Heritage, the planning imaginary and spatial justice in Melbourne’s ‘doughnut city’

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Abstract

Urban heritage can be recast as the accumulation of myths excavated from the past to suit contemporary city-imaging. Planning imaginaries are vital in facilitating this reproduction of certain urban narratives, and thus are integral to heritage valuation and preservation. This paper focuses on the transformation of the city of Melbourne from a hollowed-out inner core into a vibrant, compact, culturally diverse city. According to the celebratory narrative, the city successfully resurrected itself from a ‘doughnut city’ into a ‘café society’. Repopulation of the inner core continues apace driven by migration flows and investor capital. This paper revisits Melbourne’s urban renaissance narrative through a heritage lens. It seeks to retell the ‘doughnut city’ story by drawing from both archival research and discussion with homelessness advocates who were active during this period of inner core revitalisation. According to this counter-story, the doughnut city housed its homeless. Specifically, the paper argues that Melbourne’s urban renaissance narrative continues to serve the mythic function of invisibilising the marginal body from activated city spaces; reflecting the fraught relationship between heritage and spatial justice.

Keywords: Planning imaginaries, heritage, homelessness, spatial justice, doughnut city

Introduction

Urban heritage, beyond the built environment artefacts so visible in cities, can be understood as the accumulation of ‘myths, values and inheritances’ excavated from the past to suit the needs of societies in the present (McDowell 2008, p.37). This draws on a cultural landscapes approach, which resists the reification of culture by situating meaning within the intangible (Byrne 2008). In this rendering, landscapes are the products of memories, stories and cultural attitudes (Anschuetz et al. 2001). As Byrne (2008a, p.162) has shown, ‘the historical landscape is inherited by any one generation as a configuration of places whose significance was established by the previous generation’. Planning stories, or as theorised in this paper planning imaginaries, facilitate the reproduction of dominant urban narratives and thus constitute an integral part of urban heritage. In other words, a particular version of heritage is expressed, retained and brokered, in these celebratory narratives which then go on to affect the materiality of urban landscapes. This production of heritage, as it is deployed within planning imaginaries, reveals as much about a city’s relationship with the past as it does about its relationship with the present and the future (Harrison 2013).

When considered from this rather unconventional viewpoint, it becomes clear that heritage production is often allegorical (White 1987). With regards to planning imaginaries, the stories that get retold invest certain valences, and violence, into our landscapes that are preserved and
celebrated. These particular renderings become symbolic of what is valued and valorised in urban landscapes and have enduring implications for those who have been abandoned in this process of ‘mythic’ accumulation. In this sense, heritage landscapes are always political (Baird 2017). Questions of property, justice and power percolate throughout cultural heritage practice (Siebrandt et al. 2018). And yet, heritage in Australia is often regarded as simply ‘the things we keep’ (Davison 2008), which assumes preservation constitutes a passive, apolitical process of allocating value. This paper questions this long-standing assertion, arguing that heritage is also the things we keep telling ourselves, often entailing overt erasures, and with subsequent impact on justice. As Harvey (2013) has suggested, we should shift our attention to what heritage does rather than what it is.

In the context of this inquiry, the reinforcement of certain myths, I suggest, is to legitimise a finely orchestrated urban identity. Our cities’ collective memories, celebrated and retailed, have been narrativised and naturalised in such a way so as to lure speculative interest and mobile capital. The overall effect, in the case study of Melbourne, is the construction of a version of the heritage landscape, and urban planning history more generally, which effectively erases spatial struggle and alternative narratives. This version is by no means the only one, but it presents itself as the dominant, marketable narrative that has come to represent one of the loudest stories that Melbourne tells itself about itself. And, as Clendinnen has cautioned ‘Historians need to resist participating in the concoction of large, inspiring narratives, because any large, inspiring narrative requires significant narrowing of vision and manipulations of the truth’ (2006, np). The boisterous retelling of Melbourne’s urban renaissance redacts more subjugated histories, and this redaction I suggest confers certain and ongoing violence.

Of note, Australia’s settler-colonial past has embedded our landscapes with deep forgetfulness of frontier violence (Byrne 2003; Stanner 1968). McKenna (2018, np) has recently written that ‘it’s precisely this recognition—that the material success of Australian society was built upon the dispossession of Indigenous Australia, a history that clearly demands treaty and settlement—that causes so many to avert their eyes’. This looking away is imbricated into our planning imaginaries and heritage landscapes. As Roy (2017, p 38) has pointed out elsewhere, urban stories globally are ‘rife with historical silence’. Australian planning scholarship has started to explore the enduring impacts that colonial planning practices, and ideas, have on Indigenous peoples (Jackson et al. 2018). This paper looks at a more contemporary erasure of memory and spatial struggle. By providing a counter-story to Melbourne’s ‘doughnut city’, as a place that housed its homeless rather than merely a hollowed-out core, this work starts to interrogate the effective relationship between heritage and justice in the contemporary city.

The paper will initially provide some background, conceptual clarification and methodological information, before introducing the notion of planning imaginaries. Drawing on Lefebvrian conceptualisations, the research explores how these epistemological frameworks create problem representations in concert with a process of seeing and looking away. After outlining the doughnut city trope as ‘master narrative’ (Friedmann 1999) or ‘official story’ (Sandercoc 2003), I shall argue that the disregard for the precariously housed has helped to create ongoing tensions and foreclosures with regards to visibility and recognition within the city. Melbourne’s urban landscapes are reproduced in such a way that these outcasts are continuously unseen. It is my hope that by recovering this historical account, it not only adds nuance to recent laudatory reminiscing of Melbourne’s transformation, but will also provide relevance to contemporary discussions on urban heritage and justice.

**Background**

Melbourne’s urban renaissance narrative is a palpable example of the connection between myth, urban identity and heritage. Well-entrenched in the city’s planning imaginary, it tells of vigorous success in turning back the tide of inner-city population decline in the 1990s (Costello 2010). What eventuated was the redevelopment of the city as a vibrant, diverse and prosperous core (Dovey et al. 2018). This revitalisation project is eulogised as one of Australia’s most successfully executed consolidation programs (Hurley et al. 2017). As a Victorian state government report gloated, the revival of the inner city allowed for Melbourne’s transformation from a doughnut
city to a café society (Dol 1998). Stimulating, and facilitating, the development industry to attract well-resourced residents to central Melbourne was a resounding success (Baird 1994).

More recently, this urban planning triumphalism has been recelebrated annually with Melbourne being deemed the Economist’s ‘most liveable city’ for seven years in a row (Wahlquist 2017). This unprecedented longue durée of liveability accolades has been vigorously retailed and helps, no doubt, to buoy continual tourism and investment into the city. It has also stimulated a resurrection of the ‘Marvellous Melbourne’ trope (Alcorn 2018), with around 12,000 new residents attracted to the central city annually (Preiss & Butt 2018). This impressive growth, however, stands in stark contrast to the growing housing and homelessness crisis within the city (Wood et al. 2018).

This paper’s premise is that attention needs to be paid to the underbelly of our urban landscapes, which reveal the ‘things we have chosen not to keep’. This is what Baird has called ‘the shadow side of landscapes’ (2017, p. 15). I am specifically alluding to the abandonment of certain populations to make way for a repurposed city. Abandonment here is interchangeable with spatial injustice, and yet it implies more than the well-coined terms ‘gentrification’ or ‘displacement’ as it emphasises an ethical transgression. To be abandoned is to be unseen, disavowed and therefor denied.

It is necessary to clarify that abandonment in this research refers to the inevitable spatial displacement that occurs when multiple bodies desire to be in the same place at the same time. Those equipped with lesser resources to adequately negotiate these spatial struggles are forced to withdraw to make space for the other (Philippopoulou-Mihalopoulos 2015). This withdrawal, as enacted on precarious populations, is the ordinary and chronic violence, rather than the catastrophic and crisis-laden, that quietly characterises urbanisation processes. It is a pernicious and everyday violence, which endures precisely because it is unseen. As Solnit (2000, p.30) describes in her exposé on the then-unfolding gentrification of San Francisco, which so eloquently ties together the dialectical notions of ‘hollowed-out’ and ‘hollow’, ‘What remains will look like the city that was – or a brighter, shinier, tidier version of it – but what it contained will be gone. It will be a hollow city’.

In the context of inner Melbourne, the façade of heritage remains with the retention of valued materialities, and yet the precariously housed who often occupied these buildings were abandoned in the 1990s in what Shaw (2009) has identified as the city’s second wave of gentrification, to accommodate well-resourced residents in the redeveloping urban core.

Planning histories, so intertwined with heritage claims and valuations, tend to erase these uncomfortable spatial struggles (Huxley 2010). By revealing a counter-story, it becomes clear that through particular rememberings, we conflate, embellish and validate certain renderings of the past to effectively smoother oppositional claims (Lowenthal 1985). As Baird (2017) has argued, subjugated histories, or landscapes of loss, must be reincorporated into how heritage is framed and presented.

A qualitative single case study is explored in this paper as a means of providing in-depth understanding of Melbourne’s urban renaissance from a homelessness perspective. It forms part of a broader project that is looking at the different interpretations of spatial justice within the compact city planning imaginary in Melbourne’s strategic planning history. This work draws specifically on key state (Victorian) and local (City of Melbourne) government planning reports during the period from 1985 until 1998 to outline the dominant planning imaginary informing Melbourne’s urban renaissance narrative. It also makes use of a recent publication on Melbourne’s dramatic rebirth (Dovey et al. 2018) to accentuate how this narrative is currently deployed in popular discourse. To illuminate the counter-story, data is drawn from ten formal, unstructured interviews with key informants from the homelessness sector who were employed as outreach workers during the 1980s and 1990s in Melbourne. Archival research of homelessness reports from the period of Melbourne’s revitalisation, predominately sourced from non-profit organisations that were collecting data on homelessness numbers during this period, also inform the retelling of the counter-story.
Planning imaginary: ways of seeing/looking away

Planning imaginary is defined as the socio-spatial framings, or epistemological frameworks, of planners. The dominant imaginary constitutes the consensus view of appropriate urban development expressed in strategic plans and related policies. These are carried forward as accepted versions of past planning narratives; to be retold and resedimented in updated representations as effective histories (Hillier, 2013). As Sandercock explains, ‘Professions, like nations, keep their shape by moulding their members’/citizens’ understanding of the past, causing them to forget those events which do not accord with a righteous image, while keeping alive those memories that do’ (2003, p.37). It is the representations of the past as conceived by planners that this paper speaks to, and furthermore, how these representations become embodied within landscapes, erasing contradictions and spatial struggles. These representations, I suggest, are then inherited by future generations as effective planning histories that go on to inform ‘the things we keep’ with regards to urban heritage.

This draws on the Lefebvrian (1991 [1974]) notion of ‘representations of space’, which make up one aspect of his tripartite, or socio-spatial dialectic, outlined in his theory of the production of space. According to Lefebvre’s heuristic, space is produced in concert with three interacting moments which represent the lived, conceived and perceived aspects of the socio-spatial. Emphasis on the dynamic exchange between these three moments stresses the relationships between the corporeal, the symbolic and the concrete. As Stanek (2011, p.142) notes, according to this theorisation, ‘space is simultaneously an instrument and a goal, a means and an end, a process and a product’. Urban landscapes are perpetually being renewed and redefined according to the inseparable and reciprocal interactions between the embodied, imagined and built.

Rather than focusing in on particular materialities or built artefacts that are now preserved as tangible heritage in Melbourne’s urban core, this paper sets up the argument that heritage is also represented in planning imaginaries. Not only do these representations broker the past and so shape heritage production ex post facto, they also actively influence contemporary infrastructural investment and place-making, moulding the lived aspects of heritage. For instance, the City of Melbourne’s most recent Heritage Strategy (2013, p.6) makes clear that ‘the layout of the city, the grid and the suburbs, the port, the clusters of long-established activities and uses, the patterns of lanes and arcades, transport and other infrastructure, are all part of our city’s heritage’. Places of local significance are protected under heritage overlays within the City of Melbourne’s planning scheme, whilst heritage places and objects of state level cultural heritage significance are registered by the Heritage Council of Victoria and entailed legal recognition. The ways in which these places and objects are managed as determined by the planning imaginary, further entrenches a particular retelling, and valorisation, of the past. In other words, materialised effects of past assumptions and social preferences condition contemporary investment decisions, urban appropriations and possibilities (Young 2011).

Planning imaginaries make visible certain spatial problematisations, or ways of seeing that determine policy formulation. Drawing on the seminal work of John Berger (2008 [1972]) and applying it to urban environments, Angelo (2016, p.3) argues that ‘how we see is the product of how we have been taught to see and the qualities of the environment—the properties of the things we are looking at and the modes through which we experience them’. These modes, it can be argued, are built on certain problematisations. These are the ways in which problems, and underlying assumptions therein, are produced, made intelligible and furthermore transformed into policy. As Bacchi & Goodwin (2016, p.6) argue, “by asking how “problems” are represented or constituted in policies, it becomes possible to probe underlying assumptions that render these representations intelligible and the implications that follow for how lives are imagined and lived”. This perspective challenges the conventional view that policy addresses problems that actually exist. Rather, governing takes place through these problematisations, which are social and historical constructions, and have implications for both heritage and justice.

Planners’ ways of seeing are imbued with ethical dimensions regarding rights, enclosure and dispossession. Blomley (2003, p.131) notes that ‘the spatially defined environments in which
we move… can serve to reflect and reinforce social relations of power through complex and layered spatial processes and practices that code, exclude, enable, stage, locate, and so on’.

Problematisations defined in these processes of spatial ordering involve ethical transgressions. They reveal the ways in which planning looks away from certain processes of dispersal and deterritorialisation, focusing on particular problem representations to be solved, for instance, by renewal and repopulation. Gentrification literature has long outlined the conjugated relationship between the reproduction of capitalism and processes of gentrification-induced displacement (Lees 2018). Smith’s (1996) early work on the revanchist city touches on these issues. The gentrifying city becomes the new urban frontier, he argues, ‘largely abandoned to the working class amid post-war suburban expansion, relinquished to the poor and unemployed as reservations for racial and ethnic minorities, the terrain of the inner city is suddenly valuable again, perversely profitable’ (Smith 1996, p.6).

Within the Melbourne equivalent, the urban renaissance narrative renders certain bodies invisible and thus unreognised in the planning imaginary. These are the precariously housed and homeless, who fall into Butler’s category of those humans who are not ‘eligible for recognition within the sphere of appearance’ (Butler 2015, p.36). These established norms of recognisability, she warns, have material consequences. As Butler and Athanasiou (2013, p.128) argue ‘the differential distribution of norms of recognition directly implies the differential allocation of precarity’. In other words, deprivation of recognition (re)subjects inhabitants to an uneven spatial distribution of social abandonment (Povinelli 2011). Struggles for recognition, therefore, are clearly struggles for visibility that in turn become struggles for space.

The act of looking away, as evidenced in Melbourne’s planning imaginary, establishes a particular blindness, or ‘blind field’, which Lefebvre (2003) has characterised as the product of both our naturalised assumptions and the misunderstood. This condition of blindness, he suggests, is a failure of recognition. Lefebvre argues that the act of not-seeing is embedded in our representations, our ways of seeing:

Initially we are faced with a presentation of the facts and groups of facts, a way of perceiving and grouping. This is followed by a re-presentation, an interpretation of the facts. Between these two moments, and in each of them, there are misrepresentations, misunderstandings. The blinding (assumptions we accept dogmatically) and the blinded (the misunderstood) are our complementary aspects of our blindness. (Lefebvre 2003, p.30)

Planning imaginaries then can be understood as the product of both planners’ looking and looking away; their visibilisations and invisibilisations. As Philippopoulous-Mihalopoulos (2017, p. 28) states, ‘what-is-not-to-be-seen is part of the affective constitution of what is seen’. This unseeing within planning imaginaries keeps certain bodies in the margins, particularly with regards to the violence through which social relations are reproduced as processes of urbanisation unfold (Blomley 2016).

Urban renaissance narrative: the ‘doughnut city’

Melbourne’s urban renaissance narrative is founded on the assertion that the central city was a hollowed-out core. Depopulation was certainly an issue, as with many postwar cities, however what is striking is that the marginal inhabitants were, and continue to be, invisibilised in the popular retelling of Melbourne’s transformation. Unlike Smith’s (1996) recounting of the revanchist city in New York, there was little protestation from those displaced when policies favouring renewal were aggressively promoted and enacted in the central city, and today there is little collective memory that the ‘doughnut city’ was in fact a place that housed its homeless.

The problem that the ‘doughnut city’ policies effectively produced (and resolved) was a central business area devoid of vibrant, consuming inhabitants. This problematisation, it can be argued, was the effect of political strategies informed by the stock market crash of 1987 which sent the state of Victoria into a recession, crashed the property market, and resulted in the election of a Liberal-National Coalition government, unleashing a neoliberal era in planning (Buxton et al. 2016). Market-oriented urban policies in the 1990s focused on highlighting the decrepitude of
the inner core areas of Melbourne; stressing the need for repopulation, and developer capital, to ensure vitality, diversity and economic stimulus (CoM 1985, 1993; DoI 1998). The precarious city-dwellers merged into this agenda of renewal. They came to be seen as obsolete, decayed and unproductive much like the inner areas themselves. In effect, they came to be unseen.

Spatial intensification and displacement are familiar, and intertwined, trends in many cities around the world. Processes of revitalisation, and subsequent gentrification, were commonly stimulated by aggressive urban policies following the outward pull of suburbanisation and the automobile in the 1960s. Privatised forms of urban appropriation ensued due to the roll-out of neoliberal planning policies during this era, impacting the production, use and appropriation of space in multivalent ways. Neoliberalisation is defined according to Brenner et al. (2017, p.161) as ‘a particular form of regulatory reorganisation: it involves the recalibration of institutionalised, collectively binding modes of governance, and more generally, state-economy relations, to impose, extend or consolidate marketised, commodified forms of social life’. Cities worldwide were, and continue to be, significantly impacted by profit-oriented strategies of urban restructuring. In the context of Melbourne this has been characterised by ‘market-driven compaction’ (Gleeson 2018).

Melbourne’s Strategy Plan, published in 1985, is championed as the initiator of Melbourne’s revitalisation project (Adams & Dovey 2018). It aligned with the wider metropolitan planning direction at the time, endorsed by the Victorian State Government in 1980, in favour of urban consolidation and restrained outward expansion. It was during this transitional moment in Melbourne’s planning history, after much deliberation on future growth options for the metropolitan region, that spatial consolidation officially became de facto policy to promote inner city population and employment growth (Beed 1981). This was in response to a growing fear that Melbourne was becoming a hollowed-out city.

The notion of a ‘doughnut city’ first entered Melbourne’s planning imaginary in the late 1970s (Coffee et al 2016). The then Chairman of the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works, Alan Croxford lamented:

Melbourne’s trend towards a “doughnut” type of development is revealing the first signs of the serious problems experienced in other cities of the world. The marked decline in population levels in Melbourne’s inner and intermediate suburbs in recent times, the overall drop in job opportunity for the workforce in inner areas, the outward migration of people – often the most skilled – and the relative economic decline of inner areas, give rise to a need for action to prevent our city from developing a blighted central area. (Croxford 1977, p.3)

Urban commentary of the period also reflected this premise. The renowned urban designer Jan Gehl described Melbourne as a ‘neutron-bombed city’ (Gehl 2018, p. 21), whilst architecture critic Norman Day’s much-quoted observation in 1978 presented it as an ‘empty, useless city centre’ (cited in Lucas 2013). The Victorian Department of Infrastructure’s report on Melbourne’s development commented on this popular imagination of the 1970s: ‘the fear was, at this time, that Melbourne was becoming a ‘doughnut city’, following the trend in many North American and European cities, whose centres emptied of people and activities after business hours, becoming a sort of twilight zone, while the suburbs prospered’ (DoI 1998, p.1).

This era in Melbourne’s planning history was characterised by extensive social and cultural change, which influenced both urban dynamics and democratic planning process. Radical urban activism, reminiscent of Jane Jacob’s antimodernist planning ambition, had come to the fore in the 1960s, lashing out against earlier iterations of slum clearance, peripheral sprawl, locational disadvantage and freeway construction (Huxley 2000). This progressive momentum infiltrated local government (Ord 2018; Yencken 2018), with the 1985 Strategy Plan demonstrating clear justice intent with regards to the future direction of the City of Melbourne. Increasing the overall housing stock was emphasised, as well as additional focus on the need to retain low-cost accommodation in the inner city to ensure a diversity of population. Despite this progressive intent, there was no actual policy commitment to maintaining the stock of affordable rentals in the city, or to expanding the supply of public housing.
Other progressive policies from the *Strategy Plan* were, however, successfully implemented. These included promoting measures to improve the pedestrian environment in local streets and public spaces; protect the laneways and heritage fabric of the central areas; prioritise public transport; equitably distribute open space throughout the municipality; and encourage community participation in planning decisions. These catalysed the transformations, both design and processual, that have helped to make Melbourne a global success story, and furthermore, are regularly promoted as part of the city’s heritage. It can be argued that these measures were adopted largely because they aligned with the neoliberal planning agenda which came of age in Melbourne on the election of the Kennett government in 1992. Financing urban aesthetics in the exclusive inner core helped to promote the veneer, and allure, of liveability.

The *Strategy Plan* is celebrated today for its ambitious target of adding an additional 8,000 dwellings in the City of Melbourne by the year 2020. This goal reflected the desire to build residential activity in what had become a predominately monocentric business core, and so produce a vibrant twenty-four-hour city. As Adams (cited in Adams & Dovey 2018, p.206) reflects, ‘all of the policies were designed to get activity back to the central city – to get retail back, more business back’. The prominent planning and promotional strategy to facilitate this growth and investment was the *Postcode 3000* program, launched in 1992. It outlined financial incentives, technical support, street level support and promotion initiatives to encourage a larger central city population to foster ‘Melbourne’s position as one of the world’s most liveable cities’ (CoM 1993, p.3).

*Postcode 3000* was predominately about the relaxation of planning controls, and stimulation of the development industry, to maximise opportunities to construct residences in the inner-city. The problem was clearly represented to be the absence of an inner-city population that could reinforce the commercial prospects of the city. In other words, it was the lack of well-resourced inhabitants who would remain, and consume, at the end of the working day. The 1990 report, *City for Melbourne Strategy Plan: Issues for the 90s*, celebrated the earlier 1985 Strategy, stating that ‘it played a major role in creating an improved climate of investor confidence in Central Melbourne in the second half of the 1980s’ (CoM & DPUG 1990 p.9). Indeed, residential accommodation in central Melbourne increased from 738 units in the 1980s to almost 10,000 units in 2002 (Adams 2005).

The city continues to grow and prosper for those with a foothold in the housing market, with dwellings in the central area pushing up to 30,000 units (Bale 2017). The estimated resident population in 2016 was approximately 41,400, up by 172 percent since 2006 (ABS 2016). This is in stark contrast to the official population estimate of less than 1000 persons in 1981 (Davies 2018). An astonishing forty-five percent of the city has had to be rebuilt to account for these demographic changes since 1985, resulting in a city core characterised today by high-density urban reformation.

**Counter story: doughnut city housed its homeless**

A recent monograph ‘charting Melbourne’s dramatic re-birth’ (Dovey & Adams 2018, np), titled *Urban Choreography: Central Melbourne 1985*, traces the urban design transformations of the central city. ‘Melbourne’, the introduction states, ‘is now emerging as a city with a depth of character and urban buzz that is palpable, ineffable and unfinished’ (Dovey & Jones 2018, p.9). These are certainly the characteristics of Melbourne’s transformation that have been celebrated globally and firmly retailed. The introduction goes on to define ‘choreography’ as the shaping of a city: ‘capturing the idea of many combined movements that would create chaos but can be guided to work in synergy and harmony’ (Dovey & Jones 2018, p.10). Presumably this is to validate the many players involved in Melbourne’s successful transformation: local councillors, urban activists, state government leaders, urban designers; as reflected in the diversity of contributors to the volume.

What is not validated in this ‘urban choreography’, and this is reflected in the retelling of Melbourne’s transformation across the board, is the movement demanded of those who resided in short-term, low-cost accommodation in the central city. That is, the withdrawal enacted by
this marginal population to make way for the speculative sale of strata title development. This development was enabled by the construction of higher-density dwellings and the conversion of underperforming commercial buildings into residential; as well as the repurposing of existing short-term accommodation for the higher-end tourist market. The withdrawal of the marginal to allow for this redevelopment was the requisite, but largely undocumented moves in this urban choreography which allowed for Melbourne’s success story to be recelebrated time and again.

As Davies (2018) writes in his candid review of *Urban Choreography*, ‘Few of the contributors – many of whom have been involved in managing the central city at various times since the 1970s – attempt to identify the transformation’s wider implications, including the key question of who has benefited from the changes’. I would argue that the beneficiaries are obvious, and standard to renewal stories globally. Neoliberal overproduction of space, de-politicising planning objectives, and adjoining capitalist conceptualisations of property markets, ensure the victors are habitually the investors. The more relevant question is who remains unseen in the retelling of this narrative, and what are the enduring implications of this with regards to spatial justice in Melbourne today?

The reproduction of invisibility harkens back to the problematisation identified in the planning imaginary, which defined Melbourne’s urban transformation. This allied with the neoliberal planning agenda emergent during this period, which catalysed new, powerful alliances of property speculation, finance capital, and a deregulated land-use planning system. A mythical *urbana nullius* was cemented in the popular imagination; the city as empty and needing stimulation. Fixation on solving the problem of the ‘doughnut city’ meant no policies were set in place to support those who did occupy the city, but with fragile tenurial relationships and tenuous footholds in the housing market. This *looking away* was certainly a displacement of responsibility. Policy interventions to promote revitalisation failed to query the appropriation of these spaces. Indeed, the unpropertied inhabitant is too fine grained to be captured, and remediated, in land development decisions in the capitalist market economy. As Blomley notes, and so apposite to this context:

Land use planning does not question who owns, or how. Issues of property acquisition and distribution are bracketed. In bracketing such questions, moreover, land use planning becomes implicated not only in reproducing a prevailing hierarchy of exclusion and domination but may also produce new forms of dispossession and displacement. (Blomley 2017, p.361)

Archival documentation, and discussion with homelessness advocates working during this time, reveals that Melbourne’s ‘doughnut city’ was replete with cheap accommodation that housed the homeless. This included private rooming and lodging houses, cheap hotels, crisis and emergency accommodation. The dominant planning imaginary erases this counter-story. As a veteran outreach worker, still employed in the industry, reminisced:

The CBD was traditionally a place for poor people after hours. It was an enclave of poor people who were hard drinking, day labourers, knock-about. They all lived in those rooming houses…And then when the CBD was transformed those people no longer had a place to go (Anon., personal communication, 1 March 2018).

Gauging the precise number of low-cost beds in the inner city is difficult due to the lack of official data collection at the time, however homeless population estimates and reported losses in crisis and transitional housing during this period give an indication of demand. Alan Jordan’s (1973, p.83) seminal work on Melbourne’s inner-city homeless male population noted:

at any given time in the period there were at least 3000 and probably 4000 homeless men within two or three miles of the centre of Melbourne who were currently using night shelters, lodging houses and handouts. (Jordan 1973, p.83)

Similarly, a report commissioned by the City of Melbourne in 1984 (Sussems 1984), indicates that there were approximately 3700 rooming house rooms for rent, accommodating a probable 4500 people in the central area. By 1990, it was estimated that each night, within a five-kilometre radius of the centre, there were 4000 people in large rooming houses and private hotels; 930 in crisis accommodation, 530 in squats and sleeping rough (CHP & VCoC 1990).
Within that same report, a 48 percent decline in rooming house stock was estimated for the seven years from 1981 to 1988. Furthermore, a study commissioned by the City of Melbourne on rough sleeping in 1998 reported an overall reduction of 78 percent in short-term housing stock in central Melbourne between 1987 and 1996, which amounted to the loss of 1400 crisis accommodation and low-cost hotel beds (Driscoll & Wood 1998).

The erosion of this low-cost accommodation in the 1980s and 90s made way for the repopulation of the inner city. As an interviewee from the homelessness sector declared, when discussing the implications of the Postcode 3000 program on the socio-materiality of Melbourne:

But what it actually did was, you know Postcode 3000, what that did was, I could take you around the city and I could point out to you where affordable, not great housing admittedly, but it was really low-cost housing. In order to populate the city, they actually moved all the poor people out. It focused on drawing in well-resourced people into more expensive housing. But it forced a whole lot of people out of the city (Anon., personal communication, 26 March 2018).

This recent history of homeless occupation in Melbourne remains largely undocumented in the city’s planning history. Disregard for the un-commodified body, in turn, has perpetuated ongoing tensions and foreclosures with regards to visibility and recognition in the city. Unpropertied citizens are increasingly regarded as out-of-place in the thriving, liveable inner core. For instance, some of the hundreds of calls made to the City of Melbourne from concerned traders and residents during the peak of the homelessness crisis in early 2016, complained that the homeless were ‘not really desirable for business’ and ‘not a good look for the city’ (cited in Dow 2016). Indeed, Melbourne’s transformation reinforced an ideal of urban citizenship aligned with an individual’s investment potential.

Arguably a spectral presence in Melbourne’s ‘doughnut city’, the homeless were not visible enough to warrant recognition in urban commentary at the time, and yet today, their mounting visibility within the city renders them increasingly problematic. Recent Census data reveals a fourteen percent increase in homelessness Australia-wide between 2011 and 2016, with twenty percent of this population living in Victoria (ABS 2016a). Central Melbourne alone has an estimated 928 homeless people (ABS 2016a), with rough sleeper counts in Melbourne noting a 121 percent increase in the central city between 2008 and 2016 (CoM 2016). This deluge of precarity sits side by side Melbourne’s growing prestige as a thriving, culturally diverse and vibrant city. ‘There has been a campaign,’ another interviewee suggested, ‘and it is about essentially...people want to use the city of Melbourne as a consumer paradise and poverty gets in the way of that narrative’. What results is familiar to many global cities; visible homelessness as an impediment to city imaging and ‘liveability’.

Recognition is clearly not an unambiguous good (Butler & Anthansiou 2013). As Brighenti (2010, p.39) has argued ‘the effects of visibility swing between an empowering pole (visibility as recognition) and a disempowering pole (visibility as control)’. Within both categories, one is equally dependent on another’s terms as to whether they conform to the established schemes of intelligibility. In Melbourne, attention is paid either to the normalisation of homelessness within the city or correcting its presence through punitive compliance measures and surveillance. In other words, subsuming difference through forcible inclusion, or dialectically, forcing exclusion through coercive intervention and regulation. Even without clear laws criminalising homelessness in Melbourne, authorities are still able to govern individuals through regulations that target uses and activities seen as devious, disruptive or impediments to amenity (Valverde 2005).

Lockers, for instance, have been proposed to store the personal belongings of the homeless, which are seen to clog up the streets and jar the frictionless mobility, and amenity, that the city promotes. At the same time, the local government’s recently revised homelessness protocol takes a firm compliance approach, outlining targeted regulations that warrant disposal of personal items that disrupt public space, and restricting congregation numbers of those sleeping rough (CoM 2017). In both scenarios, there is a sense of surging hostility; an urge to unsee through normalisation, and an urge to incapacitate through compliance. Considering this dialectical characteristic of visibility from the perspective of the homeless, one interviewee reflected:
There’s two elements to that. One is around wanting to be seen. The other one is around being seen, and how you are seen. Our society is structured around various ways of seeing. The media is very involved in what we see, and so the story that is portrayed in the parts of the media that align to the right, is around aggressive, violent coal-biting; or poor, deprived, needing help. You know this deserving/undeserving dichotomy that underpins it, and you know it’s always been here… (Anon., personal communication, 23 March 2018).

Discussing the implications of increased visibility with a homelessness advocate, he offered a sober appraisal of the consequences of Melbourne’s transformation on marginal populations:

I guess mainstream culture, if it doesn’t care and it sides with the idea that this city is about spending money and having events and not seeing the other side of life, if that is the dominant view and culture, then there won’t be a tension. It will just be a law and order issue. It’s only a tension if there are two views and I think the two opposing views are rapidly diminishing in favour of one view which is simply that people live in the city and they don’t want to see complexity unless it’s complexity that makes money. It’s as simple as that (Anon., personal communication, 1 March 2018).

The problem, within popular commentary and urban governance more generally, is increasingly represented to be the homeless and particularly their visibility, rather than the invisible, normalised violence which is the denial to the homeless in the neoliberal (re)production of space. This is in stark contrast to the problem representation constructed in the ‘doughnut city’ trope; where the precariously housed were not considered at all. The violence of such perverse capitalist valorisations and subsequent deterriorialisations, ordinary and chronic, continues in inner Melbourne’s reforming urban landscape which appears ever more antithetical to homelessness.

**Conclusion**

Planning imaginaries, I have argued, embody certain narratives in material landscapes. These become the effective histories, or foundational stories of our cities that are imbricated in heritage production. I have explored how these ways of seeing are imbued with ethical dimensions that result in planners’ looking away from acts of displacement that urban transformations upend on certain precarious bodies; reproducing social abandonment in space. In other words, how the ‘mythic’ accumulation naturalised and narrativised in planning imaginaries occlude counter-stories of displacement. These partial accounts go on to shape and broker what is valued as urban heritage, and furthermore, have enduring implications for the spatial injustice of those displaced.

The aim of this paper was to revisit an oft-quoted planning story from Melbourne’s recent history, and parallel it beside a counter-story that was revealed in discussion with homelessness advocates. It illustrates how the production of urban history is also a process of cloaking, in the sense that the dominant version becomes symbolic of what continues to be unseen. This is not to suggest that these are the only two retellings of Melbourne’s urban renaissance narrative, but rather to demonstrate the relationship between heritage and spatial justice. By using Melbourne urban renaissance narrative, I have shown how the planning imaginary constructs certain problems which go on to influence the (re)production of space, and particularly socio-spatial relations with regards to everyday justice implications.

Recent laudatory reviews of Melbourne’s transformation retell the foundational narrative of the city’s rising from the ashes of decrepitude and stagnation. This has become an effective history central to Melbourne’s planning imaginary. The problem representation within the ‘doughnut city’ trope, I have argued, has helped to erase struggles over space, contributing to ongoing spatial injustice for the precariously housed in the activated central city. The paper sought to tie these themes of myth, urban identity, and spatial justice back to the notion of urban heritage. It has done this not by assessing the heritage of homelessness per se, but by interrogating the planning imagination and its enduring implications for spatial justice in a city promoted for its liveability. Specifically, it turned over a foundational story from within Melbourne’s planning imaginary, to reveal the underbelly, or shadow landscapes of abandonment.
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