated

⁴⁸ Macquarie, ‘Journal of Macquarie’s 1810 Tour’, 8 November 1810.

⁴⁹ Macquarie, ‘Journal of Macquarie’s 1810 Tour’, 20 November 1810.

convict – that he granted him an additional 100 acres on the spot.⁵⁰

At the same time, however, not all of the wealthy and privileged settlers were praiseworthy in the eyes of the Macquaries. Emancipated convicts like Andrew Thompson were model settlers, whereas free settlers or retired officers like John Macarthur and or the Blaxland brothers were noisome impediments. The political division between these factions – the emancipists and ‘exclusivists’ – was a struggle over the colonial booty (in terms of both land and government aid) and the nature of privileged status within the settler colony.⁵¹ Lachlan wrote to the Earl of Liverpool in 1812, complaining that John and Gregory Blaxland were engaged in “the lazy object of rearing of cattle” rather than “setting a good example of an improved stile [sic] of farming and agriculture.”⁵² Knowing that the government was concerned with the expense of the colony, he took pains to emphasise (i) that their herds began with government cattle, (ii) the sale of their beef to government was expensive, and (iii) the costs of supplying their convict labourers. The wealth accruing to the Blaxland brothers stemmed from government subsidy. Such “Gentlemen Settlers,” Lachlan said, failed to “[contribute] to the advancement of Agriculture in this Colony” in spite of favours and privileges granted to them by the state.⁵³ In contrast, he claimed that “the best Description of Settlers for this Country are Emancipated Convicts” – skipping over his disappointments with the more impoverished settlers.⁵⁴ He rendered his views starkly to the government, querying whether the policy was to advantage the free settlers or “hold out the greatest possible Rewards for the

⁵⁰ Macquarie, ‘Journal of a Tour to the Cow Pastures and Other Parts of the Interior’, 4 October 1815.

⁵¹ Connell and Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History*, 65–66.

⁵² Watson and Chapman, *Historical Records of Australia*, vol. 7, 559.

⁵³ Watson and Chapman, *Historical Records of Australia*, vol. 7, 559.

⁵⁴ Watson and Chapman, *Historical Records of Australia*, vol. 7, 598.

Convicts for Reformation of Manners.”⁵⁵ Lachlan’s frustration at the failure of gentlemen settlers to improve the land was the logical continuation of the ideology of improvement which justified Indigenous dispossession: agriculture, not pastoralism, was the standard-bearer of civilisation. Free settlers like John Macarthur and the Blaxland brothers represented the leading edge of the pastoral sector, which was to be at the centre of capital accumulation in Australia in later decades but were at odds with the moral order of space that the Macquaries’ sought to consolidate within the Sydney Basin.

In the following years, these men, and their pastoral enterprises, would be at the heart of the colonial violence in south-west Sydney that culminated in the Appin massacre. What this suggests is that the defining motifs of Lachlan Macquarie’s encounter with the settler space of Sydney – romanticism, extractivism, and moralism, expressed within land, labour, and nature – were superimpositions upon settler counter-movements that had their own ends and desires. The main point of this chapter is to reveal how the Macquaries’ sought to consolidate and bend a particular tendency within the production of settler space, even as its enabling conditions were beginning to dissolve. That is not to say that this project was transient: rather, it took up the fragments of nature and violence and reinserted them within the spatial history of Sydney in the form of a racial hierarchy coordinated through nature, landed property, and labour.

4.2 Violence, logistics, and space

That racial hierarchy continued to depend on colonial violence for its survival. For instance, Lachlan’s favourite settler, Andrew Thomson, did not

⁵⁵ Watson and Chapman, *Historical Records of Australia*, vol. 7, 776.

earn his privilege and wealth through innocence and virtue. Alongside his landholdings, he was one of the few emancipated convicts before the Macquarie administration who successfully entered the colonial patronage networks to receive government appointments and income, including as chief constable in the Hawkesbury region. Apart from the judicial responsibilities of the role, he led settler militias in hunting down and killing Aboriginal raiders along the banks of the Hawkesbury, sometimes with assistance from colonial troops.⁵⁶ In the previous chapter, I argued that the settler production of space can be framed through the intertwined fragments of nature and violence, enabling us to understand how frontier violence is internally related to the settler transformation of the social relations of nature. The consolidation of the Sydney Basin as a settler space depended on the capacity for colonial violence. In turn, this capacity depended on practical efforts to reshape the region so that military force could be effectively projected across the region and settlers could provide mutual protection. Concretely, the Macquarie administration was engaged in producing a violent logistics of space.

Colonial officials were aware of the logistical requirements for settler dominance in the Sydney Basin. As we saw in the previous chapter, the pattern of land grants was amended by Governor Phillips to ensure settlers neighboured one another, eliminating tree cover between properties and providing mutual security amongst the settlers. Even later revisions to these instructions – requiring five hundred acres reserved to the Crown adjacent to each thousand acres – were not followed because, in the words of Macquarie’s Surveyor-General, “those detached Settlers would have been liable to have been cut off, in Detail, by Hostile Natives.”⁵⁷ The Crown’s hope for vast tracts

⁵⁶ Gapps, *The Sydney Wars*, 172–74.

⁵⁷ Watson and Chapman, *Historical Records of Australia*, vol. 9, 369.

of surplus land, either for the clergy or for sale once the land became valuable, was undermined by the operational necessities of colonial violence.⁵⁸ Even with this pattern of land, the large distances, rugged terrain, and limited population continued to pose challenges. In 1805, Judge-Advocate Atkins wrote to Governor King, lamenting that the colony lacked centralised rural villages for the farmers: “It would have been a fortunate circumstance had villages been built for the residence of the settlers, and their farms have radiated as from a centre; but as it is, they must devise some means of protecting themselves by dedicating part of their time to their mutual protection...”.⁵⁹ The gradual influx of free settlers carrying letters of recommendation to receive large grants of land exacerbated the problem, since half-heartedly cleared grazing land undermined the smallholding pattern (see fig. 4.1). For the Macquaries, the absence of rural village life not only had a military aspect but limited the moral and communal qualities in regions like the Hawkesbury. On 7 November 1810, during his first journey, Lachlan Macquarie surveyed and promulgated the Liverpool township; a few weeks later, in the Hawkesbury region, he declared the formation of five more towns. Each allotment within these ‘Macquarie towns’ was intended to be inseparable from a corresponding farm in the vicinity, echoing Atkins’ model, and expressing a socio-spatial integration between urban and rural zones.⁶⁰ Lachlan took a close personal interest in the planning of these towns, surveying Windsor on 6 December and returning the following day with a detailed plan:

“Accompanied by the two Surveyors, to whom I communicated my plans and final orders respecting the scite [sic] of the Church, Great

⁵⁸ Watson and Chapman, *Historical Records of Australia*, vol. 8, 638.

⁵⁹ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 5, 653.

⁶⁰ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 7, 469.

Square in the new Town, and Small Square and Streets... I laid out several new Streets and gave directions for enlarging and improving the old ones, as well as respecting the size and descriptions of all future Houses that are permitted to be built.”⁶¹

Macquarie kept on returning to these towns to inspect, correct, and improve upon their development. For Macquarie, the critical spatial features of these townships included well-ordered streets, regulated houses, elegant churches with schoolhouses – and the necessary spatial instruments of a state highly integrated with the labour discipline of convicts. By the end of his tenure, each of the Macquarie towns had a brick church and schoolhouse (excepting Pitt-town, where an appropriate weatherboarded building had been purchased).⁶² A number of these brick churches, in fact, were indicated only as temporary constructions, implying a desire to bring them to the architectural quality of St Matthews in Windsor, which Macquarie described with a string of effusive adjectives as “a very handsome large brick-built church, with a spire and of a sufficient height to admit of a gallery.”⁶³ (As we shall see in the next section, these architectural interventions were aimed at expressing the moral order of space and what I will call a logic of devisualisation.) Part of the general pattern of these urban nodes was the establishment of commons. The five Macquarie towns in the Hawkesbury were amply supplied with three commons, established in 1804 by Governor King, and Macquarie declared new commons near Liverpool and Sydney itself.⁶⁴ Chapter Six examines how these commons form the site of later political struggle. In line with the regressive–progressive method, detailed in

⁶¹ Macquarie, ‘Journal of Macquarie’s 1810 Tour’, 7 December 1810.

⁶² Watson and Chapman, *Historical Records of Australia*, vol. 10, 684–701.

⁶³ Watson and Chapman, *Historical Records of Australia*, vol. 10, 690.

⁶⁴ Bruce Baskerville, ‘Commons of Colonial New South Wales’, *History Matrix* (blog), 28 November 2016.

Chapter Two, this was in part a struggle between the residues of the moral order of space discussed in this chapter and an ascendant capitalist rationality.

There was, then, a standard architectural template for the various townships that constituted the urban fabric of the Sydney region, with additional buildings contingent on the specific needs of each place: barracks, if government convicts were about; commissary stores and grainhouses for the rationing, sale, and purchasing of grain by the state; official residences for employees of the government; and sundry workshops for convict labour. These public works functioned to absorb chronic surplus labour problems that resulted from the accelerating flow of convict transportation after 1815, the trickle of capital entering the colony, and flooding on the Hawkesbury River. Although the first few years of Macquarie's tenure were relatively peaceable, the establishment of these townships also carried their earlier function of securing settler territory from Aboriginal people. To draw out the point here, these townships formed a connective tissue from the logistical requirements for settler dominance to the specific principles of the moral order of space.

To accompany these initiatives in town planning, there was a program of investment in roads and turnpikes. Four months after his arrival, Lachlan reported his intention to rehabilitate the Sydney–Hawkesbury road and turn it into a turnpike road (i.e. a toll road). In November 1812, Lachlan stated his desire to construct roads to his new Liverpool township and south-west towards the Nepean and the Cowpastures.⁶⁵ The southwestern region, largely limited to the north and east of the Cowpastures, was a fresh zone for settler grants, with grants initiated in what he named the 'Airds' district

⁶⁵ Watson and Chapman, *Historical Records of Australia*, vol. 7, 605.

immediately after his 1810 tour.⁶⁶ From 1814, after a period of drought, Stephen Gapps reports an upsurge in frontier violence within this region, with raids and reprisals.⁶⁷ The 1816 Appin massacre, which I will return to shortly, was the outcome of colonial violence spurred on by this expansion of settler landholdings. With the 1813 ‘discovery’ of a route over the Blue Mountains to Wiradjuri lands, near what would become Bathurst, Lachlan ordered a road constructed.⁶⁸ Stretching over 160 kilometres, it was completed by some fifty convict labourers in six months, with a military detachment for security. Grace Karskens notes that it was “a simple track,” roughly made, and the convicts were selected for their good character and promised emancipation upon conclusion of the work.⁶⁹ All of these roads within the Sydney Basin were turnpikes, intended to defray their costs by the collection of tolls, and were aimed at the “Prosperity and Welfare of the Colony at large.”⁷⁰

These roads had multiple effects. Consistent with the ideology of improvement, Lachlan believed that “the making of permanent roads and bridges is one of the first steps towards improving a new country.”⁷¹ Added to this, Dierk Walter, a military historian, points out that the building of roads was not just a logistical necessity for colonial violence, but “can also be seen as a symbolic and practical conquest of an alien environment that was predisposed to favour the indigenous enemy.”⁷² Expensively paved and engineered roads were not necessary to those ideological or logistical objectives: even “a broad lane of cleared undergrowth was sufficient to

⁶⁶ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, 470–71.

⁶⁷ Gapps, *The Sydney Wars*, 199–201.

⁶⁸ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 8, 150.

⁶⁹ Grace Karskens, ‘The Blue Mountains Crossings: New Histories from the Old Legends’, *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 16 (23 December 2020): 197–225.

⁷⁰ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 8, 152.

⁷¹ Bladen and Britton, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 7, 356.

⁷² Walter, *Colonial Violence: European Empires and the Use of Force*, 33.

overcome many of the tactical and logistical disadvantages of the terrain and sheer expanse of space.”⁷³ The roads within the Sydney Basin wove a web of space, tying together the new townships and outlying properties, articulated within a hierarchical nodal structure that centred on Parramatta and, especially, Sydney. That web of space enabled both domestic commerce as well as facilitating the response of centrally located garrisons to respond to Aboriginal raids (or convict unrest) as needed. The road over the mountains to Wiradjuri country was, at first, not in great use: it had been prompted by the need for better grazing stock, since drought and overstocking had degraded the pastures in the Cumberland Plain, but Lachlan was disinterested in facilitating the desires of the ‘Gentlemen Settlers’ and their herds.⁷⁴ A fully-fledged invasion of Wiradjuri country would have to wait until the 1820s and ‘30s, as the settler relations of landed property came to be impelled by imperial circuits of capital, as Chapter Five discusses.

What I am trying to indicate is how these exercises in the logistics of space – the web of space produced by these townships and their roads – were integrated with frontier violence. At minimum, such spatial logistics represent the potential conditions for consolidating settler domination; in fact, they were material to the grisly tasks of frontier violence. The most vicious instances of frontier violence were the colonial reprisal parties and expeditionary groups aimed at retributive deterrence and territorial scouring, which I discussed briefly in the previous chapter. Here I want to stress how the logistics of space indicate the growing capacity of the colonial military and settler state to enact this kind of frontier violence, towards the end of perpetuating settler control of the territory. Grace Karskens, in contrast, draws on the frequency with which these expeditions failed to find

⁷³ Walter, *Colonial Violence: European Empires and the Use of Force*, 33.

⁷⁴ Michael Pearson, ‘Bathurst Plains and Beyond: European Colonisation and Aboriginal Resistance’, *Aboriginal History* 8, no. 1/2 (1984): 63–79.

let alone kill any Aboriginal people and concludes that there was a structural problem in so far as “the fixed grid of the British military raid was forced over slippery, complex local networks.⁷⁵” Stephen Gapps, however, argues that “in fact, it [viz. the fixed grid] was surprisingly flexible and reflected the military’s adoption of colonial warfare tactics.⁷⁶” Gapps takes pains to show that the operational planning of the colonial military was sophisticated, not bumbling, and it must be noted that the distant powers of the imperial state loom beyond the shores of the settler colony. Dierk Walter notes, in general, that “one of the fundamental asymmetries of imperial warfare consists of the fact that an isolated society with at best regional resources to draw upon would regularly confront a world empire with global resources.”⁷⁷ The logistical pipeline of the imperial state, funnelled through the port at Warrane, meant that at least economic support if not military reinforcements was always available for Lachlan’s project of consolidating a settler moral order of space in the Sydney Basin.

A full account of the minutiae of the 1816 campaign is not necessary to my purposes. The immediately salient point is that three detachments marched, at first to Windsor, Liverpool, and the Cowpastures – all along the newly constructed or improved roads and, for two out of three, to Macquarie’s new townships. After gathering intelligence from local settlers, each then proceeded upon their routes, aiming to scour the land. One of the three detachments, in the Appin District (adjoining the Airds district, in the south-west), learned of an Aboriginal encampment in the hills. Launching a surprise dawn raid, they massacred sixteen Aboriginal men, women, and children and captured two women and three children. The men were hung on gibbets of nearby trees. The soldiers beheaded one of them, Cannabaygal, and his skull

⁷⁵ Karskens, *Colony*, 508.

⁷⁶ Gapps, *The Sydney Wars*, 237.

⁷⁷ Walter, *Colonial Violence: European Empires and the Use of Force*, 53.

was sent to England.⁷⁸ Macquarie's intention, as he wrote to Earl Bathurst, was to identify which 'tribes' were responsible, then "drive them to a distance from the Settlements of the White Men, and to Endeavour to take some of them Prisoners in order to be punished for their late atrocious Conduct, so as to Strike them with Terror against Committing Similar Acts of Violence in future."⁷⁹ Such a campaign of terror was well within the capacities of settler power. We cannot deduce a lack of such capacities based on the fact that two out of three detachments in the Appin expedition failed to massacre Aboriginal people, or that preceding and succeeding expeditions failed to accomplish atrocities of the same scale. Indeed, the show of force that such expeditions express may be such that Aboriginal people may seek strategies of survival and resistance other than outright conflict.

For instance, Goggey, who had met the Macquaries on their 1810 tour, had been caught up in the conflict of 1816. At the time, he was sheltering on the property of Charles Throsby, and it appears that he was amongst those Aboriginal people known to settler authorities that was investigated for possible participation in the earlier hostilities.⁸⁰ He escaped the violence of 1816, after making a "Submission" to Lachlan and promising "to be friendly in future to all White People" – although it isn't clear that he was involved in the first place.⁸¹ In 1818, his past apparently forgiven, he was presented a gorget (*viz.* an ornamental armour about the throat) by Lachlan.⁸² McClaren argues that Goggey carefully manoeuvred himself within the entangled web of settler–Aboriginal relations even as "the colonist's presence disrupted and

⁷⁸ Gapps, *The Sydney Wars*, 236.

⁷⁹ Watson and Chapman, *Historical Records of Australia*, vol. 9, 54.

⁸⁰ McLaren, 'Reading the Entangled Life of Goggey, an Aboriginal Man on the Fringes of Early Colonial Sydney'.

⁸¹ Macquarie's Diary, 6 June 1816

⁸² Macquarie's Diary, 1 January 1818.

reconfigured the social, material, and environmental landscape.”⁸³

These ruptures of Aboriginal space – first with the fragments of nature and violence and consolidated through the Macquaries’ project of a moral order of space underpinned by a violent logistics of space – were the means by which Indigenous dispossession was secured and entrenched within the Sydney Basin. Added to this, a system of control was instituted after the conflict of 1816: an assumption of hostile intent if any Aboriginal person carried weapons within a mile of any settlement or farm; a prohibition on gathering in groups larger than six near any farm; a ban on what seems to refer to gatherings for traditional law amongst or between groups; a system of passports within the settler space; and permission to request grants of land to settle upon.⁸⁴ Lachlan’s appeal to Aboriginal people to settle upon the land was continuous with the moral order of space discussed earlier in this chapter: he “earnestly exhort[ed] and thus publicly invit[ed] the Natives to relinquish their wandering idle and predatory Habits of Life” so that they may “become industrious and useful members of a community.”⁸⁵

⁸³ McLaren, ‘Reading the Entangled Life of Goggey, an Aboriginal Man on the Fringes of Early Colonial Sydney’, 507.

⁸⁴ Watson and Chapman, *Historical Records of Australia*, vol. 9, 142–44.

⁸⁵ Watson and Chapman, *Historical Records of Australia*, vol. 9, 144.

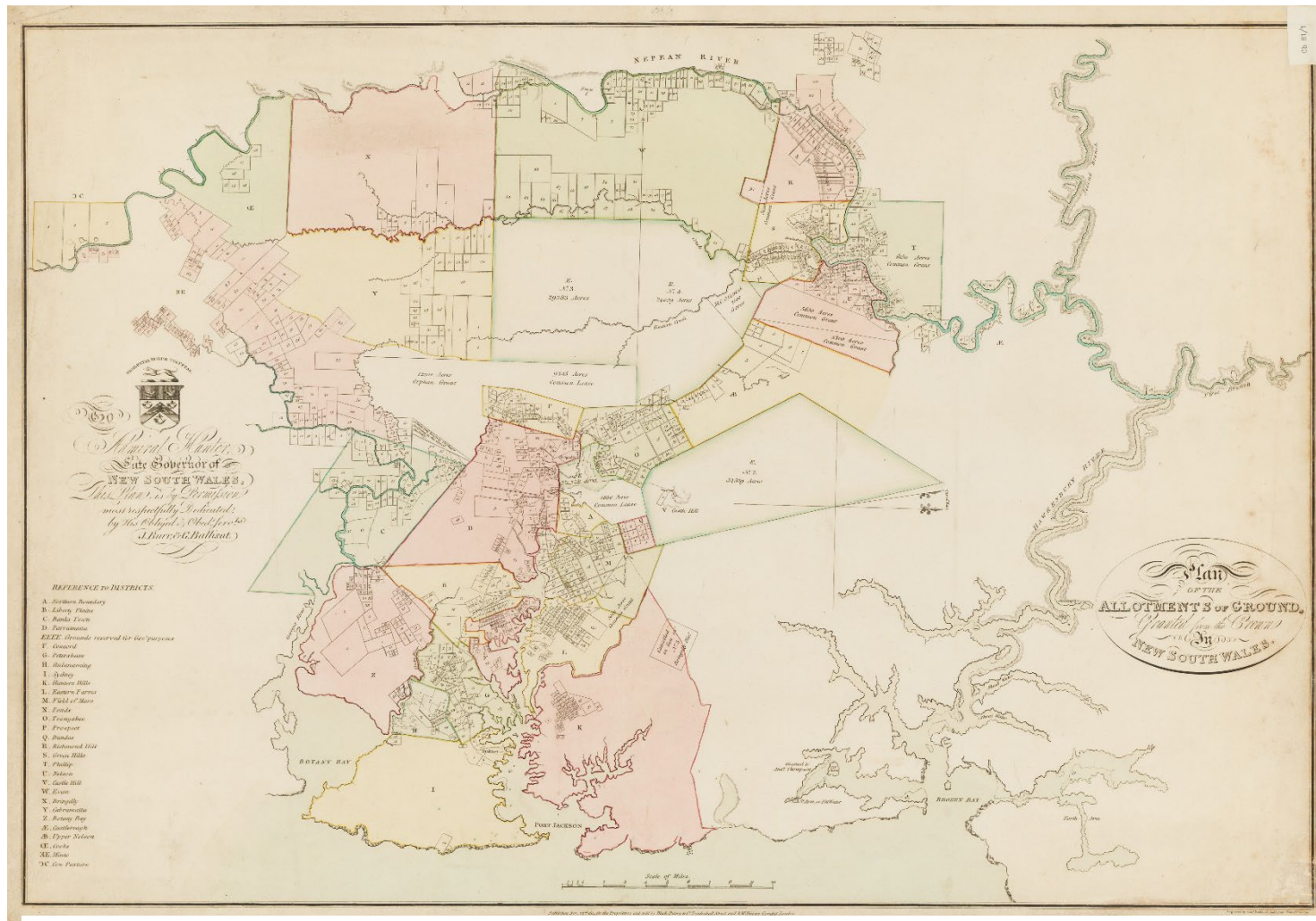


Figure 4.1. Plan of the allotments of ground, granted from the Crown in New South Wales. North is to the right. Noticeable is a broad arc of settlement from the Georges River (south), to the Cow-Pastures (south-west), and in the Cumberland Plain (west), in contrast to fig 3.1. The substantial variations between smaller and larger allotments is apparent.

4.3 The logic of devisualisation

My argument so far has aimed at showing how the Macquarie period was characterised by a project of *consolidating* a set of tendencies within the production of settler space: namely, a moral order of space premised on improving the land to improve the morals. In turn, this depended on the fragments of nature and violence discussed in Chapter Three, which were deepened through a carefully calibrated web of space that formed a violent spatial logistics. The reputation of the Macquaries within traditional Australian history emerged from some of these elements: the reformation of convicts was integral to this moral order of space, and thus ‘accentuated’ the sense of the emancipists and their Australian-born children that possession of the colony was owed to them.¹

The main other plank of their reputation was the immense program of public architecture that they embarked upon almost immediately upon arrival. These efforts were a striking change from the policy of previous governors, who were not particularly exercised about questions of architecture and aesthetics. In the words of William Robbins, “Macquarie’s public buildings represented a strategic shift in the manufacture of social space.”² The sheer breadth, in both social and geographical terms, of these buildings entailed that they touched upon nearly every aspect of the everyday life of the settlement, and within this production of space emanated the political and moral power of the vice-regal authority that defined the early colonial state. At Warrane and surrounds alone, Macquarie listed sixty-seven works, with close to a hundred more throughout the Sydney Basin.³

¹ Ward, *The Australian Legend*, 59–60.

² W. M. Robbins, ‘Spatial Escape and the Hyde Park Convict Barracks’, *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 7 (2005): 90.

³ Watson and Chapman, *Historical Records of Australia*, vol. 10, 684–701.

Detectable within these signal achievements is what I term the logic of devisualisation. Here I draw on Lefebvre's spatial history within *The Production of Space*, discussed in Chapter Two, where he examines the *logic of visualisation*. To recap, Lefebvre argues that the architecture of Gothic cathedrals indicates the 'decrypting' of the relations of absolute space that had been buried within the space of the crypts. The effect, he argues, was a new ascendancy of abstraction, mental spaces, and the power of capital and the state. This thesis shows how the spatial history of settler societies turns this logic on its head through the erasure and invisibilisation of Indigenous life, presence, and sovereignty, and how this logic of devisualisation is integrated within settler abstract space.

The construction of a web of roads throughout the Sydney Basin, as I have discussed, was crucial to the violent logistics of space necessary for settler dominion and dispossession. At the heart of this web was an obelisk, still present today in the heart of the Sydney CBD, and visible in the 1810s from the Government House. Lachlan recorded his intention to construct "a very handsome Stone Obelisk in the Center of Macquarie Place, as an Ornament to this Part of the Town, and also for the purpose of measuring the miles from to all the interior parts of the Colony," the design of which Diane Brand credits to Elizabeth Macquarie.⁴ Following the western road out of Sydney town you would pass under "a very handsome Toll House and Toll Gate" that marked the start of the turnpike road to Parramatta, dotted with sandstone mile-markers.⁵ Sandstone milestones were laid along the web of roads that were constructed or repaired during his administration, underscoring that

⁴ Lachlan Macquarie, 'Diary 10 April 1816 – 1 July 1818' (Macquarie University Library, 2011), ML Ref: A773 pp.44-49, Lachlan and Elizabeth Macquarie Archive, originally held in Mitchell Library, Sydney, 19 September 1816; Diane Brand, 'An Urbane Gaol: Macquarie's Sydney', *Journal of Urban Design* 3, no. 2 (1 June 1998): 232.

⁵ Watson and Chapman, *Historical Records of Australia*, vol. 10, 686.

the port at Warrane, as the gateway to empire, was the logistical heart of settler-colonialism in Australia.



Figure 4.2. Engraving of Sydney from the Domain, 1829.⁶ Macquarie Place is to the right of the scene. From the left: partially out of frame, the housing for the Governor's Bodyguard; the Colonial Secretary's Office and house; and the Chief Justice's house. This view appears to be from just north of Government House. The genteel aspect of the gardens formed a space of privilege oriented around the viceregal authority.

How far a settler travelled along the roads was a measure and reminder of their distance (or nearness) to the settler state. (These milemarkers retained their roles as road measurements until the 1970s and as surveying tools to this day.)⁷ Situated within a large triangle that formed Macquarie

⁶ John Carmichael, *Select Views of Sydney, New South Wales* (Sydney: John Carmichael, 1829), 11.

⁷ Robert and Sandra Crofts, *Discovering Australia's Historical Milemarkers and Boundary*

Place, the obelisk was accompanied by a water fountain housed in a Doric temple, surrounded by a dwarf wall.⁸ Nearby were the official residences of the Colonial Secretary, Judge-Advocate, and Judge of the Supreme Court, all of which faced north towards the waterfront, and beyond these were the convict lumberyard and workshops (see fig. 4.2, above). As architectural historian James Broadbent puts it, the overall effect of the space and its obelisk was “a fitting proscenium to Government House and its Domain.”⁹

In this space was expressed the central relations of settler society, at least as far as the Macquaries saw them. Cantrill and Thalís explain how Macquarie’s monumental buildings in Sydney town “provided a civic order that dominated views of the fledgling town” as a result of their height and location upon the major ridges that straddle the Tank Stream.¹⁰ Such a civic order monumentalised in representational space the distinction between the western cluster of state administration, the eastern clusters of commerce, and the ramshackle housing on the Rocks – although the spatial practice of everyday life evinced a more complex hierarchy of space.¹¹ The ‘plan’ of Sydney in 1822 (see fig. 4.3, below), after the Macquarie’s had left, indicates the key public buildings that constituted its representational space. The straight streets reflected in this map were one product of the governor’s policy of orderly urban flow of people, goods, police, rainwater and waste.¹²

Stones (Xlibris Corporation, 2013), 10–11.

⁸ Macquarie, ‘Diary 10 April 1816 – 1 July 1818’, 1 July 1816, 19 September 1816.

⁹ James Broadbent, ‘Aspects of Domestic Architecture in New South Wales 1788–1843’ (PhD Thesis, Canberra, Australian National University, 1985), 125.

¹⁰ Peter John Cantrill and Philip Thalís, ‘Beyond Planning and Architecture: The Urban Project in Sydney’, *URBAN DESIGN International* 10, no. 3 (1 September 2005): 151.

¹¹ See: Graeme Davison, ‘From Urban Jail to Bourgeois Suburb: The Transformation of Neighborhood in Early Colonial Sydney’, *Journal of Urban History* 32, no. 5 (1 July 2006): 741–60; Grace Karskens, ‘The Rocks and Sydney: Society, Culture, and Material Life 1788–C1830’ (PhD Thesis, Sydney, University of Sydney, 1995); Grace Karskens, ‘The Dialogue of Townscape: The Rocks and Sydney, 1788–1820’, *Australian Historical Studies* 27, no. 108 (1 April 1997): 88–112.

¹² Watson and Chapman, *Historical Records of Australia*, 688. Macquarie’s Reply to

Yet the Rocks, as Grace Karskens points out, were infamously resistant to attempts to reshape them in an orderly fashion.¹³ It was this ‘unruly’ nature of the convicts which led to the construction of the Hyde Park Barracks – not only as a means of moral discipline but as a technique of labour discipline. The Barracks was an assertion of viceregal authority through space over convict life; by placing the convicts within a state residence, as William Robbins argues, the Barracks was a spatial solution to the division between public (and coerced) labour-time and private labour-time which was necessitated by the requirement of convicts to pay rent for accommodation.¹⁴ Like many of the Macquarie buildings, this was no slapdash assembly: it was a sandstone structure in the Georgian style, designed by convict architect Francis Greenway. Lachlan was pleased enough to accord the building a triple adjective – “that elegant spacious and commodious building” – and to grant Greenway his pardon soon after.¹⁵ By elevating the architecture for a convict barracks and avoiding the contemporaneous ‘panopticon’ style of prison building, the intent was to communicate the possibility of moral improvement for the convicts.

The architectural sources and training within the colony were relatively limited, effectively amounting to what skills Greenway brought with him and the landscaping eye and pattern book of Elizabeth Macquarie. Diane Brand credits to Elizabeth the Gothic influences within these buildings and to Greenway the Classical traditions; she argues that the latter was the architectural language of the traditional British elite and the former represented “a more accessible, reactionary, and romantic image [that]

Commissioner Bigge.

¹³ See: Karskens, ‘THE ROCKS AND SYDNEY’; Karskens, ‘The Dialogue of Townscape’.

¹⁴ Robbins, ‘Spatial Escape and the Hyde Park Convict Barracks’.

¹⁵ Watson and Chapman, *Historical Records of Australia*, vol. 10, 192.

became emblematic of society without nobility.”¹⁶ The architecture of the Macquarie period was somewhat limited, too, by an imperial constraint that emphasised austerity in budget, urban design, and infrastructure, although Lachlan was able to evade much scrutiny while his superiors were still occupied with the Napoleonic wars (until 1815).¹⁷ Public infrastructure ought to follow public demand, not facilitate it. According to Michael Rosenthal, if such an imperial constraint had not been in play, Sydney may have “form[ed] an emblematically zoned cityscape with classical buildings for the convict and gothic for the free citizens that they might in time become.”¹⁸

The values expressed in these buildings were those of the Scottish Enlightenment, as Coltheart and Bridges argue, although accompanying this philosophy was the “filter of practical experience” of Lachlan’s estate management in Scotland and Elizabeth’s landscaping and gardening practice.¹⁹ Sharing this view is Verena Mauldon, who perceives an Enlightenment philosophy within the spatial organisation of the Parramatta Domain and the Parramatta Government House.²⁰ In six years, largely under Elizabeth’s supervision, the Domain was transformed from an informal commons to a private and fenced space, centred on a “Palladian mansion with an elegant Roman Doric portico” – the most elaborate decoration in the colony at the time – with stately garden walks through lemon trees, a summerhouse, and a veritable menagerie of animal houses: a cow-yard, emu-house, rabbit hutches, deer-house, and dove & hen house.²¹ By closing off the land to the

¹⁶ Brand, ‘An Urbane Gaol’, 235.

¹⁷ J. J. Spigelman, ‘The Imperial Constraint on Lachlan Macquarie’, *Quadrant*, October 2010.

¹⁸ Michael Rosenthal, ‘London versus Sydney, 1815–1823: The Politics of Colonial Architecture’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 34, no. 2 (1 April 2008): 215.

¹⁹ Coltheart and Bridges, ‘The Elephant’s Bed?’; Iain Stuart, ‘Macquarie and the Towns’, *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 105, no. 1 (June 2019): 26.

²⁰ Verena Mauldon, ‘Shaping the Domain: The Macquaries, Prestige, and Parklands in Colonial Parramatta’, *Garden History* 44 (2016): 191–203.

²¹ Mauldon, ‘Shaping the Domain’; Broadbent, ‘Aspects of Domestic Architecture in New South Wales 1788–1843’, 108–112.



people, reconstructing the building in an elite style, and reshaping the Domain as a preserve of the Governor and his guests, the Parramatta Domain was transformed into a space of viceregal authority, a space for the representative of the Crown in Australia. Chapter Six picks up this thread by exploring the political tensions embedded in the opening up of the Domain: the subversion of the imperial Crown by the settler's State.

The architectural analyses canvassed above, however, have concerned themselves with which European historical legacy survived within Sydney and with how that survival set the tone of later urban development. What the narrow focus on architecture misses is the mutation of an implanted European spatial history under settler-colonial conditions – that is, they fail to predicate these spatial forms on the crucial role of dispossession. In contrast, this thesis delivers an account of the logic of devisualisation embedded in these architectural forms – a logic which is then integrated into the production of settler abstract space.

The architecture of the Macquarie period plays an ideological role within the production of settler space. I discussed, above, how the Hyde Park Convict Barracks was an intervention into convict labour relations and the ideology of improvement. Nearby, the other Domain, at Warrane, “was an ideological landscape” in the words of Mary Casey, which expressed British sentiments of order and power. As with the Parramatta Domain, the Macquaries sought to reshape the Domain in the image of a walled and delimited British park as part of their attempt to reshape the colony as a whole (see fig. 4.4, below).²³ The Macquarie buildings, she writes, exhibited a deliberate blend of distinct architectural styles in order to “fashion a patina of age.” The blending of

²² John Septimus Roe, *Plan of the Town and Suburbs of Sydney, August, 1822* [Cartographic Material]. (Sydney: sn, 1822).

²³ Mary Casey, ‘Remaking Britain: Establishing British Identity and Power at Sydney Cove, 1788-1821’, *Australasian Historical Archaeology* 24 (2006): 95–96.

Gothic, neo-Palladian, Georgian, and Grecian styles creates the impression of successive layers of architectural tradition within the space, reminiscent of the historical towns of Europe, and implying settler occupation is older than the few decades or so since invasion. However, Casey does not link this patina of age with the invisibilisation of Aboriginal dispossession that is characteristic of settler-colonial ideology. Instead, she suggests that the function of apparent monumental age is to stabilise colonial factional dispute through the spatialisation of temporal continuity. This may well be true, but it does not give a complete picture. In contrast, this thesis argues that the patina of age constitutes a crucial element of the logic of devisualisation: a carefully ordered project of reproducing and transforming the Aboriginal landscape into a settler space with no trace of Aboriginal presence, led by the state in its form of viceregal authority.

In line with this argument, SM Monteith suggests that, within this settler architecture, the spectre of medievalism looms over Australian settler society, providing the illusion of history and heritage that legitimates settler occupation of Aboriginal land.²⁴ Likewise, Grace Karskens is clear on how “buildings of all sorts played a crucial role in the politics of dispossession.”²⁵ Vernacular structures and buildings seized the land through its “naked possession.” Militarised buildings functioned as practical nodes of domination in frontier violence and monumental structures operated as representational embodiments of settler ideology. Similarly, the logic of devisualisation stretches into landscapes, as with the two Domains, and ornate manses like the residences of the Judge Advocate or Colonial Secretary.

²⁴ S. M. Monteith, ‘Culture War: What Ho, Cocky?: On Australian Medievalism and (de)Colonisation’, *Overland*, December 2018.

²⁵ Grace Karskens, ‘Naked Possession: Building and the Politics of Legitimate Occupancy in Early New South Wales, Australia’, in *Investing in the Early Modern Built Environment* (Brill, 2012), 325–57.

Ian Willis argues that the Cowpastures was recast in the image of European rural society, extending the transformation of Aboriginal into settler environmental regimes discussed in the previous chapter. In his words, the Cowpastures “had been reshaped into a safe and secure landscape familiar to English sensibilities from its frontier origins and the associated violence.”²⁶



Figure 4.4. Plan of Governors Demesne Land, 1816. ²⁷ Macquarie enclosed the Domain with a wall, limiting the previous public access.

²⁶ Ian Willis, “Just like England”, a Colonial Settler Landscape’, *ISAA Review* 15, no. 2 (8 November 2020): 8.

²⁷ C. Cartwright, *A Plan of Governors Demesne Land [Cartographic Material] / Surveyed in the Year 1816 by C. Cartwright*. (Sydney: C. Cartwright, 1816).

The devisualisation of an Aboriginal landscape was a constitutive, and ongoing, current within the settler production of space. In an examination of the Gothic within Australia, Turcotte argues that “by the 1840s, the Gothic was used as a way of *forestalling* the sense of isolation from Home that settlers experienced.”²⁸ Barry Corr, in his study of the Hawkesbury, positions this illusion of heritage as no less than the “lifeblood of settlement”:

“Heritage, the lifeblood of settlement, is the ultimate metaphor of settlement. It is also the weight of ownership of the past. Through memorialisation, genealogies, centenaries and bicentenaries; Heritage, consciously or unconsciously, ensnares bystanders as beneficiaries, in a conspiracy to bury the horror and close the Abyss.”²⁹

Corr’s point is that the illusion of heritage elongates the gap between the present and invasion: the enduring presence of the buildings and landscapes produced through frontier violence and dispossession implies a historical and moral distance from the horrors of settlement.

For Lefebvre, the logic of visualisation at first made *transparent* what was previously sacred and secret: it linked the mundane with the divine, through the rationality of man. In contrast, the logic of devisualisation aimed towards making the material dynamics of dispossession and violence *opaque*. This represents a basic difference within the spatial history of settler societies *vis á vis* the history of European space that Lefebvre relies upon in explaining the origins of abstract space. What the logic of devisualisation expresses is the separation of histories of dispossession from the appearance of settler

²⁸ Gerry Turcotte, ‘Footnotes to an Australian Gothic Script’, *Antipodes* 7, no. 2 (1993): 129.

²⁹ Corr, ‘Pondering the Abyss: A Study of the Language of Settlement on the Hawkesbury Nepean Rivers’, 68.

space. It deploys the formal elements of European architecture and landscapes, but the content of these forms is transmuted within the totality of settler social relations. Their functions differ. They carry novel structural relationships – to the ideology of improvement, the violent logistics of space, and the social relations of settler landed property.

Complicating matters, however, is the way in which abstract space turns the logic of visualisation on its head. The tendency to transparency is joined by its own tendency to opacity, just in so far as abstract space is defined by the reification of capitalist social relations. What I mean by this is that the apparent legibility of Cartesian representations of space, linked with the circuit of capital, belies an excision of the messy realities of everyday life. Put differently, abstract space is characterised by a dialectic of transparency and opacity, and this is itself confronted by the residues of a historical reality overtaken by, though not annihilated, the constant mutations of capitalist geographies. Likewise, the logic of devisualisation cannot successfully dispel Indigenous presence: for one thing, at the most basic level, Aboriginal people remained present in the space of the Sydney Basin.³⁰

Conclusion

The insights about the production of settler space that we can glean from the Macquarie period are found in the attempt to consolidate a specific project: the moral order of space, with its key motifs of romanticism of nature, extractivism of the land, and a moralism of personal reformation through the ideology of improvement. These elements were carved out from the space of violent dispossession that the Macquaries encountered upon

³⁰ Heather Goodall and Allison Cadzow, *Rivers and Resilience: Aboriginal People on Sydney's Georges River* (UNSW Press, 2009); Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*; Irish, *Hidden in Plain View*.

their arrival, which Chapter Three argued can be usefully framed through fragments of nature and violence. Key to this attempt to consolidate a settler space were the entrenchment of a violent logistics of space, and the materialisation of that potential in the colonial violence of the 1810s. The crux of this chapter was the argument that these elements were linked to the development of a logic of devisualisation: the systematic and material practice of erasing Indigenous presence through a 'patina of age' and an illusion of heritage. This thesis regards this logic of devisualisation as a crucial element within settler spatial history and, consequently, within the production of settler abstract space that the following chapters analyse.

Importantly, however, I view the project of the Macquaries as limited and incomplete, aspiring to more than it achieved. The settler state in its form of vice-regal authority was more-or-less unhindered by the formal means of struggle that characterise liberal capitalist states of the twentieth century, and it therefore focalised around the vision and ambition of the governor. Yet the capacities of the state were lesser than those states and even the New South Wales state of the late nineteenth century, as we will see in Chapter Six. Moreover, the social relations of the settler colony were already beginning the transition towards the centrality of the pastoral sector and its internalisation within imperial circuits of capital. The attempt to consolidate a pattern of landed property defined by its relation to moral reformation was ridden with rot from the outset. The extent to which the Macquaries were able to intervene into the totality of the everyday lives of free settlers, convicts, and Aboriginal people was relatively limited, notwithstanding the many and varied spatial projects that they embarked upon.

Yet what I have sought to suggest in this distance between achievement and aspiration are the contradictions embedded in the production of settler space. Put differently, the development of a settler hegemony over and through space is not necessarily a unitary project *except* insofar as

dispossession is the common premise of settler social relations. The nature and direction of dispossession can vary immensely across settler societies, as do the social relations of landed property, and the overall production of settler space. To my mind, it is these questions which are essential for the critique of settler spaces. This signals the original perspective provided by this thesis on the spatial history of settler societies through my focus on the historically and geographically specific social relations of the Sydney Basin. In this respect, the approach undertaken here is informed by the regressive–progressive method for the project of spatial history, introduced in Chapter Two. That method obligates the critique of space to trace the differential routes to abstract space.

Added to these general insights is the fact that the conditions underpinning the moral order of space were primed for its own dissolution, with the transition to pastoral capital accumulation around the corner. The supersession of this moral order of space, I propose, is key for understanding the origins of settler abstract space.

Chapter Five: The origins of settler abstract space

“To the ingenuity of the draftsmen has been added the eloquence of the auctioneer.”¹

From the 1820s onwards, there were decisive shifts in the political economy of the colony of New South Wales: the pastoral sector was increasingly significant in setting the terms of dispossession, landed property, and the production of settler space. The spatial expansion of settler pastoral economies over the mountains led to cyclical gluts and scarcities of capital, transforming agrarian production within the Sydney Basin and situating finance within the production of settler urban spaces. Whereas the moral order of the Macquaries was characterised by a nodal web radiating from the viceregal authority – symbolised by the architecture and infrastructure centred on Macquarie’s obelisk – the space of Sydney came to be grounded not on the personal power of the governor but the impersonal power of capital.

Chapter Three focussed on the role of fragments of nature and violence in shaping settler space, defined by a violent socio-ecological contradiction between Indigenous and settler relations to nature, which was incorporated with the social relations of landed property. Chapter Four argued that these fragments were taken up within a moral order of space that related nature, agrarian improvement, and the moral improvement of the convict, with the effect of introducing a logic of devisualisation within the space of the Sydney Basin. This chapter argues that the origins of settler abstract space must be interpreted as internally related to imperial circuits of capital, extensive dispossession, and pastoral capital accumulation. This advances the thesis’ central contributions by tracing the material social relations that were at the

¹ ‘Land Lotteries’, *Sydney Herald*, 17 March 1841.

heart of the production of settler space, linking the empire, the settler-colony as a whole, and the space of the Sydney Basin.

As this thesis argued across Chapters One and Two, Lefebvre's project of spatial history demands a historically and geographically specific account of our conception of abstract space. The origins of settler abstract space, I propose, can be understood through the transformation of the social relations of landed property. These relations are crucial because they are at the nexus of imperial circuits of capital, pastoral capital accumulation, and urban property speculation. In Chapter Two, I argued that we require a conception of settler abstract space that internalises the violent dispossession of First nations. This chapter delivers on that argument by examining the production of settler abstract space in relation to extensive dispossession across the project of settlement in New South Wales.

This chapter is organised into three sections. The first section gives a snapshot of the relation between landed property and world market conditions that came to drive dispossession in Australia from the 1820s onwards. It identifies how the Australian colonial project was impelled by the wool export sector, which meant that the colony's development was hand-in-hand with the fortunes of imperial circuits of capital. Though pastoral economies predated the 1820s, the 1820s and '30s saw an accelerating integration of the sector into the London wool trade. In turn, this required mass quantities of cheap land, acquired on the back of colonial violence. To comprehend this process, I develop the concept of extensive dispossession, drawing on my discussion of surplus profit and ground-rent in Chapter Two, to identify the mechanisms by which value was appropriated from the plundering of First Nations land. This forms a crucial backdrop for the two remaining sections. The epigraph to this chapter, drawn from an 1841 editorial on property speculation, schematically indicates the 'ingenuity of the draftsmen' and the 'eloquence of the auctioneer,' from which flow the

titles for these two sections. The ingenuity of the draftsman refers to the abstract spatial technologies that have so much to do with the contemporary reproduction of abstract space: planning, surveying, property title, and so on. Settler-colonial critiques of these abstract spatial technologies identify the role of these spatial technologies within the commodification of land and space, arguing that this was tied to dispossession during this period. While this is not wrong, these arguments underestimate the limited capacity of the settler state to deliver such a rational management of space. On their own, these spatial technologies thus signal an abstract and racialised ideology of space more than a shift in the underpinning social relations. The third section turns to the ‘eloquence of the auctioneer.’ It builds on my argument by examining property speculation in the Sydney Basin, deploying the auction of the Redfern estate in 1842 as a toehold for analysis. I argue that urban property speculation, and the accompanying ideology of space, was tied to imperial circuits of capital and, thus, to extensive dispossession. It is this fact which sits behind the transformation of the social relations of landed property into the abstract, homogeneous, and fungible units of space that characterises abstract space.

5.1 Riding on the sheep’s back: extensive dispossession and capital

In 1923, Agriculture Minister Frank Chaffey declared that “Australia is riding on the sheep’s back financially.”² His seat – Tamworth, in northern New South Wales – had been a sheep-farming region since the 1830s, during the first major boom in the wool export sector. After the 1813 British crossing

² ‘Image’, *Sun*, 1 July 1923, 1. The phrase “riding on the sheep’s back” was a mainstay of Australian politics, referring to the economic lifeblood of wool, for most of the 20th century and the phrase, contrary to the online Australian National Dictionary Centre, first appeared in 1923, not 1924.

of the Blue Mountains, and the 'discovery' of vast pasturages, the pastoral expansion was set to occur. Yet Macquarie's vision for the colony was not welcoming to the large pastoral landlords; as we saw in Chapter Four, Macquarie understood his task in terms of the moral redemption of his charges through the application of labour upon small plots of land. Just as Macquarie's moral order of space was swept away, so too was this reluctance to let loose the sheep of industry. The outcome, as Noel Butlin puts it, was that the settlement in the Sydney Basin became a colonial 'bridgehead' from which expanded the settlement, both territorially and economically.³ While other sectors held some prominence – whaling and sealing, for example – the primary mechanism for the territorial expansion of the colony into Indigenous lands was the wool industry. What this section aims to show is that the pastoral export sector adopted a qualitatively (and quantitatively) different character, starting from the 1820s, which had great consequences for the spatial history of the Sydney Basin.

Rearing sheep for the export of wool originated within the Sydney Basin relatively early on, during the period discussed in the previous two chapters. Yet this was the idiosyncratic efforts of a few enterprising men, significant for laying the basis for pastoralism in the nineteenth century, but not yet foundational to the political economy of the colony or its production of settler space. In 1821, the quantity of privately held land totalled 380,000 acres, mainly within the Cumberland Plain, but by 1829, this figure had grown to three million acres, with the majority outside the Sydney Basin.⁴ Evidently, this represents a vast dispossession of Indigenous land, accompanied by much

³ Noel George Butlin, *Forming a Colonial Economy: Australia 1810–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 96.

⁴ Ken Buckley, 'Primary Accumulation: The Genesis of Australian Capitalism', in *Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Capitalism*, ed. E.L. Wheelwright and Ken Buckley, vol. 1 (Brookvale: Australia & New Zealand Book Co Pty Ltd, 1975), 30.

the same violent conflicts over nature and space that we discussed in Chapter Three. In 1822–1824, for example, the Wiradjuri people (in central NSW) engaged in guerrilla warfare against the influx of British settlers, with the same pattern of raids, punitive expeditions, and massacres. Behind this extensive dispossession was a shift in demand for Australian wool from the London markets.⁵ British wool consumption previously relied on domestic production, with the start of the 19th century marking a shift towards foreign sources.⁶ Up until 1822, Australian wool exports to Britain did not exceed 200,000lb – less than one per cent of annual British wool imports – but reached two million pounds by 1830 and ten million by 1840.⁷ Even still, in 1830, German wool – not Australian – represented four-fifths of British imports.⁸ Philip McMichael frames these developments in the Australian wool sector as “the beginnings of the integration of the settler economy into the world market.”⁹ For McMichael, the early enterprising pastoralists laid the groundwork in the 1800–1820 period for a competitive wool product in the succeeding decades.¹⁰

The first three decades of the nineteenth century saw the wool and textile industry in Britain transform, both in terms of the sources of wool as well as the distribution of surplus value. McMichael outlines the tensions in Britain of the 1820s between domestic wool-growers and landed interests, on the one hand, and the manufacturers and merchants, on the other hand.¹¹ The landed

⁵ Butlin, *Forming a Colonial Economy*, 186.

⁶ For the underlying causes of this change in demand, see: McMichael, *Settlers and the Agrarian Question*, 55–60.

⁷ McMichael, *Settlers and the Agrarian Question*, 63; John Ritchie, *Punishment and Profit: The Reports of Commissioner John Bigge on the Colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, 1822–1823; Their Origins, Nature and Significance* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1970), 498.

⁸ J. A. Perkins, ‘Rehearsal for Protectionism: Australian Wool Exports and German Agriculture, 1830–80’, *Australian Economic History Review* 25, no. 1 (1985): 27.

⁹ McMichael, *Settlers and the Agrarian Question*, 54.

¹⁰ McMichael, *Settlers and the Agrarian Question*, 61–66.

¹¹ McMichael, *Settlers and the Agrarian Question*, 58–60.

interests preferred protection for the domestic wool sector while the urban interests desired free trade in wool, citing the technical changes in textile production which increasingly favoured wool like that produced in Germany and Australia. Protection meant that profits in textiles were diverted to landed property, until the political conflict between urban and rural interest resolved in favour of the former. Subsequently, McMichael explains that “once it recognized the value of this colonial resource for both the metropolitan and the colonial economy, the British state supported the nascent grazier class with land grants and convict labor.”¹²

With an increasing demand for Australian wool came an avaricious demand for cheap land. And cheap land was available for the taking. Grants were attached to a two-shilling per acre quit-rent, normally payable after seven years; Crown land sales were at a flat rate per acre, starting at five shillings in 1831; and squatting only attracted a fee once depasturing licenses were introduced in 1836.¹³ Collection of quit-rents, however, were nil until the 1830s and 1840s, due to inadequate state capacity. Squatters, at first, paid no rents until the 1836 depasturing licences, which were set at a tenth of the quit rent rate. The cheapest, clearly, was to squat. Across the board, however, land was cheap, which meant that the Australian proprietor could pocket the unpaid rents and thus be at an advantage compared to their overseas competitors. Moreover, since the land in question had been produced and reproduced through generations of Indigenous labour and life, from the point of view of the pastoralist capitalist it represented a ‘free gift’ of nature.¹⁴ At the same time, Indigenous resistance represented a risk to the pastoralists –

¹² McMichael, *Settlers and the Agrarian Question*, 60.

¹³ Campbell Enid, ‘The Quit Rent System in Colonial New South Wales’, *Monash University Law Review* 35, no. 1 (2009): 32–44.

¹⁴ Paul Burkett, ‘Capital’s “Free Appropriation” of Natural and Social Conditions’, in *Marx and Nature* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 1999), 69–78; Ryan, “Our Land Abounds in Nature’s Gifts”.

a cost which was suppressed by settler militias and state militaries. As a result, the pastoral expansion on the extensive frontier began to accelerate across the 1820s and 1830s.

As I have indicated, the primary state mechanism for allocating land through to the end of the 1820s was the direct grant of land. In 1831, that system was brought to a close by order of the British Prime Minister John Robinson, who saw the rapidly growing extension of occupation as impeding the development of an effectual labour market.¹⁵ In its place, land was intended to be for sale by auction only. This is the infamous Wakefield model of land sales linked to labour supply, where land prices are set at a high enough level to both fund immigration and prohibit immigrants from purchasing land.¹⁶ Combined with these economic limits was a limited spatial range of settlement. The range of land potentially available for sale was curtailed within the 'Limits of Location,' defined in 1826/29 and depicted in the map below (fig. 5.1).¹⁷ In practice, however, both within these boundaries and beyond, the pastoral expansion continued through the 1830s by means of squatting. Estimating exactly how large was the quantity of squatted land is difficult, since the lands brought into use were vast – tens of thousands of acres was not uncommon for a single pastoral run – and amorphous, varying according to circumstance and negotiation amongst squatters.¹⁸

¹⁵ Watson and Chapman, *Historical Records of Australia*, vol. 16.

¹⁶ The typical view of the Ripon Regulations, which implemented the Wakefield model, is that it represented a reversal of imperial objectives in colonial landed property. Yet the detail of administrative regulations in the colony underwent far fewer changes than might be presumed. For more, see: Peter Burroughs, 'Wakefield and the Ripon Land Regulations of 1831', *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand* 11, no. 44 (April 1965): 452–66.

¹⁷ Colonial Secretary's Office, 'Government Order No. 50', *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 17 October 1829.

¹⁸ Squatters seem to have avoided reporting to government officials how much land they have illegally occupied.



Figure 5.1. The limits of location.¹⁹ The Sydney Basin is at the centre. Indicated are the settled areas within the Limits, shaded areas marking allotments. The shaded areas to the north, beyond the limits, are special allotments for the Australian Agricultural Company.

Settler pastoralists who identified the best lands would possess great prospects for profits. Here, I want to develop the concept of *extensive dispossession* to comprehend the appropriation of value through the settler's seizure of Indigenous lands. In Chapter Two, I introduced Marx's theory of ground-rent to help explain the role of landed property within the production of space. Landed property appropriates surplus profits within rural economies in the form of ground-rent (differential rent 1 and 2, and absolute rent). In the case where a capitalist is one and the same as the landlord, that ground-rent goes straight into their wallet, representing windfall gains for that producer, over and above the norm. Extensive dispossession is characterised by this mechanism of surplus profits. In the case of nineteenth century settler pastoralism, the squatters were able to seize Indigenous lands, and appropriate the generations of Indigenous care for country. The advantage of this account of extensive dispossession lies in its specification of the means by which the appropriation of value takes place for the squatter, and thus enriching our account of the internal relation between dispossession and landed property.

By contrast, accounts of the commodity frontiers of Cheap Natures adopt a world-ecological standpoint to examine the same totality of capitalist relations.²⁰ For Jason Moore, the expansion of socio-ecological commodity frontiers is the search for a world-ecological surplus that cheapens the costs of production, enabling less capital to get more surplus-value through the appropriation of unpaid work (of socio-nature, reproductive labour, and more).²¹ Thus, this enables us to comprehend how British imperial capital benefited from the production of Australian wool through dispossessed

¹⁹ Robert Dixon, *This Map of the Colony of New South Wales Exhibiting the Situation and Extent of the Appropriated Lands Including the Counties, Towns, Village Reserves Etc.*, [1:506 880] 1 in. = 8 miles (London: J. Cross, 1837).

²⁰ Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*; Ryan, "Our Land Abounds in Nature's Gifts".

²¹ Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, 91–109.

‘Cheap Natures’: it cheapened the costs of reproduction for labour-power.²² But this does not specify the *distribution* of this world-ecological surplus: specifically, of a crucial means by which the squatters appropriate value from dispossession. What the concept of extensive dispossession does it that it helps specify aspects of the distribution of this world-ecological surplus: a crucial means of distribution to the settlers was through ground-rent.

It is tempting to view this as the accursed results of private landed property, suddenly imposed on Indigenous lands. Allan Greer remarks that historians of settler-colonies commonly view dispossession as taking shape through the enclosure of Indigenous lands as private property “bringing survey lines, fences and legal rules fostering exclusive access to delimited portions of the landscape.”²³ Though these are significant, Greer goes on to argue that “while the long-run outcome of colonization was typically the establishment of a regime of bounded properties, along the way to that destination various forms of commons frequently played a decisive role in depriving natives of their lands.”²⁴ Greer’s central argument here is that the formation of settler property was often preceded by *ad hoc* arrangements amongst settlers outside the express purview of the state, which he characterises as commons.²⁵ His objective is to illuminate how settler

²² Ryan, “Our Land Abounds in Nature’s Gifts”, 153–54.

²³ Allan Greer, *Property and Dispossession: Natives, Empires and Land in Early Modern North America*, Studies in North American Indian History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 241.

²⁴ Greer, *Property and Dispossession*, 242.

²⁵ However, squatters tended over time towards relatively exclusive possession of their runs, with *de facto* norms of possession developing amongst the squatters. These were then followed in 1836 by limited *de jure* recognition of the squatters in the form of depasturing licenses, which granted the pastoralists the right to graze on Crown lands beyond the Limits. Greer is right to identify that *de jure* private property was not the initial means of land appropriation, but it is difficult to see in this case how this can be characterised as a commons (except perhaps in the very earliest phases of extensive dispossession, where the evidence is the sketchiest). See: Lee J. Alston, Edwyna Harris, and Bernardo Mueller, ‘The Development of Property Rights on Frontiers: Endowments, Norms, and Politics’, *The Journal of Economic History* 72, no. 3 (August 2012): 741–70. For a model that incorporates the role of

property formation takes shape over time, which aligns with the project of spatial history undertaken by this thesis.

Greer sees the emergence of private property not as the replacement of Indigenous possession with a singular form of property ownership but as the relational outcome of confrontations between Indigenous peoples and settlers: “a process of mutual engagement through which native property, European property and new colonial property forms could coexist and shape one another.”²⁶ The process of property formation is positioned in terms of the relations between distinct concepts and practices of property amongst settlers and Indigenous peoples. Robert Nichols, in *Theft is Property*, lets us locate this process of settler property formation as co-constitutive with the process of dispossession, arguing that “theft is the mechanism and means by which property is generated.”²⁷ As I discussed in Chapter Two, he draws on Indigenous thinking on property to characterise this as ‘recursive dispossession’: the creation of property is co-extensive with the dispossession of the land, and the Indigenous inhabitants are “figured as ‘original owners’ but only retroactively, that is, refracted backward through the process itself.”²⁸ The value of Nichols’ argument is the unmistakable link between dispossession and property, where Indigenous rights to the land in settler societies emerge only as the right to sell, the right to extinguish their own property.

However, the relational making of property and dispossession does not explain the scope of that process or the nature of its integration with the production of space. Additionally, it does not tell us the means by which the

government revenue-raising and Indigenous violence, see: Alan Dye and Sumner La Croix, ‘Institutions for the Taking: Property Rights and the Settlement of the Cape Colony, 1652–1750’, *The Economic History Review* 73, no. 1 (2020): 33–58.

²⁶ Greer, *Property and Dispossession*, 19.

²⁷ Nichols, *Theft Is Property!*, 9.

²⁸ Nichols, *Theft Is Property!*, 8.

dispossessing class appropriate value, which I have argued can be understood through Marx's theory of ground-rent. This chapter argues that it is the integration of the Australian pastoral economy, defined by extensive dispossession, within imperial circuits of capital that drives the character of landed property – not the other way round.

In short, the character of landed property that emerged during this period was increasingly defined by the abstractions of capital. The “abstract commodity logic of landed property” emerged from the process of extensive dispossession: the seizure of cheap land through colonial violence in order to appropriate surplus profits.²⁹ It was simplest to squat upon Crown lands, since you need not provide even proof of adequate capital or social standing to receive a land grant, and thus wait for the cogs of the bureaucracy to turn and allow your capital to waste away in the town (or so the pastoralists complained in the papers). Even with land grants priced at ‘free’ and quit-rents left uncollected, it remained cheaper still to squat on Crown lands, with the price to pay measured in ‘blood and dirt.’³⁰ This is significant for comprehending the origins of settler abstract space, because it represents a decisive, and violent, shift in the social relations of settler landed property from the moral order of space under the Macquaries. This was not limited, either, to the territories occupied by the squatters, but implied transformations within the space of the Sydney Basin.

How did the incorporation of pastoral economies with imperial circuits of capital affect the spatial history of Sydney? Within the Sydney Basin, as I discussed in Chapters Three and Four, the early patterns of the agrarian economy in the Basin were defined by a mixture of relatively small farms, like those on the Hawkesbury, and larger pastoral runs on the Cumberland

²⁹ Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*.

³⁰ Marx, *Capital*.

Plain and Cowpastures to the south. During this period, however, this pattern began to break down: subdivisions of large estates near urban concentrations proceeded apace and pastoral activity subsided and were replaced by other land-uses. Ecological historians have highlighted a number of factors beginning to constrain pastoral activity within the basin across the 1820s and 1830s: perennial overgrazing on unsuitable native grasses, drought in the late 1830s, and the sheer availability of new frontier lands untouched by ungulates.³¹ Other spatial forms began to replace the initial pattern of occupation: orchards and market gardens, urban subdivisions near existing new towns or at new settlements, as well as quarries and forestries.³² The profitable production of wool for export had shifted to greener grasses, replaced by other ways to extract value from the land.

More than this, however, my argument across the next two sections aims to show how the spatial history of the Sydney Basin was coordinated through (i) a racialised and abstract ideology of space, detectable in abstract spatial technologies and (ii) the incorporation of urban landed property within the circuit of capital that wends its way from squatter's run to London markets. The structural transformations in the political economy of the colony, discussed in this section, are crucial to the origins of settler abstract space. The emergence of settler abstract space came through the internal relations amongst dispossession, violence, nature, property, and finance. As the next section discusses, this is a fresh perspective on the origins of settler abstract space, which point towards the role of abstract spatial technologies, like surveying or property title.

³¹ Haworth, 'The Shaping of Sydney by Its Urban Geology', 49; Douglas Howard Benson and Jocelyn Howell, *Taken for Granted: The Bushland of Sydney and Its Suburbs* (Kenthurst, NSW: Kangaroo Press, 1990), 32; Jennifer K. Fitzgerald, 'The Soil of Abandoned Farmland, Cumberland Plain Woodland and Restored Vegetation: Implications for the Restoration of an Endangered Ecological Community', 2009, 42.

³² Fitzgerald, 'The Soil of Abandoned Farmland, Cumberland Plain Woodland and Restored Vegetation', 43.

5.2 The ingenuity of the draftsmen: abstract spatial technologies

The draftsmen of the colony were key agents for making and maintaining property: they trod over soil, drew their lines, and conveyed surveys for buyers and sellers. Their application of spatial surveying and cadastral mapping was the generation of an abstract mental space. For settler-colonial theorists, state technologies of surveying and cadastral mapping are critical tool through which land and space are made into commodified objects of investment. Brenna Bhandar, for instance, argues that such technologies are required to make Indigenous territory legible for appropriation as settler property.³³ In a recent intervention, Benson et al examine the “intensive history of cartographic ‘emptying’ that takes place [in so-called Australia] through the colonial assumption of terra nullius.”³⁴ The construction of the colony depended on justifying the occupation of Indigenous land, and the maps and surveys were a key means for accomplishing this task.³⁵ As R.J.P. Kain puts it: “in the colonies the surveyor’s prime responsibility was the imposition of a new economic and spatial order on ‘new territory’, either erasing the pre-capitalist indigenous settlement or confining it to a particular area.”³⁶

In Chapters Three and Four, I drew on Bhandar’s critique of the ideology of improvement as a set of racialised abstractions that identifies racial superiority with the adoption of ‘proper’ forms of land-use (viz. European

³³ Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*.

³⁴ Eleanor Benson et al., ‘Mapping the Spatial Politics of Australian Settler Colonialism’, *Political Geography* 102 (April 2023).

³⁵ Giselle Byrnes, ‘Surveying Space: Constructing the Colonial Landscape’, *Fragments: New Zealand Social and Cultural History*, 2000, 54–75.

³⁶ Roger J. P. Kain, ‘The Role of Cadastral Surveys and Maps in Land Settlement from England’, *Landscape Research*, 19 August 2010, 22.

patterns of agricultural cultivation.) Bhandar develops her critique of the ideology of improvement through the survey of William Petty, which she argues both commodified land and abstracted space.³⁷ Drawing connections to the then-nascent scientific method, she notes that “the ingenuity of Petty’s method” came from his “peculiar mixture of mathematical accounting and scientific method that reduced human life to economic units...”.³⁸ The reductive effect of the survey, in service of a totalising economic compulsion to maximise productivity of land, appears to align with Lefebvre’s articulation of abstract space. As Christian Schmid puts it, abstract space is “a space of accumulation, calculation, planning, programming, and it is a space that is dominated – due to the worldwide reach of productive forces and scientific knowledge – by a tendency towards homogenisation.”³⁹

This mental conception of space as an abstract, empty container for productive development facilitates the repackaging of land as a commodity. Drawing on the work of Nicholas Blomley, Bhandar argues:

“Maps based on the cadastral survey ‘help make possible the very idea of ‘space’ as abstract category’ and, as Blomley continues, ‘If space can be imagined as abstract, perhaps, it begins to be possible to treat it as the reified and alienable ‘object’ of property.’⁴⁰”

Blomley’s argument focusses on how “violence plays an integral role in the legitimisation, foundation, and operation of a regime of private property.”⁴¹ This emphasis, at the time, ran counter to established conceptions of legal geography, and Blomley critiques those conceptions via a close study of the

³⁷ Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*.

³⁸ Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*, 45.

³⁹ Schmid, *Henri Lefebvre and the Theory of the Production of Space*, 345.

⁴⁰ Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*, 92–93, citing; Nicholas Blomley, *Unsettling the City: Urban Land and the Politics of Property* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 55.

⁴¹ Blomley, *Unsettling the City*, 121.

frontier, survey, and cadastral grid. He shows how these spatialisations of colonial dispossession were integrated with the making of property and, relevant to this chapter's argument, how they are closely associated with the making of abstract space. The territorial forms and representations by which property is delineated in space, writes Blomley, are "reliant upon an abstracted conception of space" and has the effect of "[facilitating] reification, whereby property... is reduced to a relation between owner and land."⁴² In short, these spatial technologies expressed an ideology of abstract space emerging in this period and, crucially, shot through with colonial violence and dispossession.

The neutral and Euclidean conception of space, with its 'cuts' into the 'flows' of space, was here made alongside the novel colonial formations of landed property.⁴³ On this view, the state plays a critical role in how abstract space is produced through property formation, since surveying and cadastral mapping are key spatial technologies of the state. Paralleling this argument is James C Scott's view on the objective of state technologies: to make its territories and populations legible for state power.⁴⁴ Extending this analysis, Henri Lefebvre argues that "every state is born of violence, and that state power endures only by virtue of violence directed towards a space."⁴⁵ The historically specific violence that he is referring to here is that violence necessary to the process of primitive accumulation.⁴⁶ The outcome of this state violence is the enthroneing of "a unitary, logistical, operational, and

⁴² Nicholas Blomley, 'The Territorialization of Property in Land: Space, Power and Practice', *Territory, Politics, Governance* 7, no. 2 (3 April 2019): 236.

⁴³ Nicholas Blomley, 'Cuts, Flows, and the Geographies of Property', *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 7, no. 2 (June 2011): 203–16.

⁴⁴ James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Yale University Press, 1998).

⁴⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 280.

⁴⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 275–79.

quantifying rationality which would make economic growth possible.”⁴⁷ In sum, these settler-colonial analyses of state spatial technologies like surveying and cadastral mapping suggestively indicate how the state produces abstract space. To misquote Lefebvre, settler-colonial geographers might say that every settler is born of violence, and that settler power endures only by virtue of a violence directed towards a space.

The aim of surveying and cadastral mapping was to delineate land as property, and thus was tied to the legal form of property, like the Torrens title. The Torrens system was first introduced in 1858 in the colony of South Australia, as a replacement for the old system, known as the Old System. Simply put, the Torrens system defines property ownership by whatever the registered title, and accompanying plan, within the state bureaucracy says. It differs from the Old System that preceded it, which relied on an often partial and incomplete collocation of deeds, oral testimony, and ancillary documents.⁴⁸ The rationality underpinning title by registration was an abstraction that, as Bhandar argues in her study of the development of Torrens title, “effectively transformed the idea of property (in land) as a socially embedded set of relations premised on use, political hierarchies, and exchange, to a commodity vision of land that rendered it fungible in the same way as any other commodity.”⁴⁹ The “commodity logic of abstraction” facilitated by surveying and property title tied financial speculation to settler landed property.⁵⁰ On this point, Bhandar suggests that “Henri Lefebvre’s insight” – into abstract space – “seems quite apt here.”⁵¹

⁴⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 280.

⁴⁸ Note, however, that characterising the Old System as a single system is misleading, because (a) it varied substantially over time and (b) it took different expressions in different British colonies.

⁴⁹ Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*, 97.

⁵⁰ Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*, 94, 97.

⁵¹ Bhandar, ‘Title by Registration’, 268, fn. 62.

For Aileen Moreton-Robinson, such title is defined by “the possessive logics of patriarchal white sovereignty” which “disavow and dispossess the Indigenous subject of an ontology that exists outside the logic of capital.”⁵² Likewise, Bhandar argues “that the progressive move toward a system of title by registration reflects logics of abstraction that determine the nature of both the commodity form of landed property and the racial abstraction of the savage.”⁵³ She argues that the erasure of historical ownership and occupation within the Torrens system is “more akin to a logic of elimination, radically negating what was there before, based on the doctrine of terra nullius.”⁵⁴ The “unencumbered and empty space of the settler colony” was made by this Torrens system: a quintessentially abstract space.⁵⁵

Taken together, these insights from settler-colonial theory suggest that spatial technologies like surveying, mapping, and property title relied upon an abstract concept of space. We might infer, then, that the origins of abstract space are found in the development of these spatial forms. However, this thesis offers a different approach. What I want to suggest is that such abstract spatial technologies were in fact not yet systematically integrated with dispossession, landed property, or the production of settler space – not until at least the latter decades of the nineteenth century in Australia. That is not to say that the ingenuity of the draftsmen was unimportant, but that the issues involved are more complex than inferring the origins of abstract space from formal spatial technologies. The above scholarship successfully

⁵² Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*, 191.

⁵³ Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*, 81.

⁵⁴ Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*, 95. However, in a counterfactual world where the Home Office overruled the South Australian experiment in title by registration, would the process of dispossession have markedly changed? Settlers were more than capable of erasing historical occupation by Indigenous people without recourse to an abstract system of title by registration. At best, the quantity and velocity of capital circulating in South Australian would be modestly less.

⁵⁵ Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*, 84.

indicates the development of an *ideology of space* which sat alongside a racial-territorial conception of space and race. Yet this was a mental space – in the mind of the draftsmen and those who modelled their political rationality on that mentality. In terms of the material relations of the production of settler space, however, the historical application of the survey was often far more constrained than both its historical practitioners envisioned and the contemporary scholars reckon.

Take the survey of William Petty, for example. Allan Greer points out that the survey was uneven and rough: “Not as precise as expected, the Down Survey covered only selected regions and confiscated lands; it had none of the comprehensiveness of a true cadaster.”⁵⁶ The uneven application of the survey *in practice* meant that “though it facilitated the ‘commodification’ of land, the Down Survey did not actually succeed in reducing the Irish landscape to geometry.”⁵⁷ This point is developed in the context of his argument that, while the early modern ‘mathematisation of space’ was a significant process, it has far fewer implications in terms of the material processes of property formation. On the side of its significance, Greer argues along similar lines to Bhandar and Blomley, earlier, by pointing to how “these spatial reconfigurations sought to impose a kind of mathematical perfection on land and society.”⁵⁸ On the other side, however, the process of property formation had as much to do with the practices of everyday settlers. As he puts it:

“Abstract constructions of space were involved, though, as I have argued, far less centrally than is usually assumed. To imply that colonization was a matter of geometry displacing human places is

⁵⁶ Greer, *Property and Dispossession*, 282.

⁵⁷ Greer, *Property and Dispossession*, 282.

⁵⁸ Greer, *Property and Dispossession*, 283.

not only at odds with historical reality, it runs the risk of veering toward a sentimentalized version of the old savagery/civilization dichotomy, the one in which natives are assimilated to Nature while Europeans represent Culture.”⁵⁹

Whether or not he is correct on his evaluation that settler-colonial theorists potentially invert the savagery/civilisation binary, the gap between the spatial technologies of surveying and the production of settler space is significant. My point is that the abstract concept of space implied by these geometrical advances primarily operated within an intellectual domain—as a mental space—and its concrete realisation as abstract space was found through other means.

In Australia, surveying was patchy and slow for much of the nineteenth century. In 1968, the NSW Surveyor-General, LN Fletcher, discussing the difficulties even then of compiling an exhaustive survey of the state, remarked that “survey before settlement was clearly impossible outside the nineteen counties, for even within the "limits of settlement" surveys were rough and incomplete, and there were long delays.”⁶⁰ Grants were frequently issued with the intent of later survey, and in the case of squatting, even the intention of survey was dispensed with. For the South Australian case, Bhandar notes that “colonization ventures were funded through the sale of lands to English investors before proper surveying of the land had even been carried out.”⁶¹ What this indicates is the limited capacity of the settler state to concretely realise the abstract concept of space implied by these spatial technologies.

The innovation of a ‘commodity logic of abstraction’ in the legal form of

⁵⁹ Greer, *Property and Dispossession*, 292.

⁶⁰ L. N. Fletcher, ‘Integration of Surveys’, *Australian Surveyor* 22, no. 4 (1 December 1968): 311.

⁶¹ Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*, 81.

property title, meanwhile, emerged at the close of a period of extensive dispossession. As I outlined in the previous section, this was primarily conducted by means of squatting, and the pace of dispossession was internally related to the imperial circuit of capital. I argued that this already expressed a 'commodity logic of abstraction' within the social relations of landed property. Moreover, on a concrete level, the limited fungibility of property under the Old System was a far lesser problem in the settler-colonies than in the United Kingdom. The chain of deeds, the number of subdivisions, and the possibility of customary or common claims were all the lesser for land made into settler property only a scant few decades earlier. In this respect, all settler landed property contains this abstraction from histories of dispossession. As the following section details, the furious rush of capital into land markets of the 1840s was not hindered by the lack of the fluid transfers of title enabled by the Torrens system. Instead, the argument of this chapter is that the origins of settler abstract space can be traced to the internalisation of the social relations of landed property within imperial circuits of capital.

What, then, should we make of the ingenuity of the draftsmen? Does the presence of an abstracting tool of space imply the production of an abstract space? Yes, and no. On the one hand, the survey and cadastral map are an abstract representation of space aimed at facilitating the sale of landed property and the security of the accompanying property rights. On the other hand, whether the space as a *whole* is an abstract space depends on the underpinning social relations. The articulation of an abstract concept of space, as I have argued, indicates an *ideology of space*, which was certainly crucial to the concrete realisation of settler abstract space. However, this was a belaboured process: the settler state slowly and unevenly developed the capacity for rational management of space. Signal events like the development of title by registration are the leading edge of this rising capacity of the state, but the crucial question for the project of spatial history

is how these events relate to the overall constitution of the social totality. I propose that the ties between extensive dispossession, the social relations of landed property, and imperial circuits of capital specify the central elements of the origins of settler abstract space. The following section builds on this argument by showing how these elements defined the wave of urban property speculation during the 1840s in the Sydney Basin.

5.3 The eloquence of the auctioneer: finance, land, and property

On 16 March, 1842, Thomas Stubbs – one of the leading auctioneers of the period – was instructed to auction over three hundred allotments located on the old Redfern Estate, a hundred-acre property on the edge of Sydney Town.⁶² The Block in Redfern – the Aboriginal housing with which I started this thesis – is just west of these properties, which today form the heart of a thoroughly gentrified suburb. The estate was granted to Dr Redfern in 1810 in recognition of his services, with the proviso that twenty acres be brought into cultivation with a two shilling quit-rent.⁶³ Redfern was ten years in the grave when his heirs arranged for the colony's leading auctioneer to sell the property. At this point, about thirty acres of market gardens were in cultivation. The announcement of sale was unusually grand, occupying a little over a full column in the *Australasian Chronicle*, most of it devoted to musing on the “everlasting stigma to the monied interest of this town if one foot of this property was left unsold.”⁶⁴ To incentivise attendance and stimulate bidding, Stubbs noted that “a champagne lunch will be provided.”⁶⁵

⁶² Thomas Stubbs, ‘Redfern Estate Auction Advertisement’, *Australasian Chronicle*, 10 March 1842.

⁶³ Grant Register, 8-260.

⁶⁴ Thomas Stubbs, ‘Redfern Estate Auction Advertisement’.

⁶⁵ Thomas Stubbs, ‘Redfern Estate Auction Advertisement’.

Embedded within this advert is an ideology of space that unifies finance, property, and the abstract spatial technology of the survey. Stubbs is anxious to stress how the estate is *metropolitan* and *urban* precisely because of its distance from the developed town – the intervening suburb is as yet relatively sparsely developed. He accomplishes that task by a privately contracted surveyor who draws straight lines on a plan (see fig. 5.2, below), extended from the main streets of the town, reducing the land to homogeneous allotments suitable for sale and appropriately ‘urban.’ Though this is a private sale, Stubbs invests the authority of the settler state and the empire in this rectilinear plan, since it is “in accordance with the Plan approved by Her Majesty’s Government.”⁶⁶ By this trick of geometry, it was surely impossible to deny that anything could be “more essentially and necessarily part of the metropolis itself.”⁶⁷ In the same breath, however, the state is cut out from interference in the development of the land: because it is technically outside of city limits any new owner would be “relieved from any tremblings or fear of that ingeniously wrought piece of metropolitan legislation – the Building Act.”⁶⁸ That freedom of construction is linked to Stubbs’ representation of the property as a low-risk high-return investment: with no regulatory impediments, Stubbs asks, “Who then is so weak to hang back from purchasing with twenty-one years credit?”⁶⁹ Indeed, no less than four times did he stress that the terms of sale “[lengthen] to twenty-one years credit.”⁷⁰

The sale of the Redfern estate was part of a speculative boom in urban property markets, both in preexisting town allotments and the first wave of

⁶⁶ Thomas Stubbs, ‘Redfern Estate Auction Advertisement’. In point of fact, he stresses this association twice. For clarity, the estate was not planned by the state; the existing streets are simply projected in the estate plans.

⁶⁷ Thomas Stubbs, ‘Redfern Estate Auction Advertisement’.

⁶⁸ Thomas Stubbs, ‘Redfern Estate Auction Advertisement’.

⁶⁹ Thomas Stubbs, ‘Redfern Estate Auction Advertisement’.

⁷⁰ Thomas Stubbs, ‘Redfern Estate Auction Advertisement’. Italics in original.

subdivisions of estates nearest to the urban centrality. On 17 March 1841, *The Sydney Herald* went on the warpath against the feverish speculation on land over the preceding two years:

“For about the last two years, there has been a growing rage for manufacturing *townships*. Every man having an estate ... must needs set a surveyor to work, parcelling it out into building allotments, and intersecting it with streets, and squares, and crescents...”⁷¹

⁷¹ ‘Land Lotteries’, *Sydney Herald*, 17 March 1841, sec. The Colonist.



Figure 5.2. Plan of part of the south end and suburbs of Sydney.⁷² The map indicates, oriented south at the top, the subdivided Redfern estate with allotments sold as of 12 September 1842.

Such speculation had led to such a property fever that auctioneers were able to pass off bad lands as good. *The Sydney Herald's* editorial was prompted by one such case where buyers bought small farm allotments within the Berkeley Estate, near(ish) the 'thriving' new town of Gosford – barely more than a building or two at that point – only to discover that the land was scraggly bush, not shipworthy timber; the soil was hard and poor, not fertile; the distance was twice as long as was promised, and the nearby bay was not navigable by more than a canoe. All this was possible only

⁷² P.L. Bemi, *Plan of Part of the South End and Suburbs of Sydney*, Cartographic material, 1:2920. (Sydney: A.E. Stephen, 1943).

because no buyer inspected the property before auction. The *Sydney Herald* stated that “it is notorious that the great mass of buyers at our land auctions make their bargains for but one purpose, that is, of selling again.”⁷³ Over the twelve months following the Berkeley estate auction, a considerable number of cases went to the Supreme Court, initiated largely by the auctioneer, Samuel Lyons, who sought to recover payment from the buyers who refused to pay.⁷⁴ In one such case, it was admitted that bidders at the auction were employed to drive up the price.

What I am indicating is the contours of a rather different relationship to property from the moral order of space that was analysed in Chapter Four. We can see some of these differences expressed in the Redfern auction. Unlike Macquarie’s moral order of space, Stubb’s advert renders landed property in terms of profitable returns, not the improvement of nature and the citizen. Although Stubbs makes dubious claims of a million pounds available to support emigration from Britain, he correctly identifies that demand for new housing far outpaced supply. Between 1830 and 1840, the NSW population increased from 46,000 to 129,000 – with a further twenty thousand arriving in 1841, and another ten the following year.⁷⁵ Who would satisfy supply, Stubbs wonders, “unless the capitalists of Sydney buy such blocks of land as the Redfern estate” – and if they fail, the moment might pass them by with both credit and migrants fleeing to Auckland, Adelaide, or Melbourne, where the wealthy build houses “for the country’s good – not forgetting at the same time to pocket the rents.”⁷⁶ In a logic familiar to contemporary audiences,

⁷³ ‘Land Lotteries’, 17 March 1841.

⁷⁴ These cases seem to have fallen either way, with some going to Lyons and others to the purchasers.

⁷⁵ Noel George Butlin and W.A. Sinclair, ‘Australian Gross Domestic Product 1788–1860: Estimates, Sources, and Methods’, *Source Papers in Economic History* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1984), 3–4.

⁷⁶ Butlin and Sinclair, ‘Australian Gross Domestic Product 1788–1860’, 3–4.

Stubbs remarks that “by the time (the 21 years credit) has expired on this property, hundreds of families may come into a handsome income, simply caused by the precaution and foresight of the parents now spending a few pounds in this freehold ground.”⁷⁷ In much the same vein, in 1840, the recently formed Australian Auction Company arranged the subdivision and sale of nineteen lots in Glebe, noting that “persons desirous of investing capital with safety” might purchase with the confidence “that [the allotments] will rapidly rise in value, as it is so near Town and in a respectable neighbourhood.”⁷⁸

Not all of the properties at the Redfern estate were sold on the sixteenth. On the face of it, it is remarkable that many were sold at all: New South Wales was in the throes of a depression that began in 1841. Despite a decline of 12% in NSW GDP in 1841, credit and capital continued to run free in the colony.⁷⁹ The value of bank lending on both town and country lands actually *rose* during the same period, with the value of bank mortgages on town lands rising by an astonishing 238% in 1841. Table 5.1 and Figure 5.3, below, indicate the diverging trajectories of mortgages on town lands and GDP. David Harvey’s concept of a spatial fix provides a useful explanation for this phenomenon. For Harvey, investment in the built environment presents a solution to the problem of excess capital. Harvey describes this as “a godsend for the absorption of surplus, overaccumulated capital.”⁸⁰ The spatial fix here is a switch in capital investment from the primary to secondary circuit of capital: from the production process to the built environment. At the start of the 1840s, property investment was one of the primary means of absorbing

⁷⁷ Butlin and Sinclair, ‘Australian Gross Domestic Product 1788–1860’, 3–4.

⁷⁸ The Australian Auction Company, ‘Boissier Estate’, *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 9 May 1840, sec. Classified Advertising.

⁷⁹ Butlin and Sinclair, ‘Australian Gross Domestic Product 1788–1860’.

⁸⁰ Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*, 236.

surplus capital that was arriving from London. Barrie Dyster explains that London-based capital, faced with depressed demand in its usual American markets and optimistic about the prospects of Australian markets, exported a glut of goods to the colonial ports.⁸¹ There is even some suggestive evidence that British publishers dumped increasingly larger quantities of old book stocks on Australian markets during these years.⁸² These imports dramatically exceeded exports – since British textiles withdrew demand – representing a net capital inflow. According to a contemporaneous commentator, the balance of trade set against the colony was half a million sterling, not counting ancillary charges and duties of importation, which might bring the figure up to a million.⁸³ In practice, it was not possible to absorb these goods at the anticipated prices or to sustain investment into the purchase of new lands – indicated by a temporary peak of Crown land sales in 1840 followed by a dramatic decline in 1841 from £314,600 to £90,400. We can see a series of peaks in land markets: Crown land sales peaked first in 1840, followed by private markets in country lands in 1841, and private markets in town lands in 1842. Consequently, Dyster concludes that “colonial businessmen, charged with realising and remitting profit on the imports and avid for a share of the rewards, concentrated more than before on equally liquid activities like money-lending and land-buying.”⁸⁴ These businessmen had become accustomed to property speculation in the preceding boom years, and auctioneers like Stubbs were more than prepared to stoke the property fever with grandiloquent advertisements and champagne lunches.

⁸¹ Barrie Dyster, ‘The 1840s Depression Revisited’, *Australian Historical Studies* 25, no. 101 (October 1993): 589–607.

⁸² Elizabeth Webby, ‘Sydney Auction Sales in the 1840s’, *Bulletin (Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand)* 5, no. 1 (1981): 17–28.

⁸³ John Hood, *Australia and the East: Being a Journal Narrative of a Voyage to New South Wales in an Emigrant Ship, with a Residence of Some Months in Sydney and the Bush, and the Route Home by Way of India and Egypt, in the Years 1841 and 1842* (J. Murray, 1843), 331.

⁸⁴ Dyster, ‘The 1840s Depression Revisited’, 607.

Year	NSW GDP	Town lending	Country lending	Crown land sales
1837	£ 3,952,000	£ 108,860	£ 102,817	£ 120,200
1838	£ 4,010,000	£ 59,702	£ 174,388	£ 116,300
1839	£ 4,410,400	£ 112,835	£ 189,447	£ 153,000
1840	£ 4,826,500	£ 112,158	£ 355,224	£ 314,600
1841	£ 4,245,500	£ 266,944	£ 643,111	£ 90,400
1842	£ 4,063,800	£ 282,659	£ 384,566	£ 14,600
1843	£ 4,195,300	£ 275,386	£ 333,487	£ 10,800
1844	£ 4,525,400	£ 94,400	£ 144,352	£ 7,400
1845	£ 5,176,900	£ 111,659	£ 107,585	£ 16,700
1846	£ 5,329,000	£ 64,856	£ 86,726	£ 27,100

Table 5.1. GDP, lending on land, and Crown land sales, 1837–1846. Drawn from Source Papers in Economic History, ANU. Note, however, that town or country classifications can be misleading: the Redfern estate was country land despite being subdivided for urban land-uses.

The total credit advanced for land is likely higher than reported here: other credit facilities were available at the time: e.g. the Australian Auction Company offered both auction and credit services, and promptly crashed under the weight of its burdens. A common mode of sale at auction was to ask the buyer for a deposit – 10-15% was a usual figure – and the buyer would issue promissory notes for the remainder, dated at six, nine, and twelve months. What we see here is the rate of mortgaging through formal bank channels. Not only did the total mass of mortgage lending increase, but the average value of each mortgage increased in 1841 by over 50%, indicating a general increase in price levels. The majority of this activity was concentrated in and around the Sydney Basin, enabling the urban speculators to move property rapidly. In the Redfern auction sales, for example, we can see a

range of total capitals mobilised by different buyers – some of whom were notable real estate players, like George Turner, Solicitor-General – and a dilettante musician and equestrian – and some of whom were relatively minor figures.

The Sydney Herald's 1841 criticisms of land speculation placed blame for economic misfortune on this wanton misuse of capital in landed property. But, as we have seen, the causality ran the opposite way: speculation in land was driven by the want for profits in the productive sectors, both within the colony and in the imperial home markets. The early 1840s depression, then, shows in stark fashion how the circulation of capital within the British Empire was internally related to the production of space in Sydney. By drawing our attention beyond the form of private property, where Bhandar and Blomley have their focus, this chapter reveals how the origins of abstract space in this settler-colony was tied to the circulation of capital. The flows of value involved in this speculative land boom did not only go *into* the colony, however. The colonial trade was integrated into the London financial system, and the colonial businessmen owed interest on credit advanced for the goods that they imported. The typical financial arrangement was a bill of exchange, agreeing payment from the colonial merchant to the London export house, due some months in the future to allow for the goods to be sold. The London export house need not wait for the bill to come due: instead, they can take the bill to the Bank of England, and cash it at the Bank's discount rate. The Bank, then, would arrange for its agents to collect the debt in Sydney. As Marx remarks, what we are describing here is the mediation of credit within the expanded reproduction of capital.⁸⁵ That mediation is significant not only for its role in expediting the turnover time of capital, but for its role in the ensuring the absorption of surplus capital in the form of the spatial fix.

⁸⁵ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3.

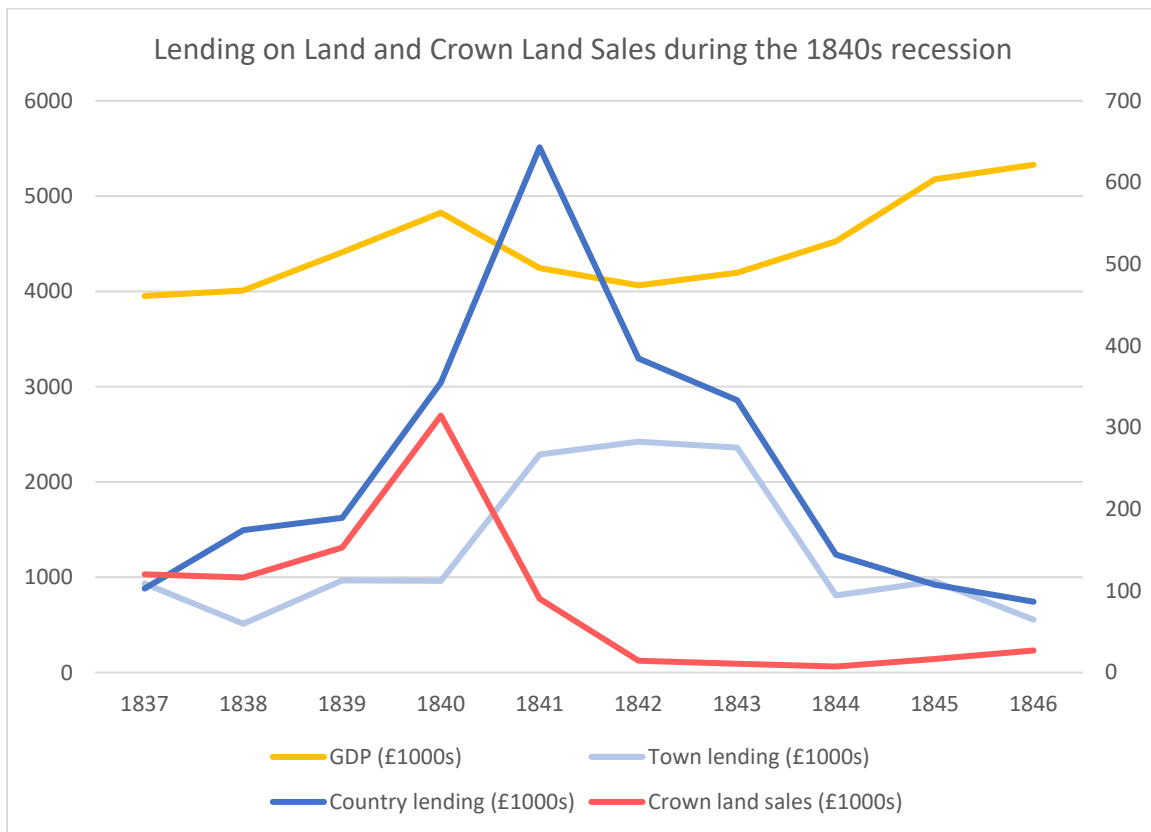


Figure 5.3. Lending on land and crown land sales during the 1840s recession. The graph indicates the data in Table 5.1, above. GDP (yellow) is expressed in nominal pounds on the left axis. Crown land sales (red) and town (dark blue) & country (light blue) bank lending are together indicated on the right axis. Crown land sales peak first, followed by country land sales, with sustained lending on urban lands during the recession.

During a crisis, like that of the early 1840s, such capital is left standing idle (in productive terms), but the obligations to return funds to London continues unabated. Under relatively stable accumulation conditions within the pastoral sector, this was generally accomplished by drawing fresh bills of exchange against wool sent on ships back to London. Indeed, to aid recovery from the depression, a new category of lending security was introduced in 1843 – liens on wool, even those still ‘on the sheep’s back.’ As Decker argues, this legal innovation was crucial in restoring the pastoral sector, noting that

within eleven weeks a full 16% of sheep were under a lien or mortgage.⁸⁶ In the recovery period after the crisis, bank lending on town and country lands dropped to the respectable 150,000 range, returning to the mid-1830s figures. Stubbs continued auctioning on the Redfern estate, advertising at latest in 1848 for the remaining allotments.⁸⁷

The wave of property speculation accompanying the wool boom was not novel to this period, however. The military officers and various enterprising free and emancipated colonists of the early years engaged in lucrative property dealings as a matter of course. These individuals were keystone merchants engaged in importing goods, especially foodstuffs, that the colony had inadequate capacity to produce in those years. They put their merchant profits to use in buying and developing property, both within the towns and the countryside of the Sydney Basin. This included the amassing of large pastoral estates, such as that accomplished by John Macarthur, of Merino wool pioneering fame. Yet this thesis argues that the production of space in the colony was not grounded upon these social relations until the accelerating incorporation of the colony within imperial circuits of capital during the 1820s and 1830s. We have already seen, in section 1 of this chapter, how pastoral exports were minor until this period. The main other export industry in the early years arose from whaling and sealing, but even these did not see consistent and substantial success until the 1820s.⁸⁸ Rather, the spasmodic development of early export industries was tied primarily to the need to secure capital for the lucrative business of controlling imports into the

⁸⁶ Frank Decker, 'The Legal and Economic History of the Lien On Wool and Stock Mortgage Act 1843 (NSW): A Case Study on the Significance of Property Law for Understanding Economic Development.', *Legal History* 12 (2008).

⁸⁷ 'Abstract of Sales by Auction This Day', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 September 1848, 2.

⁸⁸ John Ayres Mills, 'The Contribution of the Whaling Industry to the Economic Development of the Australian Colonies 1770- 1850' (PhD Thesis, School of Historical and Philosophical Inquiry, The University of Queensland, 2017).

colony.⁸⁹ To the same extent that these exports were marginal as contrasted with their importing activities, their speculative activities were harbinger for settler abstract space. Instead, Chapter Two and Three emphasised the role of fragments of violence and nature in constituting the production of space during the first three decades. Meanwhile, this chapter identifies a shift in the role of landed property markets within the production of space that accompanied the growing significance of the pastoral export sector.

Conclusion

The chapter, as a whole, develops an original perspective on the origins of settler abstract space through the internal relations of imperial circuits of capital, extensive dispossession, and urban property speculations. It departs from the temptation to emphasise the development of abstract spatial technologies like surveying or property title, due to the limited capacity of the settler state to generalise such spatial forms across the settler space. Instead, the ingenuity of the draftsmen indicates an abstract ideology of space, one which is tied to racialised conceptions of land and property. To this is added the eloquence of the auctioneers, who bring this ideology to life in urban property markets. Such speculation, however, was articulated with the flows of capital into the settler colony under the crisis conditions of the 1840s.

The first section examined the shift to pastoral capital accumulation of the settler colony. I argued that the social relations of settler landed property were internalised within imperial circuits of capital. Crucially, I developed the concept of extensive dispossession to characterise the vast seizure of Indigenous lands that was a consequence of the pastoral sector. Drawing on

⁸⁹ Dyster, 'The 1840s Depression Revisited'.

the theory of ground-rent discussed in Chapter Two, I suggested that the key mechanism by which value was appropriated was through surplus profit in the form of differential rent 1.

The second section turned to the ingenuity of the draftsmen, or the abstractions of spatial technologies. I reconstructed settler-colonial critiques of these spatial technologies, which argue that the ‘possessive logic’ of settlers is defined by a racialised hierarchy of space and a ‘commodity logic of abstraction.’⁹⁰ However, the capacity of the settler state to concretely realise these abstractions was highly constrained for much of the nineteenth century. Thus, I suggested that these spatial technologies primarily indicate an abstract ideology of space: related to, but not sufficient for, the origins of settler abstract space.

The third section addressed the eloquence of the auctioneers through a study of urban property speculation in the Sydney Basin. The auctioneers and their advertisements signal a shift in the social relations of landed property from the moral order of space, discussed in Chapter Four. I show how speculation during this period was tied to the flows of value within imperial circuits of capital. This argument advances my claim that the production of settler abstract space within the spatial history of the Sydney Basin was defined by its internal relations with extensive dispossession and imperial circuits of capital.

The rising capacity of the state to deliver a rational management of space is nevertheless crucial for understanding the nature of settler abstract space. The following chapter therefore turns to this issue in order to develop this thesis’ contribution to the critique of settler space.

⁹⁰ Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*; Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*.

Chapter Six: The nature of settler abstract space

During the latter decades of the nineteenth century, the capacities of the settler state took shape, as did its inclinations to shape the production of space in turn. The domains of such spatial intervention were substantial: from water supply systems, sanitation, and sewerage to the much-studied railways, roads, and ports that accompanied policies of land reform across the state of New South Wales. The degree of state investment was so great that it led Noel Butlin to characterise the political economy of this period as ‘colonial socialism.’¹ Much of this investment in spatial infrastructure produced a logistical lattice that linked pastoral and agrarian producers to the key nodes of circulation along the coast. As such, it built upon the prior patterns of pastoral expansion and extensive dispossession that the previous chapter discussed. There, I argued that the origins of settler abstract space were situated within this rise of pastoral squatting, linked as it was to imperial circuits of capital and the extensive dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands. The key to the project of spatial history is an emphasis on these underlying social relations that drive the production of space. As a result, the production of settler abstract space cannot be dated by a singular event or the development of specific social and spatial forms, like cadastral mapping or property title. As we saw, the state was limited in its capacity to practically assert these spatial forms as the dominant means of shaping space: the surveyor’s office was haphazard and perennially delayed while legal title was a camp follower behind the march of squatting. This chapter attends to the nature of settler abstract space within the Sydney Basin as it was reformulated through the latter decades of the nineteenth century, which was as much a story of settler-capitalist ambition as it was of the expanding capacities of the settler state.

¹ Butlin, *Forming a Colonial Economy*; Connell and Irving offer a critique of this characterisation, saying ‘it is difficult to see much that is socialist about the state acting as a sort of super-company...’ Connell and Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History*, 17.

I suggest that a fruitful route into understanding the nature of this space is through analysing how nature itself was reproduced and transformed during this period. Why might this be the case? First, the spaces I have in mind are the parks and reserves that were made across the Sydney region, and, in some cases, these connect to the analyses offered in Chapter Four. These spaces were produced with a specifically urban and colonial aesthetics, which aimed to shape nature into emblems of a civilised and prosperous city. Contemporary commentators referred to them as both the ‘lungs’ and ‘ornaments’ of the city, connecting them to health and beauty. Put differently, the (re)production of nature was instrumental to the practical and representational production of space. Second, these spaces were organised through the state under the backdrop of tensions between class fractions, transformations in the structure of landed property, and the attempts to assert a hegemonic vision of the settler society and state. The rising capacity of the state to produce nature and space is, as we saw in Chapters One and Two, as central to Lefebvre’s conception of abstract space as capital accumulation, and the study embarked on in this chapter demonstrates how this took shape in its own ways under settler conditions. Third, the making of these parks depended first on their ideological classification as waste-lands: i.e. unimproved lands not held in private property, and which at times formed residual spaces for Indigenous life, indicated a redeployment of the ideology of improvement, but within new terms of reference. In particular, the transformation of nature undertaken through these parks achieved a fresh round of capital gains in landed property, which I propose to understand as *intensive dispossession*, mediated by global ambitions of urban elites and the state’s developing capacity to intervene in space. These three characteristics help us to perceive the nature of settler abstract space within the Sydney Basin – unlike, say, a focus on the concurrent processes of railways and roads, where these features are less sharply combined.

The overall argument of this chapter, then, is that there was a rising capacity of the state to shape the production of settler abstract space. We can trace the successes – and failures – of this process through the transformations of nature

within the Sydney Basin. These did not take a uniform pathway but, taken together, they enable us to comprehend the social relations underlying the production of space. Crucially, this cannot be understood in isolation to the wider dynamics of the settler society, especially the attempted reforms to the structure of landed property. From 1861, the squatter stranglehold on the land was transmuted through the Robertson Land Acts, though the effects of land reform were uneven and incomplete for some decades – precisely because the state’s capacities to accomplish land reform and overcome fractional tensions were still developing. As is the habit of this thesis, this chapter is divided into three sections: the first examines the conflict over landed property that led to the Robertson Land Acts and its consequences. Chapter Five argued that the incorporation of settler pastoral capital and landed property within the London markets drove extensive dispossession, leading to infusions of speculative capital within Sydney property markets. By the 1860s, the land question had become a flashpoint in colonial politics and the newly ‘responsible government’ (i.e. a self-governing colonial parliament, instituted in 1856) sought to resolve these tensions. I trace these tensions in the wider politics of landed property to illuminate the debates over the improvement of land and its changing structure within the Sydney Basin. In particular, the ongoing rise in the level of (potential) ground-rent and the expansion of the wool and wheat sectors elsewhere in the colonies was linked to the rise in both urban property and specialised agrarian production.

At the same time as the 1860s land reform, there were struggles over the residual commons within the Sydney Basin. The second section, therefore, traces the diverging pathways of the Field of Mars Common and the Sydney Common: the former was transferred into private property to fund infrastructural improvements and the latter was transformed into Moore Park. In both cases, the commons were presented as vestigial appendages of a past stage of development, as ‘waste-lands’ impeding progress. I show how both were linked to speculative interests in property, though the Field of Mars was tied to changing patterns of agrarian production while the Sydney Common was bound

to the ideological representation of the city. Crucially, the improvement of the Sydney Common linked the transformation of nature, debt-financed urban development, and the erasure of Indigenous presence, showing the emergence of new state capacities and reproducing the logic of devisualisation discussed in Chapter Four. The roots of urban boosterism and global city image-branding, much discussed in the context of 21st century urban policy, can be found in the verdant soils of these parks.² These ideological and representational dynamics were linked to discourses and practices of dispossession, indicating how the production of space and nature is tied to ongoing dispossession. In remaking the Sydney Common, part of what was effaced from the landscape were the fragments of nature and violence that characterised the settler absolute space of the early colony, discussed in Chapter Three.

The third section then expands its scope from these commons to track the rising capacity of the state through a range of other parks and reserves. In 1858, the Governor's Domain at Parramatta was wrested from the control of the Governor, which I propose to understand as the assertion of abstract state power over the Crown and, equally, the assertion of the space of the (settler) State over the space of the (imperial) Crown. At stake, here, were the social relations of space to the extent that the Parramatta Domain was a key site of the viceregal authority at the heart of the Macquaries' moral order of space, discussed in Chapter Four. Parramatta Park became the site of the Cumberland Agricultural Society's annual Exhibitions until 1870, when the Society launched the Sydney Intercolonial Exhibition at the newly created Prince Alfred Park, near the Redfern railway terminus. These Exhibitions were an opportunity to showcase settler progress, and the formation of genteel parks were crucial to their success. Events and spaces such as these were mobilised in international publications to shape the global image of the settler city – including the representation of Aboriginal

² Sassens, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*; Eugene McCann, 'Policy Boosterism, Policy Mobilities, and the Extrospective City', *Urban Geography* 34, no. 1 (1 February 2013): 5–29; Sirma Altun, 'The Production of Space in Hong Kong and Taipei: Socio-Spatial Struggles over Global City Formation' (PhD Thesis, Sydney, University of Sydney, 2021).

people as a historically superseded and vanished people. By 1887, the year before the Centennial Celebrations, the conjunction of park-making and image-branding was a well-oiled state spatial program. The making of the Centennial Park ended up a centrepiece project: as with the others, it linked debt-financing, property speculation, and the transformation of nature within an ideological shaping of settler space. Yet it was not meant to be the primary focus: the government had sought to construct a monument to state power within the park. Just as there were limits to the state's ability to reorganise the structure of landed property, there were still limits to its ability to assert a hegemonic vision and actualise that vision in space.

In sum, then, this chapter develops an account of how the production of abstract settler space was consolidated through the rising capacity of the state. The project of spatial history set out by Lefebvre guides us through the historically specific limits of the state as it confronts and transforms the production of space. Crucially, my sensitivity to these limits is motivated by Lefebvre's insight that abstract space is always *totalising* but never *complete*. Equally, I am motivated by the necessity to integrate the ongoing dynamics of dispossession, introducing the concept of intensive dispossession, within these state limits and capacities. In locating the distinctive role of the settler state in the transformation of nature, this chapter charts how the project of spatial history can help us understand the 'nature' of settler abstract space. This chapter thus delivers on the promise of this thesis to develop a critique of the production of settler space.

6.1 Land for the common good

The central claim of this section is that the transformations in the structure of landed property from 1852 and through the land reform period form a crucial backdrop for understanding the production of space within the Sydney Basin. There is an extensive economic historiography on the Robertson Land Acts, which forms the subject of critical evaluation here. Two questions can be posed

to frame the analysis. First, how can we best understand these transformations in landed property? Second, how are these transformations internally related to the production of space in Sydney?

Let me set the stage. Chapter Five traced how squatters seized 'Crown' lands (read: Indigenous lands) both within and beyond the Limits of Location and put them to use in the pastoral sector. Despite the hiccough of the 1840s depression, pastoral capital accumulation and the dispossession of Indigenous lands proceeded apace from the 1830s. By the end of the 1850s, the squatters held under leasehold over 70 million acres of land across New South Wales, with rents no greater than around two-thirds of a farthing per acre.³ Chapter Five discussed how the system of licenses for pastoral runs was replaced in 1847, after a campaign from the squatters, with leasehold title of up to fourteen years and pre-emptive rights of purchase. Few were taken up, due to "the unavoidable delay" caused by insufficient surveying capacity, and on 28 October 1851, the Governor-General ordered that regardless of when the surveyors got around to converting licenses to leases, the term of lease would be considered to begin on 1 January 1852.⁴ In effect, this gave security of tenure to every licensed squatter. The significance of this date, for the purposes of this chapter, rests not in an immediate transformation of landed property relations but in its lagged effects in the late 1860s, when these leaseholds expired and were opened up to 'selection.'

The colony had been granted 'responsible government' in 1856, with a range of conservative limits on reform that aimed to preserve "aristocratic status and social pre-eminence."⁵ These were rapidly swept away in the following years by a slew of liberal reforms, which "dished the squatter-Whigs," as Connell and Irving put it, indicating a victory for an ascendant urban bourgeoisie.⁶ In reality,

³ D. W. A. Baker, 'The Origins of Robertson's Land Acts', *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand* 8, no. 30 (1 May 1958): 169.

⁴ 'Crown Lands', *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 28 October 1851.

⁵ Ruby Makula, 'Robertson's Land Act - Success or Failure?', *University of Wollongong Historical Journal* 1, no. 1 (1975): 61.

⁶ Connell and Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History*, 104.

however, divisions between urban bourgeois and pastoral landed interests were never so clear-cut, with John Robertson, the leader of the ‘radicals,’ owning large tracts of land under freehold.⁷ As we will see, even the divisions of landed interests common in Australian historiography fail to serve us well. Robertson gave his name to the famed Robertson Land Acts (1861), which sought to transform how land was transferred from the Crown and held by the private individual. On face value, the operation of the acts was simple. Crown lands were opened to ‘free selection before survey.’ The *Crown Lands Alienation Act* enabled any person to acquire blocks of land opened for selection of between 40 and 320 acres and, if they were not surveyed, to provisionally declare the borders until such time as the surveyors were able to do so. The price was fixed at £1 per acre, and a number of conditions, reminiscent of Macquarie’s conditional grants from Chapter Four, were attached to the purchase (e.g. improvement requirements and residence for no less than three years). Yet this did not pull the rug out from under the squatters: the Act would not override existing leases, many of which would not expire for some years yet. For example, the mass of pre-1852 licenses in the ‘unsettled districts’ that were converted into fourteen-year leases would not expire until the end of 1866.⁸ The Crown Lands Occupation Act shortened the leasehold periods for renewed leases to a maximum of five years, with a large quantity of these also set to expire at the end of 1866. For these early years, then, the lands available for selection were primarily those located within the old Limits of Location – including the Sydney Basin and its surrounds. Wider transformations in the organisation of landed property were possible, then, only towards the end of the 1860s. Even then, the complexity of the Robertson Land Acts and the incapacity of the state to effectively intervene in the structure of landed property entailed that the effects of land reform were slow, contested, and unclear.

⁷ For a critique of Irving and Connell on this point, see: Christopher Newland Connolly, ‘The Middling-class Victory in New South Wales, 1853–62: A Critique of the Bourgeois-pastoralist Dichotomy’, *Historical Studies* 19, no. 76 (1 April 1981): 369–87.

⁸ The actual expiry dates of leases undertaken before and after the Robertson Land Acts varied immensely. For more, see: Gammage, ‘Historical Reconsiderations VIII’, 107, fn.13.

Historical interpretation of the Acts falls into two broad camps. The orthodox view comprehends the Acts in terms of their failure to achieve their objectives of establishing freeholding small farmers across the land and breaking the dominance of the pastoral squatters.⁹ On the one hand, it was clear that selection was limited to relatively small plots of land: 40 to 320 acres is a far cry from the 70,000 acres at the Saumarez estate near Armidale, for example.¹⁰ The right to select lands on pastoral runs at the expiry of their leases undermines the security of tenure for the squatter. On the other hand, the Acts granted pre-emptive purchase rights to the squatter up to 1/25th of their leases – for the notional maximum lease of 25 square miles (though leases not infrequently exceeded this limit) this was already 640 acres – and all lands held in fee simple came with grass rights for three times the lot area. The residence and improvement conditions were easy to evade, and a squatter could register one selection for himself, another for his wife, and a few more into the bargain for his children and workers, stopping just shy of the sheepdogs.¹¹ The orthodox critics concluded that the operation of the Acts failed in their objective to enable the small man to acquire land and begin farming.

In contrast, the heterodox critics argued that assisting the unpropertied workers onto the land was always a mirage. Instead, they see the Acts as aiming to establish laissez-faire principles in land administration, which would undermine the squatters but not privilege the working men who desired land as

⁹ Augustus Morris and George Ranken, 'Report of Inquiry into the State of the Public Lands and the Operation of the Land Laws' (Sydney: Government Printer, 1883); T. A. Coghlan and New South Wales Office of the Government Statistician, 'A Statistical Account of the Seven Colonies of Australasia' (Sydney: Govt. Printer, 1892). Some later historians argue that the outcomes were better than these early appraisals: D. N. Jeans, *An Historical Geography of New South Wales to 1901* (Sydney: Reed Education, 1972); M. E. Robinson, 'The Robertson Land Acts in New South Wales, 1861-84', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, no. 61 (1974): 17-33.

¹⁰ John Ferry, 'Mapping the New South Wales Free Selection Acts in Colonial New England', *The Globe*, no. 43 (1995): 36.

¹¹ For more on the uses and abuses of selection for the squatters, see: P. J. Smailes and J. K. Molyneux, 'The Evolution of an Australian Rural Settlement Pattern: Southern New England, N. S. W.', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, no. 36 (1965): 38; R. B. Walker, 'Squatter and Selector in New England, 1862-95', *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand* 8, no. 29 (November 1957): 68-71; Peter G. Spooner, 'On Squatters, Settlers and Early Surveyors: Historical Development of Country Road Reserves in Southern New South Wales', *Australian Geographer* 36, no. 1 (1 March 2005): 56-59.

a ticket out of wage-labour. In his landmark intervention, D.A. Baker argued that their intent was “to help establish middle class values and institutions” in the face of the class tensions “not simply between rich and poor, but rather between pastoral wealth and bourgeois wealth.”¹² Irving and Connell, as alluded to earlier, argued that this period indicated a growing hegemony of the urban bourgeoisie, who sought to “[facilitate] the penetration of urban capital into the pastoral industry by encouraging the squatters to become landowners” – which would require lending from urban finance.¹³ Freeholding landowners like Robertson stood to gain because the previous system of a high price for land conjoined to low rents for leases expressed a structural preference to the squatters over the landowners.¹⁴ For the workers, as Humphrey McQueen put it, “land represented a mystical hope – the Promised Land – the alternative to the wage-slavery of the factory towns.”¹⁵ The orthodox view, that the Acts aimed to put the workers on the land, was at odds with the reformers preference for a laissez-faire equality of opportunity: selection before survey could not *advantage* or *assist* the would-be smallholder, just as the ills of the preceding system rested in their advantages to the squatter and consequent impediments to the free mobility of capital on the land. Makula showed how the debates over land reform expressed it as “a tangible issue through which promulgators of liberal principles could gather the support of the enfranchised working classes deluded by the agrarian myth and the prospect of ‘getting even with the squatter’.”¹⁶ In a theoretically rich perspective, Joe Collins argues that the Robertson Acts aimed “to break the monopoly on land held by the class of squatters in order to permit the entry of capital to land as a sphere of capitalist production” and, consequently, initiate the subsumption of landed property as a class fraction of

¹² Baker, ‘The Origins of Robertson’s Land Acts’, 166. Baker, “The Origins of Robertson’s Land Acts,” 166.

¹³ Connell and Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History*, 86.

¹⁴ Note, however, that most landowners opposed Robertson; similarly, many of the urban merchants opposed the Land Acts due to their close ties with the squatters.

¹⁵ McQueen, *A New Britannia*, 151.

¹⁶ Makula, ‘Robertson’s Land Act - Success or Failure?’, 62.

capital, rather than a class in opposition to capital.¹⁷ In sum, what defines these heterodox accounts is an emphasis on the class composition of the reformers. They rejected the view that the Acts aimed to benefit workers and concluded that the reformers asserted liberal capitalist principles in order to unlock the land from the squatter dominance and thus enable free markets and the mobility of capital.

The orthodox view suffers from credulously accepting the view that the Acts aimed to put the poor onto the land: the prices were too high, the knowledge of the land too little, and the squatters too powerful for this to be plausible, given the deliberate absence of any state assistance to such selectors. The heterodox view, however, misses the mark as well. Bill Gammage points out that if the aim were to enable capital mobility on the pastoral runs, then why constrain such investment with residence requirements?¹⁸ Yes, this is a *prima facie* impediment to abuse on the part of the squatter – but so many loopholes were foreseeable and became rapidly known yet were trenchantly rejected for amendment by Robertson. If the aim were to indebt the squatters (as appeared to have happened by the 1890s), *a la* Connell and Irving, then why adopt such a strained mechanism as decades of competition over land between selector and squatter?¹⁹ If land reform represented victory for the urban bourgeoisie, then why did so many established merchants and company directors *oppose* it?²⁰ *Pace* Collins, the squatters did not represent an opposing class of landed property so much as a branch of pastoral capital. They were not landed proprietors renting to capitalist pastoralists, but one and the same class. As this thesis argued in Chapter Five, the extensive dispossession that characterised the preceding decades was impelled by the imperial circuits of capital. For pastoral capital, there was no conflict between the acquisition of land and the acquisition of profits: the one

¹⁷ Collins, 'Possession Vis-à-Vis Power', 115, 156.

¹⁸ Gammage, 'Historical Reconsiderations VIII', 114.

¹⁹ That widespread indebtedness was the functional outcome of these reforms cannot be taken, on its own, as evidence for the role and intent of land reform.

²⁰ Christopher Newland Connolly, 'Politics, Ideology and the New South Wales Legislative Council, 1856-72' (PhD Thesis, Canberra, The Australian National University, 1974).

was the means for the other. (Buttressed, of course, by the violent expropriation of Indigenous people.) Indeed, the fact that rents were so low for so long entails that a tension between landed property and capital did not define much of the pastoral sector during this period. Where such a tension existed, it was expressed as a tension between the squatters, as representatives of pastoral capital, and *the state* as the owner of lands stolen from Indigenous peoples.

The interpretation of land reform ought to begin with appreciating the changing limits of state capacity during the period. First, it was not a coherent policy or, in Bob Jessop's terms, a hegemonic state project: there was no unified and leading class fraction that successfully imposed its interests upon society at large.²¹ Now that the colony was self-governed, the Robertson Land Acts sought to advance private property across the colony but without either locking in the control of the squatters or undermining the economic core of the pastoral sector. Both 'rural' and 'urban' interests were tied to the fortunes of the existing structure of landed property, yet its reproduction would facilitate a concentration of wealth that many were unwilling to permit. The Robertson Land Acts attempted to chart a route through these contradictions, but they did not do so by clearly and expressly privileging a certain set of interests. Second, limited state spatial capacity entailed the inclusion of administrative concessions: free selection before survey, the keystone of the policy, was an admission that the state could not survey ahead of time. Conditional purchases attempted to ensure buyers were legitimate, but the lack of an effective bureaucracy immune to manipulation doomed it to failure. Centralised management from Sydney set the operation of the Acts at a remove from the properties in question until 1885, when decentralised Land Boards were instituted, expanding the state's capacity to manage land reform. Third, the logistical lattice of spatial infrastructure expanded over these decades – railways, roads, and ports – coinciding with both a rising capacity of the state and a relative decline in the contest over the land by squatters and selectors.

²¹ Jessop, *State Theory*; Jessop, *The Future of the Capitalist State*.

The question of improving the land was essential to land reform. For one, the state's formal power to dispose of the squatter's land was premised on their characterisation as 'waste-lands,' which implied both the absence of private property and the unimproved quality of the land.²² The category of 'waste-lands' stemmed from how English common law treated a variety of uncultivated lands, which had been refined during the enclosures period, though arguably its greatest application was found in the colonies.²³ It was this concept which animated the policy and politics of landed property, far more so than the legal doctrine of *terra nullius*, though both concepts associated a raced subject with the (un)improvement of the land. Since the squatters were entitled only to leases on such waste-lands, there was no security in improving the land; moreover, profitable pastoral production only required improvement in the late nineteenth century. The Robertson Land Acts, however, required improvement as a condition of purchase, leading to debates over whether fencing (a leading form of pastoral investment) constituted improvement for the purposes of the Act.²⁴ Alongside this renewed emphasis on improvement and investment, the nature of pastoral interests transformed: by the end of the century, rising indebtedness due to pastoral investments and world market conditions had led to most pastoral stations becoming formal tenants of the banks, mortgaged to the hilt.²⁵ If there was a point of consensus behind the Robertson Land Acts, it was its emphasis on the improvement of the land as precondition for the progress of

²² Notably, this was absent from the original English vision in 1850 but was successfully included in the Constitution Act enacted in 1855. See: Michael Crommelin, 'Resources Law and Public Policy Note', *University of Western Australia Law Review* 15 (1983): 1; New South Wales and Great Britain, eds., *The Constitution Act of 1853, with the Act of Parliament of 1855 and Accompanying Despatch from The Secretary of State* ([Sydney: Legislative Council of N.S.W.], 1855).

²³ See, for instance, the role of the waste-land in India: Gorky Chakraborty, 'Roots and Ramifications of a Colonial "Construct": The Wastelands in Assam', Occasional Paper (Kolkata: Institute of Development Studies Kolkata, September 2012); Subrata Singh, 'Common Lands Made "Wastelands" – Making of the "Wastelands" into Common Lands' (14th Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Study on the Commons, Fujiyoshida City, Japan: Unpublished, 2013); Judy Whitehead, 'John Locke and the Governance of India's Landscape: The Category of Wasteland in Colonial Revenue and Forest Legislation', *Economic and Political Weekly* 45, no. 50 (2010): 83–93.

²⁴ McMichael, *Settlers and the Agrarian Question*; Ryan, "'Our Land Abounds in Nature's Gifts'".

²⁵ N. G. Butlin, "'Company Ownership" of N.S.W. Pastoral Stations, 1865–1900', *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand* 4, no. 14 (May 1950): 89–111.

settler society – but precisely *what* constituted improvement was the subject of debate, and the capacity of the state to manage that process was limited, with examples of alleged wasteful but compliant improvements abounding in the newspapers.²⁶

6.2 The commons as waste-lands

As we have seen, land reform in the 1860s was constrained by limited state capacity: the state's ability to specifically and concretely shape the structure of landed property and the production of space was not yet mature. Within the Sydney Basin, however, matters were different. The renewed emphasis on improvement that was identified within the Robertson Land Acts carried through into the production of space within the Basin – crucially, via the transformation of nature. Rather than the economic improvement of dispossessed land being tied to the moral improvement of colonial subjects (analysed in Chapter Four), this transformation of nature represented an opportunity to create and extract potential ground-rents, enhance the ideological status of Sydney as a civilised city, and consolidate a settler abstract space. As such, this round of urban improvement developed upon the integration of urban property within imperial circuits of capital – linking extensive dispossession with speculative property investment – that was demonstrated by Chapter Five.

Contemporaneous to the Robertson Land Acts were two disputes over common land within the Sydney Basin: the Field of Mars Common and the Sydney Common. The paths they took show two different sides of the production of space within the Basin. The Field of Mars Common had been established in 1804 by Governor King, alongside five other commons (three in the Hawkesbury and two

²⁶ From a squatter's point of view, the removal of pastoral fences by selectors was a step backward: 'What Constitutes Improvement in Land? Where the Evidence of Its Reality?', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 August 1872. On the other hand, ringbarking – a means of destroying trees – was feared to impede the possibilities of agricultural development: Brett J. Stubbs, 'Land Improvement or Institutionalised Destruction? The Ringbarking Controversy, 1879-1884, and the Emergence of a Conservation Ethic in New South Wales', *Environment and History* 4, no. 2 (1998): 145-67.

fourteen-year common entitlements near Parramatta). The Sydney Common was established a little later, in 1811, by Macquarie. Aside from two additional commons dating from the 1820s, further afield to the north and south, the Sydney Basin saw no more commons created. The role of these commons was to support the neighbouring landholders and townspeople: surplus land to depasture stock and trees for firewood. By the 1860s, sentiment around commons had split. Successive governments acquiesced to the establishment of new commons in the outer districts to support new towns and to provide pasturage along stock routes, despite a growing belief that commons (especially those within the Basin) were vestigial remnants of an outmoded stage of development.²⁷ Better to find a new use for these waste-lands, as the urban reformers saw them, to sell or improve them.

It is worth re-emphasising that commons and commoners, as Ben Maddison puts it, “usually occupy a positive position in the radical narrative, [but] the Australian colonial context of indigenous dispossession makes their narrative position much more ambivalent.”²⁸ In Chapter Five, I drew on Greer’s work on property formation to complicate the relation between private property and Indigenous dispossession, where Greer sees settler commons (through squatting) as crucial to dispossession.²⁹ The commons in Australia were not a simple transplant of British notions and law of commons, but a form of property adapted to the circumstances of the settler colony.³⁰ Maddison, as a result, argues that the commons “were the interface between commodified and non-commodified forms of both landed property and labour, and as such were sites of antagonism and conflict.”³¹ It was this tension that demarcates the

²⁷ Jane Taylor, ‘An Incubus Upon the District’: Progress, Private Property and the Field of Mars Common’, *History Australia* 7, no. 1 (1 January 2010): 8.

²⁸ Ben Maddison, ‘Radical Commons Discourse and the Challenges of Colonialism’, *Radical History Review* 2010, no. 108 (1 October 2010): 30.

²⁹ Allan Greer, ‘Commons and Enclosure in the Colonization of North America’, *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 2 (2012): 365–86.

³⁰ Enid Campbell, ‘Rights of Common in New South Wales: A History’, *Legal History* 11, no. 2 (2007): 243–64; Imogen Wegman, ‘Anything but Common: Why Van Diemen’s Land Never Had Commons’, *Landscape History* 43, no. 1 (2 January 2022): 87–104.

³¹ Ben Maddison, ‘“A Kind of Joy-Bell”: Common Land, Wage Work and the Eight Hours Movement

transformation of commons like the Field of Mars and Sydney Common from the establishment of new commons in the outer districts: the former were overrun by the accumulating value in landed property at the urban core while the latter were accommodations to the underdeveloped and unequal conditions in the outer districts. The attempted interventions into the structure of landed property through the Robertson Land Acts was a partial and incoherent compromise between the demands for land, which is reflected in the distinct pathways of the commons during the latter nineteenth century.

In 1863, James Farnell declared that “commons generally were of no use to the people,” calling for the resumption of the Field of Mars Common by government and its sale to fund the construction of bridges and roads to link farmers on the North Shore with markets at Sydney. The abolition of this commons, Farnell argued, would fill “an unproductive waste” with “industrious individuals” and, consequently, “the land which surrounds it would be trebled in value.”³² Taylor argues that the justifications offered by Farnell and his liberal allies “were similar to those put forward in the Robertson Land Acts as well as those seeking to justify dispossession of indigenous peoples in the imperial context.”³³ On this view, the commons was appropriate to its time, but must make way for progress in the form of agriculture – or if not farms, picturesque villas.³⁴ The specialised fruit orchards of this period stretching northward from Parramatta were the exemplars of agrarian production which the abolition of the Field of Mars Common might support. Farnell drew a comparison to the Sydney Common:

“The 100 acres originally granted to Sydney was an arid sandy desert, and never grew a blade of grass; but supposing that it had been covered by the finest timber or the most beautiful clover, of what advantage

in Nineteenth Century NSW’, in *The Time of Their Lives: The Eight Hour Day and Working Life*, ed. J Kimber and P Love, 1st ed. (Melbourne: Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, 2007), 182.

³² ‘Field-of-Mars Common’, *Empire*, 8 June 1863.

³³ Taylor, ‘An Incubus Upon the District’, 8.

³⁴ Taylor, ‘An Incubus Upon the District’, 8–11.

would it be to the seventy thousand residents of Sydney? Why, the wood upon it would barely amount to a month's consumption. These facts brought him to the conclusion that there was a period when commons become useless."³⁵

Farnell invoked what a contemporary audience might call the tragedy of the commons. As we saw in Chapter Three, such 'tragedies' were marked equally by patterns of settler-Indigenous violence over natural resources (e.g. fish) that were exhausted by settlers. The 'wasteland' of the Sydney Common represented in space what had been a basic pattern of settler dispossession in the first three decades. By 1874, Farnell and his allies had won the day. The Common was resumed, the linking bridges soon began construction, and land sales would commence. For Taylor, the resumption of the commons and its sale as private property went hand-in-hand with the discourse of improvement and progress: one grounded on private property and commerce.³⁶

In making this argument, she links her view to the heterodox critics of the Robertson Land Acts: in particular, Don Baker's argument that land reform was a project of the urban liberals. Yet the demise of the commons was not only an ideological project: it reflected, too, the transformation of the conditions of agrarian production. Around Parramatta and across the river to the north (i.e. the land about the Field of Mars), there had been a shift towards fruit orchards, especially orangeries; while other regions, like Camden and Liverpool, to the south, were characterised by an emerging dairy industry. The agrarian production of the early nineteenth century – largely wheat farming and pastoralism – saw commoners taking advantage of the commons as a means of subsistence (e.g. firewood) and production (e.g. pasturage), but the shift in agrarian production towards specialised agrarian sectors, like dairying and orchards, saw a diminishing need for the commons. Some years later, the Ham Common – near one of the 'Macquarie towns' – was resumed by government for

³⁵ 'Field-of-Mars Common'.

³⁶ Taylor, 'An Incubus Upon the District', 13.

the purpose of establishing an agricultural college, whose syllabus included specialised agrarian sectors of dairying, orcharding, and market gardening.³⁷ Taylor, then, is right that the resumption of the Field of Mars was integrally related to ideologies of property and progress, but it was also integrally related to the changing agrarian structure within the Basin.

The Field of Mars common, then, exemplifies how the resumption of the commons represented the historic consolidation of private property as the apex of settler society. Yet this is not the whole story of the production of space during this period, for the Sydney Common took a rather different path. That this land had been formally granted as a common had passed out of local memory by 1860: it was understood for public benefit and as Crown lands to be deployed for public purposes, including the Victoria Barracks. In 1827, additional land was appended to the Common as a water reserve, stretching over the swamplands to the southeast of the city. By the late 1850s, urban development had continued spreading from the urban core: eastward in Paddington, along the northern perimeter of the Common, and curling around the eastern perimeter southward to Randwick. In the early years of the colony, the land had been a verdant space tended by customary Aboriginal practices, with undulating hills covered with trees and foliage. After decades of tree-felling for firewood and grazing by licensed (and unlicensed) stock, the Commons and Water Reserve were a shifting expanse of sandhills that some feared “would soon cover the whole city.”³⁸ Urban expansion entailed that the land was quite valuable: the state government would periodically sell allotments at the borders. In 1861, however, the *Sydney Morning Herald* published an “important discovery” that it was not for public use out of mere custom but had been formally dedicated as a commons in 1811.³⁹ The state government had been in the middle of arranging its latest sale of allotments on the land nearest to the town, which was promptly withdrawn. Some aldermen of

³⁷ Bruce Baskerville, ‘The Hawkesbury Commons: Early Conservation and Local Self-Governance in Colonial New South Wales’ (Hawkesbury District Historical Society Australia Day Talk, Windsor, 2006).

³⁸ ‘Sydney Common’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 June 1867.

³⁹ ‘The Sydney Common—Important Discovery’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 September 1861, 5.

the City of Sydney Council saw an opportunity to claim compensation to offset debts owed to the state government for the construction of sewerage (and abolish the rates imposed on residents).⁴⁰ A delay of five years ensued before Robertson put a bill to parliament to transfer title to the commons to the Corporation (apparently at the behest of Mayor Charles Moore) during which the commons was a regular issue in municipal elections. At first, little was said of what use the land might have aside from paying down the debts by sale of the land, but by 1864 it was proposed that it “ought not be sold, but retained and leased, so that future generations might derive their share of benefit from it.”⁴¹ Ultimately, the proposal to lease portions of the land was set aside in favour of partial sales to fund the improvement of the remainder.⁴² Importantly, we can derive from this that there was a process of innovation and debate in how the state should organise the improvement of urban nature: there was as yet no obvious model to follow. The Macquaries’ Botanic Gardens were authorised and funded by viceregal authority and laboured on by convicts; these conditions were not available to a financially-constrained Council in the 1860s. In 1866, the land was transferred to the Council, which was empowered to borrow funds (backed by land sales) to improve the land.⁴³ (At first, only the eastern portion – the Common proper – was transferred, with the Water Reserve in the west held apart, which we shall return to in the third section of this chapter.) The Sydney Common, then, bears some similarity to the Field of Mars: the sale of commons to fund improvements. But rather than transferring the whole of the Common into private hands, the object of the Council was to sell only some to back the public improvement of the remainder.

⁴⁰ The debts had accrued for the building of sewerage systems. While the Empire was motivated by opposition to paying rates, the SMH repudiated their unwillingness to fund public works while agreeing on the need for government compensation. ‘Public Meeting on the Sewerage Rates’, *Empire*, 27 March 1862, 5; ‘The Sydney Morning Herald.’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 March 1862, 4.

⁴¹ ‘Municipal Representation’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 November 1864, 4.

⁴² ‘An Act to Enable the Mayor, Aldermen, and Citizens of the City of Sydney to Borrow Money for the Improvement of the Sydney Common’ (1866).

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Year	Debentures	Bank Loans	Total Liabilities	Annual Receipts	Running total
1867	£5,000	-£2,980	£2,019	£1,062	£1,062
1868	£10,000	£1,092	£11,092	£2,745	£3,808
1869	£15,000	£7,086	£22,086	£5,451	£9,259
1870	£15,000	£14,436	£29,436	£5,869	£15,128
1871	£15,000	£11,239	£26,239	£6,015	£21,143
1872	£15,000	£10,730	£25,730	£3,849	£24,993
1873	£10,000	£15,556	£25,556	£2,516	£27,510
1874	£10,000	£17,839	£27,839	£714	£28,224
1875	£10,000	£19,229	£29,229	£248	£28,473
1876	£10,000	£20,712	£30,712	£44	£28,518
1877	£10,000	£22,444	£32,444	£17	£28,535
1878	£10,000	£24,660	£34,660	£0	£28,535
1879	£10,000	£27,355	£37,355	£0	£28,535
1880	£10,000	£29,091	£39,091	£25	£28,560
1881	£10,000	£25,777	£35,777	£5,660	£34,221
1882	£10,000	£9,752	£19,752	£19,390	£53,611
1883	£10,000	-£2,417	£7,583	£8,000	£53,611
1884	£10,000	-£5,349	£650	£7,885	£61,497
1885	£10,000	-£4,082	£917	£1,113	£62,610
1886	£10,000	-£1,138	£3,861	£0	£62,610
1887	£10,000	-£194	£6,805	£0	£62,610
1888	£10,000	£385	£10,385	£0	£62,610
1889	£5,000	£1,821	£6,821	£0	£62,610
1890	£0	£0	£0	£0	£62,610

Table 6.1 Finances of the Sydney Common. Sources: 1867–1890 Abstracts of Receipts and Disbursement of the Municipal Council of the City of Sydney, on Account of the Sydney Common; 1867–1890 Liabilities of the Municipal Council of the City of Sydney. No source is available for 1883, but it is possible to infer the change in bank balance from the adjacent years; no such inference is possible for receipts from land sales during that year, but a conservative estimate of £8000 is reasonable. Nevertheless, I have not included this figure in the running totals.

Much energy – and funds – was devoted to the question of improving the land. This occurred in two phases: from 1867–74 and 1882–1890, both backed by the subdivision and sale of allotments on the Common. The land fetched a high price on sale, due to its situation amongst the genteel suburbs of eastern Sydney where the elites of the city had long resided in stately villas. The prospect of windfall gains from the improvement of the Common no doubt spurred land values. For instance, the first sale of 29 allotments, in 1867, raised £2435 7s – averaging a princely sum of £45 per acre.⁴⁴ (The purchasers included aldermen of the Council, including Charles Moore, the mayor at the time.⁴⁵) This initial portion of land sold was located in the north-western section of the common, nearest to the city and west of the Victoria Barracks. A new road was marked out and all the common lands north of it were set aside for private sales (see fig 6.x, below). Despite the exceptional land values backing the project, the cost of improving the Common was so great that it required debt-financing through the issue of debentures and bank loans. By 1874, the debt, *excluding interest*, had accumulated to £27,839 3s 4d and the cost of servicing that debt totalled £10423 11s 3d. Total receipts from land sales by the same point amounted to just £28224 16s 10d. From 1875 to 1881, there were neither works on the Common nor any new sales, prompting the Union Bank to write to Council in 1880, demanding “that steps be taken for immediate liquidation of the Sydney Common account,” which at this time was owing close to forty thousand pounds.⁴⁶ Following this, the auctioning of the Common re-commenced at a frenetic pace, with receipts from sales peaking at an eye-popping £19,390 4s 11d in 1882. By the end of that year, the debts owed to the bank had been eliminated (though £10,000 in debentures remained outstanding). To complete this financial overview, I will

⁴⁴ Average calculated by author; figures drawn from: ‘Commercial’, *Empire*, 16 May 1867; ‘Sydney Municipal Council’, *Empire*, 16 May 1867.

⁴⁵ ‘Commercial’, 4.

⁴⁶ ‘Sydney Municipal Council’, *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 23 January 1880.

note that the latter part of the 1880s saw additional works connected with the formation of the Centennial Park – i.e., the Water Reserve to the east of the Common – which is discussed in the following section. In 1890, the Council absorbed the remaining debts of the Sydney Common Fund via the sale of further debentures on the London financial market, at cheaper interest rates, which represented something of a novelty for Council financing during this period.⁴⁷

What is the point of this financial narrative? First, the model of finance and improvement developed on the Common would be rolled out repeatedly over the following years, as the following section will trace. Second, it reveals how the improvement of nature came to be tied to financialisation, in much the same way as the previous chapter's analysis of property speculation during the 1840s traced connections to imperial circuits of capital. The debt-financing of the transformation of nature was a response to limited revenue-raising capacities of the Council: nominally, it received a grant from state government, which was never transferred since it was held against debts owed by Council to state government. Rates on urban property, meanwhile, were unevenly collected and politically contentious. The Council was required to separate its various Funds for both income and expenses, meaning that cross-subsidies were not possible. Under these constrained budgetary conditions, the Council developed a system of financing the improvement of nature on the common. By financialising the improvement of the Sydney Common, the Council was opened to conditions of financial discipline, spurring further privatisation and improvement efforts during the 1880s. These ties between the council and finance indicate the relation between the role of capital and the role of the state in setting the nature of settler abstract space, advancing this thesis' critique of the production of settler space.

Third, the underlying reason why this financial project was possible at all can be explicated through the theory of ground-rent, introduced in Chapter Two.

⁴⁷ 'City Council.', *Evening News*, 22 January 1890; 'Monetary and Commercial', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 June 1890.

Rising land values around the urban centrality indicated the possibility for profitable gains on land and capital investment on that land (in the form of manses and villas). The intensity of investment on the land, and thus the level of differential rent 2, would be all the greater if the 'waste-land' of the common could be improved. (Here my argument parallels Neil Smith's account of gentrification as driven by the gap between actualised and potential ground-rents, although my argument specifies the concrete role of surplus profit and differential rents.⁴⁸) This mirrors the analysis of extensive dispossession conducted in Chapter Two, where the appropriation of surplus profits through dispossession was organised through differential rent 1. Much the same mechanism applies in the Field of Mars as it does in the Sydney Common, even if the spatial pattern of land-use and the political contours of debate differ. Dispossession is enrolled into this analysis by (i) the reformulated ideology of improvement at play in these cases and (ii) the role that interstitial 'waste-lands' and 'commons' play for the lives and movements of Indigenous people continuing to live in and around these spaces.⁴⁹

Where Taylor's analysis of the Field of Mars common emphasised the ideological relationship of progress and property, here, we see how this story is enfolded into the webs of finance and *intensive dispossession*. Crucially, for the purposes of this thesis' argument, this suggests that the production of settler abstract space is not only about the origins of private property and abstract spatial forms but the ways in which nature, landed property, and space are incorporated with the social relations of capitalism. As I have been arguing, this incorporation is mediated by the specific conditions of settlement and dispossession, thus reinforcing this thesis' turn to a historically and geographically materialist critique of settler space.

How, then, was nature transformed on the Sydney Common? Work

⁴⁸ Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London: Routledge, 1996).

⁴⁹ Kain, 'The Role of Cadastral Surveys and Maps in Land Settlement from England'; Irish, *Hidden in Plain View*.

commenced in 1867 to level the land, cover it with grass, and plant ornamental trees. Six contracts for varying sections of the land were issued between 1867 and 1870, inclusive, with the total cost of these works on the Common equal to £41,789 15s 11d.⁵⁰ (Much of this took the form of wages, absorbing part of the unemployment problem at the time. The improvement of nature was thus a release valve for economic tensions within the city.) The Mayor, Charles Moore, was possessed by a singularly unimpressive vision of improvement. The problem with the Common, as Moore saw it, was the distasteful sight of the barren sandhills. If the sandhills were the problem, they had to be got rid of. The levelling of the Common was, therefore, a gargantuan enterprise of moving the earth. Dirt from the undulating hills and depressions was sliced from the top and filled from the bottom, with the surplus laid upon two mounds in the west of the Common. Subsequently, the street sweepings from the city – animal droppings and human waste – were laid over the earth and grasses seeded. In this we see an urban-ecological metabolism: the waste of the city plays a role in the production of nature on the common. Waste is put to work in regenerating ‘wasteland.’ The outcome was a great level grass plain with two conspicuous ‘batteries’ on one side and a sandstone ridgeline to the east, dividing the Common from the water reserve.⁵¹

Not everyone was pleased. David Crichton, a florist, objected that “the Sydney Common, before it was touched, had every natural advantage ... and in the hands of the competent landscape gardener who knew how to turn these advantages to the best account, a perfect paradise might have been formed at one tenth the cost of the present works.”⁵² Drawing on Lefebvre, Mrozowski comments that linear perspective defined Renaissance landscape gardening, which thus enables the abstraction of nature and space.⁵³ Here, however, Moore’s plan of improvement

⁵⁰ The initial three contracts issued in 1867 amounted to a tenth of these costs, but expenditure ballooned over the following years. ‘City Municipal Council’, *Empire*, 5 March 1867.

⁵¹ With money running short and the lack of will to continue deficits, some remaining mounds were left intact. See: ‘The Sunday Morning Herald.’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 March 1872.

⁵² ‘THE CITY PARKS.’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 December 1870.

⁵³ Stephen A. Mrozowski, ‘Colonization and the Commodification of Nature’, *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 3, no. 3 (1 September 1999): 153–66.

resonates closer to Lefebvre's critique of how motorways suggest a *dominated space*: "A motorway brutalizes the countryside and the land, slicing through space like a great knife."⁵⁴ For Charles Moore, a level and grassy plain was the objective: in 1872, responding to critics in Council, he declared that "they would find that the dead level complained of by Alderman Woods was a very pretty level after all."⁵⁵ Faced with a complex landscape, the Council embarked on a debt-financed project to flatten it: a 'pretty level' reminiscent of the Euclidean plane. Unlike the Field of Mars Common, where improvement meant private property to fund infrastructure, the improvement of the Sydney Common meant an abstract spatial project of levelling the landscape to eradicate blemishes upon the appearance of the city.

Barring the florists, few commentators were critics. Of course, the published comments reflect the politics of the two primary Sydney papers: the *Herald* and *Empire*. Not recorded were the views of Aboriginal people, living in camps dotted along the southern shores of the Harbour, east of the city centre, or at La Perouse to the south; nor do we hear the working people hired to shuffle earth, manure, and seeds or the Chinese market gardeners who possessed the skills necessary to cultivate the well-watered lands near the ponds and wetlands on the Common.⁵⁶ As Michel Trouillot points out, "silences enter the process of historical production."⁵⁷ What was published, however, were celebratory commentary that invoked the beautification of the Sydney Common to Sydney's status as a great and civilised metropolis. Henry Francis commented in June 1867 that the improvements were necessary to overcome "the apathy and neglect of the advantages to be derived from the magnificent site of our city, which ought to be and could be made as attractive in the Southern Hemisphere as Paris is in

⁵⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 165.

⁵⁵ 'Sydney Municipal Council', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 January 1872. Shortly after, Alderman Raphael told Moore: "I will support you if you make [another] mound."

⁵⁶ For an indicative description of Chinese market gardening practices in the Riverina, see: 'Chinese Cultivation in Riverina', *Goulburn Herald and Chronicle*, 11 January 1865.

⁵⁷ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, 2015), 26.

Europe.”⁵⁸ In 1869, a letter to the editor of the *Herald* refers to how “the face of nature has undergone in this locality a wonderful change for the better” and “hopes are cherished that this locality will be the most beautiful and health pleasure ground in the colony.”⁵⁹ Norfolk Pines were planted along key avenues; an arched gateway installed; fencing commenced in varied places; the two western mounds were terraced; the waterholes made into “ornamental ponds”.⁶⁰

The effects of all these improvements, and the reasons they were celebrated, were two-fold. First, these improvements to the common made it an ‘ornament to the city.’ This was a phrase invoked by contemporary commentators as part of a vision of urban aesthetics: fine architecture, statues and fountains, and manicured green spaces. My suggestion here is that these visions of the city were integrated within an ideological production of settler space as civilised and modern. Second, unique to the making of the parks were their role as the ‘lungs of the city.’⁶¹ Karen Jones situates the bodily metaphor of parks as ‘lungs’ within nineteenth century Western discourses of public health and sanitation, arguing that “it was deeply evocative and malleable enough to unite a range of constituencies from urban planners, to public health reformers, green romantics and medical professionals” in response to rising fears of the social ills accompanying industrialisation.⁶² This was, of course, ideology masquerading as function. Jane Jacobs excoriates the idea of parks as ‘lungs’ as “science-fiction nonsense,” adding that “air knows nothing of grass fetishes.”⁶³ Instead, the link between parks, health, and morality can be understood as a mechanism of social control and discipline enacted by the state and internally related to class structure.⁶⁴ Spiralling out from the improvement of the Sydney Common, then,

⁵⁸ ‘The Sydney Common’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 June 1867.

⁵⁹ ‘The Sydney Common’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 September 1869.

⁶⁰ ‘Municipal Intelligence’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 September 1869.

⁶¹ For one instance of the phrase, see: ‘Moore Park Rifle Butts’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 October 1885.

⁶² Karen R. Jones, “‘The Lungs of the City’: Green Space, Public Health and Bodily Metaphor in the Landscape of Urban Park History”, *Environment and History* 24, no. 1 (1 February 2018): 39–58.

⁶³ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Vintage, 2016), 91–92.

⁶⁴ Dorceta E. Taylor, ‘Central Park as a Model for Social Control: Urban Parks, Social Class and

were relations of class, state, and race: all of which were cohered within a rationale of space that sought to elevate the status of settler society within the British Empire.

The implications of this process can be evaluated with the assistance of the literature on urban entrepreneurialism and civic boosterism. These arguments emerged from analyses of post-Fordist urbanisation, where cities and interurban competition became key nexuses within national and global political economies. David Harvey argues, as a result of this, that urban governance shifted from managerialism to entrepreneurialism: from a focus on managing collective consumption to innovating competitive advantage.⁶⁵ Harvey explains that “the new urban entrepreneurialism typically rests, then, on a public-private partnership focussing on investment and economic development with the speculative construction of place...”.⁶⁶ For Neil Smith, these processes are tied to the making of a ‘frontier myth’ in the gentrification of cities: a frontier of profit that “portends a class conquest of the city.”⁶⁷ In drawing from the well of Frederick Jackson Turner, who was discussed in Chapter Three, this mythology of the ‘new urban frontier’ inherited the traditions of colonisation, racism, and dispossession.⁶⁸ In much the same way, I propose, the remaking of the commons into parks inherited the racial conceptions of territory, land, and improvement – but with its own novel permutations, not least of which is the avarice for ever-expanding rents. We have seen already how the improvement of the Sydney and Field of Mars Commons were linked to speculative investment in property; the following section will reveal how the transformation of nature through urban parks was integrated with major exhibitions, with colonial overtones, run by

Leisure Behavior in Nineteenth-Century America’, *Journal of Leisure Research* 31, no. 4 (1 December 1999): 420–77.

⁶⁵ David Harvey, ‘From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism’, *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* 71, no. 1 (1989): 3–17.

⁶⁶ Harvey, ‘From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism’, 8.

⁶⁷ Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, 25.

⁶⁸ See, for example: Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, 26–27.

private associations. However, unlike the urban entrepreneurialism literature, the objective of these projects was not to sustain competitive advantage between cities but to reconstruct the city, and by extension the settler society, within an imagined European metropolitan standard.⁶⁹ As we shall see, this was mobilised for city-branding, city-marketing, and frontier-making within the British Empire.

Crucial within these spectacles was the erasure of Indigenous presence and the domination of nature expressed by the levelling of the common. Chapter Four discussed how the logic of devisualisation within architecture and landscapes was elemental within the production of settler space; here, we glimpse how the transformation of nature was linked to a reformulated and abstract rationale of space as an instrument of settler civilisation and capitalist society. By conjuring civilisation and modernity in this way, it continued the decades-old attempts to dispel the residualised socio-natures of a 'primitive' past. If that land was a spatial expression of the 'tragedy' of the commons – read as Indigenous dispossession and settler violence – then the 'pretty level' represented the erasure of that tragedy. The formal features of the improvement of the common – the knife slicing through nature – expressed this rationale; so, too, did the functional orientation of the park, in its ideological roles as the lungs and ornaments of the city. The form and function of the transforming commons were set within the structural relationship that they bore to landed property and finance: a debt-financed and -disciplined state project based on intensifying ground rents. Thus the logic of devisualisation was reformulated and internalised within the nature of settler abstract space. In turn, this vindicates this thesis' argument that the project of spatial history, and the regressive–progressive method, helps sharpen our critique of settler space.

⁶⁹ Robert Rotenberg, 'Metropolitanism and the Transformation of Urban Space in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Metropoles', *American Anthropologist* 103, no. 1 (2001): 7–15; Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton University Press, 2014).

6.3. Settler nature and settler abstract space

The production of settler abstract space through the transformation of nature was not only an ideological exercise that responded to present desires and ambitions. It was, equally, a (re)interpretation of settler history. As outlined in Chapter One, the analysis of spatial history requires tracing how residual spatial elements are recontextualised and mutated alongside shifts in the production of space. In the settler context, much of this process involves reorganising spaces in line with a settler, rather than Indigenous vision. For the settlers, however, the interpretation of the past through the production of space was not limited to the erasure of Indigenous dispossession but included the confrontation of residual settler spaces and social relations. In 1857, disputes over the Governor's country manor at the Parramatta Domain led to the transfer of the Domain to public hands and the formation of the Parramatta Park. As Chapter Four discussed, the Parramatta Domain had been formed by the Macquaries as a seat of viceregal authority accompanying that at Sydney – with a grand manor and landscaped gardens to match – but by the 1850s it was disused and ill-repaired.⁷⁰ Matters came to political attention when Governor Denison rented the property to tenants, and the parliamentary opposition raised hue and cry: first demanding the rents returned to government, then demanding the property itself.⁷¹ The government had rights to the land, they claimed, and could dispose of it just as they could *any other waste-lands of the colony*. Notice how the same terms of comparison entered this argument as would come in the Robertson Land Acts, or the Field of Mars Common, or the Sydney Common, though in the first it was to

⁷⁰ It appears that the disrepair came about after Governor Fitzroy's wife died in a coach accident on the Parramatta Domain in 1847, after which Fitzroy abandoned the site and it fell into disrepair.

⁷¹ For the debate over Governor Denison's appropriation of rents, see: 'Legislative Assembly', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 December 1856. For the debate asserting the Domain as property of the state, not the Governor, see: 'Parliament of New South Wales. Legislative Assembly', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 January 1857.

transform the structure of landed property in the outer districts; in the second, to privatise a peri-urban commons; in the third, to improve nature, the city, and its rents. Here it was deployed as a legal and ideological justification for the newly responsible government to take charge of the production of settler space. For this was what was at stake: the residual socio-spatial relations I described in Chapter Four, a moral order of space organised within a nodal web of imperial authority. If the spaces of the Macquaries were state spaces, they were first and foremost spaces of the Crown, and what was sought in 1857 was the counter-assertion of abstract state power for the settlers. As Mr Martin put it in parliamentary debate, “there was no excuse for the Ministers allowing the Governor to come in as he had done, and take the power that legitimately belonged to it out of the hands of the House, in order to place it in those of the Queen.”⁷² The debate spilled out into the public: The *Herald* took the side of the Crown; the *Empire* preferred the State, and success fell to the latter:

HERALD: “The Assembly is apt to consider itself the sole authority in the State, and when gentlemen desire to render the GOVERNOR a pageant, they tell him that he is here what the QUEEN is at home. But this is mere insidious flattery. He is the representative of that Royal power, which covers the whole empire.”⁷³

EMPIRE: “In a free State everything, without exception, belongs to the people; and a constitutional monarchy is a free State. Every prerogative of the Crown, therefore, is held in trust for the people, and thus only. The Crown itself is the people's property.”⁷⁴

Derek Sayer, in the English context, proposes that “state formation is, among many other things, a cultural revolution, hinging upon the reconstruction of social identities.”⁷⁵ Moreover, state formation is an eminently historical process

⁷² ‘Parliament of New South Wales. Legislative Assembly’, 3.

⁷³ ‘The Sydney Morning Herald.’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 January 1857.

⁷⁴ ‘The Domain of Responsible Government’, *Empire*, 22 January 1857.

⁷⁵ Derek Sayer, ‘A Notable Administration: English State Formation and the Rise of Capitalism’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 1 March 1992, 1396.

aimed at “situating the stately space in the flow of a national time linking the dead to the living and the unborn.”⁷⁶ What is signalled here is a refusal to identify a singularising origin to the bourgeois English state, and a preference for comprehending the “largely antecedent (and non-bourgeois) construction of a *nation* – a set of institutional forms, but also integrally a cultural space – within which more identifiably ‘bourgeois’ transformations (economic, political, cultural, moral) could operate...”⁷⁷ This argument parallels this thesis’s critique of settler space, to the extent that I propose that settler space is produced unevenly, in fits and bursts, drawing on its antecedents and reshaping them in the process. Thus, in the making of the Parramatta Park was an attempt to re-situate a key space of the Crown’s authority, dating back to Governor Macquarie, within the settler state.⁷⁸ At issue was the nature of the settler subject, expressed in space and nature itself, and whether the settlers were directors of their own history. In contrast to Sayer’s analysis, the crucial difference imparted by settler conditions was the systematic exclusion of Indigenous subjects from either the ‘stately spaces’ or the ‘flow of a national time.’ As I argued in Chapter Four, the space of the Macquaries was consolidated just as the germs of its supersession were emerging: the production of a settler abstract space, conditioned by capital and the state. The events of 1857 were therefore a late confrontation with a set of social relations that had already been swept past. What we can detect here is the formal assertion of abstract state power over state spaces. The creation of the Parramatta Park, then, was enmeshed in the changing conditions of the settler production of space.

⁷⁶ Sayer, ‘A Notable Administration’, 1396.

⁷⁷ Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 200.

⁷⁸ In practice, it should be noted that while the Governor is formally the representative of the Queen, he in fact represents the English state – so, what was dressed up in debate as between the Crown and the settler state was in fact a confrontation of one state and another. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the Colonial Secretary agreed with the rights of the Governor – but without any desire to overturn the practical decisions of the colonial government (see: ‘Legislative Assembly. Wednesday, November 4.’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 November 1857.). This point, however, is not especially material to the diagnosis of the production of space undertaken here, though a more complete examination of the murky signifier of the Crown may help appreciate the dynamics of settler state formation.

The Parramatta Park needed little in the way of immediate improvement: even if the house had fell into disrepair, the landscaped gardens predated the state's renewed control of the site. In 1859, the reinvigorated Cumberland Agricultural Society applied for, and received, a fifteen-acre grant of the Domain to use as the grounds of its Annual Exhibitions, starting the following year in 1860. The location was well-suited. The railway from Sydney to Granville opened in 1855, with an extension to Parramatta itself enabled by siting the station on the former Domain in 1860.⁷⁹ The Exhibitions continued at the Parramatta Park for the following decade, until the ambitions of the Society drove it to fresher pastures a short railway trip away. On the other end of the Sydney–Parramatta line was the station built in the Cleveland Paddocks, a block of land near the Redfern Estate, which Chapter Five discussed as a site of property speculation. That land had held an Aboriginal camp at some point prior to the construction of the railway.⁸⁰ An 1850 watercolour, by John Rae, depicts the commencement of those works, with a vast crowd arrayed in the background and a selection of Aboriginal figures in the foreground. These Indigenous figures are carefully separated from the white audience, both in composition and attire: one holds a spear and a child is draped in a blanket.⁸¹ The artist depicts a sunny vista to accompany the celebration of industry through the railway, despite the morning in question marked by heavy rains.⁸² The primary focal point of the painting is the promenading horsemen in the foreground, but the empty space around the Aboriginal figures draw the eye towards them, who are largely not gazing at the new railway, that signifier of progress, but away. It is likely that Aboriginal people were indeed present at this event, since some thousands thronged the scene, but the representational space of Rae's painting reflects a growing ideology of separation and erasure.

⁷⁹ 'Agricultural Society of New South Wales. Opening of the Metropolitan Intercolonial Exhibition.', *Empire*, 31 August 1870.

⁸⁰ *Echo*, 12 June 1890. When such a camp was present is hard to say, or whether it was on the exact site of the Paddocks, since the author gives no date or details.

⁸¹ A blanket was disbursed annually for every Aboriginal person who wished to claim it. Irish, *Hidden in Plain View*.

⁸² 'The First Australian Railway.', *Bell's Life in Sydney and Sporting Reviewer*, 6 July 1850.



Figure 6.1. Turning the First Turf of the First Railway in the Australasian Colonies at Redfern, 1850.⁸³

Later improvements to the Cleveland Paddocks would expunge the Indigenous landscape in favour of European sensibilities of nature and space. In 1868, the formerly Cumberland Agricultural Society, now NSW Agricultural Society, was looking for a new site for an Intercolonial Agricultural Exhibition in the following year: a step up from the ordinary exhibitions, the Intercolonial Exhibition appears to have been intended to legitimate the Society's attempt to position itself as the parent institution for the regional agricultural societies across the colony.⁸⁴ The other Charles Moore – of the Botanic Gardens, not the Sydney Corporation – visited regional associations seeking their support.⁸⁵ A few months

⁸³ John Rae, *Turning the First Turf of the First Railway in the Australasian Colonies at Redfern*, 3 July 1850, Watercolour painting, 44.5 x 66 cm, 3 July 1850, V1/RAI/7, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

⁸⁴ 'Agricultural Society of New South Wales', *Empire*, 24 September 1868.

⁸⁵ For two examples, see: 'The Northern Agricultural Association Dinner', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 August 1868; 'Agricultural Show at Singleton', *Newcastle Chronicle*, 1 September 1868.

earlier, the Sydney Corporation had secured the Cleveland Paddocks from the government “for the recreation of the citizens of Sydney.”⁸⁶ For the NSW Agricultural Society, this presented an opportunity: it was perhaps twice the size of the Parramatta grounds and closer to the metropolitan heart, and was consequently floated as the ongoing site of the Exhibition.⁸⁷ The Cleveland Paddocks took the name Prince Alfred Park to honour the prince’s visit to the colonies, and the Society successfully secured it for its exhibitions.⁸⁸ For the first time, the 1869 Intercolonial Exhibition included both agricultural and manufacturing exhibits, indicating its attempt to bridge ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ divides.⁸⁹ The following year’s exhibition was even more ambitious, for the date held special significance: 1870 was the centenary of Cook’s arrival at Botany Bay and his claims upon the land for the Crown. The opening day of the Exhibition had been declared a public holiday so all might “take part in the ceremony intended to celebrate the ceremony of Captain Cook’s arrival on these shores, and afford some indication of the wonderful progress made by Australia during the first hundred years of its existence as a part of the British Empire.”⁹⁰ The Sydney Corporation had expedited its improvements of Prince Alfred Park; like the Sydney Common, it was debt-financed to the tune of £20,000. The expansive Exhibition Building was constructed as the centrepiece, with the remaining land “transformed into something like a garden, intersected with walks and carriage drives,” enclosed by a dwarf wall and adorned with avenues of trees.⁹¹ The *Empire* commented that “the fine semi-circular roof, with its two commanding towers appears in bold relief from the eminence upon which it stands in the

⁸⁶ ‘Municipal’, *Sydney Mail*, 10 August 1867.

⁸⁷ ‘Agricultural Society’, *Sydney Mail*, 11 January 1868; ‘General Meeting of Agricultural Society of New South Wales’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 June 1868.

⁸⁸ During the year, Prince Alfred had been touring the colonies, ill-met by surges of Irish Catholic anger, including an assassination attempt in Sydney. Paul Irish notes that the assassination attempt disrupted the “largest gathering of Aboriginal people in Sydney since early colonial times,” many of who had come from throughout the colony to perform for the prince. Irish, *Hidden in Plain View*.

⁸⁹ ‘The Intercolonial Exhibition’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 May 1869.

⁹⁰ ‘Intercolonial Exhibition, Sydney’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 August 1870.

⁹¹ ‘Prince Alfred Park’, *Sydney Mail*, 28 May 1870.

park,” adding in passing that “it is worthy of remark that a month ago the building was surrounded by what may properly be called swamps.”⁹² Reading between the lines, we can infer that some improvements had taken place, but only to the point of ‘something like a garden.’ Nevertheless, the Prince Alfred Park linked the state with the agrarian and industrial interests of the colony through a space intended to connote progress and modernity.

Edmonds, through a focus on the Melbourne Exhibition, argues that such exhibitions “were celebrations of empire that could be viewed by locals and other British subjects from around the globe. They were spaces in which ideas about Aboriginal people and culture were exhibited and managed discursively through public and international exhibitionary apparatuses.”⁹³ Similarly, Paul Irish notes that, in the 1879 Sydney International Exhibition, there was “a static, comparative display of Aboriginal and Pacific Islander artefacts; a petrified version of Aboriginal culture, frozen in time.”⁹⁴ This reflects the prevailing attitudes of the settlers at the time, signified by frequent references to the death of local Aboriginal notables as ‘the last of their tribe’ – by which was meant the last of what Europeans considered ‘authentic’ Aboriginal people.⁹⁵ Complaints about Aboriginal people accepting state charity despite not being ‘black enough’ crop up throughout the period. Those few Aboriginal figures in Rae’s painting appeared as the authentic Aboriginal as the settlers saw them: sufficiently black, garbed in blankets or settler clothes, with women scandalously shirtless. Irish concludes that “in the space of less than a century, Europeans had ideologically alienated Aboriginal people from the Sydney landscape and denied them any role in interpreting their own past”⁹⁶ (i.e. within the public life and space of the colony).

Coinciding with the 1870 Exhibition was a special ‘Geographical Outline’

⁹² ‘Agricultural Society of New South Wales. Opening of the Metropolitan Intercolonial Exhibition.’

⁹³ Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*, 170.

⁹⁴ Irish, *Hidden in Plain View*.

⁹⁵ Irish, *Hidden in Plain View*.

⁹⁶ Irish, *Hidden in Plain View*.

produced by the *Herald* and intended for redistribution across the British Empire. It celebrated the status of the city, not least for the refinements of its natural beauty then underway: “To the poetic designation, “Queen of the Pacific,” certainly no city on the western shores of the great waters has higher claims, and *the liberal gifts of nature used to full advantage* will leave her without a rival on either side of this broad ocean.”⁹⁷ The improvements of the various parks and reserves received special attention in the Outline. Referring to the Botanic Gardens, it congratulates recent enhancements: “in place of the dullish-looking Eucalypti, are now growing up trees of the most exquisite beauty.”⁹⁸ The juxtaposition of native trees against those of ‘exquisite beauty’ demonstrates how the transformation of nature was suffused with the shift from Indigenous to colonial aesthetics. The director of the Botanic Gardens, the other Charles Moore, received special credit for his efforts. Mobilised in the Outline alongside the Botanic Gardens were improvements of urban nature at the newer Belmore and Victoria Parks and the older Hyde Park and the Domain. The Sydney Common, too, was congratulated for its rapid strides over the last three years. The ‘Geographical Outline’ was one amongst a series of publications across the late nineteenth century that aimed to summarise the civilised attractions and modern progress of the colony.⁹⁹ Without exception, these emphasised the urbane qualities of the city: the architecture of new developments like the public (and debt-financed) Town Hall or the private buildings of the leading banks. The *Herald* commented that “architecturally, Sydney has taken rapid strides within the last ten or fifteen years, and its fine banking houses, mercantile establishments, and handsome public edifices give it an aspect bespeaking substantial wealth, advanced cultivation, and growing enterprise.”¹⁰⁰ The details, here, focussed on various architectures: the ‘modern style of Italian

⁹⁷ ‘Geographical Outline.’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 September 1870, 12, emphasis added.

⁹⁸ ‘Geographical Outline.’, 14.

⁹⁹ A certain amount of this was reproduced between publications. The 1871 Edition of the *Australian Handbook*, for example, reproduced sections of the *Herald*’s ‘Geographical Outline’ in its description of Sydney. *The Australian Handbook & Almanac for 1871* (London: Gordon & Gotch, 1870), 67–68.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Geographical Outline.’, 12.

composite,' a 'columned front, of the Corinthian order,' and the columnated façade of the Post Office.¹⁰¹ Lefebvre's historical town, defined by its linear perspective and façades, was the ideological benchmark for this settler-colonial space: a fresh coat of the 'patina of age' which was first necessary to reify settler possession, now mobilised to signify settler progress.¹⁰²

If the centenary of Cook's arrival was celebrated with an Intercolonial Exhibition, then the centenary of settlement in 1888 should surely be celebrated with an International Exhibition. Or so the argument went in the years leading up to the centennial celebrations.¹⁰³ Animated discussion in the press followed, including proposed plans aiming to incorporate a monument to a century's settlement with urban (re)development along the lines of Haussmann's reforms in Paris.¹⁰⁴ Such ambitions were quickly scuttled, with the government protesting that the budget could not accommodate the necessary expenses.¹⁰⁵ Concurrent to these debates, there was the question of the Lachlan Water Reserve, no longer needed as a water supply with the completion of a pipeline to the Nepean river. Adjoining the now two-decade old Moore Park, the Reserve was about treble the size and filled with wetlands, not sand-hills. The Governor took personal interest, supporting proposals for the construction of riding and driving tracks encircling a landscaped garden.¹⁰⁶ Supporters and opponents of the Centennial exhibition leaped upon the proposal: the former declaring it could be a site for the exhibition and the latter saying that simply naming the land "Centennial Park" would suffice.¹⁰⁷ In 1887, with a change in government, fresh

¹⁰¹ 'Geographical Outline.', 12.

¹⁰² Mary Casey, 'A Patina of Age: Elizabeth Macquarie (Née) Campbell and the Influence of the Buildings and Landscape of Argyll, Scotland, in Colonial New South Wales', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 14, no. 3 (1 September 2010): 335–56; Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

¹⁰³ 'The Proposed Australian Centennial Exhibition', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 July 1886.

¹⁰⁴ 'Can the Centenary Celebration Be Turned to Profitable Account?', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 August 1886.

¹⁰⁵ With New South Wales uncertain on the exhibition question, Victoria declared its own international centennial exhibition, forcing a reactive intercolonial exhibition from NSW. 'Celebration of the Centenary', *Daily Telegraph*, 10 September 1886.

¹⁰⁶ 'A New Public Park', *Daily Telegraph*, 23 November 1886.

¹⁰⁷ 'The Centennial Celebration.', *Evening News*, 23 December 1886; 'A Magnificent Park for Sydney', *Protestant Standard*, 27 November 1886.

plans were prepared for the centenary to produce “a magnificent park and the erection of an abiding structure which will be to future ages a fitting memorial of the completion of the first century of Australian life.”¹⁰⁸ The park was to be a monumental space to match a monumental moment.

The now well-tuned program of improvements backed by privatisation of land was turned out for the Centennial Park, with again the effect of absorbing surplus labour in the region. About £200,000 was expected to be returned from sales, with the improvements to the park alone reported to double the land values of these sales.¹⁰⁹ Treble the value was allegedly achievable if all the aims of Premier Henry Parkes had been accomplished. The Premier announced that at the heart of the park would be “an edifice for a great national palace – not an ordinary one, but a great structure identified with the national life of the country,” to be named after Phillip, the first governor. Alongside would be a mausoleum to inter the corpses of national figures and a museum – named the Macquarie Institute – which would hold materials “illustrative of the historical, material, and industrial stages of the colony’s progress and the various aboriginal [sic] races of Australia, their customs, languages, and ethnological characteristics.” In short, Parkes aimed at a monument to the settler state: one which would bind a national spirit together, assert the preeminence of Sydney as first amongst the colonial cities, and express the historic ‘substitution’ of First Nations peoples by the settlers. But Parkes’ ‘State House’ was still-born. Though the Centenary Celebration Act passed – the monument included with improvements to the wetlands – opposition steadily mounted to what was nicknamed the ‘Dead-House.’ By the end of 1888, the project was dead in the water – or in the wetlands, we could say. The literature on state formation through monumental spaces suggests that such monuments both express and reproduce state power; here, however, the ambitions of the state far exceeded its capacities to assert a hegemonic vision for the production of settler space.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ ‘The Celebration of the Centenary’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 June 1887.

¹⁰⁹ ‘The Centennial Park’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 February 1888.

¹¹⁰ Adam David Morton, ‘The Architecture of “Passive Revolution”’: Society, State and Space in

The lesser project of transforming the wetlands into the Centennial Park, however, was widely applauded – and, like the abortive dead-house, we can detect within it the social relations of the settler state. While the Sydney Common accomplished a bare ‘pretty level’ under the direction of Mayor Charles Moore, this time the other Charles Moore, director of the Botanic Gardens, was placed in charge. Inspired by his training at Kew and Regent’s Park in London and his numerous visits to Europe on botanical duties, he set about employing some hundreds of the unemployed to recreate the ideals of European landscapes: stately drives encircling a series of ponds to drain the wetlands; lawns, pathways, and trees to accommodate leisurely pedestrians; and the well-appointed mansions overlooking this civilised nature. By January 26, assisted by dynamite and extended work hours (up to 11.5 hours per day, against the demands of the eight hours movement), Charles Moore had formed the grand carriage drives and cleared much of the native ‘scrub.’ As with the Sydney Common, there were a few objections to the preference of formal gardens over the cultivation of native plants, but one such critic admitted “that my ideas are not in accord with those of the present utilitarian age,” and, therefore:

“the lover of nature must submit with the best grace he can in the advance of civilisation to the transformation of his favorite resorts into eligible building sites of 20ft by 100ft, where the terrace of the speculative builder takes the place of the sylvan retreat, to the gradual metamorphosis of fern gullies and waterfalls into drains and sewers, and must accustom his eyes to an ugly pile of buildings where formerly he gazed upon the graceful outlines of his Garden Island.” ¹¹¹

Embedded in these comments is a romantic appeal to unsullied nature, yet the settler’s romanticism of original nature takes possession of the land just as much as its transformation into a formal garden. On the 26th, the Governor and other luminaries formally dedicated the Centennial Park and planted the first

Modern Mexico’, *Journal of Latin American Studies* 50, no. 1 (February 2018): 117–52.

¹¹¹ ‘So-Called “Improvements”’, *Daily Telegraph*, 13 January 1888.

ornamental trees. Some tens of thousands attended the celebrations, allegedly able to see “in a shadowy manner the lines of its future beauty, for there are many spaces which, now necessarily barren, will in the course of another season be covered with verdure.”¹¹² By the end of May 1889, £150,311 17s had been expended on improvements, with the drives and paths completed, wetlands drained to form artificial lakes and islands, and the trees and grasses arranged in ornamental fashion.¹¹³ Throughout the following decade, work on the park continued, though it is not clear how much of this was due to the need for further improvements or the need to absorb unemployed labour due to the 1890s depression. For example, *The Worker*, a paper of the Australian Workers Union, observed that the labourers on the Park were engaged in shifting half-full wheelbarrows of earth.¹¹⁴

The work on the Centennial Park, then, expressed the settler desire to transform nature in the image of civilisation. Yet this was not merely an exercise in producing a representational space – the improvements of nature had practical effects, as well. For the Aboriginal communities dotted on camps along the southern shores of the Harbour or to the south at La Perouse and the Georges River, the ‘unimproved’ Lachlan Swamps had been a relatively accessible residual landscape.¹¹⁵ Ian Hoskins concludes, then, that “the dedication of Centennial Park, in this context, represented the celebration of displacement with a further act of displacement.”¹¹⁶

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the transformation of nature within the Sydney region as a means of inquiring into the nature of settler abstract space. As we

¹¹² ‘The Scene at the Park’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 January 1888.

¹¹³ ‘Legislative Assembly’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 June 1890; ‘The Centennial Park’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 May 1889.

¹¹⁴ ‘Sand-Shifting’, *Worker*, 25 January 1896.

¹¹⁵ Goodall and Cadzow, *Rivers and Resilience*; Irish, *Hidden in Plain View*.

¹¹⁶ Ian Hoskins, “‘It Is Inevitably a People’s Park’: Ceremony and Democratic Sentiment at the Opening of Centennial Park, 1888’, *Studies in Australian Garden History* 1 (2003): 63.

have seen, intensive dispossession of Indigenous people was integral to that process: not merely in the form of seizing the land but in transforming space and nature, both in ideological and practical terms. In tracing out the transformations of the Field of Mars, the Sydney Common / Moore Park, Prince Alfred Park, and the Centennial Park, we can perceive how the (re)production of nature was a settler project, driven by the state and situated within the wider production of space. As Ian Hoskins argues, the “transformation of the land, resulting from urbanization and the demands of a resource-driven economy, was accompanied by a gradual cultural reification of the landscape” and, as a result, it “rendered invisible any prior occupation by indigenous people.”¹¹⁷ The cultural reification of nature entailed the erasure of both Indigenous possession and Indigenous dispossession, with the remaining Aboriginal people relegated to a non-authentic Aboriginal status and increasingly expelled to the peripheries of the space. These included the ongoing settlement at La Perouse, on the peninsula overlooking Botany Bay, as well as the people living along the Georges River and further afield along the Hawkesbury–Nepean estuary system.

My focus on the transformation of nature reveals three critical insights into the production of settler abstract space. First, it shows the shifting nature and role of state power. On the one hand, we can trace the rising capacity of the state: from a formal assertion of abstract state power over the residual Crown space of the Parramatta Domain to the substantive production of a state space intended to commemorate the Centenary of settlement. The expanding capacities of the state remained within limits: politico-ideological, in the case of the Centennial Park monument, as well as a backdrop of financial discipline and obligation in nearly all cases. The production of settler space in Sydney would have to wait until the 1930s for the construction of a truly monumental enterprise: the Sydney Harbour Bridge. On the other hand, this chapter has shown how the state’s capacities are produced and expanded through the transformation of nature. The

¹¹⁷ Ian Hoskins, ‘Marking Time: History and Identity in Sydney’s Centennial Park’, *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 21, no. 1 (1 March 2001): 50–51.

improvement of the Sydney Common represented a significant large-scale project of park- and space-making that necessitated financial and ecological innovations: once this debt-financed and land-backed system of level plains and genteel gardens was in the playbook of the state, it would be rolled out time and again. Crucially, this depended on the transfer of urban space to landed property, which I framed in terms of intensive dispossession. The value of the land would be reinforced by the state's improvement efforts, and tied to financialisation, mirroring the extensive dispossession and its ties to imperial circuits of capital discussed in Chapter Five.

The second insight of this chapter is in the relationship between the settler city and its imperial ambitions. The transformation of nature was part of a larger production of space that aimed to elevate the status and image of Sydney within the global empire. The objective was to exemplify the virtues of modernity and civilisation through parks, as I have discussed, but also sanitation and sewerage systems, sealed city roads, gas and then electric street lighting. Through the development of these systems, the state developed its capacities to manage and organise space – my argument should not be taken to imply that the transformation of nature was the sole means by which the state intervened in space. Rather, the making of these parks represented a high-profile and high-status project which expresses the relation between settler space and imperial ambition. For the Centennial Celebrations, for example, a few brave souls sought to include the opening of a sewerage outflow drain within the agenda, though the opening of the Centennial Park was always the centrepiece. In all of these cases, the ideological threads tying settler society to the imperial heartland were intertwined with financial threads linking settler banking to imperial finance. Through these links to imperial civility and modernity, all of these projects are internally related with the settler project of dispossession and erasure, but this chapter's study of the making of parks reveals how these relations were immanently expressed through the transformation of nature. In turn, this develops a key thread of this thesis: the shifting relation between nature and space within settler spatial history, which I suggest is a critical thread to follow

for the critique of settler space.

The third insight of this chapter is in the wider relations of landed property that buttressed the production of space within the Sydney Basin. The ideological shift towards the ‘improvement’ of wastelands was accompanied by the increasing claim of the state upon those wastelands. The Robertson Land Acts consolidated the privatisation of land within the Sydney region, even if changes in the structure of landed property in the outer districts would take longer to germinate. State projects buttressed the rise in urban land values and supported specialised agrarian industries in peri-urban regions, like the orangeries stretching from Parramatta into the hills near the Field of Mars Common. Looking beyond the Sydney Basin, my suggestion here is that the production of abstract space is not a singular event that takes place by the instalment of abstract spatial forms (surveying, title), relations of capital, or even the state’s projects of land reform. Rather, it is a tortuously winding path that navigates the structures and rubble of spatial history and, like Walter Benjamin’s *angelus novus*, is witnessed only in retrospect. By the mid-1880s, land reform began to be enacted on a decentralised model, with boards allocated per region to take advantage of local knowledge; by the 1890s, squatters had been enmeshed by financial debt and discipline, mediated by financial actors in Sydney, and were ceasing to be a distinct actor within land reform. Surveying, too, finally began to catch up with the formal promises of the state, and state government and municipal councils began to enact their own projects of space- and park-making in the country regions, as with Central Reserve in Broken Hill (1895).¹¹⁸ The nature of settler abstract space within the Sydney Basin during this period, then, can be read as a leading edge of the mutations within the production of settler space – though this is not to imply that it is a teleological vanguard of a linear march of spatial history.

In sum, the argument of this chapter has contributed to the critique of settler

¹¹⁸ Now known as Sturt Park, the Reserve was converted into a park, with the construction of a rotunda and gardens.

space through its exploration of the ‘nature’ of settler abstract space. By tracing the rising capacity of the settler state to shape nature and produce space, I develop a fresh perspective on the internal relation between the state and abstract settler space – one that moves beyond abstract spatial technologies. The reformulation of settler space during these decades was not done merely by instituting a universal spatial form, though surveying and title gradually expanded across this period; nor accomplished only by generalising a market in land through land reform, though the contestations over land by squatter and selector eventually led to this; nor achieved just by constructing a singular monument and calling it a day. Rather, the totality of social relations that underpinned and defined the state’s course of action is key to the critique of settler space.

Conclusion

For most people most of the time in settler-colonies like Australia, there is very little about the spaces we inhabit that marks them out as settler-colonial or as dispossessed Indigenous lands. The streets of Sydney inherit colonial names, like Macquarie Street, or otherwise nice English-sounding names, like Wedgewood Crescent, the street I grew up on.¹ Wedgewood Crescent, it turns out, was named for Josiah Wedgwood, a potter whose company was at the heart of nineteenth century British ceramics.² In 1789, he received a sample of clay from Sydney Cove, from which his company fashioned a medallion depicting “Hope encouraging Art and Labour, under the influence of Peace, to pursue the employments necessary to give security and happiness to an infant settlement.”³ It was this medallion which inspired his friend, Erasmus Darwin, to pen a poem on the utopian visions of the colony, as I discussed in Chapter Three.⁴ The coincidences of empire are not random within the production of settler space but instead emerge from the circulations of colonial power, science, and ideology.

Nominally overt invocations of Aboriginal heritage do crop up within the space of Sydney: like Parramatta, usually regarded as meaning ‘place of eels’, or walking tracks with signs explaining Aboriginal history, or the Pemulwuy Project, that development on the Block in Redfern with which I began this thesis. These are part of a liberal politics of recognition that, as Glen Coulthard argues, aims to “reproduce the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples’ demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend.”⁵ Such symbols of recognition are hived off from the production of space and everyday life: they exist on a different spatial plane, as it were, from

¹ Such street names indicate the ‘material structure of ideology.’ See: Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, ‘The Deficits of Discourse in IPE: Turning Base Metal into Gold?’, *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (2008): 117–22.

² Thanks to Adam David Morton for pointing out Josiah Wedgwood to me.

³ Josiah Wedgwood, *Sydney Cove Medallion*, 1789, Earthenware, 6.7 cm. medallion (max. diam.); 8.6 cm. box (max. diam.), 1789, State Library of New South Wales.

⁴ See, also: Karskens, *Colony*, 61.

⁵ Coulthard, *Indigenous Americas*, 3.

the circulations of labour and capital, or the markets for land and housing, or the sundry humdrum activities of life. It is precisely this historical and geographical blindness that settler-colonial theorists sought to challenge by insisting that dispossession, invasion, and elimination are enduring structures of settler spaces.⁶

The separation of histories of dispossession from the appearance of settler space warrants explanation. Part of that story involves the ideological function of this separation: by relocating questions of Indigenous justice into a sphere of symbolic recognition, the settler state can avoid the substantive demands for low-cost Aboriginal housing, health and education services, an end to police violence, and more. Such a story presents a critical evaluation of why this separation takes place. But it is a functional story only and, as such, attributes to consequences the role of explanation when what is required is the material causes.⁷ Elaborating these material causes requires drawing together the historic moments from which this separation originated. Establishing the origins of this separation is important because these help us understand how the movement for Indigenous justice can unpick these relations of settler society. Moreover, if these relations are made and re-made through the production of space, then the search for their origins must be in the historic shaping of settler space.

This thesis has contributed to a critique of settler space through the project of spatial history, because it is precisely this project which can explain the shaping, remaking, and mutation of settler space. As a historically and geographically materialist approach, the project of spatial history allowed this thesis to chart the production of settler space across the nineteenth century within the Sydney Basin. The strength of this approach rests on its commitment to the Marxist concepts of concrete abstraction, totality, and internal relations, drawn from the work of Henri Lefebvre. These concepts have enabled this thesis

⁶ Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*; Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native'.

⁷ For an extended critique of functional explanation, see: Sayer, *The Violence of Abstraction: The Analytical Foundations of Historical Materialism*, 113–25.

to investigate the dialectics of settler space, with key focuses on the social relations of landed property, the colonial transformation of nature, and the violence of dispossession. I see these as crucial elements within the spatial history of settler space, giving rise to a specific formation of settler abstract space and disclosing the political possibilities for superseding this space.

To develop this case, I have critically reevaluated Lefebvre's theory of the production of space. The critique of settler space and the critique of Lefebvre was a recursive process, with each impelling the other in service of this thesis' central argument. In *The Production of Space*, there are relatively limited references to colonisation: a brief discussion of the Spanish town in South America, a few passing references otherwise.⁸ During his 'rural period,' Lefebvre was intensely interested in global agrarian reforms, but this did not develop into a fully-fledged critique of colonisation.⁹ As Kipfer and Goonewardena have pointed out, Lefebvre only came to develop a critique of colonisation in *De l'Etat*.¹⁰ There, he developed a conception of the state as a multiscalar territorial configuration where colonisation enters the picture as key to capitalist social reproduction and domination:

"Colonisation is one part of the role of the state in the reproduction of relations of production and domination: the coordination of the 'pulverised' abstract space of capital and the thwarting of opposition with hierarchical separations of social space. Lefebvre's notion of 'colonisation' therefore alerts us to a key aspect of how the state produces abstract forms of space: homogenous, fragmented and hierarchical."¹¹

Lefebvre's approach is useful because it identifies how colonisation, as a form

⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

⁹ Henri Lefebvre, 'The Theory of Ground Rent and Rural Sociology', *Antipode* 48, no. 1 (2015 1956): 67–73; Henri Lefebvre, 'Perspectives on Rural Sociology', in *Henri Lefebvre: Key Writings*, ed. Stuart Elden, Elizabeth Lebas, and Eleonore Kofman (Continuum, 2003), 111–20.

¹⁰ Stefan Kipfer and Kanishka Goonewardena, 'Urban Marxism and the Post-Colonial Question: Henri Lefebvre and "Colonisation"', *Historical Materialism* 21, no. 2 (1 January 2013): 76–116.

¹¹ Kipfer and Goonewardena, 'Urban Marxism and the Post-Colonial Question', 96.

of domination, operates across multiple spaces, scales, and levels of the social world. Yet Kipfer and Goonewardena argue that this does not go far enough, because it “does not adequately specify the distinction between different varieties of ‘colonisation’ and their particular forms of determination.”¹² This thesis therefore takes up a part of this task by specifying and critiquing the production of settler space.

One of the lessons from Lefebvre’s spatial history is his attentiveness to the continual mutation of space: both within specifically capitalist spaces as well as its precursors. In the Introduction, I suggested that the formalist tendency within settler-colonial theory is flawed because it assumes the relative identity of settler-colonial societies over time and space through the formal resemblance of certain key structures, like the logic of elimination. In contrast, the historically and geographically materialist approach undertaken by this thesis indicates that the content of such forms is set in relation to the wider social totality. Moreover, the social world is dynamically transformative, defined by its contradictory tendencies towards homogenisation, fragmentation, and hierarchisation. It was precisely due to these issues that Lefebvre developed the project of spatial history as a means of criticising the production of space and, in turn, why this thesis can contribute to the critique of settler space.

Chapter One, therefore, began by elaborating the project of spatial history. I distinguished spatial history from histories of space – focussed on detailing the events within a specific place – and spatialised history – deploying spatial techniques to understand history. Spatial history, by contrast, is concerned with the social relations that underpin the production of space, viewed altogether as an open and fragmented totality.¹³ I set this approach against Paul Carter’s spatial history of Australia, which I argued represented a linguistic method of spatial history that sought to ‘read’ space like a book rather than criticise its material (re)production. The method appropriate to the task of this thesis

¹² Kipfer and Goonewardena, ‘Urban Marxism and the Post-Colonial Question’, 106.

¹³ Altun et al., ‘The Life-Nerve of the Dialectic’; Scanlan, ‘From Lukács’ Philosophy of Praxis to Lefebvre’s Metaphilosophy of Everyday Life’.

instead originates in Lefebvre's regressive–progressive method, which can successfully trace the weave between the spatial crystallisation of settler social relations and their historical genesis.

Chapter Two sought to test the limits to Lefebvre for the critique of settler space. I introduced the process of Indigenous dispossession through a discussion of primitive accumulation, drawing on Indigenous and settler-colonial scholars. Using Kipfer and Goonewardena's words from above, dispossession is crucial within the 'particular form of determination' of settler spaces. A consequence of this focus on the settler dispossession of Indigenous land is the need for a theory of landed property. I traced how the social relations of landed property, and the theory of ground rent, were defining features of Lefebvre's rural sociology. Specifically, these enabled him to explain the geographical differentiation between capitalist agrarian economies by tracking the historical development of landed property, and its varying incorporation within capitalism. However, when it comes to settler societies, he was unable to draw the links from landed property to Indigenous dispossession necessary to critique settler space, as this thesis does. Similarly, his theory of the production of space depended on a European spatial history to develop its key categories, including that of abstract space. I illuminated how landed property was integral to that spatial history, which buttresses this thesis' aim to reconstitute the critique of space through settler spatial history.

Chapter Three takes up this framework to examine the early years of the British imperial project in Australia. Underpinning this argument was a critique of the concept of the frontier, which has traditionally been understood as somewhere 'out there.' I framed critiques of this concept within the project of spatial history, seeing the frontier as an ideology tied to the totality of colonial social relations and, as such, requiring us to reject its implicit spatial binaries between 'urban' and 'rural.'¹⁴ Thus armed, I understood the frontier violence of this period through the transformation of socio-nature. The basic requirements

¹⁴ Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*.

of imperial settlement – subsistence and security – were achieved by violently rupturing the Aboriginal socio-ecological systems of caring for land and beginning to substitute it with a settler environmental regime. I traced this process through fragments of nature and violence, borrowing Lefebvre's phrase for absolute space.¹⁵ The violent transformation of relations of nature, I showed, was internalised within the earliest social relations of landed property.

Chapter Four developed this argument through a study of the Macquarie years. I argued the Macquaries sought to consolidate a moral order of space, characterised by romanticism of nature, extractivism of land, and moralism of (convict) labour. The elements of this moral order of space predated their arrival, and as such their efforts can be understood as selecting particular tendencies within the production of space in an attempt to affirm them over others. I substantiated this argument through the diaries of Lachlan and Elizabeth Macquarie, showing how this moral order hinged on entrenching a violent logistics of space, which culminated in the Appin massacre of 1816. In attempting to consolidate this moral order, the Macquaries embarked on a substantial programme of public works across the Sydney Basin, including a number of signal architectural developments. In sum, these interventions in the built environment expressed what I termed the *logic of devisualisation*: the devisualisation of residues of Aboriginal presence and life, which is a crucial origin for the ideological separation of Aboriginal history from settler space. This chapter is important to the argument of the thesis because it traces out a specific formulation of the production of settler space: one which we might not expect to be reproduced in other settler contexts, because of the peculiar emphasis on convict reformation. The value of the project of spatial history is heightened here because it can comprehend the periodic attempts to consolidate specific formations of settler space. Put differently, the approach of this thesis enables it to comprehend the spatial and temporal differentiation of settler space.

Chapter Five makes this clear: if the moral order of space selectively

¹⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

reproduced certain elements of the preexisting space, it was unable to sustain them indefinitely. Shifts in imperial markets and circuits of capital, as well as the long years of Aboriginal care for land, led to the dominant role of pastoral commodity frontiers.¹⁶ The pace of dispossession was set by these imperial circuits of capital, chiefly enacted through brute theft of Aboriginal land by squatters without formal legal title. The social relations of landed property were thus transformed by extensive dispossession, capital accumulation, and surplus profit. I argue that these processes were internalised within the space of the Sydney Basin through imperial circuits of capital, with flows of finance driving speculation in urban property. I trace the resultant ideological reshaping of landed property as a commodity through the advertisements of auctioneers. Significantly, this predates interventions into formal legal title or spatial technologies, neither of which were especially crucial to the abstraction of landed property at this time. The chapter's main point is that the origins of settler abstract space are found in the internal relations amongst landed property, imperial circuits of capital, and extensive dispossession.

Chapter Six traces the reproduction and transformation of this settler abstract space through the rising capacity of the settler state, towards the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Class tensions within settler society – between capital and labour and, to a large extent, amongst fractions of capital and landed property – led to land reform, which sought to intercede on the social relations and patterning of landed property. This was matched by political struggles within the space of the Sydney Basin over the appropriate use and improvement of the residual commons, which had been established in the early colonial period. I argue that the remaking of these commons was conducted in order to reshape nature into emblems of a civilised and prosperous city. In particular, I follow the diverging stories of the Field of Mars and Sydney Commons, tracing their linkages to speculative interests in property, debt-financed development, and ideological representations of the city. These spaces

¹⁶ Ryan, “Our Land Abounds in Nature’s Gifts”.

expressed the social relations of the preexisting settler space, and their transformation was linked to an attempt to forge a nativist settler society. By following the remaking of nature, this chapter traces the development of state spatial techniques for coordinating the production of settler abstract space.

My overall argument develops a fresh critique of settler space through the project of spatial history. It traces the dialectical development of the key social relations which underpin the production of settler space, in contrast to accounts which resort to a formalist theory of the distinctive logics of settler space. By doing so, it enables a historically and geographically materialist account of the reproduction and transformation of settler space. The regressive–progressive method, outlined in Chapter One, is crucial to this account, because it permits this thesis to comprehend how elements within the production of space are residualised, reconceptualised, and reproduced. In turn, this enables an account of settler space as a dynamic system of domination, articulated through specific interests and agents, that creatively reformulates its own conditions as part of its socio-spatial reproduction.

Building toward this central argument, the thesis offers a number of additional contributions to various literatures. First, there are a set of insights on Lefebvre that advance critical theories of space. My discussion of Lefebvre's critique of space was set, throughout, in relation to his project of spatial history, which is noted in places but as yet lacking the thoroughgoing reconstruction that this thesis has provided.¹⁷ The regressive–progressive method has seen more engagement, but this thesis advances on these discussions by setting it in the context of Lefebvre's treatment of totality and concrete abstraction, as well as showing how it is a defining method for *The Production of Space*.¹⁸ There is room, here, to deepen the account in this thesis, which I think will help illuminate the dialectical contradictions at the heart of the capitalist production of space and the complex fabric of urban and rural restructuring underway today.

¹⁷ Elden, *Mapping the Present*; Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*; Morton, 'The Warp of the World'.

¹⁸ Frehse, 'For Difference "in and through" Sao Paulo: The Regressive-Progressive Method'.

In particular, this thesis' contributions to recent work on how Lefebvre's rural sociology influenced his theory of the production of space has placed the theory of landed property under a spotlight.¹⁹ This leads to a second contribution of the thesis: namely, its focus on the social relations of landed property, which is underappreciated in traditional and critical historiography of both Australia, specifically, and settler space more generally. I have argued that the social relations of landed property are central to the project of spatial history. By turning to a Marxist account of landed property, and drawing on the theory of ground-rent, this thesis has offered a set of insights into the materialist dialectics of property formation within settler space. The social relations of landed property in the early decades of the Sydney Basin were relatively dislocated from circuits of capital, although a calculative and pecuniary rationality informed how the wealthy elite related to land during this period. Simultaneously, these social relations were conditioned by a set of racial-territorial conceptions of 'improvement' that set out the 'appropriate' form of land-use and socio-ecological development.²⁰ The result was an ideology that justified dispossession and treated Indigenous resistance as a confounding naivety. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, landed property was largely subsumed within capital accumulation: the pace of extensive dispossession was set by the pastoral economy and, as a consequence, urban property markets were internalised within these circuits of capital. Class fractional struggle over the pattern of landed property sat behind attempts to reorganise land in the settler-colony, which both drew upon and reformulated the racial-territorial principles of improvement.

The specific formation of landed property within settler space is highly mutable and contingent, implying we should expect a high degree of geographical (and historical) variegation. As discussed above, the historical transformation within the Sydney Basin (and the settler-colony at large) was not insubstantial.

¹⁹ Elden and Morton, 'From the Rural to the Urban and the Production of Space'.

²⁰ Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*.

But, also, if we cast our minds to other settler contexts, there are significant differences within their spatial histories. For Lefebvre, even intra-national variations in the social relations of landed property are crucial to understanding the geographies of agrarian production.²¹ Thus, the power of this approach rests in its capacity to account for differential production of settler spaces. Nevertheless, the roles of dispossession, colonial violence, and rent are important touchstones for explaining, and criticising, the making of settler space.

My discussion of dispossession, in turn, forms a third contribution of this thesis. The sheer length of time that scholars have debated dispossession and enclosures, as Álvaro Sevilla-Buitrago points out, “is a fair indication of the role of enclosure in the dynamics of past and present social change.”²² These include accounts that examine dispossession during the historical transition to capitalism to contemporary concerns with ongoing primitive accumulation, accumulation by dispossession, or the global new enclosures.²³ What I offer in this thesis is an account of how dispossession within the context of settler-colonial projects is tied to circuits of capital. In Chapter Five, I indicated that the expanding pastoral sector drove what I called ‘extensive dispossession,’ inspired by Marx’s account of relative and absolute surplus value (either intensifying exploitation or lengthening the working day). The pace of dispossession in this case was tied to the appropriation of surplus profit in the form of differential rent 1, outlined in Chapter Two. This was an ideologically naturalised set of ‘free gifts of nature’ which in fact originated from centuries of Aboriginal care for land. My contribution to discussions of dispossession here signals a specific mechanism by which value is appropriated into circuits of capital, and the spatial patterns of expansion that accompany it. Further research into these systems of

²¹ Lefebvre, ‘The Theory of Ground Rent and Rural Sociology’.

²² Álvaro Sevilla-Buitrago, ‘Territory and the Governmentalisation of Social Reproduction: Parliamentary Enclosure and Spatial Rationalities in the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 38, no. 3 (1 July 2012): 209.

²³ Marx, *Capital*; Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*; Midnight Notes Collective, ‘Introduction to the New Enclosures’, *Midnight Notes*, no. 10 (1990); Harvey, *The New Imperialism*.

dispossession might be fruitfully advanced by tracing the interplay between surplus profit and dispossession, including by tracing intensive dispossession (i.e. driven by appropriations of capitalisation on land and differential rent 2).

A fourth contribution, throughout the thesis, is the thread of argument on nature. In Chapter Three, I argued that the twin fragments of violence and nature expressed the underlying social relations of the early colony. These fragments point towards the socio-ecological contradiction between settler and Indigenous relations to nature, with explosively violent results. Building on this argument, Chapter Four explored how the improvement of nature through the labour of the reforming subject was crucial to the moral order of space that Macquaries' sought to consolidate. In turn, this relation to nature defined the logic of devisualisation through the reproduction of ideal English landscapes in a settler world. In the case of the Parramatta Domain, this was a 'Crown space' to the extent that it fused the personal authority of the Governor with the production of space in the Sydney Basin: it thereby generated the necessary conditions for authority *in abstract* to be exercised over space. In Chapter Five, I traced the expansion of the pastoral sector, which related extensive dispossession, the 'free gifts' of Indigenous nature, and imperial circuits of capital: all this came together within capital-impelled property speculation on urban land markets in Sydney. In turn, Chapter Six showed how the urban aesthetics of nature sought to signify what settlers understood to be their historic accomplishment: the total dominion of the settler society over its space and nature, backed by pastoral growth, lively property trading, and a web of finance. The waste-lands had no place in this world, whether they be former commons, residual Crown spaces, or 'unsullied' nature; equally, the Aboriginal people had no place in this world. In this respect, the making and remaking of parks and landscapes was key to the reformulation of the logic of devisualisation within the nature of settler abstract space.

I have offered in this thesis a conceptualisation of *settler abstract space*, developed through each these contributions signalled above. By giving this historically and geographically materialist account, this thesis advances on critiques of the spatial abstractions of settler societies which emphasise specific

state spatial technologies (e.g. surveying) and forms of property title (e.g. Torrens title).²⁴ Strictly speaking, the origins of settler abstract space rest in the underpinning social relations, not in specific spatial forms. Conceptually, such spatial forms rely on a mental and abstract space, but what exists in the mind's eye does not necessarily play out within the totality of social relations. The essential point, however, is that the abstraction of landed property was achieved through its internalisation within imperial circuits of capital and, in parallel, with the rising capacity of the settler state to shape the production of space. On the view sketched out here, such abstract spatial forms are necessary for understanding the origins of settler abstract space, but not themselves sufficient.

Yet even this is inadequate to understanding what makes an abstract space a *settler* abstract space. At the start of this Conclusion, I indicated that the separation of histories of dispossession from the appearance of settler space required explanation. I want to suggest that it is this separation that distinguishes settler abstract space. I have proposed that the logic of devisualisation, which was the outcome of the moral order of space that the Macquaries sought to consolidate, was an ingredient of this separation, to the extent that it effaced these histories of dispossession. Subsequently, this was drawn into the origins of settler abstract space: through, for example, the making of urban parks and reserves in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The paradoxical effect of this separation is that it obviates and obscures itself, but it is no less a real abstraction of settler space for that fact. Further work is necessary to chart the contours and implications of this account of settler abstract space across the spatial history of settler societies. After all, this thesis covers only a century, with the immense mutations of capitalist geographies of the twentieth – and twenty-first – centuries remaining out of frame.

²⁴ Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*; Blomley, 'Law, Property, and the Geography of Violence'.

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