




REVIEW ESSAY

‘Differences within a range of similarity’: mapping Australian urban history

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Abstract

In 1964, Australian writer Donald Horne observed that ‘whatever differences there are between the Australian cities are differences within a range of similarity’. He proposed that Australia had 11 major cities and yet, in general, there existed a singular national urban culture, a one-city Australia. Unpacking the story of Australian urban history, its national trends and local nuances, has been an ongoing project ever since. What follows is an analysis of the field, which suggests how historians might begin to unpack Horne’s assertion. The final section of the article explores the contribution of Australian urban history in the national and global contexts.

In 1964, Australian writer Donald Horne observed that ‘whatever differences there are between the Australian cities are differences within a range of similarity’.¹ He proposed that Australia had 11 major cities and yet, in general, there existed a singular national urban culture, a *one-city Australia*.² ‘A grog party in Darwin, a backyard party in Perth, a King’s Cross party in Sydney have different forms but may be versions of the same thing.’³ ‘It is one of the miracles of Australia’, he continued, ‘that, despite the extraordinary differences in the settlement and development of the nation, its people are so much the same.’⁴ Unpacking the story of Australian urban history, its national trends and local nuances, has been an ongoing project ever since. Much of the scholarship, as Lionel Frost observed in 1995, has been descriptive, thick

¹D. Horne, *The Lucky Country* (Melbourne, 2009), 50. The first edition of this canonical text was published in 1964.

²For notions of ‘one-city Australia’, as characterized by artists, see e.g. S. Alomes, *When London Calls: The Expatriation of Australian Creative Artists to Britain* (Melbourne, 1999), 264; F. St John Moore and C. Blackman, *Charles Blackman: Schoolgirls and Angels: A Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by Charles Blackman* (Melbourne, 1993), 14.

³Horne, *The Lucky Country*, 50–1.

⁴*Ibid.*, 51.

and localized, rather than analytical, synthetic and national – or even global.⁵ For this reason, few historians have explored questions of what makes Australian cities and urbanism distinctive in both national and transnational contexts.⁶ What follows is an overview of recent doctoral contributions to the field, which suggest how historians might begin to unpack Horne's assertion. The final section of this article reflects on the contribution of Australian doctoral research to urban history in the domestic and global contexts.

The most remarkable aspect of recent doctoral scholarship in Australian urban history is how attendant the authors are to global scholarly trends and historiographies. The six Ph.D. theses surveyed below place their research and cities in both Australian and international perspective, making them methodological benchmarks for global urban history. At once, the theses interrogate and transcend urban and national boundaries, to simultaneously make claims of typicality and sameness, of distinctiveness and innovation. Each of the selected theses adopts different case-study cities: Brisbane/Meianjin, Melbourne/Naarm, Sydney/Warrang and the twin cities of Kalgoorlie/Karlkurla and Boulder in regional Western Australia.⁷ Four focus on individual cities, while two are national comparative studies, albeit inflected by the strong force exerted by the principal metropolises of Sydney and Melbourne. Temporally, the theses start as early as the 1830s, when the colonization of Australia accelerated, and continue right through to the historical present. Institutionally, half of the theses reviewed were completed at the University of Melbourne, which, in the last decade, has produced about a third of urban history doctoral students, due to the cross-faculty strength in the field and a local culture that has long been drawn to urban inquiry.⁸

For the purposes of analytical clarity, and to structure this review, I have grouped the theses into three groups of two under the separate headings: housing, extractive industries and city spaces. These groupings facilitate comparison between and across theses that share thematic similarities, teasing out the insights from the work, with relevance for global urban history audiences. The review deals with recent theses, concentrating on those completed from 2018 onwards.⁹ Presenting six theses from the past five years also provides a good sense of recent scholarship as, by my estimates, some three Australian urban history theses were completed domestically each year

⁵L. Frost, 'The urban history literature of Australia and New Zealand', *Journal of Urban History*, 22 (1995), 141–53, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009614429502200106>.

⁶Some recent works have bucked this trend: M. Cook *et al.*, *Cities in a Sunburnt Country: Water and the Making of Urban Australia*, Studies in Environment and History (Cambridge, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108917698>; G. Davison, *City Dreamers: The Urban Imagination in Australia* (Sydney, 2016).

⁷Australian cities are increasingly referred to in critical scholarship and progressive public discourse by both their colonial names and Indigenous-language names. This article was written in Naarm on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung of the East Kulin nation.

⁸No other university has singularly graduated more than 10 per cent of urban history Ph.D.s. This data is now publicly available, below n. 10. For comparative Australasian urban culture, see e.g. J. Davidson (ed.), *The Sydney–Melbourne Book* (Sydney, 1986).

⁹Published Australian urban history theses from the past decade include S. Silberberg, *A Networked Community: Jewish Melbourne in the Nineteenth Century* (Melbourne, 2020); M. Cook, *A River with a City Problem: A History of Brisbane Floods* (Brisbane, 2019); T.J. Rogers, *The Civilisation of Port Phillip: Settler Ideology, Violence, and Rhetorical Possession* (Melbourne, 2018); P. Irish, *Hidden in Plain View: The Aboriginal People of Coastal Sydney* (Sydney, 2017).

since 2011.¹⁰ This review only showcases theses completed at Australian universities, as the constraints of distance, expense and the global pandemic have limited opportunities for doctoral candidates to present their scholarship to an international audience, especially in the Global North, an issue amplified by the climate impacts of trans-continental travel.¹¹ Additionally, none of these theses have yet been published as monographs. Most of them are currently – or will soon be – available online open access through institutional repositories or in the National Library of Australia's Trove search engine.¹²

Housing

Both Nicole Pullan and Rose Cullen commence their inquiries into the urban history of housing with reference to the architect and social critic Robin Boyd. More than five decades after his early death in 1971 at 52 years old, Boyd remains a prominent presence in Australian urban history. Many Australians know Boyd from his most influential and entertaining book, *The Australian Ugliness*. First published in 1960 and most recently reissued in 2012, Boyd lamented the nation's aesthetic and architectural sensibilities, while making salient points on Australian culture and urbanism. In the register of the elitist and outraged modernist, Boyd lays the blame for Australia's supposed ugliness on crass commercialism and overdevelopment, a lack of public design education and the increasing hegemony of the United States.¹³ In addressing different aspects of Boyd's influential commentaries, Pullan and Cullen both make important scholarly contributions.

Pullan examines informal housing on the suburban frontier in a doctoral thesis titled 'Just a roof over their heads: temporary dwellings on Sydney's urban fringe 1945 to 1960', submitted to the Faculty of Built Environment at the University of New South Wales in 2018.¹⁴ In 1952, Boyd summarily portrayed the phenomenon of temporary housing in a negative way, referring to it as 'unsatisfactory accommodation'.¹⁵ Certainly, Boyd was largely correct in this descriptor, but did not subsequently express an interest in the significance, character or scale of the phenomenon. Even if it may well have ultimately contributed to the apparent ugliness of the new suburbs, the transition of thousands of Australians from temporary to permanent accommodation during the post-war period justifies deeper interrogation, as Pullan argues. Amid this transition, aesthetics and taste were subordinated to the notion that permanent, comfortable housing was an engine of social change and progress. Pullan

¹⁰To accompany this article, a list of recent theses since 2011 has been posted on the website of the Australasian Urban History, Planning History (AUHPH) Group at <http://antipodes.city>.

¹¹For example, a handful of Australians present at the European Association of Urban History biannual conferences. At the last conference in Antwerp in 2022, only two Australians attended, and neither were doctoral students.

¹²Trove.nla.gov.au is a free search discovery engine and a significant resource for historians. It incorporates Australian archive, library, museum and gallery collections, including digitized primary sources.

¹³He coined the term 'Austerica', a portmanteau of Australia and America, to refer to the apparent Americanization of Australia. See R. Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness* (Melbourne, 1960).

¹⁴N.S. Pullan, 'Just a roof over their heads: temporary dwellings on Sydney's urban fringe 1945 to 1960', University of New South Wales Ph.D. thesis, 2018.

¹⁵R. Boyd, *Australia's Home* (Melbourne, 1952), 115.

locates her contribution within the international historiography, identifying parallels in the scholarship on the Parisian *banlieue* by Jean Bastie, the Toronto shacktown by Richard Harris and the English seaside and rural towns by Dennis Hardy and Colin Ward.

Using sources such as coded rate books and municipal archives, Pullan's thesis focuses on three research aims: documenting construction and occupation of temporary dwellings, providing insights into the life stories of families seeking temporary shelter and identifying the significance of these temporary dwellings at the time. Her original typology comprises garages, incomplete houses, sheds and storerooms, shacks, shanties and workshops, rooms, sleep-outs and studios, huts, humpies and former-military 'igloos', mobile dwellings and tents. This range of substandard buildings and structures housed thousands of people on a temporary and not-so-temporary basis. Indeed, we learn that temporary dwellings were more widespread than hitherto appreciated; up to a quarter of new housing commenced in this form. Relatedly, in just 14 years between 1947 and 1961, home ownership reached an unprecedented and unparalleled historic highpoint across Australia. In metropolitan Sydney, for example, home ownership increased from slightly under 40 per cent to more than 70 per cent, reflecting an 80 per cent growth in less than two decades.¹⁶ Most people living on the suburban fringe owned their allotted land (whether outright or via a loan), so it was only a matter of time before the temporary and makeshift structures were transformed into permanent and comfortable homes, albeit involving considerable time, finance, labour and hardship. Informal housing was thus a major contributor to the incredible levels of home ownership in post-war Australia, suggestive of the historical significance of the phenomenon.

Taking a different approach to Pullan by exploring established rather than new housing, Cullen commences her inquiry into home conservation in 1960 and then continues through to 2018. The thesis, 'Restoring, renovating and conserving old houses: homeowners and historical consciousness in Australia 1960–2018' is especially focused on the boom in the 1980s – and the years either side – of homeowner-led restorations of heritage homes, and was submitted to the University of Sydney's Faculty of Arts in History in 2019.¹⁷ The conservation of historic buildings was also a significant interest of Boyd who frequently commented on the topic.¹⁸ Writing in America's *Architectural Review* in 1956, Boyd praised the Australian homeowners renovating Georgian- and Victorian-era homes: 'more and more people now are intelligently accepting [architectural features such as cast-iron as the] amiable adornment in the spirit in which it was originally offered'.¹⁹ Over the coming decades, as Cullen vividly portrays in this original account which ventures down streets and peeks into homes, tens of thousands of Australians engaged in residential heritage conservation. Cullen argues for a symbolic inter-relationship between residential conservation, urban material culture and the popular historical consciousness, as bound to evolving trends in academic and public history. The thesis provides a rich narrative, framed mainly within the national Australian historiography and the

¹⁶Pullan, 'Temporary dwellings', 405.

¹⁷R. Cullen, 'Restoring, renovating and conserving old houses: homeowners and historical consciousness in Australia 1960–2018', University of Sydney Ph.D. thesis, 2019.

¹⁸J. Lesh, *Values in Cities: Urban Heritage in Twentieth Century Australia* (New York, 2023).

¹⁹R. Boyd, 'Popular art: Melbourne ironwork', *Architectural Review*, 120 (1956), 193.

global heritage studies literature. As with Nicole Davis' and Anna Temby's theses on city spaces reviewed below, Cullen draws on a variety of historical sources, from municipal archives, newspapers and periodicals to material culture and oral histories to explore the cultural trend of heritage home conservation. The roughly chronological chapters range across Georgian, Victorian and twentieth-century architecture, and engage with case-studies of heritage award competitions; magazine and newspaper heritage promotion; the aftermarkets for homewares, decorations and building salvage; and both amateur and professional conservation knowledge, through which Cullen traces the ebbs and flows of community interest in particular architectural styles and historical periods of housing.

That Cullen's inquiry commences in 1960, the same year that Pullan's concludes, is not a coincidence. Post-war Australia experienced a housing crisis and both theses tackle the issue from different angles. The housing problem had historical origins in the fervent subdivisions and often substandard home building of the late nineteenth-century economic booms, particularly in Melbourne and Sydney. At the turn of the twentieth century, Australia's modern planning movement – reflecting international trends – advocated for improved housing standards and the eradication of inner-suburban slums. The two world wars and the boom and bust of economic cycles – including the Great Depression of the 1920s and 1930s – combined with an overabundance of privately owned subdivisions assigned for housing, led to national, state and municipal inertia in the housing realm. The post-war housing crisis was then exacerbated by economic issues including inadequate finance arrangements and building material shortages. Moreover, the demographic challenges of a growing population of returned soldiers, mass inward migration from southern Europe, mainly Italy and Greece, and a baby boom placed further pressure on the housing market. For Pullan, informal housing became a means by which aspirational working-class and migrant families could temporally shelter themselves on the road to permanent home ownership, often on the same suburban sites. During the immediate post-war period, the city fringe had a strong allure, especially for families living in the run-down inner suburbs.

A couple of decades later, as Cullen scrutinizes, those same inner suburbs had come to be valued as heritage areas. Structural factors contributing to this dramatic change in perception included the resolution of post-war financial and construction challenges and the gradual voluntary or forced abandonment of the inner suburbs by working-class and migrant communities. Some inner-suburban residents had chosen to move to the middle and outer suburbs, while others were relocated by authorities as part of urban renewal or slum clearance initiatives. Within a decade of the abandonment of renewal either side of 1970, gentrification caused further social dislocation and displacement in the same inner-suburban areas. By the close of the twentieth century, the inner suburbs were again shaped by broader economic trends including de-industrialization and the adaptation of these suburbs for cultural, service and knowledge production, alongside the vagaries of real estate and marketing, favouring investment and consumption in such areas.

Cullen specifically traces how public interest in renovating older run-down inner-suburban houses rapidly intensified from the 1960s and reached its crescendo in the 1980s, before integrating into national residential cultures. The people moving into the inner suburbs were a new generation of middle-class Australians, predominantly of British origins. Cullen posits that these gentrifiers had high levels of cultural

capital, were tertiary educated and had often travelled to Europe.²⁰ They rejected the outer and middle suburbs – where many of them had grown up – and were instead attracted to the inner suburbs and the now-heritage homes there. Inevitably, this migration produced significant shifts in the culture, society and built environment of the inner suburbs and drew criticism in popular culture and attention from scholars of urban development. Meanwhile, the new homeowners benefited from emergent professional and amateur knowledge about how to modernize and conserve old houses. The homeowner activities of Cullen’s study – acquisition, renovation, restoration and conservation of older houses – were premised on cultural heritage trends, the availability of finance and materials and building trade and conservation awareness. Overall, Pullan and Cullen provide complementary studies contributing to the urban history of housing during the second half of the twentieth century.

Extractive industries

The historical development of Australia’s cities has been strongly linked to mining. In 1963, historian Geoffrey Blainey referred to Australia as a ‘boom nation [which] has been so quickly transformed by metals; the normal growth and achievement of several decades were crammed into one’. He then continued: ‘Bendigo, Ballarat, and Kalgoorlie – still display in their main streets a concentrated collection of “Late-Victorian” architecture and statuary such as it would be difficult to find in any European city holding fewer than 100,000 people – unless it was once a royal city.’²¹ In his 2019 thesis, completed at the University of Melbourne School of Design, Philip Goldswain considers the rapid establishment of the twin mining cities of Kalgoorlie and Boulder between 1893 and 1903. Late nineteenth-century Perth provided access to booming Kalgoorlie and Boulder, 500 kilometres away; just as nineteenth-century gold-rush Melbourne served as a ‘natural gateway’ to Bendigo and Ballarat, each some 100 kilometres away.²² In contrast, Victoria Kolankiewicz’s 2020 thesis is less interested in the story of nineteenth-century Melbourne as commercial or mercantile hub city to the region’s goldfield, and instead turns its attention to mining within the city itself and, specifically, its many historical urban quarries.

In ‘Depicting boom urbanism: a critical investigation of Kalgoorlie and Boulder, Western Australia, 1893–1903’, Goldswain renders an original account of these twin cities in their first decade.²³ Despite their historical importance, neither city has been prominent on the itineraries of Australian urban history. Kalgoorlie and Boulder are conceptualized as ‘boom’ or ‘instant’ cities in the tradition of the American historiography, albeit especially isolated from their nearest gateway city of Perth. Goldswain, however, makes his most important contribution to global urban history through his methodology, using novel creative, visual and design approaches, drawn from material culture, art and architectural history, geography, cartography,

²⁰In Australia, this generation of gentrifiers has been referred to as ‘trendies’. See R. Howe, D. Nichols and G. Davison, *Trendyville: The Battle for Australia’s Inner Cities* (Melbourne, 2013).

²¹G. Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended: A History of Australian Mining* (Melbourne, 1963), 61, 211, cited in P. Goldswain, ‘Depicting boom urbanism: a critical investigation of Kalgoorlie and Boulder, Western Australia, 1893–1903’, University of Melbourne Ph.D. thesis, 2019, 12, 13.

²²G. Davison, ‘Gold-rush Melbourne’, in A. Reeves, I. McCalman and A. Cook (eds.), *Gold: Forgotten Histories and Lost Objects of Australia* (Cambridge, 2001), 52–66.

²³Goldswain, ‘Boom urbanism’.

photography and design. This methodology is then applied to a small number of illustrated newspapers, photolithographic images, photographs and maps. This primary source material has been carefully selected, suitably contextualized and deeply interrogated. Goldswain's three case-studies are: a special edition 24-page photographic supplement published by *The Kalgoorlie Western Argus* in 1902 to celebrate the first decade anniversary of gold discovery; a 55-page souvenir programme produced to celebrate the opening of a major water scheme in 1903; and 14 land maps produced between 1893 and 1905 and held by the Department of Lands and Surveys at the State Records Office of Western Australia. This visual material enables Goldswain to present the rapid spatial and physical development of the twin cities, and to then identify their transient characteristics, primary instigators and representational languages. Processes of urban development are traced through serialized and before/present/after images, along with contextual and proximal image relationships. We learn how mining shaped property ownership, street layouts and building forms. Remarkably, Goldswain identifies the ways in which mining and urban activities overlapped to produce identifiable interstitial and anomalous urban zones.

Kolankiewicz explores basalt quarries in Melbourne in a thesis titled "Leisure, pleasure...rubbish and rats?": the planned and unplanned reclamation of bluestone quarry sites in urban Melbourne, 1835–2000'.²⁴ As the world's largest city located on a basaltic plain, where bluestone features strongly in the urban imaginary, Melbourne is an eminently appropriate case-study.²⁵ Its geology is comparable only to the Siberian Traps of north-eastern Russia and the North American Columbia River Basalt Group. The thesis traces the urban governance of extractive industry from the establishment of the city in the 1830s through to the present day, drawing on primary sources from planning and municipal archives, along with newspaper periodicals and interviews with residents. Extractive industry encompasses not only coal, gold and oil, but also quarrying for stone, clay and sand. Until the late twentieth century and the arrival of the post-industrial age, all kinds of resource extraction were effectively governed, regulated and planned in similar ways – whether in a one-industry, regional, boom city like Kalgoorlie or an expanding commercial metropolis like Melbourne.²⁶ Working-class residents who lived near to quarries were accustomed to the nuisance of pollution, dust, smoke, odours, noise and vibrations. Indeed, it was not until the modern town planning movement – with its priorities of functional separation and improved amenity and health – opposed the co-locating of residential and industrial activities that this would begin to change. Even then, homes and quarries often remained in close proximity, at least until the 1960s and 1970s, when citizen movements succeeded in strengthening environmental and planning laws to prevent the construction of *new* quarries near to residences.

The focus of Kolankiewicz's thesis is how *existing* quarries were closed, remediated and adapted for new uses from those same decades. The thesis has two specific case-studies: the transformation of the former quarries at Newport Lakes into parklands and at Niddrie into a housing estate, between the 1970s and 1990s, both

²⁴V. Kolankiewicz, "Leisure, pleasure...rubbish and rats?": the planned and unplanned reclamation of bluestone quarry sites in urban Melbourne, 1835–2000', University of Melbourne Ph.D. thesis, 2020.

²⁵S. Trigg, 'Bluestone and the city: writing an emotional history', *Melbourne Historical Journal*, 44 (2016), 41–53.

²⁶Kolankiewicz, 'Melbourne quarry sites', 113.

in Melbourne's western industrial suburbs. Historically, as elsewhere, Melbourne's exhausted quarries had been used as rubbish tips, and then eventually turned into public parks. Kolankiewicz demonstrates how new middle-class residents living in recently constructed low-density housing estates, along with existing working-class residents, advocated for tighter planning controls and clearer timelines towards the termination, remediation and adaptation of quarries at both Newport Lakes and Niddrie.²⁷ Central to this activism was the question of how to now fill the holes in the ground left over from quarrying. Unsurprisingly, following past trends, tipping was proposed by authorities for both Newport and Niddrie, but concerted resident campaigns avoided this outcome. In both cases, residents sought the quarries' immediate transformation into public open space, parks and gardens and community facilities. Melburnians turned to Canada and specifically the models offered by Butchart Gardens in British Columbia and Elizabeth Gardens in Vancouver. Ultimately, political and economic factors meant that Newport Lakes was wholly transformed into parklands, while housing was built at Niddrie, albeit with some public green reserves.

Both Goldswain and Kolankiewicz demonstrate how Australian cities have quite literally been built upon mining exploration and deposits. In addition to producing tremendous financial wealth and influencing local cultures, extractive industries have shaped urban governance and design forms and intersected with key social, political and environmental changes. Although the relationship between cities and mining is most perceptible in boom cities like Kalgoorlie and Boulder, the same might be said more than 2,000 kilometres away in Melbourne. Kolankiewicz's thesis was also completed at the University of Melbourne School of Design, although her approach is more rooted in planning history than Goldswain's architecturally inflected study. Each thesis explores different periods, different contexts, different coasts and different issues, while both use different methodologies: Goldswain emphasizing urban design, while Kolankiewicz focuses on urban governance. Even so, both writers make contributions to urban histories of extractive industries and express the range of techniques and approaches that characterize the wider field.

City spaces

While the theses on housing and extractive industries explore twentieth-century cities from the perspectives of planners, designers and middle-class homeowners, Anna Temby on Brisbane's public spaces and Nicole Davis on Australian arcades invite us to walk nineteenth- and early twentieth-century city streets and enter their buildings and spaces. Both authors evoke nineteenth-century writer Marcus Clark who, writing in the tradition of Baudelaire, Balzac and Dickens, vividly represented the Australian city and specifically Melbourne in newspaper columns including 'Night scenes in Melbourne' (1868) and 'Lower Bohemia' (1869). In the literary genre of the 'dark and light city', Clarke journeyed from the 'large streets [that] present no spectacles of extreme poverty or extreme vice [to the] least public places

²⁷Kolankiewicz even posits that geology may well have shaped Melbourne's contours of social class, because middle-class and elite neighbourhoods have historically been in the eastern suburbs which are formed of sand, clay and mudstone rather than darker basalt bluestone of the working-class northern and western suburbs.

[where] the most startling and interesting details were gathered'.²⁸ He was a self-styled bohemian, a night-time urban explorer, most drawn to the metaphorical city underground and its spectacles of vice and decay.

Such themes animate the studies of Temby and Davis. They invite readers to re-trace these kinds of journeys through neighbourhoods, streets, parks and arcades of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Brisbane and Melbourne. They critically read social and cultural history primary sources; interrogate institutional, sensation-alist and everyday archives and representations; and successfully re-construct the life and places of past cities. Both authors are strongly influenced by social and cultural history as well as theorists of space and place, building on the work of notable historians of Australian cities like Graeme Davison, Penelope Edmonds, Andrea Gaynor, Jenny Gregory, Lionel Frost, Grace Karskens, Alan Mayne, Andrew May, David Nichols, Mark Peel, Peter Spearitt and Simon Sleight. The theses purposely engage with the urban history tradition to evaluate diverse historical sources: from municipal and corporate archives of text, photography and maps, through to contemporary social media and websites.

Arcades are the focus of Nicole Davis' thesis 'A fashionable promenade: arcades in Australia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries', completed in History at the University of Melbourne in 2023. She focuses on arcades as a singular and familiar urban typology, while making clear that these are not merely *shopping* arcades, but rather urban 'worlds in miniature'.²⁹ All the arcades have a broadly similar form: shops either side of a covered walkway, which provides a thoroughfare across a city block. The thesis commences with the construction of the first Australian arcade in gold-rush 1850s Melbourne and concludes at World War I. The arrival of architectural and urban modernism at that time did not mark the end of the arcade as typology, but represented a significant disjuncture in their life, management, design and planning. Many were also demolished during the twentieth century, before entering the sights of the late twentieth-century heritage movement. In the period under study, a total of 32 arcades were constructed of which some 13 exist in some form to the present day.

Examining the nineteenth-century arcade as typology enables Davis to consider them across both Australian metropolises, Melbourne (10 arcades) and Sydney (8 arcades), where most were built, along with smaller capital cities and the regional, mining and industrial boom towns where further arcades appeared. In other words, this range of case-studies facilitates a comparative urban study in which Sydney and Melbourne have the strongest presence, but other cities and towns then have a clear emphasis. A spectacular unfinished arcade exists in Charters Towers in regional Queensland, for instance. This mining town has a remarkable built environment, comparable to Bendigo, Ballarat and Kalgoorlie, but has seldom appeared in national urban histories. Each of the seven thematic chapters adopt a different angle on the arcades: global perspectives, architecture and design, urban contexts, commodities and merchandise, services and entertainment, stereotypes and realities and heritage afterlives. We learn about owners, shopkeepers, designers and visitors. The Australian arcade is also placed in its transnational context as amalgamations of

²⁸ *Argus*, 28 Feb. 1868.

²⁹ N. Davis, 'A fashionable promenade: arcades in Australia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries', University of Melbourne Ph.D. thesis, 2023.

the European, British and American type. This enables Davis to conceptualize the Australian arcade within the global historiography and canonical literature, including authors such as Walter Benjamin and Lynda Nead. Previous arcade scholarship has focused on aesthetics or made conceptual advancements on modernity. In contrast, Davis argues that Australian arcades must be conceived as an interconnected and hybrid global phenomenon, shaped by their significant social history of regulation, design, community, trade and entrepreneurship, extending from at least the nineteenth century to the present day.

Rather than exploring a specific urban typology across cities, Anna Temby, in 'Negotiating order in the colonial city: civic improvement and the social ordering of public space in Brisbane, 1875–1914' completed in 2020 at the University of Queensland, examines the nebulous urban type of 'public space' within a single city.³⁰ Brisbane is the focus, and the study addresses three kinds of public spaces: the street; the neighbourhood; and the natural environment. Brisbane has been less often a subject of Australian urban history than Melbourne or Sydney, but has also been neglected compared to its most similar capital city, Perth. The combination of deep empirical research and rich conceptual engagement in Temby's thesis sheds new light on the nuanced ways that specific kinds of public spaces were contested at the turn of the twentieth century. The study is bookended by the years 1875 and 1914, reflecting a tremendous growth period for Brisbane; the choice to start in 1875 being guided by the extant city archives.³¹ The close of the study in the early twentieth century, in common with Davis' thesis, is linked to modernism, and specifically the phenomenon of suburban expansion and motor vehicle transport, which fundamentally transformed inner cities and their public spaces.

Temby brings new perspectives to the canonical urban history topic of public space. The thesis is divided into three neat sections, evaluating how public spaces constitute urban experience and everyday life. The section on streets looks at urban development and municipal by-laws, especially move-on mandates and hatpin bans. A subsequent section entitled 'Neighbourhoods' studies the apparent emergence and rapid disappearance of the slum of Frog's Hollow, before the third section on the natural environment takes us to designed parks and gardens and related contests among authorities and visitors. Applying a singular lens of how public space has been represented, regulated and experienced to case-studies of streets, slums and parks enables Temby to make the fresh case that public space has always been historically and spatially contingent, and negotiated and ordered among a range of urban actors. Democracy and participation have been, at once, realized and expressed and controlled and curtailed, across urban sites.

An area of note in Temby's work is the attention to marginalized voices. The accounts of women's, Chinese and Indigenous experiences brings to life the colonial city of Brisbane in its many vicissitudes. On the streets, hatpins may have been a nuisance, even dangerous, but, as Temby argues, only men were seemingly threatened by them. The by-law banning hatpins was not only a clear case of gender discrimination, a refutation of first-wave feminism, but also prevented their use as a potential safety device for women. Meanwhile, in the so-called slum of Frog's Hollow,

³⁰A. Temby, 'Negotiating order in the colonial city: civic improvement and the social ordering of public space in Brisbane, 1875–1914', University of Queensland Ph.D. thesis, 2020.

³¹The surviving archival collections on colonial Brisbane and Sydney, for instance, are far less comprehensive than those for colonial Melbourne and Adelaide, for example.

a small cluster of buildings called ‘Nine-holes’ was a special target for racist media commentators, because of its Chinese population. Yet municipal and policing archives do not suggest it was an especially dangerous or nefarious space, reflecting divergences between representation and reality. Finally, addressing the invisibility of Indigenous peoples in settler-colonial cities and archives is a concern for Temby, who makes deliberate efforts to highlight their presence in public places, particularly the parks and gardens used as camping grounds in the early colonial city. As arguably the most illiberal city in Australia,³² Brisbane operates as a fitting case-study to demonstrate how public order has been maintained and subverted across class, gender and racial lines in built, open and green public spaces.

Urban history snapshot

The recent theses reviewed here, let alone the more than 30 Australian urban history Ph.D.s completed in the past decade, cannot be neatly typified by period, theme or issue; rather, doctoral research into Australian urban history is diverse in its contributions, subjects, methodologies and interests. The theses also engaged with questions of global, transnational and comparative urban history, using diverse methodologies rooted in different disciplinary backgrounds. In doing so, they provide valuable insights for international audiences on the topics of housing and conservation, boom cities and urban quarries, and arcades and public space. Indeed, since Australian urban historians tend to envision themselves as contributors to global debates, the scholarship studied here reflects the trend to aim to build upon and draw inspiration from international and transnational histories. The broad themes of housing, extractive industries and city spaces were selected in this article to group the six theses, but alternative and equally compelling headings might well have been methodology, policy, heritage, regulation, municipalism, planning and design.

The two theses that adopted a nationwide approach – Cullen on residential conservation and Davis on urban arcades – deserve special mention for necessarily engaging multiple city historiographies and highlighting both differences and similarities across cities, taking up Donald Horne’s social criticism and the *one-city Australia* provocation. Temby brought innovative perspectives to the enduring urban history subject of what constitutes public space. Her thesis traversed sensationalist nineteenth-century sources penned by city dwellers such as writer Marcus Clarke. Meanwhile, urban historians might be inspired by the methodological rigour of Pullan on post-war housing and Goldswain on boom cities, as inflected by planning and architectural history, respectively. Finally, Kolankiewicz on quarries unearths the geologies of urban landscapes from the point of view of governance. These final three theses bring fresh perspectives to questions of the urban past, which, thematically, first appeared in the works of earlier generations of Australian historians such as Geoffrey Blainey and Graeme Davison, but rarely of popular writers such as Robin Boyd and Donald Horne.

Despite the thriving doctoral research, Australian urban history does not boast as strong a disciplinary identity as in past decades. The number of self-identified academic urban historians appears to have declined compared to the heyday of the

³²R. Evans, C. Ferrier and J. Rickertt (eds.), *Radical Brisbane* (Melbourne, 2004).

late twentieth century.³³ Many of the leading contemporary contributors to Australian urban history choose not to primarily identify as urban historians, even when their work is critically engaged with the field and cognizant of the distinctive and active role of ‘the city’ in the past. The phenomenon is most evident in the thriving areas of environmental and settler-colonial histories.³⁴ While a broader evaluation of the state of Australian urban history is beyond the scope of this article, some observations are relevant in line with the inquiry into doctoral theses. A disjuncture appears to exist between the interests of recent urban history doctoral students and those of academic Australian historians. Even accounting for the inevitable lag between published academic scholarship and doctoral thesis design, urban history doctoral students are also not generally pursuing topics linked to the most prominent areas of Australian history: namely, environmental and settler-colonial pasts, which are significant historical, social and urban concerns that demand greater interrogation by the next generation of urban historians in Australia and, indeed, across the world. Notably, Temby asks settler-colonial and environmental questions, and so her thesis serves as the exemplar in this review for its conscious engagement with the relevant historiography.

The six reviewed theses also score highly on measures of industry and public impact; a trend likely fuelled by the research policy and funding environment, as well as by the career ambitions of doctoral students. Arcade conservation and home renovation are thriving areas of heritage practice, tied to social, cultural and environmental motivations. Planning for obsolete industrial landscapes and to address housing shortages continue to be heated topics in present-day discussions of urban design and governance. The provision and regulation of public space is another pertinent concern; town squares, shopping complexes and planned landscapes proliferate, while authorities and corporations seek to control activities within them. Urban design for the resource industry is also significant today, mining being both Australia’s biggest industry and trade export.³⁵ Australia is the world’s largest producer of lithium and in the top five for gold, iron ore, lead, zinc and nickel, and it also seeks to generate renewable energy for the Asia-Pacific region.³⁶

Topic selection by doctoral students in Australian urban history seems to be motivated by personal factors, social concerns and career prospects. The individual motivation for pursuing a Ph.D. is often explained within dissertations. Although typically passion projects, many theses also have direct relevance to social, policy and cultural issues, as demonstrated immediately above. Career prospects might also have a role in shaping topic selection, because only a minority of urban history Ph.D. graduates will end up working in the academy in the long term. Graduates of

³³A. Mayne, ‘“Our corner of the world”: Australian urban history and the poetics of space’, *Journal of Urban History*, 39 (2013), 820, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144213479306>.

³⁴For recent overviews of these fields, see K. Holmes, A. Gaynor and R. Morgan, ‘Doing environmental history in urgent times’, *History Australia*, 17 (2020), 230–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14490854.2020.1758579>; J. Carey and B. Silverstein, ‘Thinking with and beyond settler colonial studies: new histories after the postcolonial’, *Postcolonial Studies*, 23 (2020), 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2020.1719569>.

³⁵Reserve Bank of Australia, ‘Composition of the Australian economy snapshot’, 6 Apr. 2023. Online: www.rba.gov.au/education/resources/snapshots/economy-composition-snapshot/, accessed 1 May 2023.

³⁶United States International Trade Administration, ‘Australia – mining’, 20 Jul. 2022. Online: www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/australia-mining, accessed 1 May 2023.

Australian urban history Ph.D.s are well equipped for careers outside of the academy, where most of them ultimately find themselves, such as in the planning, municipal or cultural heritage sectors. Notably, the heritage industry is the largest source of new empirical research in Australian urban history.³⁷ The authors of the most innovative and robust heritage studies tend to have undertaken postgraduate study.³⁸ Overall, recent Ph.D. theses in Australian urban history can be characterized by their intellectual range, rigour and relevance.

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³⁷See P. Ashton and P. Hamilton (eds.), *The Australian History Industry* (Melbourne, 2022). This important historical work is mandated within planning and heritage laws, funded by state and municipal authorities and property owners, and conducted by private-sector heritage consultants.

³⁸The professional pathway for many heritage consultants is fourth-year honours and/or postgraduate degrees in history and heritage, incorporating extended original research theses. Some members of the profession also have Ph.D.s in history and allied heritage fields such as archaeology, planning and architecture.

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